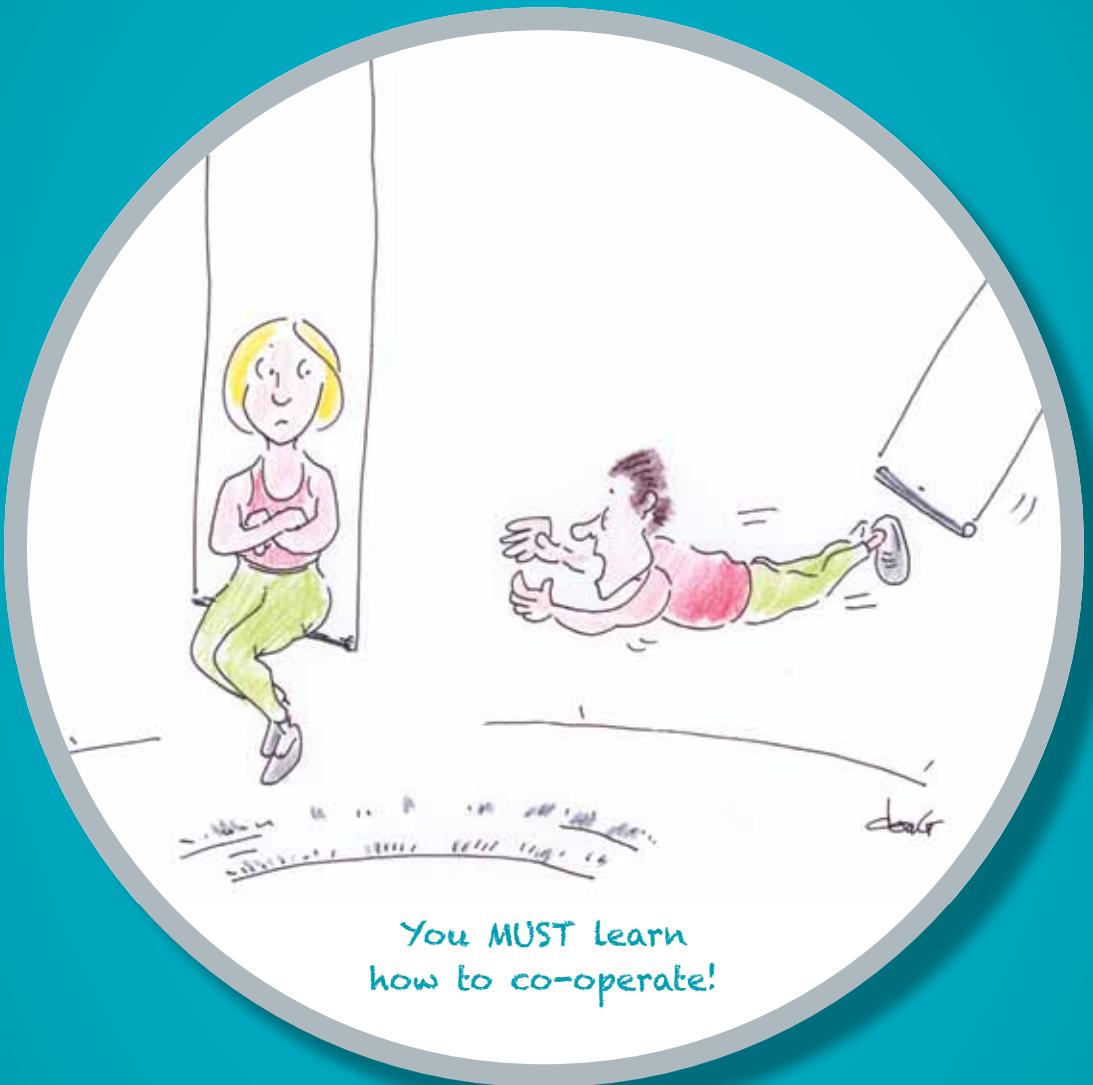


FORUM

Enhancing learning and teaching

Issue 31 | Spring 2013



Group work: co-operation and collaboration in learning and teaching

Student views

Learning and Teaching Conference 2013: call for papers

Case studies:

promoting variety

Helping groups to bond

News, resources, events, funding opportunities

FORUM

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For a large print, black and white text version please contact Alice Wakely on ext 2018

Editorial



The focus of this issue of *Forum* magazine is group work: co-operation and collaboration in learning and teaching. This is also the theme of this year's Learning and Teaching Conference, to be held on 8 May.

As suggested in the leading article by Sam Hellmuth (Language and Linguistic Science), the literature identifies three main problems with group work: 'free-riding', balancing personal with group priorities, and issues around cultural integration. But, conversely, she argues that group work in higher education has clear benefits, providing 'an environment conducive to experimental and/ or collaborative learning' that could be useful for students' later employability, even if we should not assume that group work is direct preparation for team-working in the workplace, as the latter might vary greatly from place to place. Our discussions with students about their experiences of group work present a similar mixed picture.

