



**STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES**  
that demonstrate tangible impact on  
**Retention, Pass Rates & Completion**

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**STUDENT LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMMES  
THAT DEMONSTRATE TANGIBLE IMPACT ON  
STUDENT RETENTION, PASS RATES, AND/OR COMPLETION**

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**Executive Summary**

This report comprises summations and brief case descriptions of some of the effective programmes and other support mechanisms that New Zealand Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs) provide for students in universities, polytechnics, institutes of technology, and other tertiary institutions. The programmes demonstrate tangible impact on student retention and success outcomes. The evidence offered varies across summations and includes both student satisfaction and student success data presented in a range of formats: statistical, evaluative comments and personal narratives. Where possible – and this can depend upon the different management systems used by different institutions which allow TLAs access to different types of information and analysis – more than one form of evidence is provided to add strength and rigor to the results described. In some summations, this is already available; for others, it represents the next evolution of the process. The range of initiatives included in this edition are described here to facilitate shared learning amongst tertiary educators, to enhance understanding of strategies that make a difference to student learning, and to promote the use of methods that have been shown to effect better retention and completion rates for students in tertiary education.

The summations were written by 16 TLAs from six different tertiary institutions during a two-day “writing hui” that was held in Tauranga. The contributors were members of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ). This project was funded by the Ako Aotearoa Northern Regional Hub.

*A report for Ako Aotearoa, the New Zealand National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence,  
from members of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand  
(ATLAANZ)*

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## INTRODUCTION

On 30th April and 1st May 2009, 16 TLAs met at an Ako Aotearoa-supported hui in Tauranga. The TLAs were from the following institutions: the University of Auckland, AUT University (AUT), Unitec, Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), Bay of Plenty Polytechnic (BoPP), and Eastern Institute of Technology. During the two-day hui they wrote, and supported each other in writing summations of some of the instruction and support programmes they provide for students that clearly achieve tangible results.

This report is a compilation of those summations.

The two-day hui was the result of an application that Emmanuel Manalo, Jenny Marshall, Cath Fraser, Fe Day, and Lin Ayo made to the Ako Aotearoa Northern Regional Hub. The application was for the purpose of identifying and reporting on student learning support programmes and initiatives in tertiary institutions in the upper half of the North Island that demonstrate tangible positive impact on student retention, success, and completion. The applicants stressed that there are many such programmes and initiatives around the country but, for various reasons, they seldom get reported or shared.

Previous projects that examined reports and published literature on programmes and strategies that promote student success have largely neglected the contributions of TLAs. This neglect is not the fault of the previous researchers; the main problem is that TLAs have not been widely reporting or publishing in the academic literature the work that they have been doing in teaching and supporting students in their learning. The main reason for this is lack of time and opportunity to do so because most TLAs are employed under tutor or general staff contracts, with little or no time for research writing.

We know that the uptake of TLA services is consistently high at around 15-20% of the student population in universities and often over 50% in polytechnics (based on student use figures reported in annual reports from learning centres at Auckland University of Technology, the University of Auckland (including the Faculty of Education programme at NorthTec in Whangarei), the University of New South Wales and Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki).

Within the TLA profession itself, the knowledge and experience that the instruction and support provided to students achieves tangible results is shared. While many other tertiary institution personnel grapple with the complexities of both teaching students and promoting retention and success, TLAs take 'promotion of student retention and success' as the central tenet of their everyday work.

In very simple terms, the work that TLAs undertake can be described as teaching students:

- How to be most effective in their academic learning and performance; and
- How to successfully deal with problems that occur.

As such, it makes logical sense that their work would directly contribute to students staying on and achieving success in their studies. The student population in most tertiary institutions is now quite diverse; students bring with them a wide range of backgrounds, qualifications, experiences, and expectations. Irrespective of how good a teacher might be, their teaching style and the approaches they use will not suit everyone. Thus, students for their part need to understand how to cater to their own learning requirements and manage any challenges that arise.

The programme summations that comprise the bulk of this report clearly indicate that TLAs are succeeding in teaching and developing these skills in students. The programmes are producing tangible evidence that students are developing the learning and writing skills demanded of their courses of study; that they are staying on instead of dropping out; and that they are passing and completing their courses. In many cases, evidence comes not just in the form of numbers (e.g. grades, retention and completion rates) but also feedback, observations and/or reflections from students and teachers about the impact of the programmes provided.

### **The kinds of programmes provided**

The wide ranges of programmes described through the summations represent the extent of instruction and support that TLAs provide for students. There are centrally provided Study Skills Workshops that:

- Cater for students in general, to improve their overall academic performance;
- Address a key aspect of essay writing success;
- Address the needs of students who have previously failed their courses and are therefore at-risk of further failures; and
- Induct students who are transitioning to tertiary studies.

There are programmes that are integrated within specific subject disciplines. These highlight an increasing segment of TLA work – that of establishing partnerships and working with subject discipline lecturers in developing instruction and support mechanisms delivered within the context of the subjects that students are taking. The successful programmes described here are provided in the following departments, faculties, or disciplines:

- Health
- Statistics
- Nursing
- Business
- Foundation Learning
- Biology
- Electrical Engineering

There are also two peer tutoring programmes described here: one is provided widely in the institution concerned, and the other within three specific courses. These programmes highlight the crucial role that students themselves can take in facilitating each other's academic success.

