



STUDENTS AS  
CO-CREATORS

**A Curriculum Design Collaboration**

***Designing authentic assessment and activities for  
6FNCE005W International Financial Management***

Nasira Nedahi, Entela Shurbi, Sumaya Sikder

Dr Julie Ayton

**School of Finance and Accounting**

**Academic Year 2021-2022**

# Introduction

Julie is the module leader for 6FNCE005W International Financial Management. This module is an introductory module catered for a **wide variety of students** (from Marketing to International Business to Finance and Accounting).

For several years, Julie has struggled to engage students with the module, the assessment, and the learning activities. It may have been challenging to create the appropriate learning activities and assessments due to the **lack of consideration given to students' interests, backgrounds, and objectives**. Also, most students are new to the module and amongst themselves, therefore were reluctant to collaborate through class discussions and group coursework. This was more challenging during the pandemic because no direct lessons or advancements could be made to better teaching and assessment styles for students. As a result, Julie opted to collaborate with student partners to make the module's learning and teaching as engaging and inclusive as possible. The timing was right with the move to authentic assessment (replacing the exam with a group project) and the return to face-to-face teaching.

Three students volunteered for this project as they were interested in **understanding how teaching materials are prepared** and **eager to demonstrate their own suggestions from a student perspective** to improve and make the module engaging. Interestingly, all three student partners were female, with already busy schedules outside of university life (e.g., part-time job, sports, etc.).

The project's goal was to acquire insightful feedback on two important components of teaching and learning from the module's participants, including both student partners as well as other students: the **assessment** and the **learning activities**, both of which are aligned with the module's learning outcomes. Julie was particularly interested in finding out the **'why' factor**. Why students would not collaborate in group discussions and exercises and what could be improved. The assessment and learning activities for the following academic year were then revised in light of the feedback gathered during the focus group and during the semester. Therefore, a solid understanding has been made to reshape the teaching style in the hope of a better-improved outcome.

# Project development

This project consisted of a few stages and levels of collaboration between the teaching team and participating students. The project started with the module leader sharing the previous assessments and historical teaching techniques used so far in this specific module and as co-creators, we took our time to read through all the materials provided and analyse them to figure out what points are valuable to be kept the same and what aspects could be improved. After carefully assessing and providing feedback on the existing form of assessment, we came up with new ideas and techniques that we believed could be beneficial to the course. Considering the fact that **we worked together as a team**, ideas were elaborated on and shortlisted at each meeting in order to select what would work best. We also worked collectively on determining the new assessment methods provided as a draft by the module leader.

After the work between us and the module leader, we asked for the collaboration of other students taking the module. we organised **formal and informal feedback sessions** from students across different courses to have a broader understanding of their opinion. In order for us to gather as much information and feedback as possible, we prepared some specific questions which required students to elaborate on their answers and provide their ideas on what could have been done differently. The feedback collected was presented to the module leader and **further improvements were made consistently during the delivery of the module**, i.e., Julie would update the learning activities as needed.

A **focus group** has been designed and conducted to get students' opinions to improve engagement in the class activities and assessments. In this project, 4 students taking this module and a student partner performed the focus group, where a certain set of questions has been asked to the students to get a real insight into what they think and feel about the class activities and assessments and how they could be polished up further. Questions were asked about **seminar activities**, e.g., "Did some students have difficulties with engaging/taking part? Why?" and about the **authentic assessment**, e.g. "What do you think about group assessment in general? Is it appropriate/desirable to have group coursework at level 6? How can it work best at level 6? Can you suggest an alternative?"

A lot of questions have been answered quite positively as the students liked the way the activities have been designed and the way the assessments have been structured and explained. However, there are a few things that could be better according to the student's point of view.

