

Chapter 1

Student Perceptions of Value and the Impact on Curriculum Design: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This research adopts a case study approach to interrogate key questions regarding how curriculum design, assessment and delivery impacts on student perceptions of overall value relative to their job readiness. The initial research question to be answered in this study is how can shifts in curriculum design and assessment affect student perceptions of value? The method uses a case study and adapts Brookfield's multiple source approach, which enables the examination of the case study from multiple perspectives. The objective of the case study is to draw out the implications for understandings of student perceptions of value and how curriculum design can enhance this sense of value.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on student perceptions of value relative to their future job readiness at the undergraduate level and how these perceptions can be affected by changes in curriculum design. This research seeks to interpret the means by which curriculum changes either enhance or reduce, firstly, student experience in

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the university classroom and, secondly, student perceptions of course value, since in citing the question of experience, this also implies a secondary issue of meeting student expectation (James 2003; Miller, Bender & Schuh 2005; Voss, Gruber & Szmigin 2007). Using a case study approach, this research focuses on the key issue of how course design and course changes potentially impact student experience, thus enabling students to make a determination on the overall value of the course. This consideration is significant in that it connects to the larger picture of student expectations of their university education experience as a whole, where the role and effectiveness of elements such as assessment, content and delivery mode come under question as part of a larger re-positioning of education in the twenty-first century (Astin & Antonio 2012).

The initial research question to be answered in this study is: *how can shifts in curriculum design affect student perceptions of educative value?* Underpinning this over-arching question are two sub-questions: (a) *what effect does a change in assessment tasks have on student perceptions* and (b) *what effects did the process of responding to student perceptions and making changes have on institutional practice and perceptions of value?* The case study approach is used as a way of addressing these questions. The method adopted is a thematic analysis of qualitative data (Leininger 1985; Joffe 2011) in order to identify the key issues or themes that underscore this study. Brookfield's (1995) four lenses, using autobiographical, student and peer feedback combined with the theoretical literature, inform the data sources.

BACKGROUND

The conceptual framework commences with an account of current understandings of the positioning of students within the contemporary higher education environment. Drawing on some of the literature on the role of the modern university, this section maps this shift. The second conceptual frame is developed around the perception of value in an effort to define what is meant by the term value, or more specifically, "good value." The further point covered is the subsequent issue of assessment as connected to this overarching question of student perceptions of value and their expectations.

The Contemporary Higher Education Environment

While the focus of this research is constrained to the specific context of enhanced student experience as the basis for gaining overall value, the issue of student experience and its commensurate relationship with student expectations is embedded within the larger social, political and economic context of higher education practices

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