

Goldsmiths DSC Annual Project 2017

Learning, Teaching, and the Curriculum

Members

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Introduction and Background

This report covers a wide range of topics related to Learning, Teaching, and the Curriculum, with emphasis on satisfaction with course organisation, the current curriculum, assessments and feedback, and the number of student-staff contact hours.

After examining the previous Learning and Teaching reports, this year's report will address issues and recommendations raised in previous years, explore how they have been responded to, and pursue the implementation of improvements in the future.

Project Aims

This report aims to:

- Highlight prominent issues felt across many departments at Goldsmiths
- Offer suggestions for implementing positive changes to the curriculum, to teaching, as well as suggest tools that can be used to enhance learning
- Explore areas for improvement within the educational experience at Goldsmiths, including online resources, the curriculum, and feedback on lectures

Through addressing these aims we hope to:

- Ensure that students' feedback about their education is heard
- Represent positive and negative feedback from students across all departments

Methodology

This report used two primary sources to gather feedback from students: the DSC Annual Report Survey and independent student interviews.

DSC Annual Report Survey: A college-wide survey was released in which 1322 students responded. The Learning, Teaching, and the Curriculum group submitted nine questions. These included two preliminary quantitative questions, followed by seven 5-point scale questions. Students were also given the opportunity to submit additional comments where qualitative data was collected.

Interviews: Members of the group also conducted interviews with students, including two on film. These interviews were loosely structured, with open-ended questions related to the questions asked in the Annual Report Survey.

Results, Findings, and Recommendations

The data collected from the DSC Annual Project Survey and the individual student interviews were analysed, and general themes and key statements were extracted. The responses fell into one of several categories including the VLE, Teaching Satisfaction, Reading Lists, and Challenging Course Content.

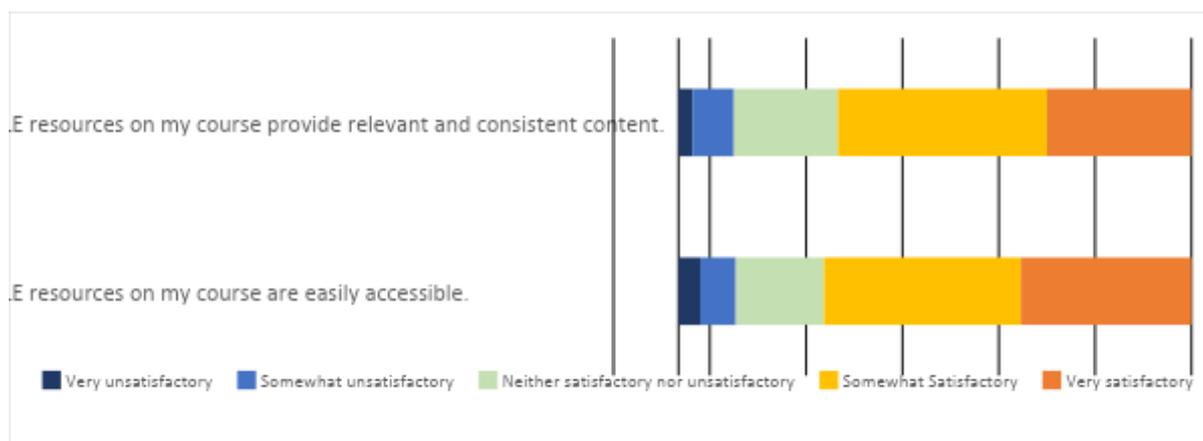
VLE:

Overall, 71% of students report that they are either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the content and the accessibility of the VLE. However, it should be noted that students frequently report that there is very little consistency between the VLE sections for each module page. Students have also raised concerns with the information provided on these pages, highlighting that discrepancies frequently occur at the start of term in the course/assessment information. Students have requested that the departments examine the content on their pages prior to the term starting to ensure the validity of information, as well as the uniformity of these pages across all modules within the department.

