



Implementing In-Semester “Check-in” Surveys via Microsoft Forms

An SBMS and SSET Case Study on Supporting Real-time Course Improvement

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Overview

Traditional end-of-semester evaluations, such as SECaT, capture valuable retrospective data, but they arrive too late to address concerns from current student cohorts or make needed adjustments during the teaching period.

To evaluate student engagement mid-semester, SBMS collaborated with SSET to pilot an agile 'check-in survey' for a newly introduced course using Microsoft Forms. Deployed in Week 7 and closed in Week 9, the pilot provided timely insights that enabled immediate course adjustments and informed the design of an upcoming sister course.

This case study demonstrates how lightweight, secure tools can bridge the feedback loop before end-of-semester evaluations.

Objectives

1. **Real-time intervention:** Gather early feedback on student belonging, engagement and course structure mid-way through the term.
2. **Dual-impact delivery:** Identify actionable improvements for the remaining weeks of the active course while building evidence-based refinements for the sister course running the following semester.
3. **Low friction and high security:** Deploy a method that is quick to complete, easy to manage and secure within the university digital ecosystem.

Approach

Strategic platform choice

During early consultations between SBMS and SSET, Microsoft Forms was selected over Qualtrics due to distinct operational advantages for informal, in-semester check-ins.

- **Seamless access control without pre-loaded panels:** Microsoft Forms leverages native UQ authentication to automatically restrict participation to internal UQ students. In contrast, Qualtrics requires pre-loading and managing explicit student participant lists to achieve the same security boundary for locked surveys.
- **Low administrative overhead:** Microsoft Forms offers a lightweight interface that allows staff to quickly construct, launch and manage pulse surveys with minimal setup friction.
- **Streamlined data export and confidentiality control:** results can be instantly exported to Excel while keeping access restricted to the survey administrator.

**Separate from this pilot, an innovative chatbot-based conversational check-in survey was also piloted in HMBS through a student-partner project in Semester 1, 2026, representing another emerging alternative for informal feedback collection*

Governance and data privacy workflow

To balance psychological safety with actionable reporting, a two-tier review process was established.

- **Governance Review:** SSET provided upfront advisory on authorisation, question design, and survey architecture.
- **Data Anonymisation:** Raw data was exported to Excel by the Learning Designer. All student identification was stripped and open-text comments were screened for appropriateness before generating the final report for the Course Coordinator.

Outcomes and impact

Curriculum continuity

Insights were formally documented to inform structural adjustments for the sister course operating in the subsequent semester.

Closing the loop

The Course Coordinator shared key aggregate findings and planned adjustments with the student cohort before the semester concluded, demonstrating that student input directly shapes their learning environment.

Proactive pre-SECaT communication channel

The check-in survey established a vital communication channel during the teaching period, enabling teaching staff to identify and resolve anticipated issues before formal SECaT evaluations take place.

“Often, by the time we receive student feedback through the end-of-semester SECaTs, it’s too late to make immediate changes to our teaching or explain the rationale behind design decisions to students. The in-semester student survey has been a low-effort, high-value tool for supporting iterative, student-centred course design, and opening a channel for communication between students and teaching staff. This has been particularly valuable for our new course, BIOM1001, where in-semester student feedback directly informed design decisions for its sister course, BIOM1002.”

Amy Chan, Principal Learning Designer

Future directions

- **Engage Course Coordinators early:** direct consultation before launch ensures the survey addresses critical teaching pain points and secures buy-in to act on the results.
- **Keep it short and targeted:** focus mid-semester check-ins on actionable dimensions, such as course structure clarity and student belonging, rather than broad satisfaction metrics.
- **Prioritise anonymisation:** using an intermediary, such as a Learning Designer, to review data builds student trust and supports unbiased feedback.
- **Always close the loop:** informing students of changes before the semester ends transforms feedback from a compliance exercise into an active dialogue.
- **Leverage SharePoint for strategic data assets:** replicate check-in surveys and centralise survey outputs within School-level Microsoft SharePoint. This builds longitudinal datasets across iterations, establishing a historical record of student learning trends to directly support periodic School and Program Review