

Course Feedback at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna

CONCEPT FOR THE PILOT PROJECT
AT THE INSTITUTE
FOR ART AND ARCHITECTURE (IKA)

(FULL VERSION)

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I would like to thank the Student Representatives – Architecture, the ÖH/University Representation, as well as those lecturers who have provided me with numerous helpful ideas for this concept.

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Foreword

The Academy of Fine Arts is planning to implement course feedback provided by students as a continuous instrument accompanying quality assurance and the improvement of teaching. Therefore, the first step will be to carry out a pilot project at the Institute for Art and Architecture in the winter semester 2013/14.

The project aims to try out various approaches to and methods of student feedback in order to find out whether the method planned against the backdrop of the teaching and studying conditions specific to the Academy can be considered beneficial to and useful for all people involved (especially for students and lecturers). The experiences thus gained, plus all accompanying thought processes, shall serve as a sound basis for all further developments and refinements of course feedback provided by students.

1 Quality in Teaching¹

At the Academy, quality in teaching is regarded as a heterogeneous variable that must be continuously challenged and discussed. What constitutes good teaching always depends on the respective context and cannot be determined one-dimensionally. Especially at a school of art, which is characterized by a diversity of teaching and learning processes which are often hard to determine, and by complex pedagogical contexts, a definition of the term “quality” is well-nigh impossible.

Nevertheless, the Academy’s understanding of quality is anything but arbitrary. The points of reference for its values can be found in the objectives defined in the Development Plan and the relevant Works Council Agreements, and in the Academy’s provisions on employment and study law. Moreover, the principles outlined in the Austrian Universities Act provide the legal, sociopolitical and educational background.² The actual interpretation of the values and objectives contained therein is, however, subject to the respective university context. The nature of quality and its manifestation in everyday practice is under constant scrutiny, and must be defined afresh for each context.

For processes such as the course feedback provided by students, this demand is to be met by adjusting all the indicators prepared to the general conditions prevalent at the Academy. In the long term, the definitions grid for high-quality teaching is to remain open so that different or new aspects can be made visible or definable at any time. Furthermore, the Academy is bound to the principle that feedback results only serve as clues and must not be regarded as the ultimate solution. Contextualizing feedback results is therefore a decisive

¹ This text serves to provide only a preliminary definition of the term “quality” or “quality objectives” specific to the Academy. However, we are planning to develop for the future an understanding of these terms in cooperation with Academy members.

² Cf.: Academy of Fine Arts (Blimlinger, Eva/Braidt, Andrea B./Riegler, Karin) (2012): Development Plan of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2013 – 2015. Vienna; Universities Act 2002 (as amended 2009). Online at: http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Erw/ERV_2002_1_120/ERV_2002_1_120.pdf (25/07/2013).

approach in quality management, within a framework of dialog and the willingness to reflect upon their actions of all those involved.

The Academy is aware of the fact that any discourse on quality and values is always linked to differing interests. Therefore, it is also committed to making transparent which interests and objectives underlie which measure. The Department of Quality Management puts this principle into practice by clearly communicating how it intends to make use of the results gained.

2 Legal Basis

The following statutes and provisions are relevant to course feedback at the Academy:

- Universities Act 2002³
 - § 2, 6: “student codetermination, particularly in respect of matters relating to studies, quality assurance of teaching and the application of tuition fees”
 - § 14 (1): “The universities shall develop their own quality management in order to assure quality and the attainment of their performance objectives.”
 - § 14 (7): “The performance of university professors, associate professors, and other research, artistic and teaching staff shall be regularly evaluated, at least once every five years. The detailed arrangements shall be established by university statutes.”
- Guideline for making temporary positions permanent at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna: the results of course feedback are not automatically taken into account when considering the removal of the time limit on an employee’s position; such results can, however, be included should the respective employee so desire.⁴

3 Objectives

The main objective of course feedback at the Academy of Fine Arts is to sustain and continuously improve the quality of teaching. This feedback is part of a versatile, continuous process to ensure the quality of teaching, which is reflected by an open and lively quality culture, by the productive dialog between students and lecturers, and by the willingness on the part of all those involved to reflect on their actions.

³ Cf. Universities Act 2002 (as amended 2009). Online at: http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/ErV/ERV_2002_1_120/ERV_2002_1_120.pdf (24/07/2013), unofficial translation by the Austrian Federal Chancellery, Austrian Legal Information System.

⁴ Cf. Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (2012): Guideline issued by the Rector’s Office on the extension of temporary employment contracts of university professors according to § 98 Universities Act 2002 – UA. § 4 Teaching. Vienna, unofficial translation.

4 Principles of Course Feedback

4.1 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Course feedback is based on the principles of fairness, integrity, and honesty. Students are seen as being on an equal footing with their lecturers, and all those involved in the feedback process are expected to uphold the principles mentioned.

