Taught Postgraduate Student Experience: Transition to Master's level study

Collection of International, UK and Scottish case studies

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Introduction

The Learning from International Practice, Taught Postgraduate Student Experience project ran from January 2012 until the end of July 2013. It addressed the theme “what is mastersness?” and encompassed a number of strands, including identifying and collecting concrete case studies to illustrate practices developed, adopted and used by higher education institutions around the world to help their students reach master’s level.

Case study 1: Recognising M-Level, University of Bedfordshire

Overview

Notes originally prepared for fellow-tutors to initiate a debate about master's level work, but which escaped into the wild.

Recognising work at Master's level is an "I can't describe it, but I know it when I see it" situation. Unfortunately, that is not very much use to programme participants who want some idea of what to expect and what to work to.

They were intended to promote increased consistency in marking from the tutors, and a clearer idea of expectations from the participants – by articulating some of the ways in which one tutor recognises Master's level work.

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

Originally a paper document circulated for discussion, now a web-page, which sets out the qualities I look for in Master's level work: Writing at Masters Level

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

A contribution to a debate among a team of academics when setting up a Master's in Learning and Teaching in HE (MALT) at De Montfort University in the mid-90s. Its interesting feature was of course that it was both about HE teaching and an example of it at Master's level. It was shared within the team and by our colleagues who were taking the course, was incorporated in the Handbook, and then taken up by colleagues at other institutions.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

That's an interesting question, because of course these notes themselves are not at M level. Are they?

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of mastersness - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

At one time we were going to create a more definitive set of guidance notes, but happily never got round to that, because it is the status of the notes as something to be argued with or about which makes it work at this level. I think—but feel free to disagree!

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Case study 2: MA in Luxury Brand Management, Regent's University London

Overview

The final module of the MA in Luxury Brand Management offers the opportunity to undertake a Masters' level Dissertation or Consultancy Project.

Keywords

Luxury Brand Management Dissertation Consultancy Project.

Describe briefly the activity/initiative/practice

Evaluation: The module, and the programme as a whole, is evaluated by the students and by the external examiners and has grown in acceptance and impact since the first projects in 2011.

Student numbers: There are two entry points to the programme throughout a year and a typical annual number of students on the programme would be 100. Initially, every student is registered for a Dissertation Report, unless a Consultancy Project is finalised by the student or with help from the Faculty. The experience so far is that 50% stay with the Dissertation route (50 students) and 50% do a Consultancy Project (50 students). Experience also indicates that, of the 50 doing the Consultancy Project, half of them find their own projects (25 students) and half are set up by the Module Leader (25 students). As these are a combination of individual and group projects, this typically means that around 10-15 client projects need to be negotiated and agreed with clients each year. This is a significant task for the Module Leader and time has to be set aside to maintain the network of client contacts.

What is the background /context to the activity/initiative practice?

This is a relatively new and specialised MA programme that attracts both people with work experience as well as those finishing a first degree. Typically, the students are seeking to gain employment in the luxury sector in a brand-related or management role. Therefore, work experience is important and, given that the College is well located in central London with access to many luxury brands marques, it has been considered important to utilise those facts. As a result, many guest speakers are invited into the College to speak with the students and the Consultancy Project option offers another chance to apply the knowledge gained on the programme in a practical and real way, to develop the student's skills base and potentially enhance their employability in the sector.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

The aim for these Master's-level students is to demonstrate both the understanding and the real world application of their knowledge, as compared to a greater focus on the learning and accumulation of knowledge at undergraduate level [V1]. Therefore, there are several differences, notable ones being that it is a live project which the client needs doing now, the students take on the responsibility of acting as real management consultants, and are working within time constraints to develop costed proposals and recommendations that may well be taken up by the client.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The selection of suitable students is an important matter, as is the construction of small teams where necessary. This may be student initiated but may also require active management by the academic staff, with input from the client who ultimately has a final say on the suitability of a particular student. Also, the timing of the client work may not fall neatly within the usual academic calendar and so a degree of flexibility and negotiation is required.

Where to next – *in terms of mastersness* – and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The Consultancy Project is proving on the whole to be a success with the students and with the employers, with an increasing number of students wishing to pursue this route and employers regularly requesting repeat projects. The key challenge in terms of 'mastersness' is to ensure that the consultancy projects are sufficiently complex and yet not too onerous for the students in the time allowed.

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Case Study 3: Activity Led Learning (ALL) for Master's Project, Engineering, University of Coventry

Overview

The ALL for Masters Project was funded by a Higher Educational Academy Teaching Development Grant and operated from 1st January 2012 until 31st March 2013. The project investigated how Activity Led Learning (ALL) could be incorporated into postgraduate taught programmes in the Engineering Management department of the Faculty of Engineering and Computing at Coventry University.

Project objectives

a. Explore views of different stakeholders about benefits and disadvantages of applying ALL to PGT programmes
b. Pilot and evaluate ALL for some programmes and modules
c. Propose a framework for implementing and integrating ALL across PGT programmes
d. Revise PGT programmes and monitor

Keywords

PGT, Activity Led Learning (ALL), PBL, graduate employability, International students, Part-time students

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The starting point was to look for answers to the following questions:

- Does the one-year study interval for full-time PGT students provide sufficient time for adaptation of students' learning styles to ALL?
- Will international students and part-time UK students find an ALL experience appropriate?
- Can we devise a standard framework and structure for the faculty's subjects?
- Would pre-publicity of an ALL approach be seen by prospective students as a positive reason (USP) for applying to CU?
- Could we integrate UG and PGT programmes using ALL?
- Could integrative ALL activities be designed for individual PGT courses, across PGT programmes and disciplines? Would this be a useful experience for students?
- Do employers and companies see ALL potential for improving employability?

To find evidence to answer the above questions the team analyzed documentary evidence about PGT curricula and pedagogy conducted student questionnaires at different stages during the study, targeting different cohorts; conducted focus groups and interviews with different categories of students, academic staff, representatives from local industry, academics from outside the department and internationally; designed the curriculum, assessment and delivery methods for one new PGT programme to incorporate an ALL approach, piloting and monitoring from autumn 2012; revised and adapted a part-time operation of a module to incorporate ALL, piloting and monitoring from autumn 2012; Trained student employees (advocates) undertook most of the student-facing research work.

Based on the amassed evidence a report was produced that set out a series of recommendations and proposed a framework for revising PGT programmes to incorporate ALL.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

Since 2007 the Engineering and Computing Faculty at Coventry University has transformed the way undergraduate students learn by developing and implementing a faculty-wide Activity Led Learning (ALL) approach. This has led to improved retention and engagement of students and enhanced student employability. In September 2012 the faculty moved to a new building (ECB) that had been purpose-designed for ALL. The development of ALL and the design of learning spaces was evidence-led, building on good practice observed and studied elsewhere across the world, for example in Problem and project based learning, CDIO and similar approaches.

The ALL for Masters Project aimed to extend the good practice to the PGT students in the faculty, but first it was necessary to investigate whether it was feasible to implement ALL for PGT programmes and if so, how should this be adapted to meet the different needs of the PGT student population.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

ALL requires a discovery approach to learning, leading to acquisition of deep and sustained knowledge and understanding. This ethos is particularly pertinent to master's studies with learning outcomes and assessment criteria drawing on the higher level characteristics of analysis, synthesis and critical evaluation (Bloom's Taxonomy).

A few words from academic staff about ALL for Master's:

- "They love it! They enjoy it! It encourages deeper sense of learning"
- "They appreciate its interactive nature. Some students (especially Chinese) find it difficult, but when they get used to it, it's beneficial for them"

As the second quotation suggests, the mixture of about 75% international full-time PGT students, with many mature UK and international students bringing wide ranging work-place experiences, demands a careful approach to changes that impact on the student experience. Prior to beginning their PGT programme, many students have only experienced learning by rote and memorisation of facts for examinations and some have not been in education for many years. ALL can be an extremely challenging experience, but if done well, this approach brings with it great rewards to the learning potential of students.

ALL encourages module leaders and programme directors to devise innovative and inspirational assessments, often involving industry and external contacts.

Although this approach has been successfully implemented at undergraduate level, the maturity and experience that the PGT students bring to the table makes it work very effectively in the courses where we have piloted this approach so far.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of mastersness - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

At the outset of the project some PGT module and programme leaders believed that many PGT students would not accept an ALL approach, because their background led to expectations of passive learning, but this proved not to be the case. In fact introducing ALL led to opportunities for integrative and holistic learning. The student respondents talked about developing transferable skills and acquiring contextual knowledge that brought together the broad range of subject knowledge

ALL is often but not always team-based learning, which for different reasons can be seen as problematic by many PGT students, UK, EU and non-EU. Some interesting experiences and ideas emerged from the research about how to manage groups in diverse PGT classes.

There are specific challenges relating to PGT international students:

The short time to adapt to a completely new culture of study before the first assessment is due International students enrolling late because of visa problems can be very disruptive to ALL teaching. Some students arrive with weak English language skills and a small number with weak IT skills

Preparation, induction and support systems need to be put in place to address the above challenges. A small number of students find ALL not suited to their learning style, but almost all students can adapt and find this way of learning fulfilling and very rewarding.

Almost all module leaders who were initially sceptical about ALL at PGT level are now more confidently implementing some elements of ALL in their modules, as evidenced from the student and staff feedback captured towards the end of the project. It is possible that this transformation was assisted by the inclusive, non-judgemental approach to the capture of evidence from academic staff, coupled with positive student feedback.

Where to next - in terms of mastersness – if anywhere?

The 15-month project timeframe was insufficient time to fully implement it across the department. A PGT framework for ALL programmes as been designed and a consultation about implementation across the faculty is beginning.

The research revealed some excellent practice already in place in parts of the faculty, generating exceptionally good student feedback. However the research also highlighted a few examples of poor practice that will now be addressed. The big challenge is now to ensure that the recommendations are followed through to enhance the quality of learning for all students in the faculty and beyond.

Journal papers are being prepared about the research and the team would be delighted to have opportunities to disseminate more details about the findings from this project.

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Case study 4: Making the Most of Masters

Overview

Making the Most of Masters aims to improve collaboration between employers and universities; and, enhance student employability and attributes; by providing opportunities for masters students to undertake work based projects (WBPs). Working with taught postgraduate (PGT) programmes, MMM seeks to instil personal responsibility in learning; deepen employer engagement and networks; and facilitate in the exchange of research knowledge.

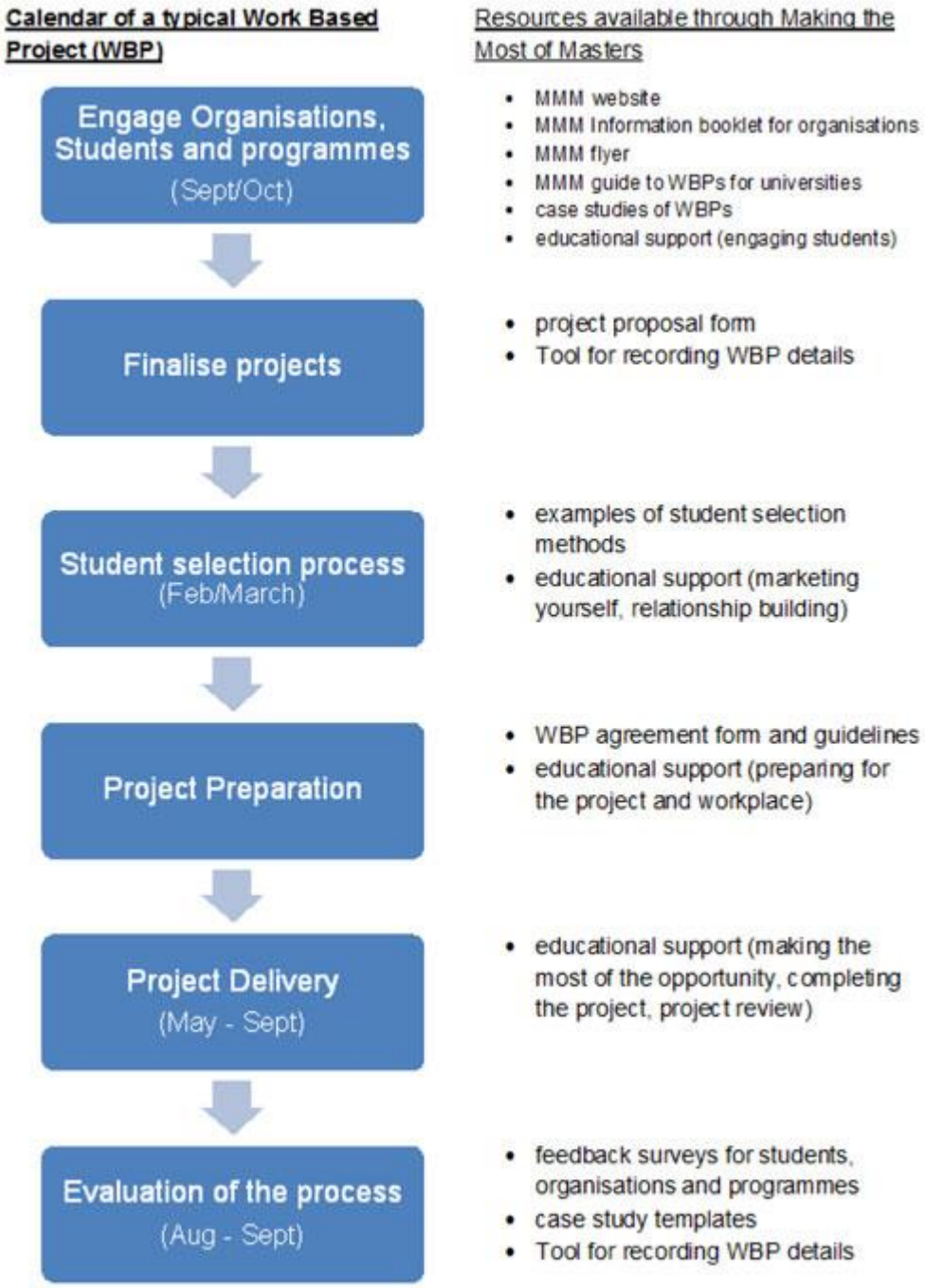
WBPs are adaptable across disciplines and key economic sectors in Scotland. Funded by the Scottish Funding Council's Learning to Work 2 initiative (LTW2), MMM is a partnership project between the universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Stirling.

Keywords

Employability; research competency; learner autonomy; responsibility, ownership and professionalism; work based learning (WBL)

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

MMM supports PGT programmes at host institutions by providing a framework of support for the successful implementation of WBPs as an alternative to a traditional masters dissertation. This support follows two main strands: operational support and educational support, considering issues from finding organisations willing to offer projects, to supporting students in making the most of the experience. The diagram below summarises the main stages of a WBP and how MMM supports both programme staff and PGT students.



What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

A recent article in the Scottish Enhancement Themes series highlighted that PGT students represent a third of the increase in numbers in the sector over the last decade and a growing consensus that universities need to be doing more for this cohort.

