

## Thematic Summary of Student Reviewer Reflections 2024-2025

**How would you describe your recent experience as a student reviewer? What role did you play? What questions did you ask?**

Students found the experience highly positive, describing it as enlightening and eye-opening, providing valuable behind-the-scenes insight into program evaluation processes. Student reviewers served multiple functions - they acted as bridges between students and external reviewers, led focus groups to facilitate peer dialogue, represented student voices in the process, and documented student concerns through detailed notetaking in support of the external reviewers. The main areas of discussions were around the following themes:

- Student support and accessibility (community building, support access, program accessibility)
- Academic experience (curriculum relevance, course offerings, workforce preparation)
- Career preparation (professional development opportunities, career alignment, post-graduation planning)
- Program structure (grading consistency, class size impacts, potential improvements)

The student reviewers felt empowered in their role and successfully brought student-centered perspectives to the evaluation process that external reviewers might have overlooked. Their participation ensured practical student concerns were addressed in program reviews.

**Drawing from your student experience at Western, as well as this recent experience as a student reviewer, what program features and/or factors are most impactful on student learning?**

The central theme is that students learn best in environments where they feel seen, supported, and connected to both faculty and their future careers, with programs combining academic rigor, personal attention, and practical relevance producing the most positive outcomes.

- **Faculty Relationships and Support:** Students thrive with small class sizes that enable personal connections with professors. The most impactful faculty are passionate about their field, genuinely care about student success, and maintain accessible communication through multiple channels with clear expectations.
- **Practical and Experiential Learning:** Students value hands-on opportunities like internships, research experiences, and courses connecting theory to real-world applications. Programs with guaranteed internships, career preparation features, networking opportunities, and diverse assessment methods beyond multiple-choice testing are particularly effective.
- **Academic Structure and Support Systems:** Clear program pathways and transparent prerequisites help students navigate their education. While support services are important, students emphasized that awareness of these services is equally crucial, as many resources go unused due to lack of knowledge about their existence.
- **Community and Inclusion:** Programs incorporating diverse perspectives, especially on global issues and Indigenous viewpoints, enrich learning. Students benefit from strong peer connections, supportive academic communities where they feel they belong, and inclusive environments accommodating different learning styles and career paths.

- **Resources and Infrastructure:** Access to appropriate library resources, databases, and research support tailored to specific disciplines is essential. Thoughtful technology integration, including learning management systems and AI tools, should enhance rather than complicate learning.
- **Program Relevance and Evolution:** Current, relevant curriculum reflecting modern field developments and workplace demands is vital. Sufficient variety in course offerings and electives allows students to customize their education to their interests and career goals.

### **What do you feel are the best ways to engage students in continuous program enhancement?**

The overarching theme is that successful student engagement requires treating students as genuine partners in program improvement, with clear evidence that their input leads to actual changes, convenient and rewarding participation opportunities, and ongoing dialogue rather than one-time feedback collection.

- **Creating Safe and Supportive Environments:** Student reviewers highlighted the importance of addressing power dynamics that can inhibit honest feedback when speaking to faculty. Small, intimate group settings work better than large formal meetings, and students need adequate time (more than 20-45 minutes) to warm up and engage in meaningful discussion.
- **Practical Engagement Strategies:** Simple incentives like providing food during focus groups or offering gift card raffles significantly increase participation. Programs need to improve awareness since many students don't know feedback opportunities exist beyond end-of-term surveys. Multiple participation opportunities should be offered to accommodate different schedules and comfort levels.
- **Ensuring Representative Voices:** Engagement should include diverse perspectives from students across different years, backgrounds, and program pathways. One innovative approach suggested pairing program members with non-members to balance insider knowledge with fresh external perspectives. Alumni input is also valuable for understanding long-term program value.
- **Establishing Ongoing Structures:** Rather than episodic feedback, programs should create student-led advisory committees that meet regularly with faculty, develop ambassador programs leveraging existing student networks, and establish regular communication channels like town halls and open forums.
- **Ensuring Meaningful Follow-Through:** Students want transparency about how their feedback leads to actual program changes. Their input must be genuinely valued, with clear communication about policy changes and improvements through multiple channels including emails, social media, and websites.
- **Making Participation Accessible:** Programs must reach all students, not just highly involved ones, since experiences vary based on individual backgrounds and goals. Multiple participation formats should be offered, with student-led facilitation creating more authentic peer-to-peer dialogue.

## Other Comments

Students reflected on their participation in academic program review processes, revealing particularly positive experiences:

- **Gratitude and Appreciation:** Student reviewers expressed genuine appreciation for the opportunity, describing it as valuable and enjoyable. Comments consistently reflected gratitude for being included in the review process and hope that their contributions were beneficial.
- **Recognition of Collaborative Support:** Students specifically acknowledged the guidance they received from both external and internal reviewers. They praised the internal reviewers for helping them understand the review process and providing thoughtful questions and space for reflection and growth throughout their participation.
- **Suggestions for Process Improvement:** While feedback was predominantly positive, students offered constructive suggestions including concerns about limited time allocation for student perspectives and requests for clearer role expectations, particularly regarding whether student reviewers should lead focus groups.
- **Future Participation Interest:** All student reviewers expressed enthusiasm for participating in future reviews. The lack of negative feedback was notable, with many students simply responding "N/A" to requests for additional comments or concerns.

## A Few Excerpts:

- *My recent experience as a student reviewer was an incredibly positive and enriching learning opportunity. It allowed me to collaborate with a diverse range of people—from faculty and administration to fellow students—and take on a leadership role in the review process. This role sharpened my leadership, problem-solving, and communication skills, and reaffirmed how valuable student voices can be in shaping the future of education.*
- *This experience as a student reviewer was very interesting and I was able to learn so much, as well as have conversations about a program I did not know much about. I believe my role was to bridge the gap between student voices and the external reviewers, as well as provide key information about how the modules and programs work at Western.*
- *I believe that one of the best ways to engage students in continuous program enhancement is to first build a safe environment in which they feel they can speak freely. I think the position of a student reviewer in this respect is incredibly important to the program. There are certainly power dynamics involved in speaking to faculty/staff and therefore speaking with students/peers alleviates that anxiety.*
- *My experience as a student reviewer revealed that students want to know that their degree holds value beyond the classroom. Job probability, industry connections, and exposure to relevant experiences all play a huge role in shaping a meaningful university experience. When programs provide not just knowledge but also clear pathways to professional success—supported by faculty who want to see students thrive—that's when learning becomes transformative.*