Furthermore, 61% of Part-time (PT) students report being either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with their VLE areas compared to 74% of full-time (FT) students. PT students also report lower satisfaction rates with the organisation, accessibility, and relevant/consistent content of their VLE spaces. However, it should be noted that less than 100 PT students responded to this survey, so there is a need to further investigate.

“I wish we used the VLE more to ask questions or to facilitate discussion about topic areas. I feel that people are just so against using it, and lecturers don’t encourage us to.” – Second year Psychology student

“Navigating the VLE can be quite confusing sometimes as each is different depending on who is teaching the course. My classmates mention finding something useful but it feels like it is hidden in a really unobvious place.” – First year Psychology mature student



Recommendations:

- Ensure a member of staff is quality checking every VLE page within a department to ensure similar format, ease of access of materials etc.
- Train staff on how to use the VLE effectively.
- Encourage students to utilise the VLE forum options more to facilitate discussion or to ask questions (anonymous posting feature)? Staff to ask to circulate questions asked via email on the VLE.

- Renovate the interface of the VLE as it is confusing and difficult to use. Important announcements/selected modules do not stand out, so crucial information can be missed. Moreover, the VLE's black and white design is not overly accessible for those who need/prefer a different background colour (i.e. for Irlen Syndrome).
- Ensure students are not enrolled on the VLE of old modules.

Teaching:

Overall, 70% of students report being either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the helpfulness and accessibility of teaching at Goldsmiths. Last year saw the introduction of the Student Led Teaching awards, where students nominated and voted to recognise the contributions of exceptional staff members from innovative lecturers to supportive security staff.

However, it should be noted that students have reported that the style and method of teaching can vary greatly across modules and departments, with 57% of students reporting being either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the style of teaching on their course. While teaching staff will have their own approach to delivering the syllabus, the survey data and the interview responses highlight that the overall best practice for teaching is a more discussion-based approach, rather than traditional lecturing. Students report that this provides the platform to think critically and creatively within the syllabus.

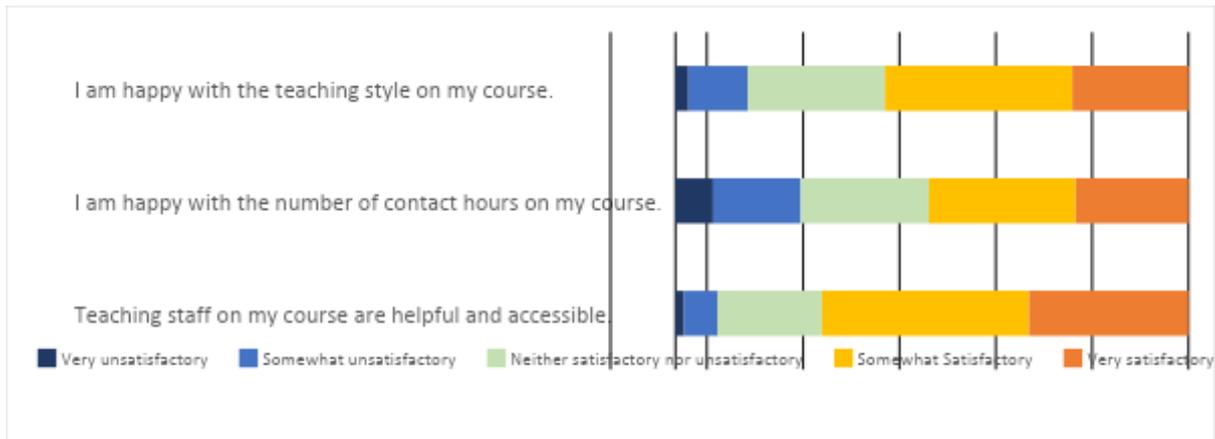
Students have also reported that some lecturers spend a lot of time introducing a topic which doesn't always leave a lot of time for the deeper content. This has been highlighted as an issue due to time constraints within a standard 50 minute lecture. Within the undergraduate survey responses, satisfaction with the number of contact hours decreases with the year of study, highlighting the desire for more staff contact hours (e.g. through seminars, tutorials, workshops, additional lectures).