There is also increasing evidence to indicate that work-based experiences can positively influence employability and academic performance (Mansfield, R. 2011). The 2013 High Flyers publication claimed that new graduates without work experience are increasingly

unlikely to be offered a good graduate job after university. In order to maximise learning in this area, Pegg et al. (2012) recommend that such experiences are pragmatically embedded into the curriculum and designed using sound pedagogy, which includes space for reflection.

Integrating WBL during a 12 months taught postgraduate programme is particularly difficult due to tight time constraints. Thus, the idea behind MMM was to develop a process - considering this and other WBL issues at masters level – which could become embedded into PGT programmes.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

A WBP is very different from a traditional placement or period of work experience (that is often commonplace at undergraduate level), because it must fulfil the assessment criteria for a masters dissertation.

Projects can involve data analysis, modelling, reviews, method optimisation and comparison, equipment development, laboratory or field work - it depends on the business needs, the student's interests and the programme requirements. In addition to the research competency required to produce a dissertation at masters level, students must demonstrate professionalism when producing a piece of work on behalf of an external organisation and take responsibility for ensuring the output meets the needs of all stakeholders.

Tobbell et al. (2010) suggest that effective independent study is one of the principal practices that underpin postgraduate study. A successful WBP student should take ownership to assess the feasibility of the project and plan accordingly; manage the delicate relationship between themselves, their academic supervisor and external supervisor; and ensure their dissertation is finished on time and adheres to the expectations and requirements of both parties. This is evidenced by the fact that many organisations treat the student in a similar manner as they would an external consultant and many academic supervisors can take a more 'light touch' approach than with a traditional dissertation.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Student engagement: Initial results from Making the Most of Masters (2012) have shown that approximately half of projects sourced are not actually taken up by students. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students may view a WBP as a risky option when compared with a more traditional university-based dissertation. Educational resources developed by MMM aim to introduce the WBP concept early on in the masters year (ideally before arrival) so students can make an informed choice and if appropriate can begin to develop the ownership that is required. However, this can be difficult to implement considering the demand on students transitioning into a masters programme. The best solution appears to be integrating such support with timetabled, face-to-face sessions, supplemented by online resources.

Academic Engagement: Many academics have experience with WBL or placements but few have explicitly explored employability as a concept and have reservations about embedding it in the curriculum. MMM has raised awareness of the need to develop attributes associated with employability and academics have embraced the support available. By working in partnership with Careers and other Support Services, employability has become part of the masters curriculum without putting an additional burden on academic staff.

Ownership: Whilst the benefits of WBPs are accepted, further consideration is needed regarding responsibility for the WBP process. Who has ownership of making employer links

and supporting students in the process of securing and undertaking a WBP? Academics? School Administrators? A central support unit or students themselves? Current evidence suggests that there is no 'one size fits all' and MMM is in the process of developing scenario-based case studies to demonstrate different ways of managing WBPs.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

MMM is in the process of developing a set of tools and support provision for any PGT programme in Scotland that wishes to offer WBPs as part of a masters programme. Key to this in relation to mastersness are resources that encourage students to take ownership of the process and demonstrate the independent approach to learning expected at masters level.

In the future, we also hope to explore forms of dissertations and look at alternatives, which can maintain academic rigour whilst considering employability. Such forms may include a technical document, a website or a reflective element. Related to this idea is looking at best practice in assessment and curriculum design across different types of masters programme (e.g. a translational masters), identifying elements that are synonymous with mastersness.

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Case study 5: MA Childhood and Youth Studies, University Campus Suffolk

Overview

Commencing in 2011 the taught MA Childhood and Youth Studies at UCS is an innovative new Master's programme based on an informed and critical approach to the academic study of childhood and youth. However when we started to deliver the course our expectations of post-graduate students were immediately challenged in terms of the students' academic knowledge and levels of self-confidence to study at M level. Characteristically our students are mature, have often been out of formal education for some time and are often juggling paid employment, family commitments and post-graduate study. Underpinned by a blended learning combination of traditional teaching methods and technology enhanced learning, the programme endeavours to develop students' confidence and foster meaningful engagement through cooperative student endeavour via new social media.

Keywords

Social science – technology enhanced learning – student engagement – collaborative learning – building confidence

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

We designed our masters' programme around a range of creative assessment strategies mindful of the rapidly changing educational and wider professional environment in line with the QAA (2010) masters' degree characteristics. Using a combination of technology enhanced learning and innovative assessment strategies, combined with traditional face-to-face support, we encouraged collaborative student endeavour and set out to develop student confidence from the outset. Through the use of mind-maps for theoretical structure, group web blogs to encourage debate and develop critical, concise analytical writing and web quests, the students quickly developed critical media literacy skills through their own investigation of their chosen specialist area of interest. Active participation was required from the onset and the task orientated mechanism enabled immediate feedback opportunities from both academic staff and fellow students. This further motivated students to meaningfully engage with the subject area under discussion thus creating a successful community for learning.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

As a social science programme students enter the course from a wide variety of different backgrounds, academic experiences and abilities. In our experience masters student often lack confidence when they start the course. They have often been away from formal education for some time and not only lack confidence in subject knowledge but also in how to learn especially in a rapidly changing technological climate. Students often view a Master's course as a huge mountain that they have to climb and we envisage our role as guiding them up the mountain from base camp helping them to develop the skills that will enable them to negotiate what are often steep paths of learning. As the students become more self-reliant, they gain knowledge and understanding of their subject specialisms which further builds their own confidence and abilities, becoming more autonomous learners able to navigate their journey to the Master's summit. This provides an opportunity for Master's students to assert their own individual perspective and originality in their learning and their achievements.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

Master's level study adopts a specialised approach. At undergraduate level we expect students to have a robust, but broad base of knowledge and understanding on a variety of subjects but at M level students hone their knowledge into a more specialised area of interest which necessitates a higher level of student ownership than is expected at undergraduate study. This includes demonstrating a systematic understanding and a critical awareness of contemporary issues and recent developments which are at, or informed by, the forefront of their chosen subject area (in this case childhood and youth studies). Students are expected to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the appropriate techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship and demonstrate originality in their application of that knowledge to derive solutions to / recommendations to resolve complex situations and address issues in relation to children and young people. Furthermore, a conceptual understanding of children's rights and welfare that enables the student to evaluate critically complex issues, both systematically and creatively, to evaluate improving outcomes for children and young people. At Master's level the advanced scholarship of childhood and youth studies includes a thorough critical evaluation and analysis of methodologies and previous/current to propose new research questions and directions. Students also need to acquire the skills to exercise independent learning and to develop these skills to a high level so as to work with self-direction and originality and to communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The most important lesson that we learnt was at the beginning of the course that students do not enter a Master's course at Master's level. Although it sounds a bit obvious when we think of Master's level it is easy to assume that students will have already acquired certain academic skills and a level of relevant subject knowledge before they enter the course. However these assumptions do not, in our experience, necessarily reflect the reality of students' capabilities at the onset of the course and can be unhelpful. In fact many students do not step off level 6 (final year of a Bachelor's degree) straight into a Master's degree often they are much lower than a level 6 when they start the course. This is an important consideration when designing a masters' course. We had to re think our approach and change our initial expectations of the students. This was due in part to many students returning to education after a considerable period of time, having studied a diverse range of subjects at UG level at different institutions and at different times. Therefore, in reality there is a diversity of prior subject knowledge and student experience at the start of the course. Furthermore, students can feel very daunted and unsure at the start of the course and in an attempt to understand their concerns and worries we introduced writing on a 'worry wall' on the first day which enables everyone to collaboratively explore students' concerns. This endeavour also allowed us to identify specific areas which the students felt they would benefit from additional support. We were then able to reassure them before their concerns become barriers to effective learning and offer additional help and support for example in developing critical writing skills, referencing, literature searching etc.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

According to the HEA PTS report (2011) the main motivating factor for students to enrol on a PG programme is to improve employability. Therefore, we need to consider how we can foster a closer relationship between our HE academic endeavour at M level and the world of work and exploit technology enhanced learning to more realistically reflect the expectations of current and future demands of employers to this end.

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Case study 6: Masters of Science in Geographic Information Systems Technology (MS-GIST), University of Arizona

Overview

This program integrates science, cutting-edge systems technology, with management skills for use in government, corporate, non-profit, and academic settings. It is designed to meet the important educational needs of working professionals and recent graduates seeking employment in the high-growth geospatial industries. Participating students may have either extensive or limited experience in GIST. The MS-GIST program meets in the evenings (Monday-Thursday), does not require a master's thesis, and can be obtained in one calendar year as it begins in January and ends in December. The curriculum brings together technical and other professional GIS education that will lead toward placement in the geospatial industry.

Keywords

GIS, Master's in GIS, Professional Master's Degree

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The MS-GIST program offers an integrative approach to graduate education that allows for deep learning, fostering of a learning community and of multi-faceted professional development. It uses a modular teaching platform for its 30 academic credit unit degree. Modules may be a small as one academic credit (15 direct student-professor contact hours). Each is taught by a University of Arizona Graduate College approved faculty member with eight faculty currently teaching in the MS-GIST program. They come from the School of Geography and Development as well as adjunct faculty who work in the professional GIS community in Arizona. A sequence of 16 modules are currently taught including: Introduction to Geographic Information Science; Geodatabase; Python Programing; ESRI's Model Builder; Spatial Analysis – Vector; Spatial Analysis – Raster; Mobile GIS and Open Source Web Mapping; Spatial Statistics and Geoda; ArcServer and ArcSDE; Geoprocessing; Web GIS; GIS Project Management and Geovisualization; Remote Sensing; LiDAR; Master's Project; Professional Development. Modular teaching is adaptive. It allows for fast integration of new science, and technological and industrial changes. It provides an integrative and focused experience that is not often gained in higher education. New modules are built, adapted and move to the best timing within the program. They are sequences to build on what was learned in previous modules as student advance through the program. Applied projects and professional development requirements are interspersed throughout the curriculum at key times to test student learning, challenge student skills, advance critical thinking, and sharpen professionalism. As needed, new modules are introduced and the best, most relevant and useful modules are integrated into the program while other modules can be shed quickly.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

What makes this MS-GIST a master's level program is related to the subject matter and the emphasis on professional development. While some of the subject matter introduces general scientific principles related GIS, most of it focuses on graduate level work. The curriculum emphasizes professional development and recognizes the fact that simply obtaining a degree will not get you employment. Its underlying pedagogic philosophy centres on professional education. This is expressed both by having subject matter focused on professional applications and problems and by integrating the development of professional

business skills that can aide a student in finding employment upon graduation. In other words, what occurs during graduate school outside of class and how students engage with others during the course is just as important as the subject matter being taught. This perspective builds on research carried out in geography as part of the Association of American Geographers EDGE project (AAG 2013) including that by Solem et.al. 2008 which emphasized that employers express a strong need for general skills including public speaking, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, time management, teamwork and more. The approach also draws on an industry competency model created by the United States Department of Labor designed to "promote an understanding of the skill sets" that are "essential to educate and train a globally competitive workforce" (DOL 2013). The geospatial technology competency model is shaped like a pyramid with foundational skills at the base (personal effectiveness, academic and workplace competencies), followed by technical skills (industry-wide, industry-sector), and management and occupational specific skills at the top. Skills obtained through higher education predominately fall within academic and industry levels. What has not been emphasized in traditional master's level education are the non-academic foundational skills. The MS-GIST emphasizes these skills through an internships, professional events, networking activities, and conference attendance. Where all graduate GIS programs seek to be the best through staying current on GIS science and technology, the MS-GIST goes one step further by also being at the forefront of graduate education.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The integrated modular education is different from a traditional U.S. Master's education model which involves separate courses and commonly a capstone research thesis. The challenge in implementing the new approach remains making university policies related to faculty workload and course scheduling work for this pedagogic model.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

The emphasis on professional education and development can only be required within assigned course units. The importance of extracurricular program activities can only be stressed but not required. Assessment outcomes (program/student/faculty) must equally emphasize normative practices (what should be taught and are we doing a good job teaching it) and professional ones (job placement, industrial feedback about program).

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Case study 7: Accounting and Finance, University of Stirling

Overview

Introduction to the expectations and norms of British Higher Education and discipline specific communication skills. These are discussed and explored during the first weeks of the academic module Financial Reporting. Students complete literature and essay exercises thus gaining hands on practise with feedback and an assessment that counts for 10% of the module weighting.

Keywords

Academic study; British Higher Education norms; student experience; language skills Accounting; finance; investment

Describe briefly the activity/initiative/practice

Students are led through British higher education expectations including how to write accounting and finance essays and exam questions, review literature and reference academic sources. Practical skills are developed as students are, for example, asked to grade mock essays.

What is the background /context to the activity/initiative practice?

Our taught postgraduate programmes attract students from around the world at different stages in their educational and professional careers. This initiative, embedded in an academic module in the first semester of Masters Study, seeks to familiarise students with academic practise in British higher education.

What made/makes it Master's level?

The material is designed for students learning at a postgraduate SCQF level and with greater prior educational and professional experience. The students are asked to demonstrate a greater assimilation of knowledge from their background and studies along with a more developed and developing critical approach than would be expected of UG students.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of "Mastersness" - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The diverse range of international background and prior experience of higher education held by our taught postgraduate student cohort give rise to widely ranging skill sets and expectations.

Where to next in terms of "Mastersness" and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

It is anticipated that this academic element will continue to benefit students across our suite of taught postgraduate programmes.

References

Programme website

Contact

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Case study 8: Learning Methodologies

Overview

This case is about bridging with study skills, via a non-credit bearing module called Learning Methodologies, for predominantly international Master's students.

Keywords

Diagnostic assessment; study skills support; partnership working; expectations of UK HE

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

Learning Methodologies is a compulsory but non-credit bearing three week module at the start of several Master's programmes in the School of Health Sciences. It does not contribute to the final MSc but aims to enable the development of awareness and capabilities regarding Master's level learning strategies and tools in order to support all modules. The programmes have a strong emphasis on student directed learning and practice-based learning, and incoming students often had problems understanding these different educational philosophies and expectations.

The students' prior learning experience is evaluated prior to the commencement of the study unit in order that the hours of study required by individual students can be ascertained. Thus, students with a higher level of prior learning experience are not required to undertake the entire study unit. However, all students will be required to undertake a diagnostic formative assessment that requires the different academic skills necessary for Master's level study; students who are at an appropriate level will be permitted to undertake these elements within a shorter time period.

The diagnostic formative assignment is used to identify gaps in students' academic skills. Gaps are discussed in individual Personal Academic Tutorials, and discussions facilitate the development of a personal learning contract. Learning contracts are reviewed and progressed in academic tutorials following the first summative feedback, early in semester 2. Further classes are held to build on skills over the following two semesters, to advance critical analysis and synthesis, and practise this in journal clubs, as well as providing strategic support, e.g. relating to statistical analysis and use of SPSS. The most recent additions are sessions on continuing professional development and reflection.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

Focus groups were conducted with past students prior to the last revalidation, which not only led to the development of this module but informed the content as well. The result was this initiative, largely to support international students who found it difficult to adjust to UK expectations of Master's level study

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

The unit is only offered to Master's students, to help them make the transition to Master's level study

It is a transition tool with elements of Master's level study contained within. BY the end of the module, participants should know what is expected at Master's level.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of mastersness - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The unit aimed partly to give a supportive start to students at risk of failing in their studies, for lack of knowledge of what was expected, and how they should work at M level. There is evidence that the unit has been effective in this.

