

Discovering Student Experiences

Instructing post-secondary courses involves a complex balance of delivering both course content and the skills that students need to successfully master this content and become life-long learners. In increasingly diverse classrooms, how can we accurately know what learning skills our students already have? Discovering students' current knowledge of academic skills can help you to connect your students to the right opportunities to develop their skills so that they can fully participate effectively in the assignments and learning activities you have designed for them.

A Strategy: Student Experience/Skills Survey

Consider asking students to complete an anonymous survey about their past learning experiences and current learning skills early in the class. This can help you to bridge any gaps proactively.

Example Student Skills Survey

The survey below lists some skills that students use in university courses. Please share your current level of experience with these skills. Be honest – this survey is anonymous and will not affect your grade. The results will be used to support you in developing the skills you need to succeed in this class. Put an (x) in the box that represents your current level of knowledge.

Skill	I don't know about this skill	I am aware of this skill, but have never done this	I have done this, but I am not confident that I always do it correctly	I know how to do this
I can find an academic article in a library database				
I can take good notes from an academic book or article				
I can paraphrase/summarize key ideas				
I know when and how to use in-text citations				
I know how to make a references page				
I can work with a group of classmates to complete a project				
I know how to make a presentation				
I can use Word to format assignments				
I can use Powerpoint to make presentations				

Conducting an Assignment Audit

When you have a sense of your students' current skills, you can then match these to those required to meet the Learning Objectives of your course or a particular assignment. Review one of your assignments (alone, or with a colleague). List any skills that students require in order to do the task effectively.

Now, match this list with your students' skill levels. Which skills do your students still need? Once you have identified these, you have a path ahead. You can choose to:

- (1) Embed the skill into your current instruction (model "how to learn" alongside "what to learn"). This is often the most effective way to ensure all students have the opportunity to gain the required skills. Models and support are available for this process.
- (2) Connect students with specific, on-campus support and/or online modules to learn the skill. You can find available resources and learning opportunities at kpu.ca/learningcentres.