I coordinate a large first-year subject called Ecology, Evolution, and Biodiversity. The subject explores the amazing diversity of life from a global and Australian perspective, as well as the interaction between organisms and the environment.

We use a number of formal and informal methods of student feedback to better understand how well our students are learning.

Outside of the classroom environment, our main source of student feedback is the SFS survey.

The SFS is a really valuable tool to help us to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of learning and teaching in our subject.

It helps us especially to understand the clarity of intended learning outcomes and the structure of the curriculum through students’ eyes, and to see just how well our learning materials, teaching practices, and assessment and feedback strategies help students to achieve these outcomes.

We use a few strategies to engage students in the SFS feedback process.

Firstly, we make regular announcements during class time and on LMS when the survey is open.

Secondly, we set aside time in a practical class or workshop for students to complete the survey. This strategy increases the response rate so that we capture the views of a broad cross section of the class rather than just a few students who felt strongly enough about the subject (either positively or negatively) to provide feedback.

For example…

One year students identified that better pre-lab class preparation for dissections would be beneficial.

In response to this feedback, we created online Dissection guides that led students through each dissection step-by-step showing them what they needed to do and what structures to observe.

It’s also useful to collect and analyse this type of student feedback to support applications for promotions, and for internal and external awards, citations, and grants. In the past, I’ve used SFS and SFT data and student comments in successful promotion and teaching award applications.