In its first iteration, in 2010/11, the study unit was initially delivered to 26 MSc Physiotherapy (post-registration – full time) students, as a collaboration between Physiotherapy staff, Centre for Academic Practice staff, including the Effective Learning Service, and Learning Resource Centre staff. Feedback from students has been highly positive and supportive of the unit.

Of 26 students (22 international, 3 EU), the initial fail rate for the Learning Methodologies was 38%; this reduced to 15% at the end of semester 1; fail rates for modules assessed at the end of semester 2 varied from 4-23%. However, only one student had 60 credits of fails at the end of Semester 2, and there were no incidents of plagiarism identified. These are improvements on past years, and are hoped to influence future recruitment and retention. The study unit is now also delivered to other international Master's students in the School of Health Sciences.

Where to next - in terms of mastersness – if anywhere?

There is interest in supporting all international students in the School with Learning Methodologies, although this has resource implications. There is also interest in supporting distance learning students using material from this module. This is in its early stages, but some of the sessions have been recorded using Echo 360.

References

Queen Margaret University, MSc Physiotherapy (Post-Registration) (Full-Time) http://www.qmu.ac.uk/courses/PGCourse.cfm?c_id=197

Contact

Dr Cathy Bulley and Dr Kavi Jagadamma, School of Health Sciences, Queen Margaret University.

Case study 9: MSc Psychology of Sport at the University of Stirling

Overview

The MSc Psychology of Sport at the University of Stirling adopts a 'teaching hospital' model to help ensure students learn to work at and beyond Master's level. Drawing upon the unique integrated approach of the School of Sport and the Sports Development Service, students engage in postgraduate-level professional practice and development opportunities in relevant work environments. Our teaching hospital model is underpinned by a philosophy that students need to learn their skills in an environment where they can both achieve and reflect upon mistakes alongside more experienced practitioners.

Keywords

Professional practice, Development, Integrated practice, Mastersness, Master's study, Elite

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The MSc Psychology of Sport embeds opportunities for students to gain the experience that employers desire. Our teaching hospital approach to learning is embedded throughout the MSc Psychology of Sport, and is led through a dedicated 30-credit Professional Practice and Development module in which students engage in postgraduate-level workplace experience, through which they learn to operate at and beyond Master's level. The module provides students with opportunities to analyse and reflect on professional practice and development, and topics include self-analysis, reflective practice, action planning and ethics, and professional standards. The assessments for the module comprise a written essay and portfolio of practice based on professional practice and development experiences, and a postgraduate-level job application and interview.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

At the University of Stirling, the academic School of Sport is completely integrated with the provision of sport at the University through the Sports Development Service. This unique integration enables us to provide a high-level teaching hospital model to our postgraduate students whereby they acquire the academic underpinning to their studies and knowledge development alongside acquiring professional experience in postgraduate-level job placements. Our industry partners and employers have told us they seek individuals with knowledge and experience, and our teaching hospital approach provides our students with both of these key elements. Employability, following postgraduate studies, is a key driver for the teaching hospital model that we employ.

What makes it "Master's" level?

The job placements are of postgraduate-level and are focussed upon a specialised area of knowledge, the psychology of sport. Through the distinctiveness we mentioned earlier of an integrated academic and sport service facilities approach, we are able to provide postgraduate students with access to high-level sport psychology experiences. This means students have the opportunity to acquire their knowledge and demonstrate subject-specific (sport psychology) skills with elite athletes who compete very close to or at the highest levels in sport. In other words, acquiring and developing subject-specific attributes (sport psychology) and working with elite clients leads to the development of 'Mastersness' knowledge and experience. Students have access to the University's Golf Centre, Tennis

Centre and Swimming facilities, together with studying in an outstanding environment with supportive staff.

As part of the 30-credit Applications of Sport Psychology module, for example, students engaged in a practical session at the Golf Centre, providing them with an opportunity to test their knowledge. Developing further, as part of the 30-credit Professional Practice and Development module, some students have placements at the Golf Centre. Within these placements they work alongside experienced practitioners in an environment where they can both achieve and reflect upon mistakes, developing their knowledge and experiences with elite athletes. They have opportunity to use their initiative and take responsibility, solve problems in creative and innovative ways, make decisions in challenging situations, and develop professionally. One of the current students working at the Golf Centre said,

"At the Golf Centre I am given a chance to practice my skills and the knowledge I have learned throughout the programme with elite athletes. Because the Professional Practice and Development module runs throughout the nine-month programme, this reflective and integrated process of putting theory into practice is on-going; it's excellent."

The Performance Golf Coach, Dean Robertson, at the Golf Centre also commented,

"The students from the MSc Psychology of Sport work with our elite golfers within a safe and supervised environment. Because of the level of the athletes we work with, it's essential that we provide an equally high level of 'knowledge' in our service. These placements, therefore, are only suitable for postgraduate-level students and beyond."

Specific, tailored postgraduate level professional practice and development opportunities, through our teaching hospital model, provides graduates on the MSc Psychology of Sport with the skills to move into a broad range of postgraduate career opportunities, including a number of sport and health professions, posts within a number of fields in the science industry, to careers within the civil service and government.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of mastersness - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Students need to be operating towards postgraduate level to begin to engage effectively and appropriately with postgraduate professional practice and development opportunities. There is a steep learning curve for students to undertake and close supervision, guidance and availability by staff is essential to mentor the students into and beyond 'mastersness'. Postgraduate students need time with staff and experienced practitioners to learn.

Where to next?

The teaching hospital is embedded across all of our taught postgraduate provision in the School of Sport. The focus upon employability in post-graduate study is central to developing our taught postgraduate programmes and central to students' experiences.

References

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Links

MSc Psychology of Sport, University of Stirling, http://stir.ac.uk/7n

Contact

Dr Pete Coffee and Prof David Lavallee, School of Sport, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA

Case study 10: MSc Adult Nursing and MSc Mental Health Nursing programmes

Overview

The MSc Adult Nursing and MSc Mental Health Nursing programmes are designed to meet the requirements of both the University and the Nursing & Midwifery Council (see references below). The programme has 4,600 mandatory hours (EU Directive 2005/36/EU). However, students have Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) awarded for 900 hours of study and as a result the 2 year programme is allocated 1400 hours theory delivery and mandatory 2,300 practice learning hours.

The programme admits students on an annual basis and is delivered as full time attendance. The vision is of a robust and dynamic education which develops post-graduate nurses who are competent and safe practitioners and can meet the demands of a modern healthcare system in Scotland, the UK and Internationally.

Keywords

Higher Degree, Professional Programme

Describe briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The current MSc Nursing programme was originally validated in September 2010 with approval from the Nursing & Midwifery Council expiring in April 2013. The newly validated MSc programme (5 March 2013) represents a programme that has marshalled a great deal of experience and learning from the original programme/student evaluations. Both MSc programmes are considered a major modification of the BSc Nursing programmes.

What is the background /context to the activity/initiative practice?

The MSc is a shortened 2 year programme that admits graduates with a Social Science/Science degree (relevant degree in biological, health, social science or related subject).

It was envisaged during the initial planning in 2009/10 that the MSc programme would produce future leaders in nursing through an accelerated career pathway. However at this stage there is not enough information on student cohorts as the first one (February 2011) has just completed in February 2013. What is known is that mentors and practitioners do see a difference in the MSc students in comparison to the undergraduate pre-registration students in so much as they are far more enquiring and engaged in critical discussion.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

The programme is delivered at SCQF Level 11. However Nursing & Midwifery Council competencies do not carry any academic credit. Rather, this is applied in the context of patient care. Specifically MSc students are expected to demonstrate the ability to synthesise, critically analyse and evaluate information and apply originality in problem solving in nursing practice.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Graduate entry students are awarded RPL on the basis of their original degree having an equivalency to SCQF Levels 7-9 in nursing. However it has been apparent in the first 3 cohorts of students that the underpinning knowledge in nursing is not robust and this is further compounded by the rigors of mandatory practice learning experience representing 40 hours a week. Students have no previous subject expertise in nursing and the shortened nature and demands of the programme result in an inadequate amount of time to *'think through'* and ultimately consolidate their learning.

The newly validated MSc programme redresses some of these issues in the introduction of more robust marketing information, pre-induction resources to provide students with underpinning knowledge prior to commencing the programme (SCQF Levels 7-9) and more extensive research supervision. Support mechanisms are strengthened including the personal tutor, who will now also be the research supervisor, and peer support for graduates buddying those from "hard" science with those from social science backgrounds to help each to adjust to nursing theory

Where to next – *in terms of mastersness* – and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

A longitudinal study commenced in September 2012 to evaluate the needs of MSc students and thereby identify programme development that will enhance student engagement and learning. This study will continue and has already given rich data on the basis of which programme enhancements have been introduced.

From a nursing perspective the student's research proposals will be tracked to identify new areas of hypothesis/enquiry resulting from the dissertation. In addition, results of this tracking will identify suitability for PhD study and /or consideration for funding application.

The School compiles first destination statistics on all commissioned programmes and will advance the MSc data to track career pathways over a longer period of time. This information will be integrated into employability provision for MSc students.

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Contact

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Case study 11: International Business Programme, University of Greenwich

Overview

This case study brings together results from two main pieces of research conducted on two cohorts of MA/MBA students. Master level students are expected to engage in peer learning to support and enhance their personal and professional development. Through the application of Social Network Analysis (SNA), the relational networks of learners were mapped and analysed together with their learning preferences.

Our findings clearly show that relational networks are predominantly built among learners belonging to the same ethnical group. When focusing on students undertaking their internships, surprisingly no association between the relative positions in networks and performance was found. Research findings were utilised to highlight implications for the development of teaching and learning strategies enabling postgraduate learners to master viable transferable skills.

Keywords

Employability; Peer learning; Personal Professional Development; International Business

Describe briefly the activity/initiative/practice

In order to improve the learning environment for students on the programme and encourage the learners themselves to critically review their learning experience we decided to undertake an in-depth investigation involving different cohorts of postgraduate students. Specifically, two projects were carried out on two separate intakes of students, with both projects adopting relational view learning perspective (Marton and Booth, 1997).

Masters students are expected to engage with peers forming a community of learners in order to learn and develop relevant skills. Consistent with this view SNA (Wasserman and Faust, 1994) was used to map and analyse the relational networks of learners. Initial research was focused on understanding friendship, study and support interactions of learners. A specific questionnaire was aimed at both investigating students' learning preferences and also understanding where students go for support (both study and personal) and professional advice.

As foreign postgraduate students come to the UK for a limited time only and have to acquire many skills over a short period of time, the challenge is considerable. The inability to rapidly adjust to the new environment with its unfamiliar approach to teaching, learning and assessment often results in low performance. When learning new material students tend to trawl the internet via Google as a first source of reference and in case of outstanding questions - by asking those peers who have covered this material already (we have two intakes of students – September and January). On a bigger scale, students tend to stay in their comfort zone by communicating with peers of similar national backgrounds both in the classroom and outside the university. We also found that culture engrained learning preferences often lead to strong patterns of 'reliance and trust' on the authority (in our case - tutors) by that under-using a valuable resource – peer community.

This was particularly obvious when we studied the network relationships of students on placements as part of the second project. In this case online interactions (comments on blog entries) were considered, together with a qualitative analysis of the contents of the

messages exchanged. We found that concern about being wrong and an unwillingness to share views, prevented many students from actively blogging and cross-posting, resulting in generally low engagement and posts that were rather descriptive and lacking in critical thinking. With the difficulties of creating online relationship and the concerns about “being wrong”, no association between positions in networks and performance was identified, with cultural similarity (measured considering the nationality of learners) remaining the driver for the creation of relationships. However, if prompted by tutors, students did post and participated in blogging activities when given clear instructions.

What is the background /context to the activity/initiative practice?

The MA (one year) and MBA (two years) International Business Programmes at the University of Greenwich Business School are specifically designed to reflect the increased emphasis on multidisciplinary, information technology and the international business perspective arising from today’s market developments. In both programmes to a different extent, learning and training is organised to meet employers’ expectations of integrating theoretical knowledge and applied skills. Teaching and learning is designed to train minds and also develop a range of intellectual and practical skills to enable students to become effective specialists in the global knowledge economy as traditional boundaries between sectors are breaking down.

Students undertaking the programmes are from different geographic regions, but predominantly from Asia. They spend a year in the classroom learning the foundations of international business and in their research are encouraged to specialize in one of the following areas:

- General Management
- Public Policy
- Business in Emerging Economies
- Consulting and Business Analysis

In the second year MBA students embark on professional internships, where they are expected to secure a job with management responsibilities and continue their learning in SOL mode to develop critical reflective skills.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

Holders of a Master’s qualification are expected to be ready for employment. Master’s students are expected to continuously learn independently and sustain their personal and professional development, whilst developing their knowledge and challenging their perspectives (QAA, 2007).

Masters programmes allow learners to develop their potential in a structured way compared to undergraduates, who rely more on the support of tutors and instructors. They are expected to be more autonomous and play a more active part within a learning community where professional development occurs by effective collaborative discussion (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999). The shift from a learning style based mainly on the tutor’s guidance, towards a more relational, collective one, where learners collaborate with fellow peers is a fundamental component of “mastersness” and ultimately professional satisfaction.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of "Mastersness" - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Our research found that students often rely quite heavily on “authority” (tutors) rather than their peers. Moreover personal networks were often established only with peers from the same nationality, resulting in a split of allies based on ethnicity. In a global world, where culture is essential for management, this might generate some concerns which need to be addressed. This may well be because the students on the programmes are mainly international, and come to the UK for just one year, with little time to adjust to a new learning environment and the new expectations placed on them. For the same reason students establish connections with others who they feel they can “trust” on the basis of some cultural similarity. The development of more robust networks across ethnic groups would require more time and appropriate training for both tutors and students.

When focusing on the experience of students in internship it was found that engaging in online networks is a demanding task. Some students might require specific training on the use of certain tools and the cohort presented a lot of heterogeneity in terms of IT literacy. The technological infrastructure in different locations also varies, thus limiting the type and amount of activities which students could perform online. Previous personal face-to-face interactions in classroom settings seemed to be a prerequisite for the creation of meaningful online connections. In researched sample students also rarely demonstrated the ability to engage in critical reflection. Specialist training prior to internships could enable learners to link their professional experience with relevant academic knowledge more effectively.

Acknowledging these issues should influence the development of new teaching and learning strategies of international postgraduate students, and particularly those courses which are delivered on-line.

Where to next in terms of "Mastersness" and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Our study employed formal techniques to analyse the networks generated by students during their studies. Social Network Analysis has been already widely used in similar context and is perceived to be particularly useful in tackling the issue of exclusion from online communities of learning (McDonald et al, 2005). Integrating this methodology with an analysis of individual characteristics and learning preferences is important in designing a suitable learning environment capable of supporting the objectives of a master level course.