There are four foundation skills related programmes described. These address different student requirements. More specifically they are aimed at:

- EAL (English as an additional language) students who will be undertaking a postgraduate thesis or dissertation in the following year;

- Students who may be at-risk because of the lower literacy or numeracy skill levels that they bring with them;
- Students from non-traditional backgrounds (e.g. school leavers, second chance learners, mature students, international students and students with disabilities) entering tertiary studies for the first time. (Two of the programmes address this bullet point.)

Three of the programmes describe targeted programmes to support Māori and Pasifika students. These include:

- A writing wānanga that incorporates Māori and Pasifika cultural practices in teaching academic writing skills;
- A programme aimed at developing Māori and Pasifika students' research skills and promoting subsequent enrolment in postgraduate studies;
- A tertiary studies preparatory course designed specifically for Māori and Pasifika students.

The final two programmes detail the value of providing one-to-one support for tertiary students. The first describes support specifically provided for nursing students, and the second assesses the impact of one-to-one support provided by the TLAs of one institution over the course of a year.

At the end of this report, brief case studies of student success stories are provided. In attempting to meet demands for evidence that learning instruction and support provided for tertiary students achieve the desired outcomes, it is sometimes easy to gloss over the individual experiences of the students themselves in favour of numbers and statistics. The example case studies provided here are intended to counterbalance this tendency. They serve as important reminders of how much of a difference the provision of effective support can make to the lives of the students in our institutions.

These student case studies were collected from across the six institutions represented in this book. In some cases, TLAs approached students with whom they had worked closely and requested their permission to write a brief learning story about their experience. The text was then agreed with the student who was briefed about the writing hui's purpose and outcomes, including this publication. In other cases, the student's story had already been used within the institution – usually to promote the student learning centre or, at times, to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the support provided – and therefore permission to use their story had already been given.

### **Critical success factors and action plans**

Almost all of the programmes and support mechanisms described in this report identify 'critical success factors'. These are the factors that the authors of the summations and/or the providers of the programmes consider as being critical to the programmes' ability to facilitate the intended improvements in students' academic performance.

There are some clear recurring themes in these critical success factors. These include:

- The attention given to the preparation, organisation, and implementation of the programmes;
- The knowledge and experience of the TLAs involved in delivering the programmes;
- The methods used to determine the relevant skills to cover, the teaching materials to use, and the ways of delivering these to students;
- The relationships considered, developed and/or nurtured: between TLAs and students, among the TLAs and/or other teachers involved, among students, with the relevant subject departments and faculties, and so on;
- The other supporting mechanisms linked to the programmes provided.

It is also evident from many of the summations that some personal qualities of the TLAs themselves often contribute to the successful outcomes that the programmes achieve. These qualities include persistence and having 'belief in the students' which are demonstrated in the lengths to which they are prepared to go in executing their supportive roles: for example, not giving up on students who many others have already given up on; and organising and facilitating "fish-and-chips evenings" outside of normal work hours so that students can come in, consult, and work through problematic components of their courses.

Each summation also provides an 'action plan', which is a brief list of things-to-do and/or factors to consider if someone is interested in providing a similar programme. The action plans are often closely linked to the critical success factors noted. They are however more closely focused on facilitating 'learning from each other' – so that those who are interested in addressing particular student learning and performance issues might obtain some useful pointers here and not have to 'reinvent the wheel' each time.

The action plans are concise and written in an accessible manner so that they can be easily applied to guide potential implementations of similar programmes.

Further, contact details of key people associated with each programme are provided. Hence, these people – many of whom were contributors to this project – are available for contact should there be any questions or additional information required concerning the programmes described.

In short, the TLA contributors to this project and their colleagues are genuinely keen to initiate effective sharing of best practice in this area – for the sake of promoting greater retention and success of students at the tertiary level.

### **Interpretation of the evidence**

As authors of this report, we would like to note that we are aware of the fact that there are many factors that could have contributed to the improvements in student retention and successes that are described in the summations and brief case reports contained here. Such 'other contributing factors' have frequently been a major source of dissuasion for TLAs to report on the effectiveness of programmes they provide. Many have been told that they cannot 'take credit' for improvements in students' performance because of those other factors and hence have been reluctant to report figures and statistics relating to such improvements. Ultimately, however, any initiative or programme aimed at improving student retention and success – whether they be focused on teacher development or student development – must deliver evidence on actual retention and success if they are to be genuinely accountable. The programmes described here attempt to do that, and the evidence that is presented clearly suggests that they are delivering on their intended purposes.

Again, as authors of this report, we acknowledge the likely contributions of the "other factors" on the retention and success outcomes that are reported. However, the contributions of those other factors do not negate what we believe to be the significant and more important contributions of the programmes described here. In many of the summations, more than one source of evidence is cited for the effectiveness of the programmes described: apart from numerical evidence (grades, retention figures, pass and completion rates, etc.), students' and/or instructors' views, experiences, and observations are also included. These provide valuable insights into some of the many inter-related processes that affect students' conduct of their academic work, as well as a useful means for cross-validating the different kinds of evidence that are presented.



The findings about the effectiveness of the programmes described in this report are congruent with the day-to-day experiences of most TLAs: in their every day work, TLAs regularly observe the cognitive and behavioural transformations that occur in students whom they teach and/or advise. These include, for example, observations of students finally understanding how to interpret assignment and examination question requirements, of changes that students deliberately make in the way they approach their study and revision, and of the newly found confidence that students exude when they receive positive feedback on challenging assignments they have completed. These transformations directly link to persisting in tertiary studies and achieving better results. Thus, from the TLA perspective, the effectiveness demonstrated by the programmes described in this report makes clear sense.