4.2 DATA PROTECTION

Any personal data, or the processing and analysis thereof, is subject to data protection and will be treated as strictly confidential.

4.3 DUTY TO COOPERATE

The persons responsible (especially lecturers, departmental heads) are obliged to cooperate and to provide all the data and information required for the feedback process (especially information on the lectures and courses, Follow-Up Report).

4.4 SUSTAINABILITY

Course feedback provided by students is not a one-off project to determine the status-quo but rather a continuous and sustainable process to accompany teaching. It aims to establish a sustainable, reflective, open and lively quality culture at the Academy of Fine Arts, responsibly implemented by Academy members. Both content and organization are oriented on the way the Academy has defined quality (cf. Chapter 1).

A vital precondition for a sustainable quality culture always lies in mutual exchange, and in joint visions. Therefore, we also aim to intensively involve the players (especially lecturers and students) in the process of quality development, thus creating space for creativity, innovation, and exchange. The knowledge and experience Academy members have gained through practical learning and teaching have contributed significantly to this process, and ensure that it can benefit everybody involved in the long term.

4.5 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The instruments used for course feedback have not been implemented as closed projects but rather as processes which can be continuously refined and developed further. In particular, the experiences made by students and lecturers alike provide significant stimuli, whose feedback data is systematically collected by using a variety of instruments such as meta evaluations⁵.

⁵ A meta evaluation is the evaluation of an evaluation. It serves to describe and analyze the initial evaluation in order to derive measures to improve the former in a further step.

5 Methods

For the course feedback, two different methods can be applied:

- Online Feedback
- Feedback Round

Lecturers and students together decide on the methods they would like to make use of (Online Feedback, Feedback Round or both). The best option is a consensual decision, otherwise the majority decides. Each person present has one vote (as does the lecturer). In case of an equal number of votes (i.e. a draw), both feedback methods are triggered. If no notification is sent to the Department of Quality Management, Online Feedback is used automatically.

5.1 METHOD 1: ONLINE FEEDBACK

Online Feedback will be collected via an online questionnaire using an application provided by AcademyOnline. For each type of lecture or course (project, project lecture, lecture, seminar) there is a different questionnaire, which is compiled using modules:

- comprehensive standard questions on any type of lecture or course
- specific questions depending on the type of course
- optional questions for each course, which can be supplemented by the lecturer on request

5.1.2 TYPES OF QUESTIONNAIRE

For the following types of courses⁶ different questionnaires are used (the respective questionnaires can be found on the website of the Department of Quality Management).

1 TYPE PROJECT (P)

Description: the design project is the center of the respective course of studies. In the course of a project, students learn to connect, test, and evaluate their newly acquired knowledge and their ideas. Design projects are taught in small groups of approx. twelve students each. Such intensive personal guidance enables lecturers to respond to students' individual abilities and ideas. Teamwork is supported, as both students and lecturers are thus confronted with different views, and are forced to think along different lines and consider alternative solutions. The projects are continuously assessed and supervised by the lecturers throughout the semester, and external experts invited to evaluate them additionally. Usually, students are expected to do work amounting to 9 ECTS points.

⁶ Cf.: Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Institute for Art and Architecture, Curricula Commission for Architecture (2013): Study plan for the Bachelor Studies of Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts (BArch). § 5 Course types. Vienna, pp. 4-5; Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Institute for Art and Architecture, Curricula Commission for Architecture (2013): Study plan for the Master Studies Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts (MArch). § 5 Course types. Vienna, p. 5.

2 PROJECT LECTURE (PV)

Description: Project Lectures are closely linked to design projects in content as they serve to enhance students' understanding of the issues specific to the respective project. Together with such a project, these courses each represent one module, which means that students have to attend them jointly to get a grade. Depending on the project context, students will have to do work amounting to either 2 or 3 ECTS Points.

3 LECTURE (V)

Lectures serve to introduce students to the scientific and theoretical principles and methods of architecture. Materials covering the course content will be provided by the respective lecturer. Students will be graded according to their performance at either written or oral examinations on the subject. Normally, the workload for students amounts to 3 ECTS points.

4 SEMINAR (S)

Seminars serve to deepen students' knowledge of the topics covered by presentations. These courses are based on students' participation in the form of discussions and contributions (written, visual and oral presentations). Additionally, students will be introduced to research methods. Normally, the workload for students amounts to 3 ECTS points.

5.2 METHOD 2: FEEDBACK ROUND⁷

The Feedback Round will be a discussion among students without the lecturer, taking 45 minutes during one of the lectures in the course of the semester. Students are expected to elect one from their midst to moderate and lead the discussion, as well as someone to take the minutes on the computer. At the end of the discussion, the minutes will be read and need the approval of all students present at the discussion.