Postgraduate education in the UK is becoming increasingly international, with students from all over the world arriving to learn and develop their skills in trusted high quality UK academia.

In order to maintain this eminence and satisfy the needs of learners, cross-cultural peer trust and responsibility for individual learning and development needs to be further nurtured.

Possible initiatives could involve teaching teams engaging in a multi-style teaching approach and cross-culture curricula development (De Vita, 2001) and designing learning activities in such a way that students feel responsible for the outcome with tutors playing the role of facilitators (Yakavenka & De Vita, 2012).

International students can easily feel isolated and extra curricula activities could be instigated to encourage interaction with learners from different backgrounds, enabling students and tutors to effectively embrace the cultural differences, thus supporting the “development of viable transferrable skills and critical culture competencies” (Yakavenka, 2012:154). These initiatives could complement more specific training on IT and critical reflection skills for example.

Due to the extensive internationalisation of the activities of UK HEIs, it is essential that UK teaching teams have on-going professional dialogue with foreign partner institutions' in order to develop a common meaning of concepts such as "professional practice" and "critical reflection" as these can vary depending on different cultural settings.

Following consultations with tutors and students in partner institutions in other countries, we have submitted a funding application to HEA with the aim of designing a specific toolbox to facilitate the development of critical reflective skills and other horizontal skills by learners and tutors.

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Case Study 12: PGT Student Induction, University of Northumbria

Overview

International postgraduate students are important to the higher education sectors of many countries. They arrive from all over the world with diverse cultures and prior experiences. Such students' present additional challenges in terms of programme based learning and teaching support. This case study objectives are:-

1. To identify the characteristics of postgraduate students.
2. To analyse the prior learning experiences, expectations and learning needs of international postgraduate students.
3. To design, model and implement appropriate induction and learning support to facilitate international postgraduate students engaging more effectively with their learning and teaching.

Keywords

Taught-masters, postgraduate-support, international-students, enhanced-induction, PG-Learning-Model, blended learning.

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The support programme runs parallel to the taught modules (semesters 1 and 2) and continues for the remainder of the year while the students are completing their master's dissertation. This support programme includes three non-credit bearing modules which integrate with the full master's programme. The PG Learning Model is built around four key elements of student support, embracing enhanced induction, academic skills, dissertation skills and enhanced blended learning via the VLE. (Coates N & Dickinson J, 2012,pp. 302-3). The support programme is timetabled for all full time master's students. The Academic Skills is optional for UK nationals, however many such students attend some sessions as their undergraduate (UG) degree may not have prepared them for a business management master's, such as report writing etc.

Figure 1. The PG Learning Model

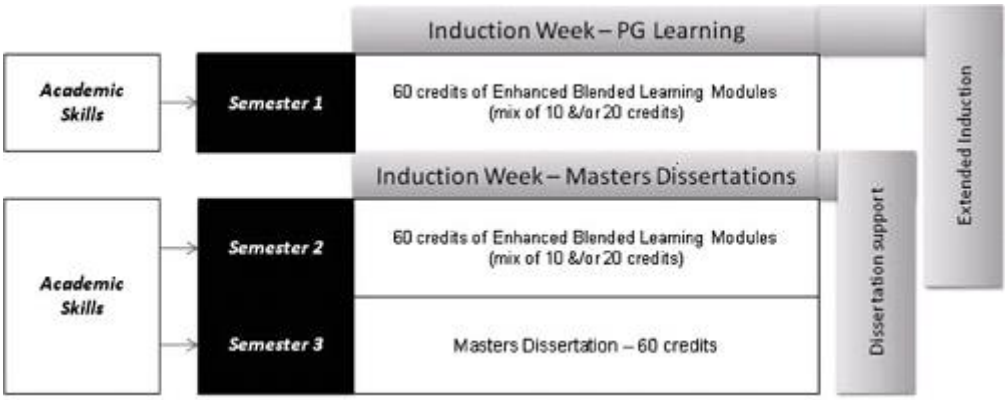
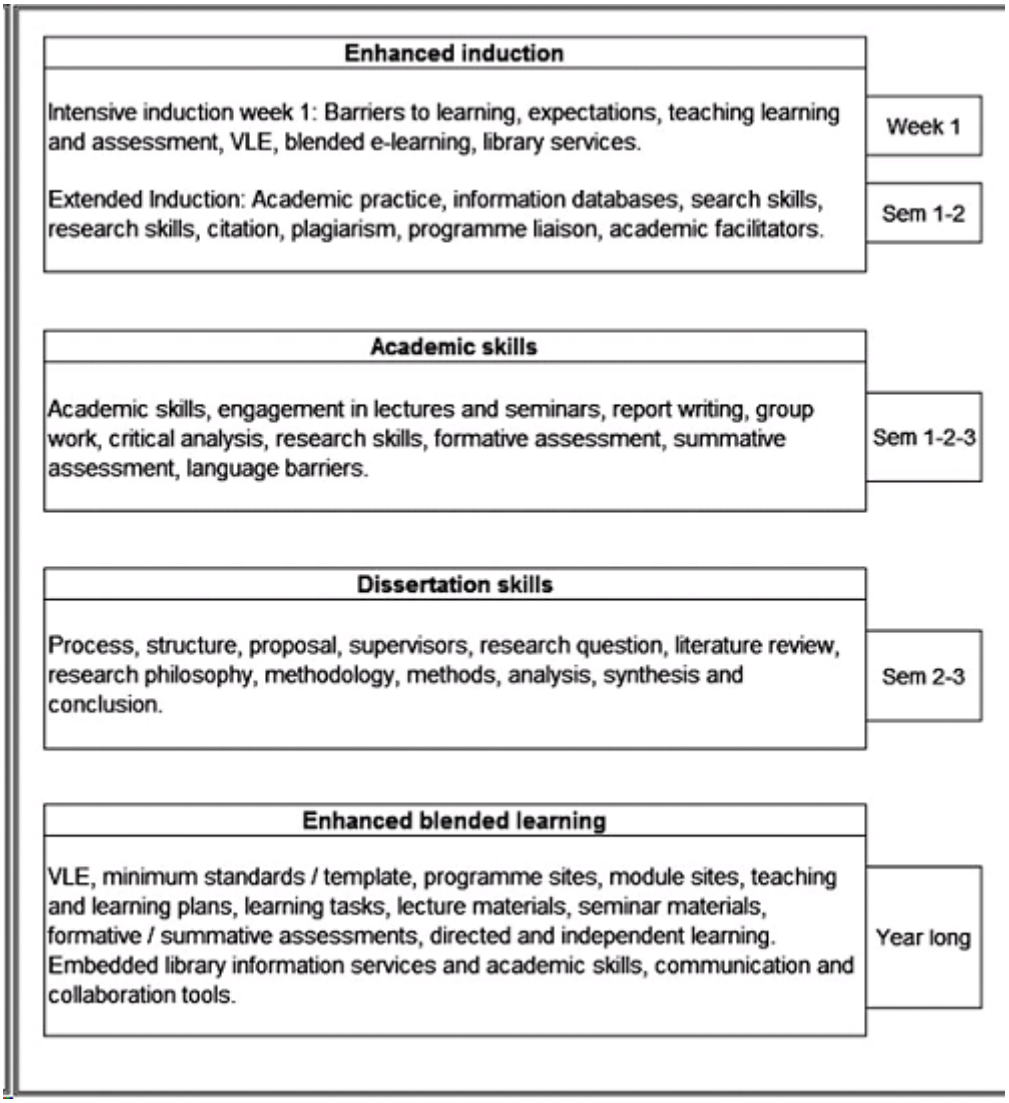


Figure 2. PG learning support: outline of key elements.



What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

The majority of full time students on taught one year master's programmes at universities in England are from outside the UK and even the EU. This presents particular problems, as unlike undergraduates, postgraduate students do not have several years for acculturation. If HE institutions can better understand their students' learning backgrounds they will be more able to develop effective learning and teaching strategies to facilitate international students realising their potential. There are also benefits for home students to benefit from studying with international students who engage effectively in their studies.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

UK postgraduate students are expected to demonstrate the powers of critical analysis. It is widely accepted that international students often find this a major difference between home and studying in the UK (Brown, 2007; Skelton & Richards, 1991). This is a common issue faced in many countries and disciplines (Milles, 2009). The support programme is designed to increase the student's critical analysis skills to master's level. The support provided to achieve master's level goes beyond what is provided to UG students. For example, the Extended Induction offers interventions on critical skills e.g. use of library / on-line resources for critical appraisal of extant research. The Dissertation support in terms of specialist

lectures on methodologies and the methods of analysis used for quantitative and qualitative primary data is delivered at master's level; higher than what is required for a UG dissertation.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The cultural background of the student is significant. Students from South-East Asia find it particularly challenging to think it correct to criticise academics (Hofstede, 1991). Turner (2006) found that Chinese students can under achieve on critical thinking due to a lack of clarity as to what is expected in terms of cultural practices. A student's skill of critical analysis is linked to their confidence to express their opinion. However, many students are reluctant to do so (Barker, 1997). The practice of students working in mixed cultural teams as part of their postgraduate learning is well established in management education. It is based on sound pedagogy and prepares the students for their future careers (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008). However, many international students find it difficult to engage in discussions and team work activities (Holmes, 2005; Parks & Raymond, 2004; Ramsey & Mason, 2004). If the student's experience of working in teams is poor, this can have a negative halo effect over the whole master's programme (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2008). Ramsden (2008) cites information and computer technology as a key contributor to evolving student and teacher expectations. The institutional adoption of virtual learning environments (VLEs) has been extensive in recent years (Browne, Jenkins, & Walker, 2006). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) found significant advantages to the student as a supplement to traditional face to face teaching, and the academic practice of campus-based students can benefit significantly from technology enhanced blended learning approaches (Littlejohn & Pegler, 2007). Online materials and collaboration can be particularly valuable to international students in supporting processes of reflection and review.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* - if anywhere?

Monitoring the profile of master's students on enrolment and adjusting the support programme appropriately. Refinement of the Post-Graduation learning Model (Coates & Dickinson, 2012).

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Case study 13: I-SEE, Employability Skills, University of Aberdeen

Overview

The initiative provides an online resource to extend employability provision for PGT students. I-SEE (Individualised self-assessment to enhance employability) is a compulsory non-credit bearing course utilising the University's virtual learning environment. Students complete a self-assessment of employability skills which aligns with the University's Taught Postgraduate Attributes. Based on their self-assessment, students receive individualised, automated responses with tailored feedback which identifies development areas and signposts appropriate support. During their studies students are required to record and reflect on their progress using an e-portfolio and use this as a prompt list to help identify their own skills and attributes to use within future employment applications.

Keywords

Employability skills, Taught Postgraduate Attributes, self-assessment, international students, Health Sciences

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

I-SEE aimed to devise an online self-awareness employability resource with tailored, detailed feedback and signposting to supportive employability resources, utilising e-portfolios to improve CVs. A selection of students following Taught MSc programmes in the Division of Applied Health Sciences were included in the pilot study as part of the non-credit-bearing induction programme (Marais & Perkins, 2012).

A self-rating skills audit was developed on MyAberdeen (University of Aberdeen's Blackboard-based VLE) utilising the quiz tool. It was based on the HEA employability profile for Health Studies (Rees, Forbes & Kubler, 2007) and the University of Aberdeen's Postgraduate Attributes. The attributes describe four required characteristics of a University of Aberdeen masters education: to enable taught postgraduates to become academically excellent; critical thinkers and effective communicators, open to learning and personal development, and active citizens. The only exception to self-assessment was the academic English language proficiency assessment which was driven via MyAberdeen, but without automated marking. Programme Coordinators were requested to mark assignments using a standardised rubric which also provided tailored feedback and signposting to resources. Self-rating was required for other communication skills/academic writing (essays, exams, oral and poster presentations, publications, referencing); IT skills (basic word processing, TurnitInUK, track changes, data base search); group work and self-development (identification of strengths and weaknesses). The self-development aspects included completing online psychometric tests and personality typing available to students via Careers Service.

Online and other resources available within the University of Aberdeen were identified. Automated individualised signposting was provided via the feedback on the quiz tool on MyAberdeen according to responses provided by the student. Students were requested to reflect on their progress and asked to upload evidence of development activities onto e-portfolios. They were asked to complete a checklist after 6 months to reflect on identified areas of development, progress made and planned. A template for a UK-style CV as well as supportive documentation in how to articulate these skills was provided.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

There is a proven relationship between learning and employability, in that the skills that facilitate learning such as being able to analyse data, solve complex problems and communicate effectively, can also enhance an individual's employability. Enhancing students' employability is therefore increasingly being recognised as a priority for Higher Education Institutions, especially within the current economic climate. Employability is defined as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes - that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy' (Knight & Yorke, 2006). Although most of the literature pertains to graduates, it is also important for postgraduate programmes to further enhance employability. As self-awareness underpins employability, a strategy of self-assessment through identifying individual strengths and development areas would be appropriate. This would enable students to develop an individualised plan of action to address their identified development needs. Signposting to resources to support this development is essential as well as providing support for reflection and articulation of these skills.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

Enhancing employability is especially important for taught postgraduate programmes where students may have diverse graduate/professional backgrounds and nationalities. This translates into a multiplicity of previous experience and skill levels in terms of key employability competencies, as well as their education and English language proficiency. Most HEIs have induction programmes designed to ease the transition of international students into their new learning environment, which may include a range of social and academic activities as well as information regarding physical and/or online support services. These induction programmes though are generally not individualised or reflective in nature.

Taught postgraduate study also requires a greater depth of engagement compared to undergraduate study and uses a significant range of principal skills and techniques (SCQF Level Descriptors, SCQF 2012). The I-SEE provides tailored and bespoke PGT support to help this distinct group of students to develop and achieve these important Masters level skills and techniques.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Challenges are two-fold, those related to the teaching staff and those to the students. In terms of teaching staff, it is essential that Programme coordinators are informed of the course and its potential advantages to the students. Their buy-in and engagement is very important. Additional advantages of early identification of problem areas for specific students should be highlighted. The fact that it is an automated process and therefore adds very little to the workload of the coordinator is a good marketing tool. In terms of the students, ensuring engagement is the main challenge. The VLE does though allow for announcements to be sent to students on a regular basis, which improves engagement. Providing specific deadlines which do not interfere with other submission dates seems to be important as well. Focus group discussions are still to be held with students, which may identify further improvement methods. Ultimately this is meant as a reflective and self-awareness activity.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

It is anticipated that I-SEE will be extended as a compulsory course for all PGT students in the College of Life Sciences and Medicine and the possibility of incorporating it into the PG research students' programme will also be investigated.

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Case Study 14: Master of Science programmes in Engineering and Management, University of Glasgow

Overview

It was decided to develop and offer a suite of PGT programmes in Engineering & Management after recognising that emerging global challenges required companies and organisations to increasingly integrate their engineering and business capabilities. This in turn demanded the provision of a stream of professional engineers, from various engineering disciplines, who also understood the essential principles of business and management. The structure and curriculum of the programmes was informed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education views of Master's degree characteristics [1] and more generally by the ideas of critical evaluation and reflection in professional practice advocated by Schon and others [2].