Our various case studies from across the University suggest that different departments have tried to deal with 'free-riding' in different ways:

- 'asking individual group members to take turns in summarising events and statements each week' (Politics);
- creating the right incentives by 'giving all the students the chance to rate the contribution of their group members at the end of the project so that individuals who have failed to contribute fairly will receive a lower grade' (Psychology);
- asking the students to produce an exhibition as a team where each student is expected to 'take on different responsibilities and to offer comments from the perspective of the particular role adopted' (History of Art);
- allocating 'different technologies to individual team members to investigate before pooling their findings for collective analysis' (Electronics).

We hope this issue provides food for thought, and that you might be inspired to contribute towards our Conference on this theme, whether as a contributor or as a delegate.

Paola Zerilli

Editor

Essay examples needed

The Learning Enhancement team is in the process of creating an Essay Library and would like to gather contributions from all departments. Essay contributions, with the permission of the student and suitably anonymised, will be used to develop interactive, example-based staff / student workshops and support resources on academic writing. If you and your students are able to help, please contact Maddy Morgan – madeleine.morgan@york.ac.uk.

Funding opportunities

Rapid Response grants of up to £3,000 are still available this academic year in support of small-scale short-term projects, initiatives or purchases to enhance the quality of learning and teaching by addressing a clearly identified need or issue.

Further information is available at www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/funding-and-resources/funding.



NEWS

Award-winning support for international students

Access UK, a video-based, interactive language programme for international students developed by Chris Copland and Huw Llewelyn-Jones from the Centre for English Language Teaching, has won a prestigious English-Speaking Union President's Award. The Award, conferred by a national judging panel of publishing, English Language Teaching and design specialists, celebrates the use of technology in the teaching and learning of English, and will be presented at a special ceremony at the House of Lords on 12 February.

Developed with the support of a Rapid Response Fund grant and published by *Clarity English*, the programme prepares international students for a whole range of situations they may face in the UK.

These include a visit to the doctor, sorting out visa problems, disputes with flatmates, and personal safety in a UK city: essential input for a smooth transition to campus life. The focus is on language and guidance, with a particular emphasis on the spoken skills and vocabulary needed for practical and social situations. Challenges such as making friends, walking home late at night or dealing with a theft are illustrated in a series of video scenes. Filmed in and around the University, the course gives learners access to authentic English and genuine situations, and the opportunity to bring this to life through active viewing.

The panel commented: 'This is an innovative, multifaceted resource for



making everyday life in UK less daunting for international students. Unlike many ELT resources, the developers weren't afraid to use regional accents, and scenarios felt wholly natural.'

The Access UK video series is available to York students on the Welcome site for undergraduates in the section for international students and can be accessed directly at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/celt/access-uk>.

Student surveys in 2013

National Student Survey (NSS)

The ninth National Student Survey will start on Monday 21st January 2013 and run until 30 April, conducted by Ipsos MORI. Our final year students will be contacted and asked for their views on the quality of the teaching, assessment, personal development and support they have experienced, the organisation and management within their department, and the quality of the learning resources to which they have access. The results are publicly reported, including via the Key Information Sets for each programme, introduced nationally this year.

This year, the University has decided that four banks of additional questions will be used to gather student views on social opportunities, welfare resources, assessment, and learning community. We will also ask one institutional question to find out what particular experience has been most rewarding or useful, and what one change would most improve their course.

The survey can be found at www.thestudentsurvey.com. For further information, please contact jo.fox@york.ac.uk.



Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

This runs every other year in the form of an online questionnaire for students, overseen by the HE Academy. Unlike the NSS, the results currently remain confidential to the University and are not publicly reported at institutional level. Nevertheless, the survey provides a very useful source of feedback on postgraduate research student experiences.

The University will take part in its sixth PRES between Friday 1 March and Thursday 16 May 2013. Various sections, plus some demographic questions, cover experiences and development as a postgraduate researcher. The final section asks about overall experience, followed by a space for any additional comments.

We will also ask one institutional question to find out what particular experience has been most rewarding or useful, and what one change would most improve the postgraduate research experience. For further information, please contact liz.stead@york.ac.uk.

Please encourage your students to take part in these surveys as appropriate. For each survey completed, the University will donate £1 to the Student Hardship Fund.

The theme of this issue of *Forum* and of this year's Learning and Teaching Conference (see page 7) is co-operation and collaboration in learning and teaching. Asked to name a potential problem with group work in higher education, 'free-riding' (to adopt the term used in the literature) is probably one of the first that springs to mind for both staff and students, and we should therefore not be surprised that it also features among the responses given by York students in a recent Forum focus group (see page 6). Free-riding isn't specific to student group work though, surely – rather, it is a risk in all group or team-based activities.

In a discussion thread on thestudentroom.co.uk, entitled *What's the one thing you wish you knew about uni before you started?*, one student writes, 'That to get through group-work on a presentation you would need either a realistic appreciation of your colleagues' anticipated work rate (not as much as you hope), or alternatively, a private supply of valium.' Compare the views of another contributor: 'I loved my research project because I was pretty much on my own, diving into uncharted territory.' We no doubt all value the intellectual space that research affords, to personally push an idea to its logical conclusion; but no research exists in a vacuum. At the very least, we are all on the receiving end of peer review, which, even if unwelcome or challenging, undeniably improves the quality of the end product. In many disciplines, and in all interdisciplinary work, research can only be the result of group work, in one shape or another.