Furthermore, Postgraduate taught (PGT) students report an overall high level of satisfaction with teaching quality, however find that the course content can be theoretically dense, in particular in programmes with an interdisciplinary approach.

"Lectures sometimes feel a little superficial, normally when the lecturer is teaching outside of their subject area. It feels like they skim over huge details. It would be better to have several lecturers teach within their expertise, rather than have one lecturer cover all the content. This could be done with short a screencast on the VLE to fill in any blanks." – Third year Psychology student

"Lecturers sometimes spend too much time outlining learning objectives, general topics, or concepts rather than discussing the actual lecture content and the evidence which supports it." – Third year Psychology student

"I would like to have more contact hours with staff. I only have 8 hours a week this term, and I feel like I am not getting the most out of my course. Seminars aren't always helpful when I go, and I prefer to do most of the work on my own." – First year Undergraduate Politics student



Recommendations:

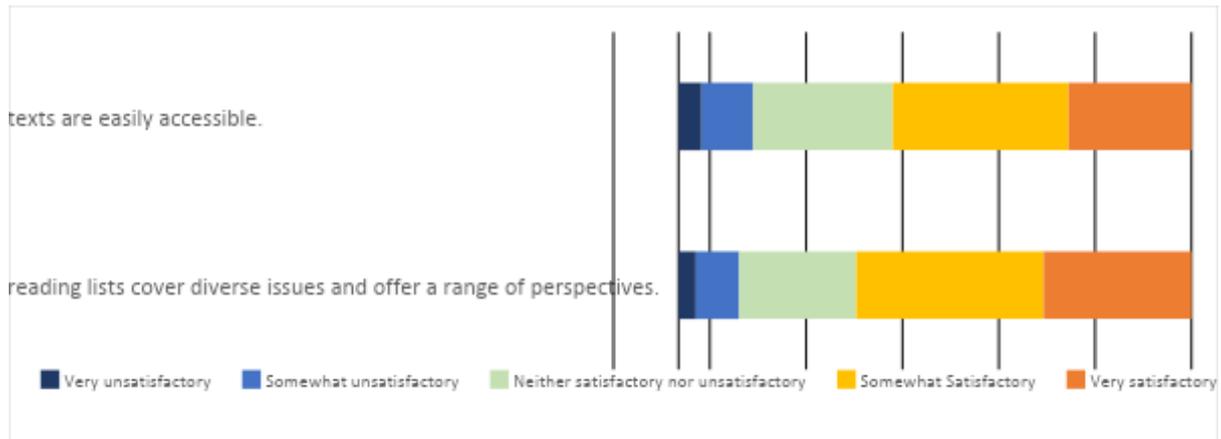
- Offer students discussion-based training workshops. Encourage more equal sharing of ideas and perspectives in seminars, tutorials, or workshops (ensure students come prepared!)
- Ask tutors to ice break in the first session and to encourage students that seminars, tutorials, or workshops are a space to share ideas and perspectives, and that no contribution is worth less than others.
- Encourage departments to balance contact time with students across all years and increase this when the needs of students increase (more in undergraduate 3rd year than in 1st year, more in week 10 of term than week 1 etc.).
- Postgraduate content needs to be broken down in class into smaller ideas to ensure better content engagement, especially in interdisciplinary programmes (not everyone has the same educational background).
- Encourage staff to make smaller narrow topic based screencasts or podcasts where they go a little deeper into a certain topic area that could have been skimmed over during a lecture.

Reading Lists:

The standard, quality, and accessibility of reading materials has been improved upon over the past year, with 57% of students report being either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the range of issues and perspectives covered in the essential and additional reading lists. This improvement could in part be attributed to campaigns such as the 'Liberate my Degree', which has taken great strides in diversifying the materials used to support learning at Goldsmiths.

However, there is still great scope for improvements to shift from traditional Eurocentric academia that does not represent the Goldsmiths student body. Examples include using academics and theorists who are female, from BME backgrounds, of various genders (or who consider themselves non-binary), from various religious (and nonreligious) backgrounds and of different sexual orientations etc.