Keywords

MSc programmes, Engineering, Business and Management, Interdisciplinarity

Describe briefly the activity/initiative/practice

The suite of PGT programmes in Engineering & Management currently consists of the following individual programmes:

- Aerospace Engineering and Management
- Civil Engineering and Management
- Electronics and Electrical Engineering and Management
- Mechanical Engineering and Management

Each programme was therefore designed primarily for students with an undergraduate engineering background, but little business and management experience. The students develop knowledge and skills of business management principles and techniques in the first semester and then advance their technical expertise in the second, through a choice of discipline specific engineering modules. In the second semester students also get first-hand experience of managing an engineering project through a multidisciplinary integrated system design module, allowing development of project management, quality management and finance skills.

What makes it master's level?

Our suite of Engineering and management programmes are judged to be at Master's level because they provide students with a critical insight into the state of the art of their engineering discipline and of the current state of professional practice. Students are required not only to understand advanced techniques related to their area of study and professional practice but also to demonstrate a capacity for critical evaluation of the techniques and methodologies and to apply them to open-ended problems. Students are also required to demonstrate a capacity to deal with complex issues in a systematic and creative manner and to be able to communicate the results of their work to a professional level. These characteristics are exercised via a major individual project and via an interdisciplinary group project. By successfully completing one of these degree programmes students will have:

- improved their abilities to work productively in a team undertaking an interdisciplinary engineering project

- strengthened their communication and presentation skills
- improved their business and management skills - with regard to both people and projects
- advanced and strengthened their understanding of discipline specific engineering principles.
- Developed their capacity for critical evaluation of their professional practice

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of "Mastersness" - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The main challenge to be overcome was to develop a subject course that could provide an interdisciplinary activity that would successfully integrate engineers from a range of disciplines: Mechanical, Aerospace, Civil and Electrical and Electronic. This was developed by a Visiting professor in Engineering Design, funded by the Royal Academy of Engineering, who was able to develop a clear link between business management at high level and knowledge of advanced engineering. The result was a course called 'Integrated System Design'. This course requires students from different engineering disciplines but with a common understanding of business and management issues (they study the latter this in semester 1) to form small groups to tackle an open-ended project. An early example of a project was to determine if a wind turbine could meet the energy needs of a small community on a Scottish island and then to plan a project for implementation. It requires the groups to consider the business dimension of the problems, the design of the wind turbine, the logistics of transporting the wind turbine to site, survey and the preparation of the site (access roads etc).

Where to next in terms of "Mastersness" and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The guidance that we receive from our Industrial liaison committee suggests that industry, around the globe, requires a steady supply of professional engineers who are able to make an immediate and effective contribution to the profitability of their business. From an engineering and business perspective this is clearly a Master's characteristics and although we would argue that the graduates from our engineering and management programmes are currently well prepared to meet this challenge there is still a need to strengthen this aspect of all our PGT programmes..

References

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Case study 15: Wide-ranging critical knowledge and understanding of a discipline, Computing, University of Glasgow

Overview

As a means of enabling Masters students to gain critical knowledge and understanding of a range of computing science topics, the students are required to read four key research papers a week, and summarise and critique two of them, before the weekly discussion session. Each week covers papers in a different computing science research area. Students write in-depth reviews of one or two of these papers during the term, present them to their fellow students, and lead the discussion of these papers.

Keywords

Computing Science, critical analysis, research literature

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The Research Readings in Computing Science course is a compulsory course for all Master in Science students; it runs throughout the first semester, and is worth 20 credits (200 hours). Each week covers a different area of computing science, and is led by an academic member of staff with research expertise in that area. The academic member of staff choses four key research papers which all students must read before the discussion session. Students submit one-page summaries of the papers at the start of the session, and students who have been assigned the task of doing in-depth reviews of the paper lead the whole-group discussion of them. Marks are allocated for the summaries, the in-depth reviews, class participation, and for an examination for which all papers (approximately 40 in total) are examinable.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

Amongst the many ways the Scottish Qualifications framework distinguishes between level 10 (Honours) and level 11 (Masters) is by specifying the extent to which Masters students are required to know and be able to critique the literature in their area. The following criteria are included in the descriptors for level 11:

A critical understanding of a range of specialised theories, concepts and principles.

- A critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline/sector and one or more specialisms.

The compulsory Research Readings course ensures that all students have this critical understanding and awareness over a wide range of computing science topics, not simply the areas in which they will specialise in their Masters programme.

What makes it “Master’s” level?

Honours students are not required to have this critical understanding and awareness over a range of topics. While they may consult the computing science literature as part of their final year project, or may be introduced to a few key publications within the courses that they study, they do not have a wide-ranging understanding or knowledge of the extent and depth of computing science research.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The main challenges in this course are dealing with the students' initial perception that four papers is too many for them to be expected to read in a week, and the complaints that arise from this. However, the students quickly become used to this reading load. Giving advice on 'how to read a paper' at the start of the course is useful to the students, and reassuring them that they will get more expert at reading as the semester progresses can help to mitigate these concerns. By the end of the course, most students report that, although a heavy workload, it is one of the most worthwhile courses they have taken.

The second challenge was one of examination assessment. There are ten questions, one from each of the ten topic areas. Students choose four to answer. Initially, the exam was conducted in script booklets; we found that students found it hard to hand-write essay-type answers, and so we moved to computer-based examinations, using word-processors and held in a lab.

The third challenge was in co-ordinating up to thirteen different academic members of staff, and ensuring that the examination questions provided by each of them were of comparable difficulty (so as to ensure fair choice for the students). Unfortunately, this process of devising a fair set of examination questions resulted in many of the questions becoming recall questions rather than analysis or critique.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

The course has been running in a stable state for several years now. We have decided to remove the examination element of the course (for the reasons explained above) and will rather place more assessment weight on the students' in-depth reviews.

References

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, Level Descriptors, http://www.scqf.org.uk/

Links

Research Readings in Computing Science

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Case study 16: Master's Internship Module, Coventry University Business School

Overview

This case study looks at how subject mastery and employability skills are embedded within a range of Master's business and management programmes. During the internship module (worth 60 of a total 180 CATS) students spend 8-12 weeks completing a real business project identified by a host organisation. The project deliverables are assessed in 3 ways; a 9000 word report on the outcomes and recommendations of the project, an employer's assessment on student performance, and a 2500 word reflection on their learning and development. These 3 pieces of work provide evidence of the development of both academic mastersness and employability skills.

Keywords

Assessment, autonomy, business, capstone, challenge, employers, employability skills, enquiry led learning, internships, management practice, placements, planning, problem solving, professionalism, projects, reflection, theory into practice.

Describe briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The internship, taken in place of the traditional dissertation, is a capstone module in which students work independently within a host company in the UK or overseas on a business project identified by the organisation. Project support is provided through a workplace mentor and a university academic supervisor. The module aims to provide students with opportunities to: apply theory into practice, work independently, develop both hard and soft personal skills, and enhance employability skills and prospects. Students reflect on their experience and learning as part of their personal development. It also offers the potential for UK and overseas work experience. The module provides students with an opportunity to develop their skills and to demonstrate and evidence these to prospective employers. Entry onto the internship module is optional but selective, the recruitment process being designed to replicate that typically used by employers with short-listing from curriculum vitae, followed by a presentation and panel interview.

The assessment of the management report follows the conventional structure to the Master's dissertation with the exception of a greater emphasis on the project's contribution to the business. Students are expected to identify recommendations, which are realistic and achievable in relation to the strategy, operations and resources of the organisation. For the reflective piece, students write 2500 words on the critical learning episodes that occur during their internship. Guidance is provided through a reflective writing workshop and students have an opportunity to submit a short piece for formative assessment. The objective of this element of the module is for students to develop the skills to become reflective practitioners in their eventual chosen career paths.

What is the background /context to the activity/initiative practice?

This module was initiated by the need for postgraduate students to develop and demonstrate mastersness by applying theory into practice; the traditional dissertation was thought to be deficient in this respect. Postgraduate students should be able to address complex problems to which a solution is not immediately obvious. Theories taught in the classroom are only simplistic tools that act as guidelines in tacking such complex problems.

"I noticed the huge gap between theory and practice. When we browse different books and theories or attend lectures, we might think that the business world is as regular as clockwork... not at all! All the theories developed by the biggest thinkers of the world are just an insight to the real conditions".

This case study illustrates one of the initiatives being taken by Coventry University to enhance the mastersness and employability of its postgraduate students.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

There are number of characteristics of the internship module that distinguish it from undergraduate study. The work is for real, and credit bearing; consequently quite different from many of the work placements typically found at undergraduate level. As a consequence, it requires a higher level of autonomy, initiative and confidence**.** The research is more critical in its evaluation and the reflection element requires a greater sense of self-awareness. The module takes students out of their comfort zone into the messy nature of the real world.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Start small – but start. The initial challenge was finding discrete projects which allowed students to undertaken a masters' level piece of work rather than just completing a work experience placement. In addition the projects needed to be across the different functions within business. However, as time went on our database of employers and project case studies grew. Also, organisations having had a successful experience with one internship student came back for more. The challenge eventually became one of not having enough students of the right calibre. How could we develop the skills of our students so that we could be certain that they were equipped to successfully undertake the internship project?

Where to next – *in terms of mastersness* – and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The internship module enables students to evidence mastery through applying theory into practice, and through developing a range of employability skills including the ability to reflect on their practice. Comments from students include**:**

'…..this was the real world and the comfort of university was suddenly gone'.

'….. it gave me the opportunity to apply everything I had learnt in the classroom'.

'If I was going to turn down every opportunity I get, when would I learn? How would I prove to myself that I have a "can do" spirit'; the internship started with an idea, but I later realised that this turned out to be a huge step forward in my life'.

'……*the internship was the most important module of my study.'*

The impact of the experience is evidenced through the student's words and through the module academic success. To date in the order of 400 students have undertaken an internship with a 100% pass rate with marks in excess of 80% of the final marks at merit and distinction level. What is the next step; finding other ways of offering this type of learning experience to the students who do not make it through the selection process.

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Case Study 17: M.Litt in Classics, University of St Andrews

Overview

St Andrews taught Master's programmes consist of a taught component and a dissertation. In Classics' four programmes, the taught component comprises a core 'themes and methods' module and two 'thematic' modules. The core module has a number of features that aim to promote self-reflection and self-awareness in scholarly terms as well as offering an intensive introduction to a wide range of methodological and theoretical approaches and issues in the discipline.

Keywords

Autonomy; reflective learning; Classics; Greek; Latin; Ancient History; Classical Studies; portfolio

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The core module runs throughout the year and consists of fortnightly (though sometimes more frequent) seminars. These focus on key episodes in the history of Classical scholarship, current themes in Classical studies (e.g. cultural identity; modern reception of the ancient world; gender studies) and important methods and theories (e.g. literary theory, commentary technique, archaeology). The aim is to help MLitt students understand their own professional context and reflect upon their own learning and current position.

The formal manifestation of this aim is the 'portfolio.' This is a specific piece of coursework which is compiled across the year in addition to the various coursework essays, etc. that the students submit. It consists of the following:

- Seminar 'Position statements' and reflective posts. Prior to each core module seminar, students must post a 'position statement' to our VLE, summarising their response to that week's reading and discussion questions. These posts form the basis of discussion in class. For the portfolio, an additional statement must be added outlining what the student learned and how his/her views changed.
- Semester reflection statements: 500 words written at the end of each semester reflecting on how the student's understanding of the discipline has changed.
- Research seminar analyses. Students are required to attend a minimum of three of the School's weekly research seminars each semester and write up and critique both the paper and the discussion for inclusion in the portfolio. (With the course co-ordinator's permission, they may substitute a paper from another venue or an external conference.)

Overall, the intention is that students reflect upon how Classical scholarship is pursued and how they might pursue it.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

Students admitted to the MLitt usually have a good degree in Latin and Greek, Classical Studies or Ancient History already. The aim of the MLitt is to help students make the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate research methods and thinking and writing styles. A major challenge students at this level face is the greatly increased requirement for independent thinking, not just in responding critically to the scholarly literature but in tasks such as setting their own essay questions. The core 'themes and methods' module is

intended to help them realise that the publications they have been reading for their undergraduate studies *have* a context in the history of scholarship and help them appreciate – in quite hands-on fashion – the range of angles that could be brought to bear on a particular piece of evidence. The portfolio aspect is intended to encourage them to challenge their own preconceptions and help them realise when they have learned something. The pre-seminar position statements also help the seminar tutors (who change from session to session) challenge the students to extend or defend their positions.

What makes it "masters" level?

The requirement for this level of contextualisation and self-reflection is rare at undergraduate level. Some Honours (third- and fourth-year) modules now use 'learning diaries', which are similar to the weekly sections of the portfolio, i.e. pre-seminar VLE posts which are then written up for a final, consolidated submission. This has developed very much as an extension to undergraduate level of the postgrad practice. Practical considerations of staff time make it hard to manage at undergraduate level, especially if position statements are submitted weekly in a solo-taught module, and even more so if students receive online responses. The MLitt core modules are team-taught, and this spreads the load. When learning diaries are used at undergrad level, the content of the module tends to be much more closely focused and content-led, and we do not expect undergrads to cope with such a wide range of theoretical positions in quick succession. In the MLitt, the expectation is that students will provide their own content and try to find ways in which the approaches and issues discussed in the seminars might affect their own work. So there is an expectation of a higher level of intellectual independence and experimentation at Master's level – which is fitting, since we conceive of the MLitt as a preparation for PhD study.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The main problem is a combination of encouraging the students to think reflectively, giving them the tools to do so (in the form of well-chosen readings) and allowing them the time to master the material and consider it critically – and all that while they are working for their thematic modules and core-module essays at the same time. Originally, the core module had weekly seminars, but we had to reduce their frequency to approximately fortnightly a couple of years ago. The students were understandably finding that the work-rate was too high and tutors were noticing not only that engagement with the core module was starting to become superficial but also work in the thematic modules was suffering. The lower frequency of meetings has helped a lot. There is a balance to be struck between quality and quantity here.

Where to next?

For the MLitt, more of the same – it seems to work. I think we may see variants of the MLitt structure being used in advanced undergraduate modules. For the students, a lot of them go on to doctoral study, either in St Andrews or elsewhere, so the MLitt is serving its purpose as a preparation for research well.

Links

Programme website

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Case Study 18: Master of Research in Clinical Practice, Kingston University and St George's University, London

Overview

Kingston University and St George's University, London is one of only a few universities within the UK to offer a fully funded Master of Research in Clinical Practice (MResCP). This inter professional programme (funded by the National Institute of Health Research and Chief Nursing Officer) is an initiative designed to build research capacity within the NHS, supporting the growth of a clinical academic workforce. It seeks to develop a wide range of research knowledge and transferable skills enabling Nurses, Midwives and Allied Health professionals, to develop best clinical practice and improve quality of care and service delivery by leading, generating and disseminating scientific research.

Keywords

Inter- professional education; transition into study; clinical academic career training.