More heads are better than one

Whatever our instinctive feelings about group work in higher education, there is clear evidence that it is a Good Thing. In a useful review article, Davies (2009: 564) sets out some of the benefits of group work suggested by HE research. These include the promotion of deep (versus surface) learning, and active (versus passive) learning, as well as the provision of an environment conducive to experiential and/or collaborative learning. Group work also arguably provides what Davies terms 'an authentic form of assessment in terms

of a student's later employability'. More instrumental reasons for greater adoption of group work include increased student numbers, as a place to foster transferable skills, and as a way to personalise the student experience in large cohorts.

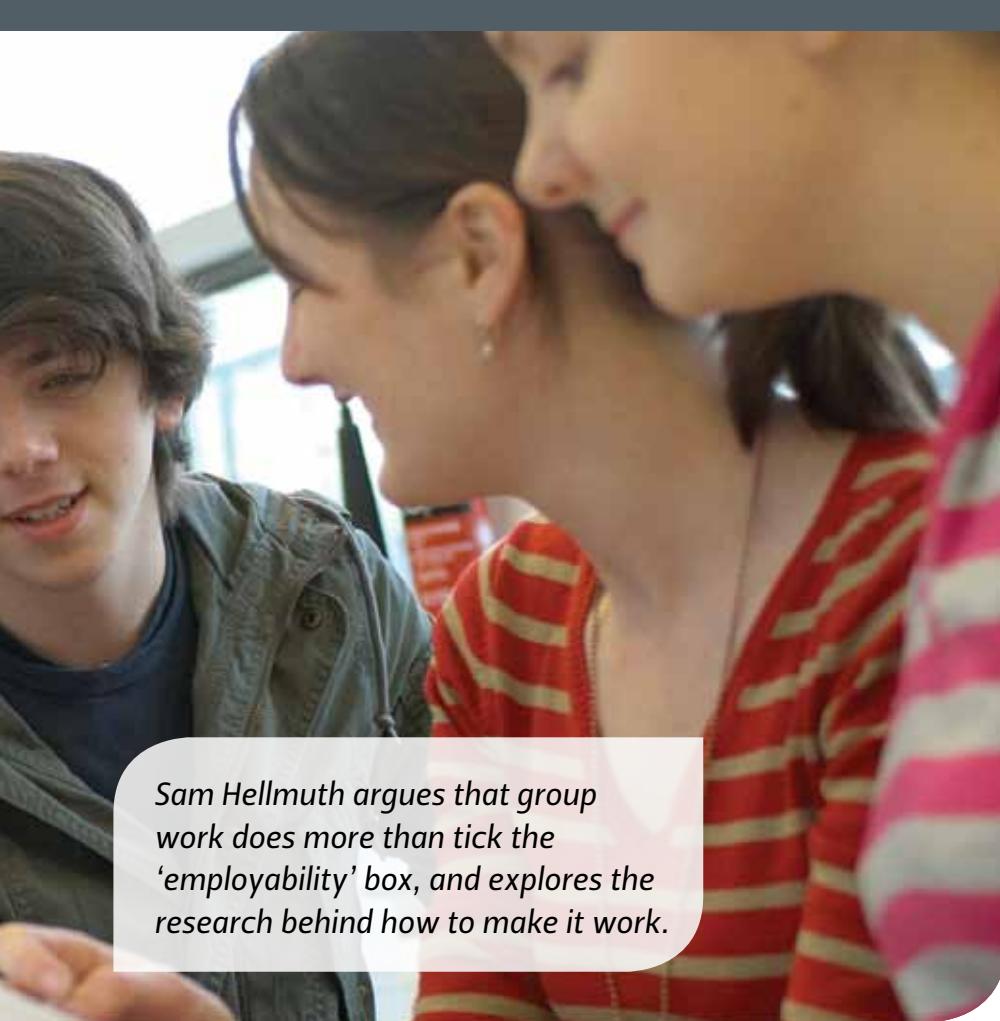
Davies lists three main problems with group work, despite its many advantages. The first is free-riding, but he also identifies what he terms the social dilemma (students having to weigh up personal vs group goals), and issues of cultural integration. Fostering effective integration of students from different cultural backgrounds in group work contexts can be fraught (Turner 2009) but the literature suggests solutions (Leask 2009).

What do we understand by group work?

It is interesting to note that only one of the listed benefits is linked directly to employability outcomes. Indeed the literature suggests we should not automatically assume that group work, as it tends to occur in HE, is always direct preparation for the type of group or team working that occurs in the workplace (Mutch 1998). Group work in the workplace varies greatly, depending on the sector or industry: some roles are intrinsically team-based, with a precise, pre-determined division of labour necessary to successful



It was a collaborative effort with a guy on the internet: I pay him and he writes the essay



Sam Hellmuth argues that group work does more than tick the 'employability' box, and explores the research behind how to make it work.

performance; in other workplaces it may be more common that individuals work independently on aspects of a shared task coming together in meetings only to check progress towards an overall goal. Recognising the variety of group working practices in the workplace should allow us to free up our thinking about group working within the HE curriculum. There is room for different types of group working, both formal and informal, and we should foster and encourage all types (see case studies on pages 8–11 for a sample of what goes on at York).