The students felt that this module was not very engaging for people who do not study a similar subject to Finance, so it would be better to offer 'this module' as an option to the related students. The majority of the activities designed by Julie were very entertaining and motivates students more to engage in lessons, but they should be kept in moderation as the students have many other responsibilities and tasks to complete. The students suggested doing a group presentation occasionally instead of every week; or instead of changing the group every week, the group could be kept the same, however, the latter recommendation takes the merits of knowing the classmates and communicating with each other away. An idea shared by a student was: "to make the module more engaging, maybe Julie should make the students try to do actual foreign currency exchange for activity". This is a possibility but not sure how achievable it is. The students also like the idea of "Kahoot" as it refreshes their memory of last week's topic. One thing the students exceptionally liked was the way the assessments were structured and the way the marking criteria were explained. The students stated that 'this module' suggests the most activities for engagement and no further improvements are needed, however, they would love to see a few exercises with provided answers. It is **well appreciated** by the students **that Julie takes their feedback seriously and acts upon them.**

The project was very useful for both the module leader and the students. Julie now has a better idea of students' background and aspirations for this module, and new ideas on how to develop the module in the future. About the **assessment**, students agreed that both coursework were authentic and engaging. The individual coursework was too long, so Julie decided to make it shorter for next year. For the group project, most students decided to split the work rather than work collaboratively, which was not the aim of the group project. Similarly, for **in-class group discussions**, some students recognised the benefits of group discussion, but most of them wouldn't engage on a weekly basis. One suggestion was to have one group present a topic each week.

To further engage students early in the semester, Julie decided for next year to organise a **team-building event** within the context of the module. This event would act as an icebreaker, emphasizing the diversity of students in the module and the benefits of collaboration and peer learning. Julie approached the Director of Teaching, Learning and Quality at the School of Finance and Accounting and they're now working together on designing such event for next January.

In a broader aspect, this was a great project for us as student partners and for the teaching team. It's important that students are aware of the process it takes to create assessments, plan lectures and activities and how important it is to participate in them as their **purpose is to broaden our learning**. For instance, after teaching the same module year after year, the teaching team tends to develop a pattern and a specific way of teaching which may decrease the innovation and authenticity of the style of teaching. Therefore, working closely with students provides a **new perspective and fresh ideas** on what they believe could motivate them to do well.

Involvement and responsibility create a willingness to understand and accept, in this project I would say one of the big impacts on students could be that they **had the chance to feel involved and valued** by having their opinion actually impact the teaching quality they expect.

# Reflection

**Julie:** This project was really interesting for me. Every year, I try to gather feedback from students through surveys, polls and informal chats, and students really appreciate it when I act on their feedback. But this was not enough, as students were not effectively contributing to the module's design. Also, I never took the time to really get to know my students and what they expect from my module. Being a specialist finance lecturer usually teaching specialist modules, I realised my expectations were not aligned with my audience. This project allowed me to connect with students like never before, not only student partners but all students on the module. I will continue connecting with students in the future and hopefully enhance their learning experience even more.

## **Student partners:**

Collaboration is key to understanding and appreciation. Students believe that teaching has become a routine which is no different from one year to another, they don't expect any changes to have been made and therefore take no time to appreciate what actually goes into learning material preparation. So I really believe that collaboration is beneficial to both parties because it helps exchange perspectives to create a new vision.

It was an extremely interesting and rare project for me as I was able to communicate with the students to know their real thoughts regarding the lessons, teaching and assessments. It was also very amazing to know how much Julie values the opinions of her students and tries her best to make everything fun and more engaging for them, and the students thoroughly appreciate this act of kindness. I really enjoyed working with the students and Julie and would love to be a part of another project like this one.

**Nasira:** Being able to take part in this project was valuable and eye-opening. The appreciation of education was shown when Julie was determined to listen and create changes for her students' learning. She strives to maintain a positive outlook in the face of challenges. Therefore the 'why' factor was accomplished as students were able to express their feelings, including any concerns or modifications they would like to see in the module to make it more engaging. This allowed me to appreciate and engross with them while re-evaluating and understanding the teaching style in more depth. Nevertheless, it was a success working with the group and I can adapt what I have learned here for the future.