### **Where to from here?**

Our hope is that this report will provide further encouragement for those working in the TLA profession to continue sharing best practice: to learn from each other, and to constantly improve on programmes and strategies that are being delivered to improve student retention and success outcomes. As noted earlier, the summations included in this report include not only “critical success factors” but also “action plans” – both aimed at making it more likely that others who may wish to implement similar programmes could benefit from the experiences of those TLAs who have been providing these programmes.

It would be helpful towards capability building if those who do implement similar programmes, or variations of programmes described here, report back on their experiences and the outcomes they achieve. Facilities for such reporting will be made available both on the Ako Aotearoa website <<http://akoaotearoa.ac.nz>> and the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) website <<http://www.atlaanz.org>>.

TLAs in other regions may also wish to consider conducting a similar meeting/hui to take stock of, and report on, the programmes they are providing that deliver tangible impacts on student retention and success. The authors of, and contributors to, the present report would be more than happy to help towards the planning, organisation, and conduct of such efforts.

We also hope that, for tertiary institution personnel outside of the TLA profession, this report will contribute towards a better understanding of the work that TLAs undertake. Such understanding, we hope, will in turn lead to a greater appreciation of the contributions that TLAs currently make – and potentially can make – in tangibly enhancing retention and success outcomes for tertiary students in New Zealand.

***Emmanuel Manalo, Jenny Marshall, & Cath Fraser***

*October 2009*

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**PART A:**  
**PROGRAMME SUMMATIONS**



# Evaluating Academic Skills Course Provision Through a Concurrent Certificate in Education Bridging – Keep Enhancing Your Success (KEYS) Programme

## Keywords

Bridging, academic induction, academic skills

## Description of programme

KEYS programmes consist of eight hours of face-to-face classes with TLAs, eight hours of teacher-directed online activities and 34 hours of self directed learning – which we envisage to be concurrent with the self-directed learning students undertake for their mainstream programme. These are five credit papers, which can be combined into a 15 credit Education Bridging Certificate. There are currently 11 of these papers and Auckland University of Technology’s Council agreed in 2000 that they could be delivered free of charge to students. These papers are offered in general as well as in specific formats for cohorts of students who are taking particular programmes. Lectures are given and activities undertaken by the students to reinforce learning. The papers are delivered by groups of TLAs so that students can get to know a variety of the staff available to support them in their studies. These papers are combined into academic transition programmes before the beginning of each semester and some of these target Māori and Pasifika students, students with disabilities, as well as there being general programmes for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The academic skills papers are Keys to:

<i>Study Success</i>	<i>Academic Writing</i>	<i>Oral Presentations</i>
<i>Group Work Skills</i>	<i>Critical Thinking</i>	<i>Postgraduate Writing</i>
<i>Computer Basics</i>	<i>Transition Success</i>	<i>Statistics</i>
<i>Numeracy</i>	<i>Algebra</i>	

## Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance

Throughout recent years, a Student Management System has been used to explore ways to show impact evaluation of TLA activities, both KEYS and contacts through the Contact Management System (OLAP). Success and retention of students in their mainstream programmes could be obtained and comparisons made between those who had taken KEYS courses and those in the same mainstream programme who had not taken these courses. These are correlations and an exact measure of causality is not possible. Nonetheless, they are still of interest in looking at the work of TLAs.

Completion and retention in this summary are based on the completion codes of grades. Below is a list of completion codes. Only codes 2, 3 and 4 are used to calculate completion and retention, the others are interim codes.

## STUDY SKILLS WORKSHOPS

### Provider

Designed and delivered by Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre, Auckland University of Technology

### What the programme addresses

This programme addressed the need for concurrent bridging of students so that while they are enrolled in a mainstream programme, they could receive a coherent programme of skill building and academic induction which would allow them to succeed at a more improved rate than they would have otherwise attained. It addressed retention, completion and success rates.

1	Still to complete course	Completion =	$\frac{2}{(2 + 3 + 4)}$
2	Completed course successfully		
3	Completed course unsuccessfully		
4	Did not complete course		
5	Practicum to complete	Retention =	$\frac{(2 + 3)}{(2 + 3 + 4)}$
6	Yet to complete - Level 9 & 10		
7	Extension or under moderation		
0	Still to complete course, valid ext		

Programme	Ethnicity	Did KEYS 2008	No. of students	Success	Retention
AK3704-Bachelor of Arts	Māori	Y	5	55%	75%
		N	19	49%	65%
AK3708-Bachelor of International Hospitality Management	Pasifika	Y	3	55%	64%
		N	12	47%	62%
AK3596-Diploma in Travel and Tourism	Asian	Y	24	77%	98%
		N	25	68%	87%
AK3704-Bachelor of Arts	European	Y	9	100%	100%
		N	93	71%	79%
NC5121-New Zealand Diploma in Business	Pasifika	Y	24	80%	88%
		N	55	50%	62%
AK3709-Graduate Diploma in Business	Asian	Y	21	98%	100%
		N	277	86%	89%
AK3619-Bachelor of Design	Māori	Y	3	100%	100%
		N	39	94%	96%
AK3619-Bachelor of Design	Asian	Y	28	97%	97%
		N	229	92%	97%
AK3303-Bachelor of Communication Studies	European	Y	28	98%	99%
		N	591	91%	94%
AK3680-Bachelor of Health Science	Māori	Y	14	84%	92%
		N	54	77%	84%
AK3313-Bachelor of Health Science (Physiotherapy)	Māori	Y	9	100%	100%
		N	28	90%	95%
AK3324-Bachelor of Health Science (Nursing)	Asian	Y	44	90%	98%
		N	99	78%	92%
AK3521-Bachelor of Sport and Recreation	Pasifika	Y	11	71%	80%
		N	43	61%	77%
AK3521-Bachelor of Sport and Recreation	European	Y	10	97%	97%
		N	226	85%	91%

Student evaluations of papers (SEPs) are administered at least once per semester for every paper and are analysed by the University Research Office. The evaluations are considered by the teaching teams and adaptations made to the programme based on what students have said: for example, KEYS to Academic English Success was not a successful paper so a new paper was written: KEYS to Intercultural Awareness and Communication Success. However KIACS was also unsuccessful and has been replaced with KEYS to Effective Groupwork Success.

