

Students in CEQ-meetings – insights into how students prepare for the core part of the CEQ-process

Katja Efring and Torgny Roxå

Abstract— At LTH, students have an important role in the development of courses, not the least during the so called CEQ-meeting, the core part of the process where courses are evaluated through the use of the Course Experience Questionnaire. During these meetings student representatives, the course leader, and the program coordinator meet after a course to discuss experiences, problems and ideas for improvement. Data obtained from student survey (CEQ) is one piece of material used during these conversations. Since students are central in this process it is interesting to reflect on how students prepare for this meeting.

This study (Efring, 2021) investigates, through a case-study approach, how various branches of the student union (Studieråden, SR) prepare for and reflect upon the purpose and the outcome of these meetings.

Findings reveal that students and SR appreciate the CEQ-meetings greatly. Furthermore, it is clear that students prepare thoroughly, and organize themselves accordingly in order to secure students' constructive and reliable contributions. Almost without exception, SR assess the outcomes of these meetings as positive.

Index Terms— CEQ, student evaluations, Students as partners

I. INTRODUCTION

SINCE the introduction of the CEQ-system at LTH in 2003, many studies have focused on different aspects of the evaluation process (e.g. Alveteg and Svensson 2010; Björnsson et al. 2009; Warfvinge et al. 2021). Yet, there is one piece that has been left virtually undocumented, and that is how the student participation is managed by the student councils. Since at LTH students have an important role in the development of courses, not the least during the so-called CEQ-meeting, this absence is intriguing. For example, as branches of the student union Teknologkåren, the SR are responsible for reviewing the open-ended comments from the evaluation questionnaire, and for recruiting and training of student representatives participating in a majority of the evaluation meetings. Figure 1 below illustrates the CEQ-process as a whole, with the students' contributions underlined in the text.

Student evaluations of courses in the literature – In the literature on student evaluations of courses and teaching two streams become visible. One stream deal with the purpose of

student evaluations (Roxå et al. 2021) especially critiquing them as unreliable as measurement of courses in relation to student learning (Uttl et al. 2017). Another stream argues for a strengthened role for the academic teachers (Darwin 2017) and for a situation where teachers and students share responsibility for the interpretation of the data produced through for example student surveys (Bovill and Woolmer, 2020; Borch 2021). It is in this latter stream in the literature where this investigation places itself. Since at LTH students and teachers together with the relevant program coordinator share a conversation on course experiences and survey data, the potential that student evaluation data is used for enhancement purposes is strengthened.

CEQ at LTH – Conceived by British and Australian researchers, the CEQ is designed to measure key aspects of the quality of students' learning experiences (Ramsden 2005). Students are asked how they experience features in a course that encourage learning for understanding.

The LTH version of the CEQ contains 26 items, which fall into three main categories. The first category addresses the teaching process in four different scales: Good Teaching (GT, six items), Clear Goals and Standards (CG, four items), Appropriate Assessment (AA, four items) and Appropriate Workload (AW, four items). The second category involves students' self-assessment of their learning in selected Generic Skills (GS, six items) that are common learning outcomes in the courses given at LTH. The third category includes two overall items: one for the students' overall satisfaction with the course (item OS), and one for the students' perception of the course's importance for their education (item IE). The students respond on a 5-level Likert scale ranging from the endpoints Fully disagree to Fully agree. In addition to this two open ended questions are being asked: What do you think was the best thing about this course? and What do you think is most in need of improvement? It is the results from the CEQ-survey that forms one part of the CEQ-meetings. The other part is the personal experiences gained during the course.

An under-researched aspect of this process concerns how students prepare for the CEQ-meeting. In this study four branches of the student unions are interviewed about how they recruit, train, and monitor students that participate in these meetings, Aspects in focus are: how students new to this are trained, how CEQ-data is discussed before the CEQ-meeting, and how the outcome of the meeting is documented. The interviewer (the first author of this paper) has a long-standing personal experiences of all parts of the processes and has therefore been able to probe the selected aspects in depth.