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The course provides a focused programme of practical and academic study and prepares students for future careers in clinical research and to effectively promote, plan, manage and support research focused activities in the clinical setting. Students are seconded from their place of employment to study full time (over 1 year) or part time (over 2 years). To access one of the 18 studentships available students are required to hold at least a 2(i) BSc (Hons) degree in a health related subject. Each cohort is diverse; students differ with respect to professional discipline, clinical roles, employment grade and educational experience, and many will be unfamiliar with the expectations of masters' level 7 study. For full time students the need to complete 5 x 15 credit modules and a 105 credit dissertation within a year necessitates immediate and all-inclusive engagement at masters' level. Pre- entry activities, the induction programme and the learning, teaching and assessment strategies within the first term are focused towards supporting this transitional phase; facilitating adjustment to new 'student role' and developing independent learners, with the capacity to build on existing knowledge and critically apply newly acquired knowledge and skills in the context of their own research and professional practice. Activities and strategies are focused towards providing a supportive and inspiring learning environment to enhance overall appreciation of academic requirements at Masters level and designing curriculum and assessment practices which are challenging and includes opportunities to gain personal experience, partake in discussion, personal and group reflections, as well as and receiving feedback on performance from tutor and peers. The main activities and strategies include:

- Pre-entry course activities which raise awareness of masters level 7 learning expectations, appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes. The Faculty 'working at masters level' activity book is utilised; the content of which encourages students to focus on a range of personal skill development and identify the learning support they feel they require.
- Offering structured study support sessions that expand on and explore some of the key aspects of master's level learning featured within the workbook such as critical debate and personal reflection with the opportunity for practical sessions on how to approach specific tasks such as critical academic writing.
- Focusing induction activities towards preparation for learning and building relationships with course team and key members of learning and research support services.

- Utilising group and problem based activities to encourage socialisation, providing opportunities for students to share experiences, learn from and support each other.
- Offering opportunities to meet with past students enabling insight into lived educational / research experiences, and explore perspectives and gain advice on making the transition from work into study.
- Offering opportunities to engage with clinical practice researchers, and the wider research community and associated networks by timetabling attendance at research seminars, network events and graduate conferences.
- Utilising from the outset the Vitae research development framework; helps students appreciated expected attributes of a researcher and enables students to identify their expertise, learning and development needs.
- Offering tailored study skill development - for example study support sessions on making effective use of PowerPoint and Word for Windows are preceded by diagnostic tests to establish current level of skill, consequently building on previous knowledge and skills; optimising achievement during assessment.
- Tripartite supervisory tutorials between academic research supervisors and clinical mentors with monitoring progression through a series of 'progress reports'. Within the reports students reflect on progression and development; students receive feedback on performance and can be directed towards appropriate support if needed.
- Formative assessment in relation to research proposal, oral presentation and reflective skills occurs in the first term, feedback given allows students to address issues prior to submission of summative assessments.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

Self-appraisal of knowledge and skills encourages and **develops capacity for reflection and self-regulation and enhances capacity for metacognition**. Use of Vitae framework offers context to the role of researcher and expected level of attainment at Master's level; enabling students to identify their own learning needs and **establish a career development plan,** consequently it **strengthens the relationship between study and employment.**

Engagement with career researchers, past graduates and the wider research community encourages students to **be aspirational in their focus** and appreciate what can be achieved. Moreover this **broadens knowledge of subject area,** and assists students to gain insight into personal perspectives and diverse **application of knowledge and skills** which helps students **synthesise the process of research** and offers students a holistic overview of the research practice.

Opportunities to building relationships with others and exposure to study support and research networks aids the **transition from dependent to independent learning, it empowers students demonstrate self-direction, act autonomously and take personal responsibility for learning**; enabling students to seek appropriate individualized support in accordance with personal needs.

A combination of taught and practical sessions enables students **to build on prior knowledge and obtain an applied understanding.** The opportunity for group activities encourages peer assisted learning; encouraging students to share their knowledge, experiences and expertise and offer each other support and advice. This mode of study facilitates the **opportunity for critical debate and encourages problem solving through collaborative working.**

Formative assessment assists students to **develop a wide range of transferable skills**, the nature of assessment encourage **original and creative thought, and purposeful application of acquired knowledge.**

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

Encouraging realistic yet rigorous research. Students often enter the programme with large scale project ideas which cannot be supported in the one year timeframe. Students are asked to submit a structured 'formative' research proposal prior to the start of the course. Guidance notes give an indication of the expected scale of the project and specific things that need to be considered, such as insurance and personal costs. The purpose of this is to avoid students proposing projects which are unrealistic and unachievable, but it also enables students to be matched to an appropriate supervisor on entry to the course. To date all students have engaged with pre-course activities and whilst research ideas require refinement, the ideas presented have been by and large appropriate to the level of study and timeframe. Students report these activities had helped them to focus and put them in an appropriate frame of mind prior to the start of the course.

Managing student expectations particularly in relation to assessment has been difficult. Those selected are naturally highly motivated and ambitious. Some student's aspirations are not matched to their overall ability. There is often a notion that their high working grade / status equates to high academic ability. Some students have been disappointed by assessment outcomes and thus challenging of feedback and the assessment grade awarded. To overcome this, sessions on understanding masters level education, the marking process, and how this functions to support fairness and equity have been included in the timetable, as well as sessions on how to interpret and act on feedback.

Ensuring students focus attention to all aspects of the programme. This course aims to develop an integrative understanding of research within practice and encourages students and explore the wider application of their acquired research knowledge and skills and relate this to their own specific areas of practice. However there has been a tendency for students to focus their attention towards completion of the research project module; as a consequence students have overlooked the relevancy of certain aspects of module content since for them it has no immediate bearing on their research project. There has been a move to ensure induction activities and the module introductions place emphasis on relevancy of module content and establish links to assessments, research role and expected competencies identified within Vitae research development framework. This enables students to appreciate the need to engage with all aspects of the programme and assists students to pursue a range of research focused activity and career development in a more meaningful way.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

Supporting outduction. Academic supervisors continue to support the student when the course has ended; encouraging them to disseminate their work locally and internationally through conference presentations and publication in academic journals, since this is an essential part of the research process. Current developments include establishing an alumnus and academic network to continue to support graduates to develop their clinical academic career. Seminars and workshops facilitated by research experts support graduates to develop further research on return to clinical practice and assist with the transition to PhD registration.

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Case study 19: Using research nodes to support Master's students, Uppsala University, Sweden

Overview

Master's students are supported by inclusion into the institution's research teams. Research supports students since students support current research at the institution. Furthermore, students are organised in research nodes wherein several researchers, from different departments, hold meetings concerning a common study area to share and discuss different disciplines' work on a similar topic. The Node is organised and quality assured by a researcher, but most activities and communication is conducted with, and by, students. Students are the Node's resource both for its organisation and for the individual research projects conducted within its framework.

NB: Master's students in Sweden study for two years. In the first year, they primarily study courses, whilst the second is more focused on the dissertation, which encompasses between 30-60 credits (ECTS) of which 45 is the standard size (approximately 9 months of research). Although the students do not have courses in dissertation work until the second year, they are expected to work on it, and hold meetings with their supervisor from Day 1.

Keywords

Students as resource, student participation, master class, research node

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

Master's students are increasingly enrolled in master's programmes and through these are connected to a research group, called *Node*. The Node provides selected master's students and researchers the opportunity for joint research, supervision and teaching as well as connection to international networks.

A node is focused on a particular research area or topic which several departments, programmes and researchers share. This node, *Mind and Nature* (2013), studies the relationships between individuals, society and the environment in the form of spatial and temporal analyses. The aim is to understand the interaction between humans and the environment in history and contemporary times. Also, the node updates the research community with developments in technical skills, e.g. through software-workshops, primarily in the GIS-labs.

By recruiting selected students to the node, researchers are able to include master's students in their own research. The student's dissertation topic is framed according to the current research topic of the researcher, who serves as supervisor. The student thus becomes involved in up-to-date research projects and the supervisor is enabled to invest teaching and tutoring effort in the master's student who by her/his own studies supports the work of the researcher.

The Node is organised and quality assured by a researcher, but most activities and communication is conducted through reliance on student participation. Students decide on which workshops, lecturers and literature readings would be beneficial to them within the framework of the node. Students are the Node's resource, both for its organisation and for the individual research conducted within its framework. As the researchers keep the node updated with state of the art research projects, so the master's students' organisation of its

activities keep the node adapted to current needs. Students are also involved in mentoring new, and prospective, master's students, e.g. in workshops, lab-work, reading.

Apart from this, the node has quarterly meetings in which the research area is discussed from different vantage points of the departments, programmes and networks involved in it, allowing current projects to have updates on relevant research fields and new collaborations to take form.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

Through the Bologna Process, Uppsala University has set out to create master's programmes with international outreach and a defined plan for retention, quality and professionalism. For this purpose, the nodes were created as a means for researchers and students of different disciplines but dealing with similar questions, to meet and collaborate.

For the node *Mind and Nature,* there are several departments involved: Department of Archival Science, Library & Information Science, and Museum & Heritage Studies (ALM), Department of Archaeology & Ancient History, Centre for Gender Research, Department of Art History, Department of History of Science and ideas, The Hugo Valentin Centre and Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology.

Along with these are the master's programmes in ALM, global environmental history, Holocaust and Genocide Studies as well as several international networks and Swedish universities engaged in similar topics and questions.

What made/makes it "masters" level?

The node allows students to become involved in state of the art research and contribute directly to the researchers involved in their intellectual adolescence. Researchers support students since students support current research at the institution.

The master's students of the node are then supported, and expected, to commit to state of the art research among other researchers, e.g. write publications, apply for grants and organise workshops, seminars and conferences. In short, by the end of the master's programme the student will be prepared for subsequent doctoral studies and to partake in a community of peers.

Several of the master's students have contributed papers to international conferences and successfully applied for travel grants as well as co-authored articles on related topics with supervisors and researchers connected to the node.

A central component is that students are considered part of the research community to a larger degree than undergraduate students. Access to kitchen facilities for preparation of food, tea and coffee is not of trivial importance but actually improves the master's student's sense of collegiality. Discussions at the lunch table, staying on until late work hours in the study or the GIS-lab, is central to developing excellence among master's students of the node.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others

Student participation needs to be cultivated early on. The first time nodes were organised it required strong advocates to assemble researchers into the node and to make students

participate on more autonomous terms than they previously were used to. Once students begin organised activities within the node, they can be trained and supported to pass responsibilities on among themselves, although mentorship by the researchers is central to making the effort worthwhile.

In terms of autonomy, the students become dependent on the research project of their supervisor. However, the students could usually choose among several supervisors and projects. The tutoring researchers also provide stability and momentum that many students requested. As projects progress, the students become aware that uncertainty is part of all research projects, sharing and dealing with complexity between themselves and with their supervisors.

The challenge involved is essentially to encourage students not to think “outside of the box” in terms of research, but “around” it. State of the art research is conducted by students who are skilled in the literature field, theories and relevant methodologies for pursuing enquiries and studies. These constitute “the box”, and new findings emerge when students and researchers linger at its edges, aware of what is known, contested, and original. From this perspective, it is legitimate to involve master’s students in current, or emerging, research projects based on the expertise of supervisors. Tutoring students towards the edges of the box takes time from the supervisor, and much effort from the student, which is a process that should be of benefit to all parties involved.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

Following the framework “Facets of Mastersness” (SHEEC, 2013 after Warring, 2011), it is important to linger here on Professionalism and Depth, as its emphasis will vary depending on the master’s programme. In the Humanities, my field of expertise, the goal should be to develop means by which students can develop vocations outside the academy, as indeed many do after graduating.

The next step of the nodes, or similar frameworks, should be to support students in bridging their knowledge towards society and labour market in general. Applying research outside of the academy is part of its complexity, a process that may benefit both the quality of the research process as well as the students themselves in choosing between future careers.

Though node research may support the depth and academic professionalism of master’s students, the narrow focus on current research projects may limit development of breadth and professionalism outside of the academy.

For this purpose, connections and communication between university administration and Node leadership, primarily that conducted by the students, should increase. Administration has more knowledge of collaborations with civil society, public and private companies, which could be integrated into the node through the student’s engagement and work in potential internships, case studies or joint conferences on shared issues.

Thus, node work must continually, and increasingly, be organised by the master’s students to ensure that its activities remain open to application outside the scope of what its researchers already know. This might also bring new skills and expanded networks into the academy through its master’s students.

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Case study 20: Curriculum Development for Practitioners, School of Education, Murdoch University, Western Australia

Overview

Curriculum Development for Practitioners deals with curriculum development from the point of view of the person developing, modifying or improving a teaching-learning program. It is of value not just to professional classroom teachers, but to anyone involved in the practicalities of education and training in an educational institution, a corporation or public service organisation. The unit content covers the basic processes of program development (i.e. design, production, implementation and evaluation) at the local level and also examines wider curriculum issues, in particular the politics of curriculum design and implementation.

Keywords

Curriculum design, curriculum development, program development

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

The unit is taught on campus at Murdoch's main campus in Perth and at its Dubai campus. It introduces students to the theories and principles of curriculum design and development. As its name suggests, the unit was designed for practitioners, people with some experience of teaching. Students are enrolled in a variety of different courses, reflecting their professional backgrounds and interests. It is offered to undergraduate students in the Diploma of Tertiary and Adult Education, and the Bachelor of Education, but it is also offered as an elective unit in the Master of Education. Some of the students taking this unit teach in schools, but others teach at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges, universities, community organisations or private adult education providers; a number of them are nurse-educators.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

Curriculum Development for Practitioners aims to give teachers/educators practical experience of the kind of skills and processes educators need in order to develop curricula in their own workplaces or contexts while helping them to critically consider a range of historical and contemporary issues and controversies surrounding curriculum design.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

There is little difference in the content of the undergraduate and masters' level versions of this unit, but a great deal of difference in the expectations of students. Students taking this unit as an elective in the M.Ed programs are expected to demonstrate a greater breadth and depth of knowledge of curriculum theory and the principles of curriculum design. More importantly, they are also expected to demonstrate greater capacity for critical thought and reflection on the processes and issues involved. In general terms, undergraduate learning may be described as reproductive; students are expected to read, listen, summarise and describe information. In many cases they are also expected to analyse and apply information as well, but analysis may be limited and they are not usually expected to create new information. At the postgraduate level, students are requires to analyse information more thoroughly and in greater detail, to evaluate information, to combine or recombine ideas. The aim is what we might term "simple originality", i.e. the capacity to reshape material into a new pattern and apply the information or concepts in new contexts (Ballard & Clanchy, 1998). Another characteristic of *mastersness* is increased confidence in speculating and hypothesising new possibilities based on existing knowledge. Originality or creativity of this

type is a requirement of higher degrees by research, but we would expect to see evidence of it in masters' level students as well. These differences in expectations are reflected in the different marking criteria used for undergraduate and postgraduate students' work.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

In terms of *mastersness*, the challenge has been to help the M.Ed students get to grips with the required skills of critical thinking and analysis at an advanced level; to move into theoretical or abstract thinking as opposed to practical approaches. Students need to be taught/shown how to critically evaluate an argument, to interpret data, to adopt a sceptical attitude to information or data, to construct an argument with an appropriate level of supporting evidence and to debate multiple points of view on an issue.