In the Learning and Teaching Forum steering committee, we worked recently to draw up the call for papers for the forthcoming Learning and Teaching Conference. We were able to reach consensus fairly quickly on the range of main themes about which we would like to encourage submissions (listed on page 7). But we couldn't get to a single view on what image should appear on the poster. We had very different ideas about what type of image sums up the concept of 'co-operation and collaboration'. Some of us liked worker ants collectively lifting more than their own body weight, others a team steering a boat down the rapids, others the co-ordination of a rowing crew. We all experience collaboration differently – and that's probably a good thing, but something we should definitely keep in mind as instructors. The students

in our focus group speak warmly of the benefit of self-formed working groups. What can we do as individual teachers, or as departments, to foster this kind of interaction among our students? What can we do as a University to ensure there is space in which such interaction can take place?

As for assessment of group work, Davies (2009) gives practical advice. Key things to pay attention to are:

- Task type: 'additive' tasks are best, in which each contributes a defined piece of the puzzle.
- Task complexity (stimulating tasks are more motivating) and desired outcomes (what will a good end-product look like?)
- Group size: the larger the group, the greater the risk of free-riding.

A range of solutions are offered in the literature to tackle the free-rider problem in particular. Maiden & Perry (2011) show that students appreciate the value and importance of group work – despite the free-rider problem – and appreciate any overt attempt to mitigate its effects. In their study, these attempts ranged from punitive sanctions (group members can award a yellow card to a non-participating member; two yellow cards and you're out), to calculation of an individual's final mark as 'group mark x average peer assessment of his/

her contribution to the group effort'. These interventions don't eradicate the problem, but they do deter free-rider behaviour, and demonstrate awareness on the part of the instructor that the problem is there.

The Learning and Teaching Conference on 8 May in the Ron Cooke Hub will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas about group work, as we do it here in York. I am sure that there is a diversity of ways in which group work happens, and it would be good to have the full range represented in posters and workshops at the Conference. If you have a group work component in an forthcoming module why not invest an hour or so and read one or two of the references mentioned here? Are there ideas you can trial next term in your own teaching? Do you have better ideas that are already working? Let us know via the Conference call for papers, so we can hear in May how things went. Even better, why not work on this with a colleague or two – remember, more heads are better than one.

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Sam Hellmuth researches spoken Arabic dialects and second language phonology as a Lecturer in the Department of Language and Linguistic Science, and became Chair of the Learning and Teaching Forum in September 2012. She taught English as a Foreign Language in the Middle East before entering the world of academia, and has been pleased to discover that communicative classroom techniques work just as well in York as they did in Yemen. Contact her via email sam.hellmuth@york.ac.uk.



STUDENT FOCUS



Clear benefits, but mixed results

The students were all clear about the benefits of group work, and were comfortable with it as a means of working. 'It's a good way to meet new people'; 'you develop lots of different skills, like leadership.' 'We did lots of group activities at school – it's part of what we're used to.' Interestingly, they didn't make an immediate link to their employability; rather, they saw it as an established way of learning. 'You learn new study methods from other people'; 'you get a better and deeper idea of what is required from an assignment'.

For the Masters students we spoke to, group work was about 'sharing different backgrounds, perspectives and experiences'. 'We're not assessed; we just work in groups in class to discuss topics and help each other get used to the concepts. We can share our knowledge and our approaches to study. I think we perform better as a group.' The language barrier for overseas students was mentioned, however. 'We get used to each other's accents after a while, but some home students do speak very quickly.'

The MRes students in particular noted that their engagement with group work would be transient, and that the academic route in their discipline steered them towards solitary study. 'It's beneficial for a solid grounding now, but eventually we'll be working

on our individual theses.' There was a perception among undergraduates too that 'clever people don't like working in groups: they always end up working harder while getting the same mark as everyone else.'

Some experiences of group work at undergraduate level were less happy. 'We have been put in groups to prepare a 15

minute presentation for a seminar, but my group members aren't contributing and I feel I'm being forced into taking the lead and in fact doing all the work. I think I am naturally geared towards working by myself, and I would certainly rather do so than rely on others who aren't pulling their weight.' 'Our group leaders don't assign the workload in the group in an efficient way.' Assessing group work doesn't necessarily make a difference in terms of students taking it seriously. 'It all counts in terms of your mark, but some people say they don't have time to contribute. They have an 'A level'

If we could base group work around the way we are already working, that would really help.

attitude to learning: they just do the minimum, and have no ambition. I just know I'm going to end up doing it myself. We do score each other's contribution but I'm not sure it counts for much in the final grade.' Others commented that 'where different weights are allowed for individual contributions, everyone just gives each other the maximum mark.' And approaching the lecturer about a malfunctioning group isn't always easy. The perception was that 'the seminar is led by a postgraduate student, who doesn't have any power.' Students need to be clear about the lines of communication open to them.

