

## STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH DEGREE, TEACHING MATERIALS AND ASSESSMENT AT JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

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*In order to attract and retain students, universities have to identify and meet student expectations. This article examines whether James Cook University students are satisfied with their university. The findings show that almost all students are satisfied with their degree, the teaching materials and assessments. The results also suggest that gender and age aspects do not impact on satisfaction of students, while their degree and major affect their rating of exam assessment and teaching materials.*

### Introduction

To assess level of satisfaction of students in School of Arts, Education and Humanities (James Cook university), the school sponsored for a group of student to conduct research about this issue. Vũ Thái Hạnh and Nguyễn Thị Hương Trà studying Master of Social Sciences at James Cook university, participated in this project by designing questionnaire and conducting survey. After that, the materials were processed and analysed by Lương Thị Thu Trang and Phạm Hoàng Tài. We would like to thank School of Arts, Education and Humanities in James Cook University that supported fund and gave opportunity to do this research.

University plays a crucial role in the educational strategy of every country,

especially in developed countries. Nowadays, the rapid expansion of colleges and universities gives much more opportunity for students to access higher education. Universities have extensively used advertising and marketing to attract domestic and international students. However, student satisfaction with university is one of the most important aspects to assessing the quality of training at a university or college. A study of Tinto and Vincent 1975 found that more than 40% of all college entrants leave higher education without earning a degree, 75% of these students dropping out in the first two years of college, and institutions can

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expect that 56% of a typical class cohort will not graduate from that college. Other research by Reisberg and Leo (1999) indicates that approximate 27% of freshmen do not return the following semester and 42.6% of students do not graduate from college. In addition, this research found a relationship between the dropout rate and student accommodation. Statistics from this study showed that commuter students have higher dropout rates while universities with a strong residential dormitory program have a lower dropout rate. There are several reasons to explain the high dropout rate of students, but dissatisfaction with the environment of high educational institutions is one of the more significant causes. Therefore, student satisfaction with university has received a great deal of attention in universities and in literature over the years.

Lee (2011) conducted research in the Faculty of Health Science, University of Sydney and found that 60% of students were satisfied with their university experience so far. In order to assess the relationship of other characteristics to student satisfaction with university, the research analysed the correlation between satisfaction of students with gender, English as main language used at home, parent attended university, type of secondary school attended, previously enrolled in a university course, program enrolled in, hope to change course, marks compared to expected, and time to travel to university. The research results indicated that no relationship was found between student satisfaction and gender, type of secondary school attended and whether or not they had

previously enrolled in a university course. However, there was strong correlation ( $p < 0.01$ ) between student satisfaction with English as the main language used at home, the student hoping to change the course, and the students' marks compared to what they expected (Lee, Jolly et al. 2011).

Adelaide University also conducted a study in 2007 on first year students' expectation of university study. The research showed that approximately 32% of students stated that outside activities have affected their ability to study, however, the research did not indicate a positive or negative influence. More than 80% of students agreed that attending the lecture was important to their study. In contrast, 20% of the rest of the students who did not agree with this statement thought that outside activities are more important than attending a lecture. It is reported that 86.9% of students wish to change to having access face to face with their lecturers and tutors outside class. They suggest that this will lead to their success in university. Interactive/group work was also expected to promote their learning in 84.8% of responses. Also, 51.9% of all students expected that their lecturers would read their draft before submitting. International students were more likely to expect to have their draft read than domestic students (Murdoch 2006).

The study which was conducted in James Cook university: "Building core strengths in the BA- Focus group report" analyses student's expectations, aspirations and experiences in BA (Bachelor of Art) program. In general,

students are satisfied with the program because they can see vocational changes to use knowledge and skills which they obtain during studying period in James Cook university. With knowledge and skills in BA program, they “indicated aspirations to pursue career in many fields such as: social work, teaching, journalism, museum curatorship”, and even though travel aspirations because they can use the second language (Derrick, 2009). However, students suggested several recommendations to improve quality of BA program. The most common suggestion from students was the appointment with Academic advisor to discuss their personal career and help them having a direction in study. The participating students recommended that JCU’s website should clearly indicate menu for first year students about important information such as library sessions, subject choices, brief subject outline and where to find assistance. Many students suggested that Effective Writing subject should become a core subject in BA program. In addition, block mode and online subjects should be analysed carefully because not all subjects would suit these structures. They also recommended that mid semester and Christmas holidays were nominated to offer online and block mode subjects.

In general, the studies show that students were satisfied with their university in terms of programs, support services and social action. However, participating students also made some recommendations to improve the quality of their university. In this report, the aim is to analyse student satisfaction at

James Cook University with the degree, assessment procedures, and teaching materials.