Many of the students undertaking this unit have had little or no exposure to the academic skills and genres of reasoning, debate and constructing an argument (either in writing or verbally) in the course of their undergraduate education. The solution has been to provide them with readings that address these topics, examples of the type of material they are expected to produce (e.g. a literature review as opposed to an annotated bibliography), and to discuss the issues explicitly in terms of the unit content. There is a very close fit between the content and delivery of the unit: as students consider the politics of curriculum design, they are encouraged to reflect on the design of the unit, and the M.Ed course, as well as on the curriculum they are delivering in their own classrooms.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

Curriculum Development for Practitioners introduces students to the principles and practice of curriculum design and development. Ideally it would be followed by a second unit that explored these same ideas in greater depth and allowed students to apply their knowledge; they would be able to develop a curriculum and then implement and critically evaluate it allowing them to demonstrate their mastery of more advanced form of learning.

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Case study 21: Master's programme in Development Practice, James Cook University

Overview

A Master's programme in Development Practice (MDP) initiated in 2010 and designed to enhance the professional skills of people who intend to make a career in international development assistance with governments, inter-governmental organisations and NGOs. The programme is multi-disciplinary – even interdisciplinary - and students are mostly already professionally active. The students come from a wide range of national and disciplinary backgrounds.

Keywords

Development practice, inter-disciplinary, mid-career, sustainable development

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

Throughout the course students work in teams on assignments on development issues from a diversity of countries. We do not use formal pre-cooked case studies but select them and work on them together using personal experience, publications and online resources. The course culminates in a semester long visit to Eastern Indonesia to live and work in poor communities and study their development problems – we are seeking to engage with these communities for the long-term and help them to explore development options and also set up long-term monitoring of livelihoods and environmental indicators. So successive generations of students would visit the same villages. The following concepts underpin the programme:

Livelihoods and the sustainable livelihoods framework – monitoring and improving them

- The Millennium Development Goals and delivering on them
- Landscapes as an organising framework for solving conservation and development trade-offs
- Equity.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?
The faculty teaching this masters have research interests in human well-being, culture and environmental change in the region where the field work is conducted – the students mostly come from other countries but some are from Indonesia.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

What makes it different to an undergraduate subject?: WE INSTIL CORE COMPETENCIES and SKILLS.

The Master's in Development Practice is a combined academic and field-based degree program designed to educate and train a new generation of development practitioners who will be responsible stewards of the Earth's resources and will lead by example, fostering attitudes of social equity to all, as they master and use certain specific knowledge areas and skills. Working closely with their colleagues—other skilled practitioners and technical specialists—in both small and large, public and private, community-based and global teams, MDP graduates must display mastery of certain skills (to complement the content areas). These skills can be grouped in certain "skill areas," as identified below. Some of the

sub-skills are repeated because they are needed in more than one context. This list is not intended to be exhaustive—individual MDP programs can modify the sub-skills to fit the local needs and the context of the local program. Project management skills, including, but not limited to:

- problem identification
- analysis
- design
- log frame analysis
- mapping techniques, including GIS
- project implementation
- monitoring
- evaluation

Policy intervention strategies, including, but not limited to:

- Problem identification
- Analysis
- Design of response
- Policy communication, including oral and written briefings

Communication skills, including, but not limited to:

- Written communication skills, as applied to memos, emails, letters, reports, presentations, case studies
- Oral communication skills, as applied to meetings (one-on-one and larger), conference participation, oral presentations

Decision-making skills, including, but not limited to:

- Ability to gather data and opinions
- Ability to analyse a problem, breaking it down into components
- Ability to create action plans

Research skills, including, but not limited to:

- Conducting qualitative research within an ethical framework
- Conducting quantitative research within an ethical framework
- Gathering and managing research results (data)
- Analysing and presenting research results

Participatory techniques, including, but not limited to:

- Community needs assessment
- SWOT analysis
- Facilitation of local events (meetings, workshops, etc.)
- Local school, government, NGO, Civil society involvement
- Community organization and IEC campaigns

Self-reflection and interpersonal skills, including, but not limited to:

- Analyses of one's own attitudes, perceptions, and biases
- Empathy

- Leadership
- Team-building
- Conflict resolution

Risk management, including, but not limited to:

- Risk mitigation
- Crisis or disaster management

Cross-cultural and intercultural skills, including, but not limited to:

- Knowledge of, and respect for, local history, language, culture, traditions, and perspectives
- The ability to use culturally sensitive written and verbal communication skills to further cross-cultural awareness and understanding

Technological and media skills, such as those needed for production of still photography, videography, multi-media presentations, distance and blended learning, etc.

- Familiarity with available techniques and technology and their uses in development work
- Ability to use available media techniques and technology
- Willingness to experiment with available formats and interest in developing and sharing further skills in the area of technology and media

Entrepreneurial and innovative business and marketing skills, including, but not limited to:

- Cost benefit analysis
- Enterprise development
- Social Enterprise organization and management

Human Resource management skills, including, but not limited to:

- Ability to recruit, train, and lead teams
- Ability to create job descriptions, conduct hiring interviews and performance appraisals, make staffing decisions and implement them

Others as identified as appropriate for local program (or area of field assignment)

We stress exploring options, creativity in finding solutions, engagement with local people and with practitioners, facilitation skills – we assume a high level of basic education and within the overall development context we encourage students to focus on issues of special interest to them but always through a broad inter-disciplinary lenses.

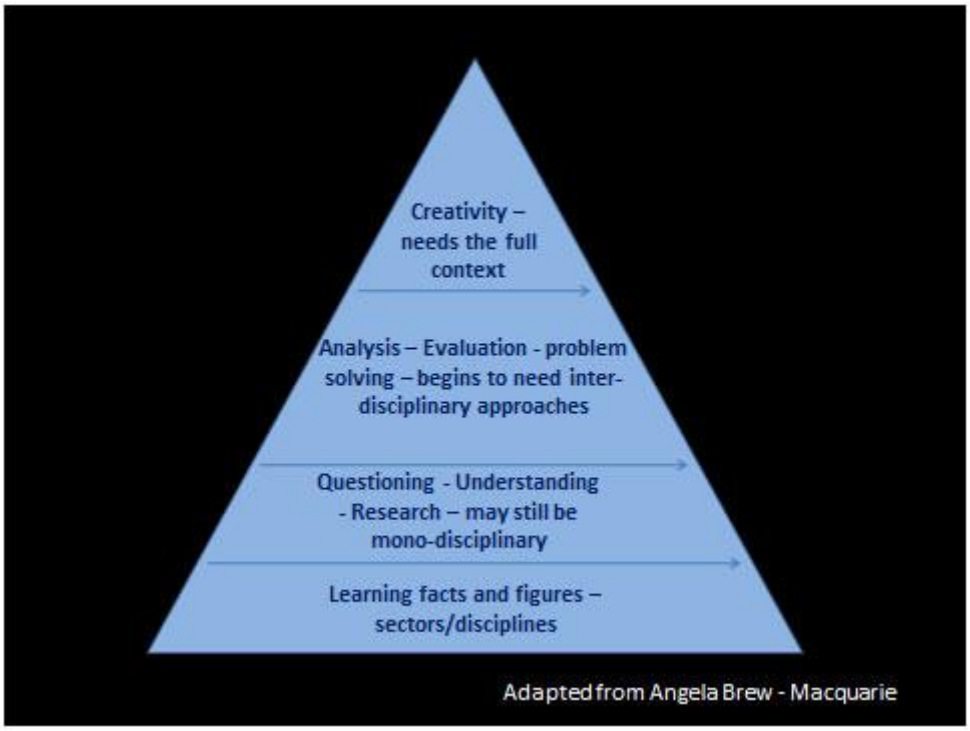
What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of mastersness - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The University struggles to allow students to take subjects from different faculties – there are problems of pre-requirements and scheduling, students almost never have English as a mother tongue and also don't know Indonesian, so there are language barriers. The University model encourages large class sizes whereas the pedagogy works best with smaller classes. Some employers prefer graduates with in-depth disciplinary skills and do not find niches for our broader inter-disciplinary graduates.

Where to next - in terms of mastersness – if anywhere?

We depend upon subjects provided by other faculty members who do not necessarily share our pedagogy and tolerance of poor English – we would ideally like to build up a centre staffed with people (from different disciplinary backgrounds) who would invest in this programme – making it a sort of MBA for international development professionals.

Mastersness for us means moving beyond just knowledge and information – it implies the ability to be creative in finding solutions to real world problems. Much of this can only come from experiential learning – actually doing things in the field in teams. We portray the evolution from regular classroom learning to this creative solutions to problems in the following diagram.



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Case study 22: Group Working On Web-Based Distance Learning Courses, Leeds Metropolitan University

Overview

Assessed group work designed to encourage communication amongst distance learning students on Master's programmes.

Keywords

Group working; distance learning; project scenarios; group assessment

What is the background /context to the initiative/activity/practice?

Leeds Metropolitan University School of The Built Environment has a suite of MSc programmes. One of the suite is the MSc Facilities Management. This is a web-based distance learning course delivered via a Blackboard VLE. The MSc Facilities Management has been so delivered for approximately 14 years and is believed to have been the first fully-web delivered MSc in the world.

Some modules are common between MScs; for example the module "Managing the Property Asset" is common to the MSc Facilities Management and is intended to be delivered on a new MSc currently being developed. There are two intakes per year onto the MSc Facilities Management; thus for each delivery there will be two cohorts of Facilities Management students and, in time, one cohort of students from the new MSc, taking this module. There are a number of students located overseas, particularly on the MSc Facilities Management.

Group work was first introduced onto one module on the MSc Facilities Management. This has been extended to a second module. In due course, group work will be further extended.

Describe briefly the activity/initiative /practice

Group work on the module "Facilities Information and Operations Management"

Assessment comprises three pieces of coursework: an individual project involving two detailed analyses of operations in the students' workplace, plus a group project concerned with Business Continuity Planning (BCP). For this group project, students are given a scenario: they are facilities managers for a local authority.

Students are allocated into groups of four by the tutor. Working as a leaderless task, groups:

- Identify 5 potential risks. (8 Marks)
- Agree a risk assessment methodology. (8 Marks)
- Select one risk and prepare a contingency plan and Standard Operating Procedures. (8 Marks)
- Carry out a financial appraisal of the contingency plan. (8 Marks)

One single report is submitted, clearly identifying who had responsibility for each task. Students decide amongst themselves responsibility for each task and a method of collating and submitting the work.

Group work on the module "Managing the Property Asset"

This module is assessed by two individual projects, one group project and an unseen examination. It is taken by students on the MSc Facilities Management and the MSc Building Surveying; three different cohorts of students. The group assignment is conceptually similar to the assignment described above for “Facilities Information and Operations Management”.

Students are allocated into groups of four by the tutor. They are given a scenario: they are property managers for a large financial services organisation. Scenarios are deliberately chosen to give a balance between private and public sector organisations. In this scenario, the organisation is seeking to open an office in another country, and the decision has been narrowed to two cities. Different groups have different cities to compare, for example, one group may be comparing St Petersburg and Moscow, another group may be comparing Mumbai and Delhi, and another group may be comparing Sydney and Melbourne.

For each city, the group has to research and report on:

- Office Rents and the Office Market.
- Residential Rents and the Residential Property Market
- Services and Transport.
- Quality of Life

Each of these reports carries 5 marks, for such items as depth of research, correct referencing, and use of authoritative sites.

A further 5 marks are given for the group part of the work; this is the use of illustrations and tables, conclusion etc. Again, students decide who will undertake each task and how to collate and submit the final report.

The report is submitted using a wiki. An example of a completed wiki is given. Students prepare wiki pages for each of the above research topics, plus a wiki page for the conclusion and a wiki page for any additional information.

Additionally, in both of the group work assessments, individually, each student has to reflect on the experience of communicating/working at a distance. This reflection is worth 5 marks.

Total marks for the assessment:

Individual research topic - 5 Marks
Shared Conclusion and other information - 5 Marks
Individual Reflection - 5 Marks
Total - 15 Marks

What made/makes it “Master’s” level?

The group work is a "leaderless task". Students are working as collaborative teams and have to decide for themselves how to allocate the various tasks and responsibilities. They are then expected to perform the task with minimum supervision. They only refer back to the tutor if there is a query of interpretation of the brief. At undergraduate level such collaborative tasks are monitored much more closely by staff, to see how they are progressing.

Within the terms of the project brief, students are expected to be able to undertake their own independent research. They can find their own resources and judge those resources for appropriateness and authenticity. At undergraduate level, whilst independent research is encouraged, staff start them off with some sites to look at first. Expecting this high degree of independent/co-dependent work is at the heutagogic end of Hase and Kenyon's (2000) PAH continuum, as is appropriate to Master's level.

The tasks themselves are quite realistic and could be expected to be actual projects for a senior i.e. Master's level, Facilities Manager. Students report that they have undertaken similar projects, including collaboration at a distance, in the workplace and they have now incorporated some of the practice from the assessment, i.e. the use of wikis into their work practice. Undergraduate students, of course, are also given typical workplace tasks in assessments. However, either they would be tasks which are more suited to their likely level of work; lower level projects; or if they are higher level projects, undergraduates would not be in a position to directly apply the learning to their work practice; or, indeed, be able to necessarily appreciate how the project could apply to their future work practice. For example, staff run some experiential learning modules with undergraduates in which the students have to reflect on a case study. At undergraduate level, the students would be expected to contribute to the decision making process in the project, for example by analysing data, providing information to the decision makers. At postgraduate level the students would be expected to be the decision makers and to reflect on the professional judgements they have made. An example of the marking sheet used is at the Annex.

What challenges were encountered/overcome – in terms of mastersness – and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

A high degree of independence is expected of the students. Students may come onto the course from differing backgrounds, and either through academic background, or professional qualification. Anecdotally, students from a professional background, especially service personnel, take to this very readily. Students from a more academic background seem less sure of the process, though this has always been resolved by peer support from the other group members.

Potential problems that were anticipated were:

- Students being disadvantaged if other members of their group failed to deliver their part of the group work; or being unfairly advantaged and getting a “free ride”
- Unfair distribution of groups. As far as possible the groups are selected by the tutors, so that students are unlikely to be able to meet face to face. For example students are in mixed groups located in different countries. No student researches cities in their own country.
- Cultural issues. The MSc FM attracts students worldwide, with significant numbers of students in certain countries. As part of the assessment, students provide a reflective study of their experiences on the module. Although overwhelmingly favourable, some students would not disclose their feelings about the experience, even though prompted to describe if they felt nervous, isolated, supported, comradely etc. A significant number of students from one culture would not explore or express these feelings, even though it was confidential between the tutor and the individual student.
- There was confusion about whether the reflection was solely about the technical aspects of communicating by the VLE discussion Board compared to email or MSN Messenger etc. One module was meant to include reflection on participating in a distance project; the other module was meant to include reflection on the technical merits of communicating by Discussion Board or other means. Significantly, nearly

all of the students from one particular culture would only reflect on the technical aspects.