The student taking the minutes will then send them by email to the Department of Quality Management, to be forwarded to the respective lecturer by the latter. This method serves to ensure the anonymity of the students involved. Lecturers can then decide whether they wish to discuss the respective results with their students at a later date.

A guideline for the Feedback Round developed together with the Student Representatives – Architecture (ÖHArch) will be provided at the Website of the Department of Quality Management. The ensuing discussion may but need not follow these lines. For students interested in hosting such a feedback discussion, the Academy offers a two-hour training session to convey the basic methods for moderating a lively, structured discussion that also integrates the “quiet ones” in a professional way. Moreover, the website of the Department of Quality Management contains a guideline for moderators, as well as one for giving feedback.

⁷ I would like to thank Ruth Sonderegger for this idea.

6 Anonymity and Voluntary Participation of Students

Students will remain anonymous throughout the entire course feedback routine. This is ensured by:

Online Feedback

- If fewer than four questionnaires have been filled out, the results will not be evaluated nor communicated to the respective lecturer.
- Should it be possible to trace back an answer to one of the open questions to a particular student owing to the language used (German/English), this will be prevented by the Department of Quality Management through translation.

Feedback Round

- Lecturers are not present during discussions led by students.
- The minutes never mention any student by name.
- If fewer than four students attend the Feedback Round, the minutes are not communicated to the respective lecturer. Any feedback provided by the students will, however, be integrated into the summary of all feedback minutes (cf. Chapter 7: Utilization of Results).

Student participation in course feedback is voluntary.

7 Utilization of Results

In order to be able to sustain and further improve the high-quality teaching and learning conditions at the Academy, students' feedback is to be incorporated into any decisions and potential modifications envisaged by those responsible. Such results will therefore be forwarded to the following institutions and persons:

Table 1

Overview of the utilization of results of course feedback provided by students

Type of result	Results accessed by	Lecturer and co-lecturer	Departmental heads	Students Representatives	Rector's Office
Results of the Online Feedback of single courses		X	X		
Minutes of the Feedback Round of single courses		X	X		
Summarized results ⁸ of the Online Feedback of all courses according to the type of course (P, PV, V, S)**		X	X	X	
Summary of main results from the minutes of the Feedback Rounds**		X	X	X	
Follow-Up Report compiled by the departmental head**				X	X

⁸) For the sake of completeness, it must be pointed out that the Department of Quality Management in its data processing function has access to all the results.

**) In the summaries, the anonymity of all lecturers involved is guaranteed as they are not named, nor are single lectures or courses listed by name.

7.1 LECTURERS

The results of the Online Feedback, as well as the minutes of the Feedback Rounds, will first be communicated to the respective lecturer and co-lecturer. Moreover, the lecturer and co-lecturer will be provided with the summarized results of the Online Feedback for all courses according to course type, as well as a summary of the main results taken from the Feedback Round minutes of all courses offered by the respective institute.⁹

Thus, these instruments offer a general framework for feedback provided by students for their lecturers. They will serve to make visible the strengths and weaknesses of the respective lecturer, and to show ways of improving performance in teaching.

⁸ For instance, the questionnaire results of all courses of the 'Project' type are combined to form a single feedback result.

⁹ The summaries do not mention either lecturers or courses by name.

7.2 HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS

The departmental head and his/her deputy will receive

- the results of the Online Feedback, and the minutes taken at the Feedback Rounds of all courses offered by the respective institute
- the summarized results of the Online Feedback according to course type plus a summary of the main results taken from the minutes of the Feedback Rounds of all courses offered by the respective institute.¹⁰

→ FOLLOW-UP

On the basis of the data received, the departmental head is encouraged to issue a report especially outlining potential measures for sustaining and improving teaching at the respective institute. Any feedback provided by students here serves to make quality visible, or to trigger processes of change and improvement.

The Department of Quality Management provides a template for the structuring of the report. The report should cover the following points:

- Description of strengths and good-practice examples (e.g. above-average assessment in quantitative questions as well as the main feedback points mentioned by students regarding the open questions and during the Feedback Rounds)
- Description of weaknesses (e.g. below-average assessments in quantitative questions as well as the main feedback points mentioned by students regarding the open questions and during the Feedback Rounds)
- Main course-feedback results relevant to the respective institute
- Lessons learned, conclusions, planned/required follow-up measures

The report is to be forwarded to the Rector's Office and the Student Representatives within a specified period. The report ensures the respective lecturer's privacy, which is why individual lecturers and/or courses may only be named with the respective person's express authorization.