The research hypotheses are as follows:

1. Students are satisfied with their degree, assessment and the teaching materials.
2. There is a significant difference between the student’s gender, age, degree, and major and their rating of the degree, assessment and the teaching materials.

### **Methodology**

This research used a questionnaire as the main method of data collection because this method was suited to the aims and hypothesis of the project. The questionnaire was designed to ask about 133 students who were chosen randomly from one class in the School of Art, Education and Humanities. The questionnaire includes 49 questions and focuses on six aspects of the effectiveness of the redesigned BA and Bachelor of Social Science degree, including: the participant’s expectation of their degree; flexibility of their degree; assessment in their degree; teaching materials used in their degree; career aspirations; and their first- year core subject. The majority of the questions are closed questions with nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio scales.

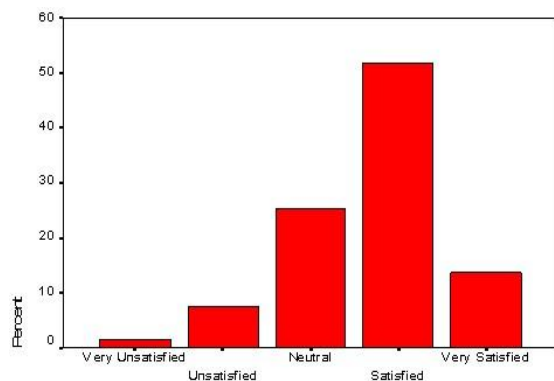
### **Results**

#### **I. Satisfaction of students with their degree, assessment and the teaching materials**

##### ***1. Satisfaction with degree***

Subject choice is one of the most important factors to assess the

satisfaction of students with their degree. As shown in chart 1, the satisfaction of students with the availability of subject choices is:



The chart above indicates that the number of students who are satisfied with the availability of subject choices is the highest category with about 70/131 students (51.9%). Also there are nearly 20 students (13.5%) who are very satisfied with the availability of subject choices. In summary, the total of students who are very satisfied and satisfied with availability of subject choices is 86 people (equal with 65.6%) while the proportion of students who are not satisfied is only 12 people (9%). However, the number of students who are neutral with availability of subject choices is 33 students (24.8) should be noted. These students cannot decide between satisfaction and dissatisfaction about availability of subject choices.

When participating students were asked about their satisfaction with the range of available classes in both lectures and tutorials, the majority of students

answered that they are satisfied. This is demonstrated in the table below

As can be seen from the table, the proportion of students who were very satisfied and satisfied with the range of available classes and their time in lectures and tutorials is quite high, 65.4% and 70% respectively. On the other hand, the proportion of students who were unsatisfied and very unsatisfied with available classes in both lectures and tutorials is low, less than 10%. The number of students with a neutral attitude is approximately 25% for lectures and 18% for tutorials.

*Table 1: Satisfaction of students with the range of available classes and their time*

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied
Lectures	18.8%	46.6%	24.8%	7.5%	1.5%
Tutorials	24.1%	45.9%	18%	6%	1.5%

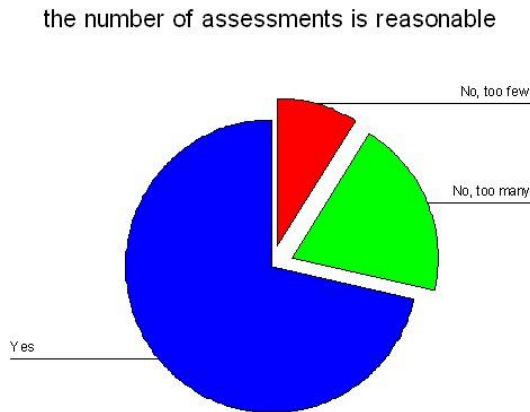
In terms of satisfaction with the student's degree overall, analysis of the data indicates that 70.7% of students are satisfied with their degree, while there is only 3% of students who are not satisfied with their degree. However, a considerable proportion of students are unsure about satisfaction with their degree (23.3%).

## ***2. Student satisfaction with assessment in their degree***

As can be seen from the pie chart, the majority of students think that the number of assessments in their course is reasonable (71.4%). A total of 28.6% of the rest of the students thinks that the number of assessments is not reasonable, of these 19.6% indicates that

the number of assessments is too many and 9% is too few. When asked about whether the weighting of the assessment is fair or not, 87.2% of students believe that the weighting of assessments is fair and 12.8% of students did not agree with this statement.

Chart 2: The number of assessment pieces



projects are moderately useful while only 21.8% found them very useful. However, the proportion of students who stated that group projects were not useful was highest with 27.1%. Exams were also believed to be not useful assessment by 18.8% of students. Overall, students appreciated the role of tutorial participation with median = 3.00, means very useful.

