

What did the students say?

An analysis of student feedback in a large introductory software engineering course

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1 Extended abstract

After introducing several changes to the design of an introductory course in software engineering, we have conducted a thorough analysis of survey responses to a questionnaire sent to students who took the course in the spring of 2022. The course is at bachelor level, and taken by around 500 students from more than eight study programs. 145 students responded to a survey after submitting their final course deliverable.

We will discuss implications of the survey findings and describe actions taken in 2023 and future plans for course improvement. We hope this analysis can be of inspiration to others for improvement work.

We will organise the presentation into four parts (1) a course description, (2) a discussion of statistical problems – e.g., sample size, (3) challenges related to data analyses, mostly based on bar charts, (4) analyses of the survey data and (5) conclusion on how we used the results to improve the course. While the majority of the students gave a satisfaction score of 5 (at the top) or 4 (almost at the top), they still indicating several course components that could be improved. On the other hand, those who were dissatisfied with the course seldom had any suggestions for improvement. The survey provides important insight into which course elements the students think are most important to their learning, and which elements are perceived as least important. We notice that course elements which require reflection such as retrospectives and the individual reflection reports are seen as most important. On the other hand, the course elements which students find are not clearly linked to the learning objectives - the group contract is ranked lowest, followed by the theory test at the end of the theory module and group reflection. .

While most students agree that they have learned a lot and generally receive good grades, many are critical to that the course requires too much work, that evaluation criteria and feedback on deliverables are vague and claims that evaluation is not aligned across the 72 teams who receive feedback. We have listed four main action points in order to address this critique in the coming years.