One suggestion for encouraging productive group work was that departments could facilitate more 'team-building', encouraging a cohort to get to know each other and work together. 'I was just given a list of people in my group who I'd never met before – I had to try and find them via the VLE or Facebook.' 'Informal study groups, where you gravitate towards people you get on with, and who have a similar attitude to studying, work much, much better. Harry Fairhurst is a good facility for this, although it does get very crowded – but it's helpful that you can book rooms. If we could base group work around the way we are already working, that would really help.'

**CALL FOR DISCUSSION
PAPERS, SHOWCASES AND
POSTER PRESENTATIONS**

Working together: *co-operation and collaboration in learning and teaching*

**How do we ensure our students leave York
with the capacity and desire to thrive in a
complex, connected, international world?**

We all create opportunities to work together, through programme design, cross-departmental co-operation, project management and collaboration with each other and with our students. This conference will provide us with time to learn about group-based initiatives in learning and teaching for both staff and students across the University, and to share our ideas, achievements and difficulties.

We invite submissions exploring a range of topics around the central theme, such as:

- The politics of group work
- Developing group work skills
- Group assessment: value and challenges
- Working as a team with colleagues and/or students
- Models and tools to support collaboration in learning and teaching

**THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION IS MONDAY 21 JANUARY 2013
(WEEK 3, SPRING TERM)**

All submissions should be sent electronically on the pro-forma provided. Full details can be found in the proposals guidelines which you can download, along with the pro-forma, at www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/conference. Registration for the Conference, which is free and open to all staff and students, will open on Monday 4 March 2013. If you have a query about any aspect of the event, please contact alice.wakely@york.ac.uk.

CASE STUDIES

Politics: negotiating conflict

Audra Mitchell and Sydney Calkin have introduced group exercises in 'conflict simulation' as an alternative to field work in international relations.

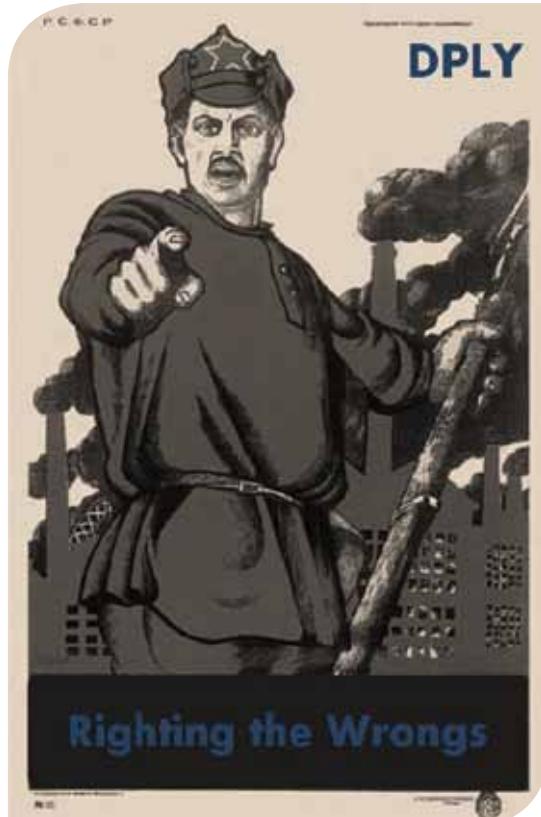
Employment in the field of international relations has become increasingly competitive, and it is often necessary for graduates to demonstrate practical skills beyond theoretical, classroom-based learning. Conflict simulation is an established method of teaching which can enhance these practical skills at undergraduate and postgraduate level, while minimising the ethical and practical risks associated with field trips. Supported by a Rapid Response grant, we have introduced conflict simulation into an MA module, *Violence and International*

Intervention. The grant enabled us to research and prepare extended problem-based learning scenarios, which present the students with context and new challenges to tackle each week. Groups of students each assume the role of a different actor in a conflict – government, guerrillas, paramilitaries, NGOs/media and diplomats/donors – and are briefed about a conflict in the fictional country of Yorkania. Over the course of several weeks, they must respond to emerging aspects of the conflict – from kidnappings to government abdications – from the perspective of their groups. They must use their knowledge of international relations, drawn from the module's lecture and seminar teaching, to navigate the events of the simulation and work for the interests they represent towards a negotiated end to the conflict. The information given to the students is general enough to allow them to shape and alter the narrative. They can even form breakaway groups if they wish – and they usually do!

The simulation makes extensive use of online learning, which is crucial to the development of a robust and engaging simulation scenario. Briefings are released on the VLE before class, and after the seminar, each group is required to post a short entry on to their blog reporting on the negotiations and setting out new demands and goals, allowing the simulation to develop outside class. Past groups have used online tools very creatively, creating materials to post to the blog which represent their groups and the events of the simulation.

Audra Mitchell is a lecturer in the Department of Politics. She has a strong interest in participatory seminar teaching methods, and is currently heading a peer support for teaching group on this subject in the Department. She is also a supervisor on the *Preparing Future Academics* programme. Her pedagogy-based research has focused on the relative benefits and risks of educational fieldwork and simulation/problem-based learning techniques. Contact Audra via email audra.mitchell@york.ac.uk.

Sydney Calkin is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics, where she teaches on several undergraduate modules. Her research is in the field of gender and development, specifically focusing on the concept of women's empowerment in international development. She can be contacted via email sac525@york.ac.uk.