**3. Student satisfaction with teaching materials within their degree**

The table below illustrates that the majority of student were satisfied with the teaching materials (mean = 7.0). The number of students who chose 7 and 8 on the scale is the highest category, with 21.1% (n=28) and 24.1% (n=32) respectively. Moreover, there are approximately 20% (n=26) of students

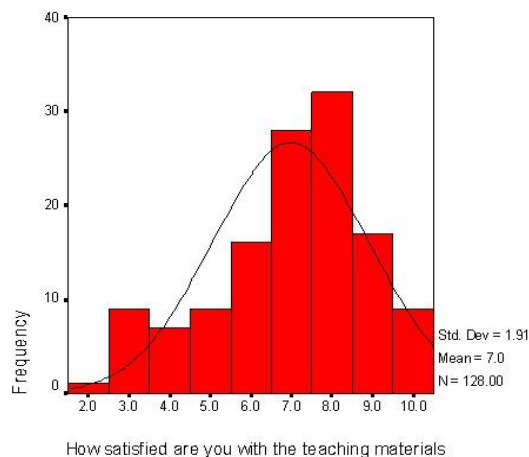
who were strongly satisfied (scale of 9 and 10) while there are only about 13% (n=17) of students who were dissatisfied (scale of 2,3, and 4) with the teaching material

Table 2: Types of assessment are useful in helping students learn

	Very useful	Moderate useful	Not useful	Not applicable	Median
Essay	45.9%	44.4%	8.3%	0.8%	2.00
Presentation	24.8%	50.4%	17.3%	1.5%	2.00
Tutorial participation	52.6%	37.6%	9.0%	0.8%	3.00
Exam	31.6%	39.8%	18.8%	2.3%	2.00
Group project	21.8%	43.6%	27.1%	0.8%	2.00

The table above indicates that tutorial participation is a very useful assessment in helping students learn with 52.6% finding it very useful. Essay writing was also rated as very useful by 45.9% of students. On the other hand, the majority of students assessed that presentations are moderately useful (50.4%), while only 24.8% thought that presentation is very useful. Group projects were rated similarly to presentations with 43.6% of students believing that group

Chart 3: Student satisfaction with teaching materials



with their degree.

The ease or difficulty of accessing teaching materials is one of the most important criteria in assessing student satisfaction with their university. Many participating students in the survey agreed that they found it easy to access textbooks, online materials, online library resources, and library resources. Approximately 30-45% of respondents believed that the teaching materials are “very easy to access”, while less than 10% of students found it difficult to or were unable to access teaching materials. However, students complained that the high cost of teaching materials makes it difficult for them to study (42.8%) and 65.5% of respondents asserted that their text books were quite expensive to purchase.

In general, participating students were satisfied with their studies in terms of degree expectation, assessments from lecturers and teaching materials.

## II. Correlation between gender, age, major of student and their degree, assessment and the teaching materials

### 1. The correlation between gender and satisfaction level of subject choices

From table 3a we can see that the Chi-square value (Pearson Chi-square) for satisfaction with subject choices by gender is 2.981 with a significance level

of .561. It is important to point out that significance level is more than 0.05, therefore, there is not a significant relationship between gender and satisfaction of students with subject choices. Finally, table 4b provides information on the strength of association between satisfaction with subject choices and gender. However, we can see from the table that the value of Cramer’s V and Phi are .151 and  $p = .561$ , indicating no significance relationship between gender and satisfaction with subject choices of participating students.

### 2. Correlation between degree and usefulness of assessment

The research shows that there is a very different opinion between student’s degree and their rating of usefulness of assessments. For example, whereas over 50% of Bachelor of Arts students felt that assessment was “very useful”, only

Table 3a: Chi-square results for satisfaction with subject choices by gender  
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.981(a)	4	.561
Likelihood Ratio	3.525	4	.474
Linear-by-Linear Association	.008	1	.931
N of Valid Cases	130		

a 3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is .57.

Table 3b: Measures of association for satisfaction with subject choices by gender  
Symmetric Measures

	Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.151 .561
	Cramer's V	.151 .561
N of Valid Cases		130

a Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

16.7% of Bachelor of Social Science students held this belief, even though no Bachelor of Education students think that assessment was very useful. Before commenting on the individual cells of the table, however, we need to consult our Chi-square results. We can see that Chi-square result of 27.556 (df= 10) has a significance level of 0.002. So the hypothesis is true that there is a considerable difference between student's degree and their rating of the usefulness of assessments. In addition, table... provides information on the strength of the association between the degree and usefulness of assessment. We can see from the table that the value of Cramer's V =.46 and Phi = .326 with significant level at 0.002 illustrates a strong association between the two variables. Consequently, we can safely reject the Null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant correlation between degree and usefulness of assessment.