### **Publication details**

*AUQU Database of Good Practice*, [http://www.auqa.edu.au/gp/search/detail.php?gp\\_id=2918](http://www.auqa.edu.au/gp/search/detail.php?gp_id=2918)

Day, F. (2002) "I would have drowned without KEYS"; *Concurrent bridging of students using student support services*. Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Conference of the New Zealand Association of Bridging Educators, Friday 6 September 2002, UNITEC, Auckland

### **Critical success factors**

- Credit bearing programme.
- Delivered by TLAs.
- Potential for cohorts to undertake learning together and share insights and strategies.
- Delivering proactive support in eight-hour programmes which allow skills to be contextualised and attitudinal matters addressed.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

- Identify and group logically academic skills deficits which students frequently present to TLAs.
- Find an academic department that is happy to host a five-credit paper on behalf of learning support. Ideally three papers can be combined to form a certificate (otherwise the department has a whole lot of students on its books who never gain a qualification).
- Negotiate with Council (governance) to gain permission to present an EFTS bearing programme free of charge to the learner.
- Negotiate with Academic Registry to develop systems which will allow the paper to not attract a fees invoice.
- Write paper descriptors and go through academic approval process.
- Pilot the programme and evaluate.
- Develop marketing plan.
- Negotiate the delivery of the paper to cohorts of students within programmes.
- Use student administration system to generate reports of success and retention of students who complete such programmes compared with students who do not complete.

### **Contact details**

- Fe Day, Head of Centre, Te Tari Āwhina the Learning Development Centre, AUT, <Fe.Day@aut.ac.nz>





## Improving Students' Ability to Write Effective and Well Structured Academic Essay Introductions

### Key words

Rhetorical structure; academic essay; content; student skills development; writing; introduction

### Brief description of the programme

The Student Learning Centre at the University of Auckland (SLCUA) delivers many essay writing workshops as part of its general Undergraduate Programme. Several of these workshops include instruction on the rhetorical structure and content of an academic essay introduction. Evaluation of the effectiveness of this component was assessed through a quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test, delayed post-test study design by a TLA as the focus of her Masters research.

Eighty-seven students with a diverse range of demographic backgrounds took part in the study and attended a two hour workshop facilitated by the researcher. The students were given a pre-prepared mind map of an essay topic and asked to write a draft introduction in response to a specific essay question (pre-test) prior to instruction on writing academic essay introductions. Following the instruction, in response to a different prompt, the students were asked to write a second draft introduction (post-test). Different prompts and mind maps, following the same structure but based on different topics, were used for the pre- and post-test. To mitigate the possibility that students' performance differed on the different essay topics, the essay questions and associated mind maps were randomly interchanged amongst the students. Therefore, both the pre-test and post-test datasets were composed of responses to both essay topics. Attendance at SLCUA workshops is completely voluntary for students. Students who consented to participate in the research study were also asked to submit the next graded coursework essay (delayed post-test) that they wrote after attendance at the workshops. These introductions were evaluated to assess the persistence of any new learning and explore any relationship between the essay introduction and the total grade awarded to the essay by the academic staff on one of the student's university courses.

The instruction on writing academic essay introductions was as follows. The researcher discussed the aim and expected structure of the introduction section of an academic essay. The funnel model was used to convey the process of leading the reader from the general essay topic to the specific focus of the essay and to the thesis statement. Exercises, class discussion, peer review, and reflection on their first draft essay introduction, were employed to assist students to clarify the appropriate structure for an academic essay introduction. Several exercises were completed by the students to illustrate how this framework could be applied and observed in written work. In the first exercise students were asked to put sentences from an introduction into the

## STUDY SKILLS WORKSHOPS

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### Provider

The Student Learning  
Centre, The University of  
Auckland

### What the programme addresses

Improving students'  
understanding and use of  
the appropriate rhetorical  
structure and content of an  
academic essay  
introduction

appropriate order. This involved identification of the sentences that formed each rhetorical move, and reorganising the paragraph into an order that made sense and which flowed from the general to the specific. In the second exercise, students were asked to critically appraise four example introductions. Students were asked to identify the rhetorical moves of the introduction, to decide if they were in an appropriate order, and whether the moves stayed focused on the essay question. Both these exercises were conducted in groups of two or three students.

Analysis of the student-produced writing was conducted by scoring the work against a marking rubric developed and tested by the researcher in a previous pilot study. The scoring was conducted by three TLAs and was tested for inter-rater reliability to ensure the results were robust. Identification on all student-produced writing was removed prior to analysis to avoid marker bias. The rubric scored the writing for rhetorical structure and content, which was taught during the workshop, and writing style, which was not taught and therefore acted as a control.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

The results from this study indicated that:

- the majority of participants, irrespective of demographic background, did not have a clear understanding of the rhetorical structure and content of an academic essay introduction prior to instruction;
- the direct genre-based instruction was highly effective in improving students' understanding of the rhetorical structure and content of an introduction within the academic essay genre;
- the training enabled students to express themselves more efficiently and fully, and orient the reader more competently.

