

For enthusing students about soil science through a focus on discovery, critical environmental issues and the application of contemporary teaching and learning principles

OVERVIEW: SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTION AND CONTEXT

Is soil science relevant, interesting or useful? Since joining James Cook University (JCU) in 2004 I have had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Soil Science program at JCU. The program is a 4-year undergraduate program that provides students with a strong foundation in soil science and environmental science. The program is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills to work in a variety of soil science related careers. The program is also designed to provide students with the opportunity to engage in research and to develop their leadership and communication skills. The program is a highly respected and well-regarded program at JCU and is a key part of the university's commitment to excellence in education and research.

average for virtually all criteria (Table 1). According to the 41 comments on the best aspects of the subject, students were most enthusiastic about the excellent organisation (16 comments), the interesting and useful nature of the practical exercises (16), the enthusiasm, approachability and quality of feedback provided by the lecturer (14), the nature of the assessment, especially the regular short quizzes (12) and the quality of the lectures and notes, including their accessibility online (11). It was also clear that the quality of the tutor in Townsville, Sue Berthelsen, was critical to the students' good experience (7 comments) and helped achieve my goal of maximising student engagement. Table 1 indicates the average student evaluation scores for 'Applied Soil Science' subject for the last 3 years, averaged across both campuses of delivery, compared to the University average. This demonstrates the very positive response from students to the teaching approach.

Table 1. Student feedback scores for 'Applied Soil Science' (1-5 Likert scale)

	2009	2010	2011
--	------	------	------