

6. Toolkit module: Students' participation in course design review committees

6.1. Overview

The educational offer of each technical university evolves with the development of science and technology. In order for newly created courses to be valuable to students, students should be involved in the design process both as course co-developers and as members of review committees. This toolkit addresses this process.

6.2. Objectives

This toolkit aims to present tips and advice for organising events where students participate in course design review committees. The purpose of this material is to empower students as participants in these processes.

6.3. Analysis of workshop conclusions

The following issues were discussed during the "Workshop for modular training toolkit for students engaged in ENHANCE activities" organised at the Warsaw University of Technology on 5th November 2021.

6.3.1. Encouraging students

There is a need to answer the following questions to discuss the issue of encouraging students to participate in course design review committees.

- What are the potential **incentives** for a student to participate in co-creation activities?
- How to **encourage** students to co-create university activities?
- What can **discourage** students from participating in the co-creation process?

As working in the course evaluation committee takes a lot of time, this time should be compensated for. Offering students credits for their work on evaluating the course can be one way to compensate them for their time.

The need to provide academic knowledge should also be discussed with students so that they are aware that certain elements of the course are needed. The teachers appreciated and respected by students can take on the task of encouraging them to participate in this process more widely. Creating courses that they will be able to attend in the future is also an important incentive for students to get involved in this process. This can prove difficult due to the time it takes to create such courses, but it is not impossible.

6.3.2. Costs and benefits

To address the problem of costs and benefits of the students' participation in course design review committees, the following questions should be addressed:

- **Do we need** co-creation at a university?
- What are the **costs** (not necessarily financial) of co-creation?
- What are the **benefits** (for whom) of co-creation?

A significant benefit for students participating in this activity is gaining considerable experience and developing transferable skills such as teamwork and communication, etc. In turn, a benefit for teachers is to get new insights which will enhance their teaching. A problem with this process is its continuity because there are new students all the time. It follows from the fact that, first of all, students' expectations are changing, and the established courses are becoming obsolete. Secondly, students should still be prepared to participate in the design review committee. On the other hand, the constant influx of new candidates keeps the results of the committee's activities up to date.

6.3.3. The organisation of the co-creation process

To analyse the organisation of students' participation in course design review committees, the following question is to be answered.

- How to organise the co-creation process to engage a small selection of participants and /or the whole community?

To organize the process of participation in a course design review committee, it is good to get started with a small group of already engaged and interested students. Then they can be encouraged to share their knowledge and experiences (e.g. in social networks) with each other. In this way everybody will feel involved. At the same time appropriate questionnaires should be designed to involve a larger part of the student community. Thanks to this, more opinions on students' preferences regarding the courses to be designed can be obtained.

6.4. The examples

6.4.1. Reviewing courses and curricula by WUT's Student Self-Government

At the Faculty of Electronics and Information Technology, Warsaw University of Technology (WUT), a periodic review of degree programmes offered by this Faculty (degree programmes in 7 fields of study) is conducted. The final discussion on the related curricula takes place at the meetings of the Education Committee – the advisory body established by the Faculty Council. Students' representatives are permanent members of this Committee. They represent the Faculty's Student Self-Government, which has its own Education Committee. This Committee collects the opinions of students involved in curricula development (see section 8) and assessment of courses (see section 9). Any essential change in the curriculum requires a formal written opinion of the Student Self-Government. It is very unlikely that the Faculty Council approves the proposed changes without the students' positive opinion.

One of the students actively involved in reviewing courses and curricula said: *“During my undergraduate studies, I took part in the work to enhance degree programmes at my faculty. I mostly collected students' opinions about the proposed changes, new courses and class schedules. I was also looking for students' opinions about the curricula, like what they want to change, which part of curricula was not helpful in looking for a job etc. Due to that contribution, several changes were made, and some approaches changed, for instance, considering the fact that many students would like to have most, or all their classes scheduled in one or two days to be able to work during their studies. Finally, I also wrote a few Student Self-Government's opinions on courses and curricula for the faculty authorities.”*

Similar procedures are adopted at other WUT faculties. The final decisions on curricula are made by the WUT Senate upon the recommendation of its Education Committee. Similarly to the case of individual faculties, the opinion of WUT's Student Self-Government representatives sitting on the Senate's Education Committee is essential for a positive recommendation for curriculum changes proposed by a given faculty.

6.5. Suggested scenario

Student committee members who give their opinion on the curriculum may need to consult their colleagues in order to express their opinion properly. Workshops for students organized by student members of the committee are described below.

6.6. Overview

The scenario describes the organization of a workshop for students. During this workshop student members of the course design committee describe the assumptions of, for example, a new education program, and the participants express their opinion. The scenario uses the SWOT method.

6.7. Objectives

The aim of the workshop is to obtain the opinions of a larger number of students regarding the reviewed proposal. This proposal may include, for example, a new or revised educational program.

6.8. Target participants

Students.

6.9. Format

The presentation of the assumptions of the new educational program followed by a Q&A session and a SWOT workshop.

6.10. Duration

Suggested duration: 180-240 minutes.

6.11. Resources

Post-its, whiteboard, markers, a projector, pizza.

6.12. Description

The workshop begins with the presentation of the main assumptions of the new educational program by a member of the course design committee (or by its authors) (ca. 30 min.).

Then the Q&A session is conducted to clarify any doubts (ca. 30 min.).

Then the participants are divided into small groups (3-6 people). They jointly create a SWOT analysis of the proposed educational program by listing single strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats on separate posts (ca. 30 min).

This is followed by a discussion of each SWOT (starting with the S), with each group discussing one post-it and placing it on a shared whiteboard. Then the other groups post their post-its. During this stage, proposals are grouped, and possibly new ones are added (ca. 60-90 min).

The result of the workshop is an in-depth SWOT analysis of the proposed program made by a group of students. It will be the basis for the final opinion.