Overall, mean scores for structure/content had a statistically ( $t_{86} = 6.71, p < .00$ ) and practically (effect size,  $d = .92$ ) significant improvement from  $M = 6.79$  ( $SD = 2.70$ ) to  $M = 9.08$  ( $SD = 2.28$ ); whereas style had a statistically non-significant ( $t_{86} = .31, p = .70$ ) and practically trivial ( $d = .03$ ) difference from  $M = 5.10$  ( $SD = 1.74$ ) to  $M = 5.05$  ( $SD = 1.74$ ).

### **Coursework results**

A delayed post test was conducted on the students' coursework essays. However, there was high mortality between the end of the program and the delayed post-test, with only 29% of the initial participants submitting a coursework essay. Nevertheless, correlations between the rhetorical structure and content scores in the post-test and the total coursework grade were statistically significant, but were weak and statistically non-significant for writing style.

The structure and content of the students' delayed coursework essay introductions were not predicted by performance in the pre-test; whereas, the coursework essay grade was predicted by the structure/content performance at the end of the training. Hence, it would appear that not only was it possible to improve students' structure and content, but such improvement persisted and was a 'real world' predictor of academic success in essay writing.

### **Within the demographic groupings:**

- Asian and/or non-native speaking students, students under 21 years old and/or in their first year at university, and male students, were particularly receptive to the training;

- Males displayed the greatest improvement, in the structure and content of their writing, within all demographic groups,  $M = 5.82$  ( $SD = 2.57$ ) to  $M = 9.25$  ( $SD = 1.86$ ) with a large effect size ( $d = 1.53$ );
- Mature students, students of lower academic ability, and Māori and Pacific Islander groups all showed improvement in their writing. However, these groups may benefit from extended instruction to firmly cement the concepts taught in the workshop.

The training programme had a significant effect on participants' performance in writing well structured, content-rich introductions, while there was no significant effect on the style of written language within any demographic groups.

### **Why this programme is important**

This programme is important as essay writing is the primary form of in-course assessment, and also plays a significant role in examinations, in tertiary education. However, this research showed that significant numbers of students do not understand or practise the appropriate rhetorical structure and content of an academic essay introduction. An introduction to any piece of writing establishes the reader's understanding of the essay topic and, in an assessment situation, also plays a significant role in establishing a marker's overall judgement of the work. Given the diversity of students currently entering tertiary education, many students simply do not understand what is expected at tertiary level in essay assignments, and may therefore achieve at a much lower level than their academic potential.

In order to provide equitable and inclusive education, explicit instruction must be delivered to ensure that all students have a common understanding of university expectations and assessment measures. The results from this study have shown that the genre-based essay writing workshop delivered by the SLCUA is highly effective and can achieve large gains in student learning, and that improvement in the structure and content of students' writing can be achieved through only two hours of explicit instruction. Furthermore, this research has shown that some of the specific target groups identified by the New Zealand government in the Tertiary Education Strategy can achieve measurable benefit from the training.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Allowing students to produce a draft before instruction so that they can analyse and identify the errors in their own work.
- The provision of exemplars that enable students to compare their own work against good examples and also against the common errors made by students.
- The relaxed atmosphere and open conversation of the teaching environment that enables students to comprehend the taught material through discussion and apply this to their subject area and specific needs.
- The teaching staff employed to provide the instruction and support are knowledgeable and skilled in the structure and content of academic writing.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Identifying students who are having difficulty in their writing or are transitioning from a different educational environment, and /or
- Targeting courses that have an in-course essay component whose students may need support in this area.

- Preparation of testing materials - two essay questions of a similar level of difficulty that are based on a subject area well known to the participating students.
- Preparation of teaching materials including good and bad writing samples.
- Gathering data via a survey or other appropriate methods, and the creation of a reliable measure, or use of an existing measure, of writing proficiency to assess student output.
- Ensuring that the staff employed to teach and provide support have the necessary knowledge and skills to not only cover content, but also appropriate learning and study management strategies.
- Clear identification, both verbally and visually, of structural elements within the writing.
- Allowing sufficient time during the workshop for discussion and self reflection on writing drafts.

### **Contact details**

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## Promoting Success Amongst Previously Unsuccessful Students

### Key words

Improved pass rates; returning students who have failed courses; assignment writing and exams skills development; understanding and meeting course expectations

### Brief description of the course

Since 1994, the SLCUA has been offering an intensive 4-day study skills course for students who have made unsatisfactory academic progress. The course, called "Puawaitanga: Making the Grades" (*puawaitanga* being a word which means "blossoming" in Māori), is offered in February prior to the start of the first semester. The 'unsatisfactory academic progress' pertains to the students having failed a significant proportion of their courses – enough for them to be placed on 'restricted enrolment' by the University. Technically speaking, 'unsatisfactory academic progress' had been defined in the past as failing more than half of the courses taken in the previous two semesters; more recently, this has been defined as falling below a certain grade point average (GPA).

Students who have made unsatisfactory academic progress are sent an invitation to participate in the course. Thus, most of the students who take part in the course do so voluntarily. However, there are some students who attend following advice by their department or faculty. These include some students who are appealing exclusion (i.e. being asked to leave the University, usually after four semesters of unsatisfactory academic progress). Students registering for the course are asked on the registration form to briefly write down what they consider to have been the main study-related challenges they faced in the preceding semester. The TLAs teaching the course consider these challenges in their preparation, and attempt to address them in the appropriate sections of the course.