"The reading lists are very comprehensive, giving a variety of views and support for theories. It really helps consolidate my learning by having these essential texts available either on the VLE or in the library." – Third year Psychology student



Recommendations:

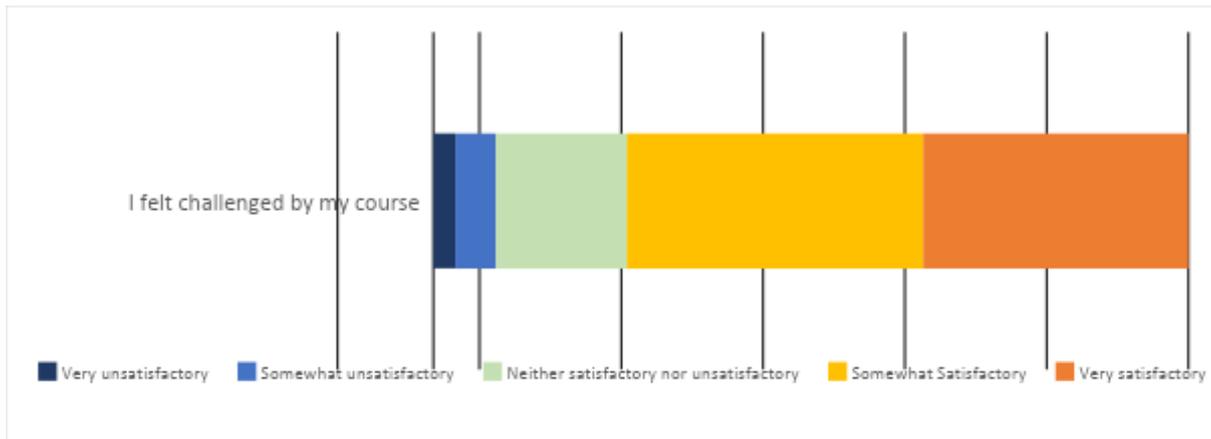
- Progress has been made on diversifying reading lists and taught content, however staff should still actively engage with broader sources to ensure a wide variety of perspectives is being given.
- Broader sources, i.e. not always a Western or male perspective, should be encouraged.
- Students do not want this to be a quota that staff feel they must achieve, it should be a natural process.
- Training staff in how to broaden the curriculum.
- More electronic reading sources at the library, e.g. if a core module has a core textbook then it should be available at the library digitally.
- Better access to coloured overlays for reading for those with Irlen Syndrome, dyslexia, and visual stress.

Challenging Content:

Overall, 73% of students report being either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with how challenging their programme is. Through the survey data and the interviews conducted, students have reported feeling challenged and engaged with their course content when they can pursue their own interests within the subject.

“I find that my course varies in how challenging it is. I like the projects where I get to explore concepts without restrictions to be the most beneficial. This allows me to be creative and to engage with the content more than conforming to a strict rubric.” – First year Undergraduate Computing student

“The course outline clearly states what happens within the course. I have been challenged and have had further career options shown to me. The only downside is the lack of consistency in some choices that are offered for practical modules, a really small factor, as previous years recommend certain modules from experience and that has an impact upon newer students.” – Second year Undergraduate Theatre and Performance student



Recommendations:

- Place more emphasis on students engaging with the essential and extra readings. This will facilitate greater discussions within seminars, tutorials, or workshops. e.g. everyone shares one interesting bit from a paper they've read at the start of a session.
- Allow students to explore content more within assessments, e.g. have more than one essay/coursework question that could be answered, especially in undergraduate 2nd and 3rd year cohorts.

Conclusion

The annual survey has brought to light some very interesting points in regards to the learning and teaching environment at Goldsmiths. In our report and through extensive investigation of student feedback we conclude that the areas that are in greatest need of improvement are the quality and accessibility of the VLE; consistency of teaching across modules; more discussion-based learning and providing engaging and creative assessments and feedback. We feel that the betterment of these areas will provide a useful starting point for improving student experience in every department.