Improvement and innovation in undergraduate teaching and learning requires understanding of student perception of discipline content and relevance. This is particularly so for veterinary epidemiology which, due to its population focus, can appear to veterinary undergraduates to be less relevant than other disciplines. In order to direct improvements in course design and implementation, a study of student perceptions of epidemiology was conducted at two Australian veterinary schools in 2005.

The study objective was to compare veterinary students' perceptions of epidemiology at the commencement and conclusion of an epidemiology course. Identical questionnaires were completed at course start and end by two student cohorts – third year students at the University of Sydney and fifth year students at the University of Queensland. This paper will describe the questionnaire, and compare and contrast the results for the two student cohorts. Identified change in student perception within cohort will indicate the degree to which the epidemiology course combined with other factors over the same period altered student perceptions of epidemiology as a discipline and its relevance to veterinary practice.

In addition, we will discuss the implications of student perceptions for improvements to the design and implementation of each course. Given the current lack of published research on best-practice in veterinary undergraduate epidemiological training, this paper will present new insights on student perceptions, supporting progression of our collective thinking as veterinary epidemiologists and educators about improvement and innovation in undergraduate teaching practice.