The four days of the course focus on the following:

- (i) identifying what worked and what did not work for them in their previous semesters of study;
- (ii) considering and planning ways to maximise the aspects that worked, and to avoid and/or have strategies for overcoming the aspects that did not work;
- (iii) developing effective time, self-, and other management skills (including management of significant others like family and friends);
- (iv) developing skills for the students to better understand their course expectations – i.e. as far as assignments and other assessments, including tests and exams, are concerned;

## STUDY SKILLS WORKSHOPS

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### Provider

The Student Learning  
Centre, The University of  
Auckland

### What the programme addresses

Pass rates of students who  
have previously made  
unsatisfactory academic  
progress

- (v) developing skills and strategies to more effectively meet the requirements of assignments and other forms of coursework;
- (vi) developing effective test/exam preparation and note-taking skills.

In addition, a session is provided during which staff members from various student services (e.g. health, counselling, scholarships and finance) are invited to briefly introduce themselves and their services. Depending on the number of students who register for the course, two or more streams are usually conducted so that each stream has no more than approximately 30 students. Where possible, students are grouped by area of study (e.g. the sciences, arts and humanities, business) and put in the same stream. The course sessions are conducted interactively with lots of exercises for students to try to apply the skills being covered. Discussions are included to facilitate the students learning from each other. Students are also encouraged to ask questions and raise issues as these occur to them throughout the course.

### **Tangible evidence that this course has a positive impact on student performance**

The pass rate statistics of the first group of students who participated in the course were analysed and reported in a paper which was published in 1996 (details below). A comparison group, comprising of randomly selected students who also failed more than half of their courses in the previous year but who did not participate in the Puawaitanga course, was used. The analyses revealed:

- Students who attended the Puawaitanga course evidenced a significant improvement in their average pass rates, from 18.70% (in 1993) to 57.98% (in 1994).
- The improvement in average pass rate is significantly greater than the improvement evidenced by students in the comparison group.

The significant improvement in the average pass rates of students who participate in the Puawaitanga course has been achieved every year since. For example, students who participated in the course in 1997 improved on their average pass rates from 20.2% (in 1996) to 53.8% (in 1997), and students who participated in the course in 2004 improved on their average pass rates from 38.8% (in 2003) to 63.8% (in 2004).

A student who participated in the course in February 2008 and who went on to pass all his courses that year, visited the SLCUA earlier this year (2009) to say how helpful he found the course. He followed up his visit with an e-mail message in which he wrote:

*I have given some thought to why I think "Making the Grades" worked for me ...*

- *I had not previously had conscious strategies in place around my learning ... so to learn some effective learning strategies was a tremendous benefit ... learning how to learn was one important reason why "Making the Grades" worked for me.*
- *I had not previously been what I would describe as a goal-oriented person. Although I had hopes, dreams and aspirations, I was not systematically working to achieve any of them or using them as the great motivational drivers they have been to me since. "Making the Grades" taught me a way to view my goals within an ordered framework that made them seem just achievable enough to get me going. I'm still using many of these skills today and it just gets easier with time.*
- *I think that "Making the Grades" presents a great tool-kit of skills that can have great effects on achievement and enjoyment at university and in life. At the end of the day though, you can only lead the proverbial horse to water ... I think that "Making the Grades"*

*worked for me because I really want to be doing well at what I'm doing at university ... It took effort to change the habits of a lifetime, but it ended up saving me a whole lot of effort too. I did it because I saw it could be the key to achieving what I wanted and what I actually believed I was capable of.*

The above comments exemplify the many comments we have received over the years from students who have attended and benefited from "Puawaitanga: Making the Grades".

### **Publication details**

Manalo, E., Wong-Toi, G., & Henning, M. (1996). Effectiveness of an intensive learning skills course for university students on restricted enrolment. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 15(2), 189–199.

### **Why this course is important**

This course is important because it provides for the personal and skills development needs of students who are at high risk of repeating experiences of failure in their studies. Many students who re-enrol following semesters of having failed most of their courses, continue on this unsuccessful path (i.e. they continue failing their courses). This course appears to combat this trend and promote a greater likelihood of success amongst students who fall into this category.

This course is a good example of an effective, cost efficient way for tertiary institutions to significantly reduce subsequent attrition and failure of one group of "at-risk" students.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Careful consideration and addressing of the factors that likely impact on the academic success or otherwise of the group of students concerned – both in general (i.e. based on knowledge that the TLAs possess), and more specifically as the students themselves indicate (i.e. on their registration forms, in discussion sessions during the course).
- Focus on practical strategies directly relating to completion of coursework and passing of exams.
- Incorporation of sessions to help students develop skills to more clearly understand the various requirements of their courses, and how to meet those requirements.
- Provision of opportunities for participants to reflect on their experiences, to share these, and to learn from each other.
- Participants are encouraged to maintain contact with each other and to provide peer support when they can.
- Participants are also encouraged to make use of other SLCUA services during the year.

### **Action plan that can be used in providing a similar course**

To develop and provide an intensive course like this for students who have previously failed a significant proportion of their courses, the following are crucial:

- Working out an effective and reliable method for identifying and contacting/inviting the target group of students. Identification of the students could involve liaison with the student administration/records section of the institution. Contacting the students could involve use of regular postal mail or e-mail.
- Keeping good records, including data about past and subsequent student performance in their courses. These are important in being able to assess some of the effects of the course on student performance.

