

Wordle – Visualising Student Feedback

Peter Nock
Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
130 Madras Street
Christchurch
peter.nock@cpit.ac.nz

ABSTRACT

How can student evaluation survey responses be used to create engaging and meaningful feedback to the stakeholders? Analysing and displaying trends in large numbers of comments from student evaluation surveys can be problematic. Wordle provides one solution by producing word clouds based on text strings. The ability to quickly, easily and freely produce word clouds from large numbers of student responses enables fast analysis of text and visually interesting and attractive posters to stimulate conversation. Backed up by quantitative data, Wordle provides a powerful, rapid, and visually engaging method of displaying text based data. We have used this to analyse student feedback comments and present them to staff during Performance Evaluation Reviews (PER).

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.6.1 [Project and People Management]: Staffing

General Terms

Management, Measurement, Documentation, Performance, Design, Human Factors.

Keywords

Wordle, online, images, content, analysis, student course evaluation surveys, pictograms, research tools, qualitative, quantitative, word clouds

1. INTRODUCTION

CPIT Campus Connect runs a community based Computing for Free programme that includes ACE computer courses (Adult and Community funded) and the National Certificates in Computing at both Level 2 and 3. Computing for Free averages around 6000 enrolments per year across approximately 2000 individual students. The programmes are offered in a self-paced environment, where students book themselves into two or more classes per week and their learning is supported by Facilitators. At the end of each course, students have the opportunity to provide us with feedback in the form of an online survey. The survey engine provides charts of the numeric data and the comments from the students can be downloaded as a .csv file. At the end of each term we review the comments from the students looking for any common themes, issues and also for the things that they value and gain from completing their courses with us. Each year CPIT conducts a Performance Evaluation Review (PER) and student feedback from the online survey is analysed and presented to give their perspective on how we are doing. With many hundreds of individual comments answering several different questions, how can we possibly summarize that amount of data into meaningful information? It turns out, that there is a way to do this using an online tool called Wordle.

2. HOW DOES IT WORK?

To quote the Wordle creator [1]:

Wordle is a toy for generating “word clouds” from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. You can tweak your clouds with different fonts, layouts, and color schemes. The images you create with Wordle are yours to use however you like. You can print them out, or save them to the Wordle gallery to share with your friends.

3. HOW DID I USE WORDLES?

For our PER, I gave a presentation using PowerPoint that included a number of Wordles generated from our student survey (1151 responses). The overall feedback from our students is that they are satisfied or highly satisfied with the service that we provide. The Wordle images allowed me to convey that message in powerful way to the people at the PER - many of whom were unfamiliar with Campus Connect and its students. Along with the Wordle images, I included quantitative data from the student course evaluation survey and specific quotes to highlight both what students valued and what they did not value in our learning environment. Without the Wordle images, it would have been much harder to present that information to the audience.

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