Students digitally altered a Soviet poster to represent the Democratic Party for the Liberation of Yorkania.

The exercise ends with a two-hour-long session where groups present peace proposals and attempt to create a peace agreement before their 'deadline' expires. They are told that in the case of failure to agree, forces from a neighbouring state will invade; but even at this stage, 'spoiler' groups may emerge to complicate the scenario, and a settlement may not be reached. Important lessons can be learned from the failure to agree: the process of the simulation and the lessons that students learn in their interactions and strategic planning are of more value than the actual outcome.

There is a risk in this kind of exercise that personalities and group dynamics can override learning objectives and engagement with module content. In order to mitigate this, we have introduced a number of measures:

- The weekly briefings reflect lecture material and encourage students to apply the lessons learned there in relation to issues such as international intervention or refugee and food crises.
- Students write procedural essays based around a single 'real world' example to ground and apply lessons learned in the simulation.
- Students' final assessed essays must include an analysis of the Yorkania

Electronics: team building and supporting technologies at Masters level

Noel Jackson, Teaching Fellow

MSc group projects present a number of challenges for all involved. Students on the one-year MSc in Engineering Management have to carry out a number of group-based assignments throughout their time at York. All are either formatively or summatively assessed using a mix of group presentations, group reports, combinations of both, peer assessment and self-reflection. Allocating different groupings for each assignment would be possible but difficult, and probably not beneficial in terms of long term team-working. In order to provide continuity and a vehicle for team-building over time, we have found it best to use their supervision groups throughout the year, allowing working methods and team spirit to improve as projects progress. While these groupings do not necessarily reflect their social preferences, by the end of the programme they appear to function as well co-ordinated research teams. This reflects industry practice, with team members from across an organisation working towards a common objective.

The Autumn term is used to iron out issues within newly formed teams, providing as much feedback on team-based outputs as possible. For example, we use group presentations and team-building exercises in induction week to put teams together for the first time, see how they perform a set task in a 'safe' environment, and ask them to report to the class on their findings. These types of activities build a firm base from which to kick off more substantial group project work.

Last year, my MSc supervision group

decided to research 'technology in teaching' from both a teaching and a learning perspective, in order to inform both future development within the University, and our own Department's VLE presence. In the course of the project, the team made use themselves of various online collaboration tools, with different degrees of success. An early activity allocated different technologies to individual team members to investigate before pooling their findings for collective analysis. However, ongoing development and maintenance of the VLE platform highlighted the need for the team to be more co-ordinated in gathering appropriate data. The team started to use the discussion area and the group wiki set up for them on Blackboard but found it too clunky, and they ended up using an iterative process with regular, minuted team meetings and Googledocs to manage their respective outputs and inputs.

All in all, the project team produced and delivered a group presentation to a very high standard, interfaced effectively with University staff, and submitted very good individual project reports. The views of nearly 200 students and academics were gathered using interviews and online survey tools; these indicated that the use of traditional classroom-based learning and teaching methods is still prevalent and seemingly preferred by both staff and students. However, the team still identified a clear demand from students for recorded lectures available anywhere, anytime, and, mirroring their own experience, for online collaboration technologies that create an integrated resource, repository and learning management system. The E-Learning Development Team is aware of the findings, and is considering where they might fit within current and future plans for learning and teaching in the University.



*Before I took part in these team-building activities
I never felt I could fully trust my colleagues.*

simulation, demonstrating an understanding of its dynamics and the ability to apply it to and compare it with real life examples.

A wider issue, however, has been the extent to which students' backgrounds have influenced the extent to which they participate. Non-native speakers and/or those who have not previously studied international relations can be less forthcoming. We have considered

specifying a base level for participation eg a certain number of blog posts, and asking individual group members to take turns in summarising events and statements each week. However, on reflection it may also be that running lectures, seminars and the simulation in parallel weekly sessions has overloaded students so that they do not feel confident about their grasp of the material. This year, the simulation sessions will be condensed into three dedicated two-hour sessions, following

six weeks of lectures and seminars only. This should ease the workload of students and will also allow instructors time to assess individual students' strengths and take these into account in the assignment of groups.

The *Violence and International Intervention* module has now run twice, and the scenarios and teaching techniques have recently been adapted for use in a second year undergraduate module, *War and Peace*, running this academic year.

CASE STUDIES

conservation of certain objects. Someone who is asked to produce activities for school groups will have a different view of an exhibition to the person designing the poster or catalogue. The project culminates in a presentation when the students explain the rationale for their exhibition using a range of materials to elaborate on it, such as sample captions and wall text, mocked-up press releases and leaflets, or even in some cases three-dimensional models. The division of responsibilities allows each student in the group to participate in the presentation by offering comments from the perspective of the particular role adopted. It also permits us to produce a mark that combines an overall one for the group with an individual element as well.

