

Thoughts on using the Vanguard Course questionnaire as a reflection tool

Velda McCune, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Unit, September 2007

The first twelve items in the questionnaire are probably most useful for this purpose as they are intended to measure responsible learning.

I think there are some key messages to put across to students at the start of the academic year which can be related to the questionnaire namely -

- learning at university is likely to be quite different to their prior experiences and they will probably have to adapt their ways of learning to do well (this sounds obvious but many new students seem not to have considered this).
- becoming an effective university learner is a gradual developmental process, no-one expects that students will have this all sorted out right from the beginning. (It is important to give this message to stop students attributing any problems they experience to a fixed lack of ability, in which case they would have no reason to engage in responsible learning).
- although students may need to change how they learn, they can usefully build on their prior experiences. They will all bring strengths to their learning from what they have done before.
- there is support available but more onus on students to ask for it than would have been the case in their prior experiences. As well as explaining how students can seek support in their own subject areas you could also point them to the 'Making the Transition to University Study' handout at this URL - <http://www.tla.ed.ac.uk/services/effect-learn/advice.htm#resources>

Then it would be a matter of setting the students a short reflective task based on the questionnaire. For example -

Based on your answers to the first twelve questions please make brief notes on the following:

- what strengths do I bring to my studies, what makes me good at these aspects of learning?
- what difficulties might I encounter with my learning in the first semester, what might I do about that?

Now discuss your answers briefly with the student sitting next to you. Can you learn from one another's' strengths or come up with ideas about how you might tackle the challenges to come.

At this point it might be possible to take questions from the floor, depending on the size of the group. Or you could ask each pair to join another pair to make a larger group for further discussion.