The main aspects to consider are, therefore:

- Make the assessment challenging and realistic.
- Provide for different tasks within the project so that students can collaborate, yet not be totally interdependent. No-one gets a "free ride", and no-one is disadvantaged if another member drops out.
- Exercise care and judgement when allocating groups.

Perceived Benefits (For Students & Teaching Support Staff)

Students report that:

Participating in group work overcomes some of the perceived isolation of distance learning

- Working with students from different countries/cultures broadens their experiences of working with others.
- Researching countries alien to the group provides a common experience to the group, the subject cities are equally alien to all participants; and provides a further international dimension with an insight into the cities concerned.
- The students reported that the process enabled them to practise modern workplace skills. These include undertaking a "webquest" to find reliable evidence from the web, and the ability to collaborate on a project at a distance. Feedback has anecdotally suggested that distance collaboration of this nature already occurs in some workplaces, or is expected to become practice in other workplaces. The use of the wiki has also been favourably commented on; at least two participants have independently commented that they will be introducing wikis as a collaborative tool in their workplaces.

Tutors have reported that:

- Students support each other; particularly weaker students who may be reluctant to approach the tutor for advice, but may approach other students.
- Group work acts as an unofficial tracking system, alongside the official tracking system. If a group feels that a member is not delivering as they should, then the group can encourage that member, whilst the tutor may not be aware of any problems.

The student response to the group work in "Facilities Information and Operations Management" was so encouraging, with the rare experience of students asking for more group work, that it was then introduced into "Managing the Property Asset".

Where to next – in terms of mastersness – if anywhere?

Two main aspects need to be reviewed:

1. The overall weighting for the group project. Is this a fair reflection of the work?
2. The reflective practice assignment needs to be reviewed. Instructions need to be more explicit; and there needs to be greater recognition of cultural differences in what students are willing to reveal. Where a culture is reserved and prizes privacy, it may be unreasonable to expect students to express their feelings about group work.

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Case study 23: Transition into Postgraduate Study, University of Greenwich, London

Overview

Recent institutional development of provision for transition has focussed on undergraduate students. University policy on New Arrivals and Transition was endorsed by Academic Council in 2011 for undergraduates. This decision raised questions about our primary focus and about the differences between undergraduate and postgraduate transition. This case study describes an institutional research project around postgraduate transition and outlines some key findings (including: preparedness for study, communication, socialisation, skills and training, and institutional systems). Finally, we share our recommendations for policy and practice enhancement that our institution has accepted.

Keywords

Transitions, induction, expectations, student support, preparedness for Masters study

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

In order to better understand postgraduates' experiences of transition, we carried out a series of focus groups with students and staff, and individual student interviews. Thirty members of mainly academic and some professional staff took part. Forty-one students took part in focus groups and five were interviewed individually. The focus groups were active, using post-it note activities to explore useful new arrival activities and sources of information; student journey mapping exercises; and staff annotations of postgraduate student lifecycle models. The result was rich, qualitative data that was analysed and formed the basis of recommendations to the institution's Learning and Quality Committee, resulting in amendment of policy.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

At Greenwich, transition has received considerable attention as we have come to understand how students' early university experience impacts on success and achievement (Tinto 1993; Yorke & Longden 2008; Cook & Rushton 2009; McInnis 2001). This focus on transition has been targeted (as within the sector more generally) on undergraduate transition; the postgraduate transition experience has been relatively underresearched Scott et al 2011; O'Donnell et al 2009; Tobbell, O'Donnell & Zammit 2010). This might be because Masters students are assumed to be successful university students and that progression to Masters level study involves 'more of the same', or 'taking things to the next level' (O'Donnell et al 2009, 27). Our experience (and that of our colleagues) was that postgraduate students are challenged by this transition and we set out to investigate whether the well-developed policies and practices that we had in place to support undergraduate students were fit-for-purpose for postgraduate transition; whether institutionally we needed to amend policy and practice to enhance Masters students' experiences of transition.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

Although it is often assumed that postgraduate students are familiar and comfortable with higher education, our study showed that they share with undergraduate students' very similar excitement, apprehension and challenges. This reinforces messages from both staff and students about postgraduates' need for transitional support before, as well as from, arrival. The flavour of that transitional support, however, will differ between undergraduate

and postgraduate students. In terms of transition, Masters level needs seem to be focussed on:

- preparedness to study at this level – this means clearly stating what is expected and how this differs from undergraduate study;
- socialisation – a lack of postgraduate-focussed social activities combined with competing work and family commitments mean that postgraduate socialisation needs to be carefully designed so that students feel they belong;
- curriculum design and delivery – students wanted to have a well-paced curriculum with more early formative feedback to ensure that they understood what it meant to work at Masters level; they were willing to take on further training and development if they were not hitting the mark;
- staff roles – academic staff wanted more clarity on what was expected of them in terms of postgraduate support. Training was requested for dealing with and tailoring provision for the diverse cohorts that make up most postgraduate taught programmes.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - *in terms of mastersness* - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

A number of challenges were raised during the course of the project. The first is the assumption that students will be well prepared for studying at Masters Level; the reality is that some undoubtedly will not be. There need to be processes and procedures in place to support students who are not fully prepared so that they do not flounder. It is important that staff do not expect all students to have the same levels of expertise and skill when they start the programme and that they might have to go back to basics for some aspects of their courses. Postgraduate students' expectations need to be managed in relation to the level of study, what is required and the notion of 'scholarship'.

The second challenge relates to international students. Many postgraduate taught programmes recruit heavily from overseas. For students who have not studied in the UK before, transition can be particularly problematic and greatly complicated by cultural and procedural difficulties, which may also result in late arrival. Hence there is a need for ongoing and targeted transition and orientation across the year.

The third issue relates to time, with immense pressure within the UK's one year Masters Programme system to cover lots of content. Yet without sufficient time for induction and socialisation into a programme - 'time of feeling like a student', 'time for processing what was going on' - the content might well be lost on students. Careful attention needs to be given in curriculum design as well as induction planning to make the best use of the time available, while recognising students' intellectual and personal capacities.

Finally, the research noted the need to recognise the importance of relationships; to establish a 'feeling of togetherness as a group'. This can be achieved through planned socialisation activities, curricular activities and extra-curricula events, and the allocation of a named personal tutor with timetabled meetings to discuss progress, academic work, and future directions, recognising and supporting students' development and achievement. It should not be assumed that postgraduates are less in need of such provision.

It may be that the increasing size of postgraduate classes and the diversity of postgraduate students make it more difficult to meet these challenges, but assumptions about the capabilities and motivation of postgraduate students may lead us to neglect their need to be engaged, supported and encouraged.

Where to next - *in terms of mastersness* – if anywhere?

For Greenwich, this project has led to amendments to our New Arrivals and Transition Policy and the Statement of Entitlement for New Students to explicitly include postgraduate students (see http://www2.gre.ac.uk/about/policy ('Academic' tab).

Our next stage is to explore the impact that the amended Policy and reporting procedures will have on practice institutionally. This change in practice will be supported by staff development workshops, which take an extended view of transition and base discussion of balanced curriculum design for transition on direct examples from students of challenges they face.

Other elements of our institutional context will contribute to changing practice: a newly restructured academic year will now include a First Week, separated from timetabled teaching, in January as well as in September; a new Personal Tutor Policy including front-loading of tutorial support for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students; and the new role of an 'International Students Compliance & Advice Manager' to meet some of the needs expressed in our research.

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Case Study 24: Business Management Capability, Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland

Overview

The learning experience described here was delivered as an elective paper within Unitec's Master of Business degree that we entitled "Small Business Consultancy". The primary learning objective was to have students work with a small retail business over a 12 week period to (a) carry out a review of operational management practices in the business; and (b) recommend a series of actions the owner could take to enhance his or her management capability. Five postgraduate students were recruited to work as implants in five separate businesses, and progress was overseen by an advisory board drawn from both industry and academic sources.

Keywords

Master of business, work-integrated learning, business consultancy, industry engagement, business management capability, retail home furnishings.

Describe, briefly, the activity/initiative/practice

For each of the five student-business interactions, the staff member responsible accompanied the student for an initial two hour scoping interview with the business owner, at which a snapshot of current management capability was obtained through implementation of a structured interview process. This process gathered self-assessments of competence in forward planning, financial, staff, and customer management, and the existence or otherwise of an effective succession plan. The student then worked within the assigned business, typically for a full day each two weeks, and sought to validate the owner's self-assessment through participant observation, and through talking with staff, clients, and other key stakeholders. Subject to a formal confidentiality agreement, each student then reported back regularly to a governance forum of academics and practitioners, and were able to share "war stories" with the other four students enrolled in the programme. At the end of this process, the student was required to deliver a verbal presentation and written consultancy report that presented recommended future directions for the business.

What is the background/context to the activity/initiative/practice?

The initiative stemmed from a casual comment made by the CE of a franchised chain of 80 retail stores in the home furnishings sector, when he said "some of our stores are star performers, and some are very much lame ducks. Trouble is we don't know what the stars do that the lame ducks don't". On that basis, the process described above was suggested to the relevant industry peak body, and funding was obtained to implement this programme on two occasions (a total of ten student-firm interactions).

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

As a polytechnic/community college/university of technology style of tertiary educator, this institution prides itself on the provision of work-ready graduates that not only know the key components of theory in their discipline, but also have a demonstrable capacity to apply that theory in a real-life commercial environment. And, perhaps to an extent that we didn't entirely foresee, the relationship between small business and student often developed to the extent that the need for "mastersness" emerged to a sometimes dramatic extent. To illustrate by example, one business owner sat the student down and explained his plans to custom

equip a light commercial vehicle as a travelling showroom, estimated capital investment around US$ 60,000. The student was shaken out of his complacency when the business owner asked “what do you advise I should do?” In another instance, the student was placed in a position of having to tell her husband and wife management team that their business was rapidly heading for disaster, primarily due to the two marital partners’ total failure to communicate as business partners. The first of these challenges requires a significant degree of both theoretical knowledge and business acumen; whilst the second makes some extremely testing demands on a student’s interpersonal skills. As such, these were situations where successful resolution required high level competence and capability – in essence, a true demonstration of “mastery” that went well beyond the level that could reasonably be expected from undergraduates. It is not surprising then that students consistently saw this as the most challenging, stimulating, and in some cases life-changing learning activity they experienced during their two years of master study, and the small businesses involved were consistent in their acclaim for a project that significantly “raised the bar” in terms of their overall capability profile.

What challenges were encountered/overcome - in terms of mastersness - and what lessons were learned that would be helpful to others?

The primary challenges were centred on the issue of mutual trust. On the one hand, the typical small business owner was initially sceptical in terms of what they could realistically expect from a person who was “just a student”; while the students themselves were less than ideally confident in their own “mastersness” at the outset of the engagement. But, in every case, mutual respect, confidence, and trust expanded rapidly over the twelve week period of engagement. By the end of the process, there was no doubt in the minds of either student or business owner that a significant degree of mastersness had been demonstrated.

Where to next - in terms of mastersness – if anywhere?

We have reactivated this programme for the second semester in 2013, though this time we have abandoned the concept of single industry as the unifying factor, to be replaced by attention to a common business challenge that transcends industry sector. We are thus working with a broad spectrum of activity (literally cradle to grave, as one business distributes mother and baby products, whilst another manufactures coffins), using the common thread of enhancing digital marketing capability as the unifying factor. At an early stage, this promises to be even more successful.

There is a bigger picture to all of this though, in that this is more than a simple exercise in offering students something new, different and exciting, but is instead a very early stage indicator of how masters Master’s students will learn in the future. For us, this has not been a fringe element of today’s tertiary education landscape; it is a core element of what masters level education will look like in the future.

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Case study 25: Pathways into the doctorate: The Australian experience, Australian National University

Overview

This case study outlines some recent developments in Australia regarding alternative pathways into the doctorate, including from a coursework (taught) masters. Such a pathway has not been common in many disciplines, with Honours or a research masters being the traditional route to a PhD. However, with greater numbers of domestic, mature-age students returning to postgraduate study and substantial increases in international student enrolments, universities are increasingly providing alternatives.

Keywords

Pathways, coursework, research methods

The activity/initiative/practice

Until recently domestic students in Australia who had undertaken a coursework/taught masters consisting of two-thirds or more coursework did not generally qualify for entry into a doctorate. Rather, entry was through a research masters or more frequently a first or second class result from an Honours program. Honours in Australia follows the Scottish model of a fourth additional year of undergraduate study involving advanced disciplinary coursework, research methods courses, and a research project of 12-15,000 words.

However, with increasing numbers of mature-age students returning to postgraduate study, often to undertake a coursework masters, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of applicants seeking enrolment in a doctorate using their coursework masters as the entry qualification.

Through interviews with: PhD candidates who entered with a coursework masters; supervisors of such candidates; convenors of coursework masters programs where it was not unusual for graduates to enter a PhD; and Deans of Graduate Research this study set out to determine whether a coursework masters provided candidates with a supportable pathway into a PhD.

Background/context to the activity/initiative/practice

The Australian funding model for postgraduate degrees distinguishes between two masters' options: the taught/coursework masters, which has at least two-thirds coursework and is a full-fee paying program, and the research masters which is at least two-thirds research and has all tuition fees covered by the government for domestic students. Until recently, issues related to this funding mechanism have caused quite distinctly different pathways for domestic candidates seeking entry to a doctoral program.

What made/makes it "Master's" level?

In particular disciplines, e.g. business, computing and IT, it has not been unusual for coursework masters programs in Australia to have little in the way of research methods or a research project. However, this is changing due to a number of influences. The first is the revised Australian Qualifications Framework (2013) which now requires all masters (level 9) programs to include some research (the extent is not specifically identified). The second is the slow, but steady increase in the number of candidates who are seeking entry into a PhD

following a coursework masters.
Therefore, it could be argued that in Australia, one of the indicators on “mastersness” is the exposure of all students to research through research methods and at least, a small scale research project.

What challenges were encountered/overcome?

In the study, the major issue reported by supervisors regarding the preparedness of coursework masters entry candidates for a PhD was their limited knowledge of research processes, in particular, research methods. Supervisors commented that they needed to spend more time with such candidates compared with those who entered with Honours or a research masters on ‘getting them up to speed’ regarding research. On the other hand, a strong positive reported by supervisors was that the coursework candidates tended to be more mature, self-motivated and professionally experienced than other entrants.

A second finding from the project related to the role of the coursework convenor or the research project supervisor in identifying student interest and ability in research and actively mentoring and encouraging them to undertake a PhD. The role of this sort of encouragement was significant, with many of the interviewees commenting along the lines that it would be very unlikely that they would have undertaken a PhD without such active encouragement. This finding suggests that many coursework masters students do not see themselves as researchers until they have someone explicitly identify and encourage this in them.

Where to next - in terms of mastersness?

One of the main recommendations from the research was the inclusion of at least one, preferably two courses related to research processes in each coursework masters program. The first, early in the overall program, to ensure that all students experienced research methods early in their postgraduate experience, allowing them to decide if they wanted to undertake a substantial research project, with a second research methods course, later in their program.

A second recommendation relates to support and development for academic staff involved in working with coursework masters students regarding the potential for identifying, nurturing and encouraging students who are interested in and have the potential for undertaking a research degree.

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