Expected Outcomes:

- In-depth study of methods and techniques relevant to the student’s focus area
- Increase written and oral communication skills
- Hands-on experience on specific techniques or methodologies
- Learn how to use literature search engines

Assessment methods

Method:

Student and faculty evaluation on Special Problems (FISH 7960). Faculty who taught Special Problems provided informal feedback to the curriculum committee chair. Students were asked to fill a questionnaire with the following questions:

1. You took special problems as: undergraduate, MS, or PhD
2. Did you find special problems a useful course? (scored as 5 = extremely useful; 1 = not useful at all)
3. What was the main learning outcome of the course?
4. Did the course satisfy your expectations? (scored as 5, it totally did; 1, not at all)
5. Was your professor engaged in your learning experience? Yes/No
6. Do you think special problems was a good complement to regular courses? (5, excellent complement; 1, did not make a difference)
7. Please, provide us with any comments that would help us to improve the quality of our courses (not just Special Problems) and programs.

Findings:

All faculty that directed a MS Special Problems felt that it was a positive learning experience for students. Graduate students spent some time working on a particular problem, outside their research topic but still within their focus area, and that helped them to acquire specific knowledge not covered by other courses. A special problems class gave them the opportunity to learn specific skill sets not covered in detail in other classes. A special problems class allowed current issues to be examined in more depth than is possible in other classes. All MS students said the course totally satisfied their expectations and that their professor was fully engaged in their learning experience. The students found Special Problems to be an excellent complement to their regular courses.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Since Special Problems courses are not subjected to student evaluations we don’t have a common method to assess these courses. We plan to develop a normalized evaluation form for Special Problems that the students as well as the instructor will complete at the end of the course.

Additional comments:

None