

## **Students as Co-Creators: Working in partnership report**

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**Project: improving theory seminars**

- **Where the inspiration to do the project came from**

The University of Westminster is in continuous development of its courses, aiming to reach an optimal structure for students who are constantly changing the way they communicate with each other, but also the techniques for learning and absorbing new information. For the last two years at least, the structure of the core theoretical modules taught to all media-related courses such as: Journalism, Radio, PR, Advertising and Digital Media, has been in development, introducing a new teaching experience every year.

In relation to this, students' feedback and class participation varied. While some enthusiastically preferred the freedom of designing and 'teaching' the seminar by themselves, through graded presentations and discussions, others relied on the seminar leaders' guidance and support for facilitating the understanding of the topics and tasks requirements. However, one aspect that the majority agreed on was the convenience of a student moderated seminar that allowed different views to be expressed and encouraged more engagement.

- **What kind of impact your work may have on learning and teaching going forward (specific to your course/module you worked on or in a broader context)**

One of the key aims of the research and our work were to improve the way that students are able to take in information that is being presented to them. As students ourselves we have a unique first hand account experience of what worked for us and what did not.

It is the hope of the co-creators that the ideas we came up with will increase engagement or inspire other teaching methods and techniques, so that learning will be even more enjoyable and worthwhile. It was agreed very early on into this project that there is essentially no point in students attending lessons if they do not feel engaged. Hence why some students tend to fail to appear in lessons towards the end of the semester. It seems to be linked with repetitive teaching styles across the modules. The modules that seem to have the most engagement changed styles and methods from week to week.

We are conscious that lecturers do not have an infinite number of hours to produce such teaching content. This is why we suggested many interactive methods that don't require too much effort as well as methods that aim to place the students in the teaching roles. This always seems to create a fun atmosphere and can also help students build confidence and develop valuable transferable skills.

- **What you set out to achieve (aims)**

We wanted to create a seminar environment that would encourage creativity, interactivity, energy and enthusiasm, ultimately leading to more productivity. By conducting quantitative and qualitative research we collected extensive feedback from the students, which was mind-mapped by our team in order to find innovative solutions as students expressed the need for engaging content and wide-ranging discussions.

The structure we proposed resulted in a half hour students-led seminar, where groups are graded weekly for their presentations and the ability to moderate discussions within the class through creative methods such as debates and role play. In addition, for allowing the students to ask the seminar leader questions, we introduced socialqa.com – a digital platform aimed at being time-efficient as well as effective in creating a safe space for everyone to anonymously express their questions and curiosities on the seminar topic. Moreover, we also suggested the last 10 minutes of the seminar to be used for addressing topics such as essay writing and approaching different assessments.

This structure has been tested within a focus group receiving highly positive feedback on its efficiency to determine the majority of students to engage with the topic and the seminar itself.

Students considered the seminar leader's guidance essential for a thorough understanding of the theories. On the other hand, they all agreed on the importance of discussing the theories in relation to contemporary examples. We discovered that activities such as debating can have a positive impact on the students' engagement with complex theories, while hearing peers' examples corresponding to distinctive backgrounds can significantly widen their understanding of the global context. Besides, the part intended for debriefing assessment received great feedback, showing that students would have the chance to perform better if there would be a minor but constant academic support in the class, throughout the semester.

- **How students and staff worked together – what the roles entailed**

During the initial group meeting an email group for both students and staff was created, as well as a student's only WhatsApp group chat. The email group was used to help meet deadlines, share important information and answer student queries. Regular meetings with students and staff were set up. As mentioned previously, the initial meeting was used to create group chats, outline deadlines and brainstorm and set tasks for between our student and staff meetings.

Students were expected to find the main issues that need to be resolved for the improvement of the lecture. And a meeting set up with both staff and students to discuss the findings, the staff member helped focus the findings of the students. Each student then created an ideal lesson plan before the next meeting were the ideas though to be most effective where selected and improvements were made.

The staff member then helped the students set up their trial classrooms, by booking us a room and organising snacks. The two students whose ideas were picked were in charge of each classroom. The other student's role was to get students to participate in the classroom trial. All students were involved in the presentation and interacted with the class, aided by the member of staff who helped answer any queries.

- **Any lessons learned from working in partnership**

Working in partnership although difficult sometimes in terms of scheduling, has ultimately been very rewarding. Working together as cliché as it may sound, definitely produces a lot more ideas in a quicker time frame. It also helped to remove the ideas that weren't as strong as everyone has the ability to look at the ideas from different angles. This project in itself would have lacked details and depths had it been a solo project. Working in partnership has taught us to use the talents and skills others have, that we may still be developing. These skills include, public speaking, organising and a multitude of other soft skills.

*12 June 2019*