



Gathering first year students' experiences by mystery shopping method

EFYE, Utrecht, 26th of June 2018

Niina Ukonjärvi, Tiina Niemi & Eila Pajarre

Teaching and Learning Services, Tampere University of Technology

Verna Hahtola & Aliisa Saari

Members of the board of Student Union of Tampere University of Technology

Tampere, the third largest city in Finland



Tampere University of Technology (TUT)

7000 BSc/MSc
students, (of
whom 550
international)

1100
doctoral
students, (of
whom 200
international)

Established
in 1965

Technology
and
architecture

Personnel:
276 teachers,
1600
employees



What is mystery shopping?

- A method used commonly by market research companies to collect customer satisfaction from e.g., restaurants or retail stores
- The main idea is to use trained individuals to act as customers and report on their experiences in an objective way (MRS, 2014)



Mystery shopping in universities

- Although the advantages and possibilities of mystery shopping within higher education have been recognized, the method still hasn't taken place among universities
- It has even been claimed that the method wouldn't be suitable for universities

(e.g. Douglas & Douglas 2006)



Mystery shopping in TUT

- The first pilot in TUT was run in 2015, which covered all services in TUT campus
- The results turned out to be positive, so another round was launched in autumn 2017
- 2017 focusing on the first year students and their experiences and transition into university



How was mystery shopping in TUT actually implemented?

- The Student Union of TUT recruited 65 first year students to write down their experiences during their first six study weeks
- The students reported their personal experiences of
 - transition into university
 - pedagogical competence and culture
 - teaching and counselling
 - course arrangements
 - student services and facilities in campus
 - learning environment
 - the learning culture as a whole



The advantages of mystery shopping compared to other methods

- The reports give a more holistic view of how the students perceive the transition phase
- Compared to traditional likert-scale questionnaires (even with open-ended questions):
 - comprehensive view of issues
 - where the university has succeeded well
 - new ideas of issues that need to be improved in the future



Findings

- Students find different things meaningful
 - every report is individual that improves the understanding of student as an individual person



"All of the teachers have been well orientated and one can notice that they are interested and want to help and explain things. I haven't always understood every explanation they have given [about the subject at hand], but the help they have tried to give has been good. I haven't felt that I wouldn't have the courage to ask for help."

"I haven't had personal and constructive feedback although I expected to have it. I would like to have more concrete and personal feedback from the work I have returned. The grades don't necessarily tell what should I change or improve in my work. I hope there's going to be a change in this matter."

"Compared to high school, here I really feel like being part of a greater community. There are lots of different events and the common atmosphere is so that I can go and talk with anyone. I said to one of my friends that even if I noticed technical field of work wasn't the right choice, I still wouldn't necessarily change the field, because here I feel like belonging to a community and I would not want to give up on it."



Findings

- Students tell exactly what they want to tell, **not** what we want them to tell us



“Compared to high school, the work load that you need to handle independently here at TUT is much greater.

Although I knew it and I had heard it several times it still came to me as a some kind of surprise.

Especially if you had handled high school studies somewhat easily without giving any attention to studies on your free time, you needed to orientate yourself to a new kind of learning style.

Also, you can't really read or understand everything that there is to know about the subject at hand completely, so you just have to deal with it and not take too much stress about it.”



Findings

- Students find it positive that the university was interested in their opinions
 - Also serve learning and the adherence to the university?



"I am a bit upset that I had not written more notes in my diary, because it would have been interesting to read those markings afterwards.

I probably could have told about the real everyday routines, if there was more markings in the diary.

Now the report lacks for example the info, that for the first time I stayed awake two days in a row just so I could complete all the assignments.

I hope this report helps to improve and develop TUT in the future.

I greatly appreciate that the opinions of first year students are wanted to be heard in the develop process of TUT."



So what?

- Comprehensive view about issues:
 - What makes transition phase easier or harder for students
 - Development targets reported by students
- An even bigger challenge than identifying development targets is putting them into practice
 - What we can influence in?
 - How these findings can be utilized?



References

- Douglas, A. & Douglas, J. 2006. Campus spies? Using mystery students to evaluate university performance. Educational Research 48 (1), 111-119.
- MRS 2014. MRS Guidelines for Mystery Shopping Research.
<https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/2014-09-01%20Mystery%20Shopping%20Research%20Guidelines.pdf>

Contact:

niina.ukonjarvi@tut.fi

Niina Ukonjärvi
Study Psychologist
Teaching and Learning
Services, TUT

eila.pajarre@tut.fi

Eila Pajarre
Planning Officer
Teaching and Learning
Services, TUT