The interaction between the group and individual aspects of the task quickly orientates it towards problem-solving. Ultimately we get very few proposals for 'blockbuster' exhibitions. In fact, the suggestions are frequently very enterprising. We apply our standard marking criteria and students are made aware that we are not testing their graphic design skills but their abilities to connect their project work to relevant issues and think creatively about them. For example, last year one group came up with a fantastic idea for a Tate bus that could take works from the collection and set up in remote locations for short periods. What they had worked out in the process, however, was that the essential concept of taking art to people who would not otherwise have opportunity to see it was compromised by the restrictive nature of the vehicle design itself. When they presented the idea at the end of the project, they were able to discuss it from the larger perspective of access to museums, as well in relation to the specifics of installing art in such a context. They had even been in touch with a bus manufacturer to find out the feasibility of inserting a lift for disabled visitors. The fact that the proposal was partially compromised did not mean it was a failure. Rather, the students were able to demonstrate how much of what they had learned about museums – their collections, their audiences, the ways they exist architecturally and the ways in which they communicate – relates to practical decisions made in them every day.



History of Art: undergraduate group exhibition projects

Michael White, Reader and Deputy Head of Department

For many years, students taking History of Art modules have submitted exhibition proposals as part of procedural work on a number of modules. As art historians, my colleagues and I are accustomed to making arguments visually with objects in three-dimensional space as well as with words on paper. Many of us have curated exhibitions, often at major museums and galleries where they have been seen by tens or hundreds of thousands of people. What we all know from such experience is that exhibitions are produced by large teams of people rather than lone individuals, and that museums and galleries are complex organisations with competing priorities. Anyone who thinks that the person who selects the artworks has control over the marketing or even the title of an exhibition is greatly mistaken.

Given that many of our students go on to work in museums and galleries after their degrees, we decided to include a group exhibition project as a compulsory element of the newly modularised degree, in order to give them greater critical insight into this field, raise their

awareness of the range of jobs available in such organisations, and enhance their employability. All single subject students now take a 20 credit module on *Museology and Curatorship* in their second year, for which the group project is part of the formal assessment. We believe that even those who are not intending a career in the museum or heritage sector benefit from the insight the task provides into a genuine working environment.

Students are placed in groups of five or six and asked to devise exhibitions for specific locations. Although the project has no direct physical outcome, we invite the students to think as carefully as possible about the opportunities and constraints that their chosen site offers and to plan as realistically as they can. We also ask them to take on different responsibilities based on the kinds of professional roles within the cultural sector to see how their idea addresses the different perspectives people in such positions would have. For example, the most wonderful scholarly concept for an exhibition might be useless from the point of view of audience development or may create risks to the

Group work: an integral part of the Psychology BSc degree

Katie Slocombe,
Senior Lecturer

There is growing acknowledgement of the need to train our students in key transferable skills if they are to be ready for the workplace and competitive in the jobs market. Group work provides students with valuable opportunities to develop and practise their team work, leadership, communication and negotiation skills. For Psychology undergraduates, group work is a pivotal part of their degree programme in all three years.

Assessed group miniprojects

In the first year we deliver an interactive lecture where the students are encouraged to consider what skills are necessary to work well in a team, and given a practical group exercise which tests and encourages them to reflect on their negotiation and communication skills. The students then meet their group members for their Year 1 miniprojects: the first of the group assessments that we run. We allocate students to groups rather than allowing them to work with their friends, as this enables us to encourage engagement between overseas and home students in all groups, and to get the students used to working with unfamiliar individuals: a skill they need for success in most workplaces. In their miniprojects, the students have to integrate knowledge of psychological theory and literature with their research methods and statistical skills. Each group has to design their own study, collect and analyse their data and then present their findings at a poster conference, where the group presentation of their poster is graded by academic staff. Feedback from students indicates they relish the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice in the miniprojects, and although some are

nervous of the challenge of working in unfamiliar groups initially, in the vast majority of cases they enjoy working with others in this setting.

Staff were initially nervous of how we would cope with individuals who made an unfair contribution to the project; however, we have a process which minimises unequal contribution and successfully deals with it on the rare occasions it does occur. We make it very clear to the students from the outset that we expect every group member to make an equal contribution (not pulling their weight or taking over are both strongly discouraged), and that all students will have the chance to rate the contribution of their group members at the end of the project. If the majority of the group agree that an individual has failed to contribute fairly, that individual will receive a lower grade than that awarded to the rest of the group. In practice, we encourage students to try and resolve any issues related to unequal contribution themselves, and if this is not effective, each group is assigned to a PGWT who helps to mediate. In our experience, a combination of peer pressure and a system that has clear consequences for poor contribution results in work of excellent quality and less than 5% of groups report any problem with unequal contributions. Our undergraduates complete two miniprojects in both Year 1 and Year 2.

Group oral presentations

We also run formative group oral presentation projects between Years 1 and 2. After a lecture outlining how

to give good presentations, the Year 1 students meet their new group members and are given a topic to investigate towards a 5 minute oral presentation. In parallel, the Year 2 students attend a session on how to mentor and give effective feedback to others (key communication and leadership skills). We then pair up a group of Year 2 students with a Year 1 group, so that the former can provide encouragement and constructive feedback on a practice performance of the presentation. The groups present to a large audience of fellow Year 1 students, their Year 2 mentors, PGWTs and staff. They receive feedback from their Year 2 mentors on their performance, and prizes are awarded to the best presentations. The final piece of the project is for each group to watch a video of their final presentation and to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their presentation skills. For most students, speaking in front of large audiences is nerve-racking, but working within a group to do this, and meeting with Year 2 students who understand the challenge, make it less daunting. The standard achieved by most students is excellent, and this initial induction into group oral presentations lays the foundations for a real emphasis on group presentation work in our seminar-based advanced modules in Year 3.