7.3 STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

The Student Representatives will receive:

- the summarized results of the course feedback sorted by course type plus the summary of main results taken from the minutes of the Feedback Rounds on all courses held at the respective institute.¹¹
- the Follow-Up Report provided by the departmental heads.

7.4 RECTOR'S OFFICE

The Rector's Office will receive the Follow-Up Report compiled by the departmental head. This report, or rather its underlying data – the feedback provided by students – thus becomes a significant instrument for revealing quality in teaching, and it also acts as a catalyst for structural changes within an institute, but also at university level and beyond.

^{10, 11} The summaries do not mention either lecturers or courses by name.

8 Time Schedules

8.1 SELECTION OF FEEDBACK METHOD

The lecturers decide together with their student groups by November 15, 2013, which method of student feedback they would like to use (Online Feedback, Feedback Round or both) and notify the Department of Quality Management. If no preference is registered, Online Feedback is automatically selected.

8.2 REALIZATION OF THE COURSE FEEDBACK SELECTED

8.2.1 ONLINE FEEDBACK

Short title	Description	Scheduled for
Additional questions provided by lecturers	If they wish to do so, lecturers can add one or two personal questions per course to the questionnaire. A set of possible questions will be provided. Such questions should be communicated to the Department of Quality Management by November 15.	Nov. 15, 2013
How Online Feedback is carried out	Students have access to the course feedback questionnaires on AcademyOnline from Dec. 2, 2013 until Jan. 7, 2014. For courses ending before Dec. 2 (e.g. block courses), the questioning period will be adjusted accordingly.	From Dec. 2, 2013 until Jan. 7, 2014
Results provided for lecturers and co-lecturer	The results of the Online Feedback can be accessed by the lecturer and co-lecturer at AcademyOnline for each course taught. Additionally, lecturers and co-lecturers will be provided with the summarized results of the Online Feedback according to course type as well as the summary of the main results taken from the minutes of the Feedback Rounds. ^{*)}	As of mid-Jan 2014
Lecturers' comments	If they wish to do so, lecturers can (via the application offered by AcademyOnline) post their comments on, or add their own views to, the feedback provided by their students.	From mid-Jan until March 7, 2014 (deadline)

^{*)} The summaries do not mention either lecturers or courses by name.

8.2.2 FEEDBACK ROUND

Short title	Description	Scheduled for
Moderation Training	For students interested in moderating a Feedback Round, the Academy will offer a two-hour training session.	Nov. 2013
How the Feedback Round is carried out	The student group attending the respective course will be carrying out the Feedback Round autonomously in the course of the lecture (45 min). A discussion guideline will be provided. A moderator determined in advance will host the discussion and a predetermined minute-taker will record the main points of discussion. The minutes will be sent to the Department of Quality Management by email.	Dec. 2013
Results provided for lecturers and co-lecturers	The Department of Quality Management will then send the minutes taken in the course of the Feedback Rounds to the lecturers and co-lecturers.	Dec. 2013/Jan. 2014
Lecturers' comments	If required, lecturers are invited to comment on the feedback results, or to add their own views to students' feedback. Such a comment is to be sent to the Department of Quality Management.	By March 7, 2014

8.3 FOLLOW-UP

Short title	Description	Scheduled for
Results provided for Student Representatives	The Department of Quality Management will communicate the following to the Students Representatives <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. the summarized results of the Online Feedback sorted according to course type2. the summary of main results taken from the minutes of the Feedback Rounds*	March 2014
Results provided for Departmental Heads	The Department of Quality Management will communicate the following to the Departmental Heads: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. the assessment of the Online Feedback for each course offered by the respective institute, including any comments added by the lecturer involved2. the minutes of the Feedback Rounds for each course offered by the respective institute, including any comments added by the lecturer3. the summarized results* of the Online Feedback sorted according to course type4. the summary of main results gleaned from the minutes of the Feedback Rounds*	March 2014
Follow-Up Report	On the basis of the results transmitted, the departmental heads are expected to compile a report containing the strengths and weaknesses of the courses, as well as possible measures for sustaining and improving the quality of teaching. This report will then be sent to the Rector's Office, and to the Students' Representatives.	By May 5, 2014

**) In the summaries, individual lecturers and/or individual courses will not be named.*

9 Questionnaire on the Pilot Project

(May 2014)

In order to be able to learn from the experience gained throughout the pilot project, we plan to ask everybody involved (especially students and lecturers) about the course feedback. Any feedback and suggested improvements will serve to refine the methods.

Further queries

If you have any further questions, please contact:

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References

Academy of Fine Arts (Blimlinger, Eva/Braidt, Andrea B./Riegler, Karin) (2012): Development Plan of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2013 – 2015. Vienna.

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Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Institute for Art and Architecture, Curricula Commission for Architecture (2013): Study plan for the Master Studies Architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts (MArch). Vienna.