- Ensuring that tutors who teach the course have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to cater for the learning development needs of the students.
- Designing the contents of the course with enough flexibility to accommodate sufficient opportunities to address academic performance issues or problems that students raise.
- Incorporating lots of opportunities for students to practise the skills being taught, preferably with the use of authentic study materials (i.e. from past courses they have taken and/or future courses they will likely be taking) like notes, assignment instructions, readings, and examination questions.

**Contact details**

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## Students' Perceptions of the Value of Transitioning Study Skills Programmes

### Key words

Study skills; transition to tertiary; success and retention

### Brief description of the programme

BoPP, like most tertiary institutions, offers all new students the opportunity to attend specialised, intensive study skills programmes with the aim of easing the intellectual - and social - move into higher education. These are offered immediately prior to the start of the semester, and, like similar programmes across the sector, have a number of objectives focussing on improved student success and retention. Objectives include:

*To develop academic learning and performance skills, develop an effective balance of independence and collaboration, form support networks with other students and academic staff, become familiar with University and department expectations and requirements, and efficiently access other student services and resources (Trafford, 2001, as cited in Fraser & Hendren, 2003, p. 97).*

Study skills programmes at BoPP are managed by Kahurangi Learning Worx, the institution's academic support wing. Practising what we preach, TLAs collect evaluations from students following each programme delivery, reflecting and collaborating to incorporate student preferences and feedback, and making adjustments to format and delivery. Programmes have evolved over several years to move from three weeks to one week blocks, and the mix of topics continues to change from year to year. In its current incarnation, the programme is known as "Learn2Learn".

Students receive details of the programme in their enrolment packs, and we remind tutors to encourage students to attend during selection interviews. All students are eligible, whether full or part-time, regardless of qualification level. This year, students from the University of Waikato's Tauranga campus were also able to attend, due to a new institutional joint-delivery partnership, and accounted for a significant increase in numbers. In 2008, the programme attracted 83 enrolments, and offered a wide range of 'pick-and-mix' generic study skill sessions: whakawhanaungatanga; learning styles; time management and goal setting; oral presentations; report writing; essay writing; note-taking; library skills; reading for study. In 2009, this was reduced to: learning styles; time management and goal setting; oral presentations; report writing; essay writing; with the addition of 'catch-up' maths. Enrolments increased to 137.

In keeping with key tenets of adult learning pedagogy, Learn2Learn comprises interactive and practical workshop-style classes with an emphasis on experiential learning. Students work individually, in pairs and groups and produce brief presentations and assignment sections such as an essay introduction, or a Table of Contents, which they share with classmates.

## STUDY SKILLS WORKSHOPS

### Provider

Kahurangi Student  
Services, Bay of Plenty  
Polytechnic

### What the programme addresses

Provision of generic study  
skills to students who are  
new to tertiary study

Throughout the week, there is a strong focus on building confidence, reducing anxiety and encouraging a sense of fellowship and enculturation, or 'fitting in'. We include a sausage sizzle, campus tour and a question and answer session with a panel of past students.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

Included in the folder of resources each student receives is an evaluation form, which asks them to rank the workshops they attended for their "general level of usefulness/effectiveness/relevance" on a Likert scale of 1(low) to 5 (high). They are also given the option of responding to two general statements: "Overall, the course provided me with useful skills" and "Overall, the course increased my confidence about learning", using the same 1 – 5 scale. Finally, space was provided for comments and/or recommendations.

Table One: Student perception of value of Learn2Learn programme, 2008. *N=47*

<b>Session Topic</b>	<b>Mean rating</b>
Whakawhanaungatanga	4.7
Learning styles	4.3
Time management & goal setting	4.4
Oral presentations	4.5
Report Writing	3.8
Essay writing	4.4
Note-taking	4.3
Library skills	3.8
Reading for study	4.2
<b>Course provided me with useful skills</b>	<b>4.6</b>
<b>Course increased my confidence</b>	<b>4.5</b>

#### **Comments included:**

- *Got to know tutors really well*
- *Helped me to interact with others, confident to set up study group within my class*
- *Made me realise I can achieve*
- *Jogged memory of previous knowledge*

Several comments reflected a desire for some sessions to be increased in length, for example, report writing to be increased from a half-day to full day session (implemented in 2009).

Table Two: Student perception of value of Learn2Learn programme, 2009. N=56

<b>Session Topic</b>	<b>Mean rating</b>
Learning styles	4.3
Time management & goal setting	4.2
Oral presentations	4.2
Report Writing	4.5
Essay writing	4.5
<b>Course provided me with useful skills</b>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>Course increased my confidence</b>	<b>4.3</b>

**Comments included:**

- *Learnt more in 3 days than I did in 1 year of school!*
- *I feel like a whole new world has opened up for me*
- *Good to find out how you learn personally and set challenges for yourself*
- *I wish I had the same advice given to me years ago, then I wouldn't have had to learn things the hard way*
- *I never knew so much effort went into report writing*
- *Fantastic to be taught the steps and rules of writing*
- *Great warm-up exercise for we more rusty students*
- *I had no idea of what or how an essay should look*
- *I would recommend that all new enrolments do your course*

The extremely positive feedback from participating students certainly indicates that they see value in transitional study skills programmes which allow them to sample the classroom experience and institutional environment, prior to commencement of their course-proper. Over the two years for which data is included, there is a consistently high value given to the generic skill sessions, and to the perceptions of the usefulness of these skills and students' confidence to transfer them to their own, subsequent course of study.