### ***3. Correlation between gender and satisfaction with the teaching materials***

*The hypothesis:* Males' mean score on the satisfaction with teaching material scale is higher than the females' score on the satisfaction with the teaching material scale.

*The Null hypothesis would be:* Males' mean score on the satisfaction with the teaching material scale is the same as the females' mean score on the satisfaction with the teaching materials scale.

The output on the output viewer windows starts with the statistic for the two groups with their means and standard deviations followed by the

value of the difference between means (mean differences). We can see that for 37 males the mean score is 7.14 (sd= 1.828), while for the 90 females the mean score is 6.90 (sd = 1.961). The difference between the means for the two groups is 0.214. There appears to be very little difference between two variables, but we can confirm this using the independent t-test.

With the Independent Samples Test, interpretation of the independent t-test output is a two stage process. This time when we examine the homogeneity of the variance between the two groups using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, the F value is 1.107, and the "Sig". (p value) is 0.295. This is considerably greater than .05 (thus not significant), indicating that equal variance can be assumed. It is now possible to test the hypothesis using the t-test row of results labelled Equal variances assumed. This provides the t-value (t=0.626) and the degrees of freedom (df= 125). From the result of analysing data, we find that 'Sig. (2 – tailed)' is 0.532, which is greater than the 5% cut-off level (p>0.05). Thus, the result is not significant. Therefore, we reject the hypothesis, and accept the null hypothesis. This is expressed t =0 .626, df= .125, p = 0.532 ns.

### ***4. Correlation between major and satisfaction with the teaching materials (F test)***

*The hypothesis:* There is a significant difference between majors and level of satisfaction with the teaching materials.

*The null hypothesis:* Students with different majors have the same level of satisfaction with the teaching materials.

To interpret these results we examine the mean scores on level of satisfaction with the teaching materials for nine major groups. For satisfaction levels of the teaching materials, Asia Pacific governance and development score a mean of 9.00, both Human services/Social work and Environment and Heritage score a mean of 8.00, Psychology score a mean of 7.88, Humanities score a mean of 7.06, Tropical Health and Society score a mean of 7.00, AASC score a mean of 6.67, Social and Criminal Justice score a mean of 4.25, and Other score mean of 6.53. The ANOVA box results inform us whether the difference between the means is significant. Here  $F$  is 2.372. The significance of  $F$  is 0.023 ( $p < .05$ ). That means we accept the hypothesis because there genuinely is a significant overall difference between major groups in their level of satisfaction with the teaching materials.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The research shows that the majority of students who study in the School of Art, Education and Humanities are satisfied with university in three perspectives: their degree, the assessment used and the teaching materials. These results were consistent with my expectations in predicting their study experiences at university. The research also agrees with Lee's research (2011), however Lee clarified indicators of satisfaction level such as: academic advising, instructional effective or campus life etc. Overall, the

satisfaction scores of James Cook University students are higher than those for Sydney University students (Lee, 2011).

When we examine the correlations between independent variables such as gender, age, major, and degree with dependent variables such as satisfaction levels with subject choices, lecture times, the teaching materials and assessment, the results were not consistent with my expectation. The only correlations found were between the student's degree and usefulness of exam assessment; and between the student's major and teaching materials. Other correlations were not significant. This can be explained by limitations of the study.

Questionnaire only was conducted at one class with 133 respondents, therefore it was un-proportional sample. We can see from methodology that the majority of respondents are females (about 70%); Bachelor of Arts (51%), Psychology (31%) while other degrees are under 10%; or full-time students are 91% whereas part-time students are approximately 9% etc. Therefore, the reliability of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables is low.

The research results also demonstrate that students are very satisfied with essay and tutorial participation assessment, while exam, group project and presentation only are moderate usefulness. Even though a large percentage of students believed that group project and exam are not useful. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage student to study by writing essay and participating in tutorials. The lecturers

should reduce the weight of exam, group project and presentation because students felt that they did not obtain a lot of knowledge and skills from these assessments.

The price of books are expensive, therefore several students complained that they can not access these teaching materials. It is suggested that the university need to provide more books to student accessing the teaching materials in the library. It is also very important for student to get feedback from their lecturer to improve the next assessments and their study in the future.

In conclusion, the survey was only conducted on few classes, so the research results cannot reflect the total opinion of all James Cook University students. However, overall, students are satisfied with their university experiences, especially their degree, the teaching materials and assessment. In terms of correlation, student's gender and age do not affect their satisfaction, but the student's major and degree are

significantly related to their rating of teaching materials and exam assessment.

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