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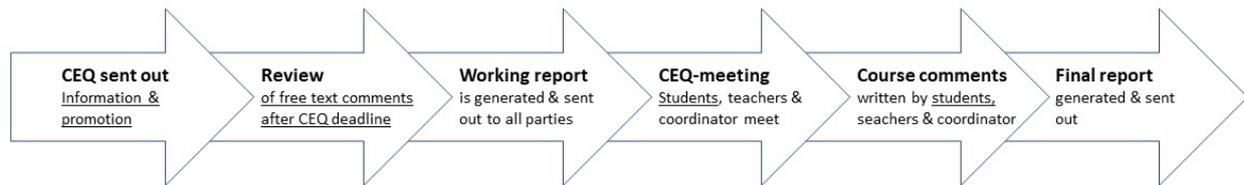


Figure 1. A simple summary of the CEQ-process at LTH. The students' involvement is indicated by underlined text. (Efring, 2021)

II. RESULT

The CEQ-meetings All student councils interviewed have established processes for preparing for the CEQ-meeting and managing the related administrative tasks. In general, the students' aim is to ensure that the opinions and feedback presented at the meeting is representative for the entire group of course participants and not just the students who attend the meeting. All student councils also report that they use the working report produced from the questionnaire results as their primary material for preparation. However, all councils also strive to ensure that at least one of the student representatives has participated in the most recent round of the course, so that more subjective experiences and specific issues also can be taken into account. In order to make the most of a meeting, or to strategize for an especially sensitive meeting, student representatives sometimes have a pre-meeting where it is decided how to approach the meeting and what topics are the most important to bring up.

During CEQ-meetings, students are normally offered a central role, i.e. it is common in the CEQ-meetings that the students are asked to lead the conversation. This arrangement improves the position of the students in a situation where the power relationships may otherwise be rather unequal. Often the meeting starts by students summarizing what they have prepared to put forward and then a discussion follows. Not only the results from the survey to students are discussed, but also other things are being brought to the table, things those present find relevant for the discussion. Sometimes the student council or the teacher has performed a sort of mid-course evaluation, the results from which can also be discussed at the CEQ-meeting.

Answering rates are talked about frequently, since an important issue concerns how relevant various points of views are. It is not unusual that teachers argue against results from an evaluation in which the answering rate is low. However, the preparation by the student councils and the student representatives' first-hand experience of the course can often "fill in the gaps" and make up for a lacking answering rate. One could also note that teachers in other investigations report that even though the answering rate can be used to question the value of student evaluations, they also sometimes assign meaning to single comments, simply because they are useful and add to the quality of the course (Roxå and Bergström, 2013). Arguably, what is meaningful in these meetings is not to debate the validity of certain numbers but rather to use the material in order to reach a consensus on what could be improved or to identify things that should not be changed.

General climate in the CEQ-meetings At their best, the

meetings constitute a situation where all relevant stakeholders engage in constructive discussions and course development. The student councils interviewed do indeed describe most meetings as positive and constructive. Naturally, exceptions and variations do exist. Sometimes it is certain discussion topics that cause the atmosphere to become strained. Things might become too personal for the teacher, some things are hard to change, and sometimes the students are simply being questioned. Things can come into a deadlock where no progress is made, and no solutions are suggested. When the meetings concerning a specific course do not lead anywhere or repeatedly end in stalemate, the head of the student council may raise issues with the program coordinator outside the meetings or put things forward to the central organisation of the student union, and thereby move the discussion elsewhere.

III. ABOUT THE STUDENT COUNCILS, DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

All student councils investigated by Efring (2021) operate independently and have adopted slightly different organisational structures. In some, the head of the student council does most of the administrative work, from receiving the open-ended answers to the CEQ to writing summaries for the final/end report. In others, the work is divided between all members of the student council. Another difference is that some councils have more "temporary" course representatives, while others have permanent representatives for each year of the programme. It might be argued that the differences imply a risk of varying quality in the work of the student councils. However, it seems that it could be more of an adaptation to the different characteristics of the programmes and student guilds to which the student councils are linked. An example of an aspect that might require adaptation of this kind is the size of the programmes, as well as the ability of student councils to recruit members.

One key similarity between all student councils is that their perceptions of the purpose of the CEQ-meeting clearly align. The student councils generally describe the meetings as an opportunity to nuance the questionnaire results, to broaden the perspective and bring light to the more subjective experiences of the course participants. Moreover, the meeting is described as an opportunity to increase understanding between the different parties, and to discuss actual suggestions and changes that can improve the course for the next year.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTEXT

Students at LTH are integral in the processing and interpretation of CEQ-results, and the student councils have well established routines to manage their part in the course

evaluation process. The topics discussed in this text relate to an international discussion where students as partners (Lowe and Bols, 2020) increasingly are being invited to take on a wider responsibility for development of higher education. At LTH, CEQ-meetings in its current form have been a regular feature since 2003 and place LTH as an interesting example of how teachers, students, and program coordinators in collaboration and through the use of respective experiences can work together for the benefit of educational development.

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