We hope that both the training and opportunities for group work our students experience throughout their degree encourage high levels of achievement in these activities and the development of key employability skills.

Year 1 miniproject poster presentation.



Learning and Teaching Calendar of Events: Spring Term 2013

WEEK 1	
Fri 11 Jan, 2.15–3.45pm, ATB037	Staff Turnitin awareness
WEEK 2	
Wed 16 Jan, 10.15am–12pm, W218	Yorkshare: getting started
WEEK 3	
Thurs 24 Jan, 9.15am–12.15pm, HG09	Planning assessment methods for student work
Thurs 24 Jan, 10.15am–12pm, W218	Blended learning design
WEEK 4	
Wed 30 Jan, 12.30–2pm, HG21	Standards in academic writing
Thurs 31 Jan, 10.15am–12pm, W218	Yorkshare: getting started
WEEK 5	
Mon 4 Feb, 2.15–5pm, HG21	Employability in the curriculum
Tues 5 Feb, 11.15am–12.45pm, LMB036X	Staff Turnitin Awareness
Wed 6 Feb, 10.15am–12pm, W218	Yorkshare on your mobile phone: a preview of Mobile Learn
Wed 6 Feb, 12.15–1.45pm, venue TBC	E-learning show and tell
Fri 8 Feb, 1.15–4.15pm, HG21	Introduction to pedagogic research
WEEK 6	
Mon 11 Feb, 12.30–2pm, HG21	iTube, YouTube, WeTube, ChemTube: using video to enhance student learning Professor David Smith, Chemistry Shortlisted for THES Most Innovative Teacher of the Year Award 2012
Wed 13 Feb, 10.15am–12pm, RCH018	Yorkshare: getting started
Wed 13 Feb, 2.15–5pm, HG21	Using your voice most effectively
Fri 15 Feb, 9.15am–12.15pm, HG09	Effective lecturing
WEEK 7	
Wed 20 Feb, 1.15–4.15pm, HG09	Evaluation and quality enhancement
Thurs 21 Feb, 9.15am–12.15pm, HG09	Structuring and designing sessions
Thurs 21 Feb, 2.15–4pm, W218	Introduction to collaborative tools
WEEK 8	
Mon 25 Feb, 9.15am–4.15pm, HG17	Marking and feedback – all-day workshop
Mon 25 Feb, 12.30–2pm, HG21	Consulting on pedagogic requirements for e-learning
Wed 27 Feb, 10.15am–12pm, W218	Yorkshare: getting started
Wed 27 Feb, 2.15–5pm, HG21	Information literacy in the digital age
Fri 1 March, 9.30am–12.30pm, HG09	Teaching through debate
WEEK 9	
Mon 4 March, 9.15am–12.15pm, HG17	Learning styles and student motivation
Tues 5 March, 9am–5pm, RCH CPD Suite	Micro teaching
Wed 6 March, 10.15–11.45am, LFA144	Staff Turnitin Awareness
Thurs 7 March, 12.30–2pm, HG09	Teaching international students
Thurs 7 March, 2.15–4pm, W218	Building formative quizzes
WEEK 10	
Monday 11 March, 12.30–2pm, HG17	Taught Masters SIG The curriculum: rigour and standards, options and electives; The July –September period: supervision. UKBA and facilities
WEEK 11	
Tues 19 March, 12.30–2pm, HG21	Investing in those who teach: supporting your PGWTs

Key to the calendar

 Events organised by the Learning and Teaching Forum. Open to all staff and PGWTs. For further information, see www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/sharing/sharing-practice/workshops/; to register, contact janet.barton@york.ac.uk. If you are unable to attend an event but would like a copy of the materials, please let Janet know.

 Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) sessions. Priority is given to staff enrolled on the programme, but other staff are invited to express an interest in attending any session and places will be confirmed a week or two before the event. For further information, see www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/academic-practice/pgcap/workshops.cfm

 Preparing Future Academics sessions aimed at PGWTs. Priority is given to those enrolled on the programme, but others are invited to express an interest in attending any session and the places will be confirmed a week or two before the event. For information, contact the Researcher Development Team: rdt@york.ac.uk

 Freestanding workshops offered by learning support colleagues. Please contact janet.barton@york.ac.uk for further details or to book your place.

 E-learning Development Team sessions, open to all staff and PGWTs. Bespoke sessions are also offered to departments on request. Go to the Support tab on <http://vle.york.ac.uk> for an overview of what we offer and to register for scheduled sessions, or contact wayne.britcliffe@york.ac.uk

 Academic Integrity: Staff Turnitin awareness sessions. Please contact adrian.lee@york.ac.uk for further details or to book your place on a session

 Taught Masters Special Interest Group: for further information, see www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/sharing/sharing-practice/special-interest/; to register contact janet.barton@york.ac.uk