This type of student satisfaction data is useful in the mandate it provides TLAs to continue to deliver transitioning study skills programmes. Students respond positively and testify to their efficacy as an introduction to tertiary life. However, such data also has clear limitations: did it ultimately affect the pass rates and completion of those who attended? Would those students have out-performed classmates who did not attend the optional Learn2Learn programme due, perhaps, to having a higher level of motivation and persistence? These questions are similar to those which affect all reporting of TLA work and are perhaps unanswerable. Nonetheless, a useful next step for the Kahurangi team at BoPP will be to compare final achievement data of those who attended Learn2Learn with those who did not. We hope that the institutional change to a new student data management system in 2010/2011 will facilitate this.

## **Why this programme is important**

Most tertiary institutions today increasingly cater for large numbers of non-traditional students: mature students who have been out of the education system for many years; students who achieved poorly at secondary school or left early; students from minority culture or ethnicity backgrounds, and students for whom English is a second language. Such students often feel particularly anxious about their likelihood of academic success, and so often make up a significant proportion of the Learn2Learn cohort.

The very term 'transition' refers to areas of adjustment experienced by all new students, and includes cognitive as well as psycho-social factors. Challenges around individual responsibility, engagement and enculturation can affect all spheres of a student's life. It is therefore quite natural for students to feel alone and unsupported, unfamiliar with terminology and processes, concerned about different teaching styles, intimidated by workload, worried about letting themselves and family down, and unsure of how to relate to peers, lecturers and tutors. This is a common and shared first year experience, and one which some students will automatically cope with better than others. By incorporating strategies and skill sets to assist students to transition into the tertiary sector, programmes such as Learn2Learn can make a fundamental difference to a student's comfort with, and commitment to, their study.

It has been well established that students are most vulnerable at the beginning of their study, and it therefore makes sense that transitional study skills programmes are offered prior to the commencement of credit-bearing courses:

*If students are going to need creative and thinking skills, metacognitive awareness and research ability, yet come from a background with little exposure to higher order thinking, we must teach these directly, before they are applied to the content areas. Essentially, we must help students prepare for a life as students (Fraser & Hendren, 2003, p. 97).*

As well as the humanistic reasons for providing study skills programmes to scaffold students into higher education, there are well established financial incentives. Transition problems can result in enormous economic waste when students are unable to reconcile a mismatch in their prior expectations of tertiary study, and actual experiences. Awareness of the millions of dollars of direct cost to taxpayers of non-completion means that the onus is on institutions to find ways to improve success and retention by every means available; transition programmes such as Learn2Learn, which utilise existing resources and slot into the overall academic package offered to students, must surely be one of the most cost-effective.

## **Publication details**

Fraser, C. & Hendren, G. (2003). Research Note: Revisiting agendas: Confirming the value of traditional study skills programmes. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, (38)1, 97-103.

## **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- An understanding of the student body and their needs.
- Liaison with the tutors and lecturers of first year classes to ensure the study skills and strategies taught are appropriate and relevant.

- Support and endorsement by staff and management across the institution so that the programme is promoted to all eligible students – through enrolment administration processes and through contact with students during the initial interview/screening/acceptance procedure.
- An experienced and enthusiastic team of TLAs who are experts in the area of academic study skills and understand the psycho/social and intellectual challenges involved in tertiary study.
- Programme design which is student-centred, activity-based and incorporates a range of learning experiences and opportunities for reflection about the learning process.

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# Embedding Academic Skills Development into Mainstream Programmes: Delivering Faculty-Based KEYS Papers

## Key words

Cooperative faculty/adjunct learning development strategies; genre writing; discipline-focussed academic skills

## Brief description of the programme

Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre at the AUT (LDC), has been offering generic academic skills courses to students since 2000. One of the courses, Keys to Academic Writing Success, involves the students learning about essay writing skills and being assessed by submitting a short academic essay. TLAs had begun to work with groups of Semester One Health students, who attended voluntarily and worked on one of the assessments for their mainstream programme.

In 2007 and 2008, students in the first semester of the Bachelor of Health Science were timetabled into classes of approximately 30 students. These students were given an 18 hour programme which combined two of the LDC's KEYS courses, KEYS to Study Success (which covered areas such as time management, academic reading, note taking, planning writing, avoiding plagiarism and referencing) with KEYS to Academic Writing Success which gave information, tuition and discussion of the academic writing process, from understanding the requirements of assessment tasks right through to editing, revising and proof reading.

The students were encouraged to use one of the assessments they would be submitting for one of their papers (in 2008, Interpersonal Skills). The TLAs made a commitment to receiving, commenting on and returning a draft of this assessment so that the students could make amendments and take on board the suggestions for improvements, in time to affect their performance in the Interpersonal Skills assessment.

This programme represented a demanding commitment for the LDC, with 30 parallel classes being timetabled at the beginning of Semester One: some of these were later combined. However, the chance to pilot a method of delivering skills tuition to students which was seamlessly integrated into their academic programme and the opportunity to work cooperatively with the Interpersonal Skills teaching team were seen as well worth this effort.

## Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance

Throughout recent years, AUT's Student Management System has been used to explore ways to show impact evaluation of TLA activities. These are

### INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

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#### Provider

Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre, Auckland University of Technology

#### What the programme addresses

Delivery of academic skills in the context of discipline-focussed assessments

correlations and no claim of causality is being made. They are still of interest in looking at the work of TLAs. In this case, a report was run from data in the Student Management System, which meant that a comparison could be made between students in the Health Faculty who:

- Took no KEYS courses – 2697 students
- Took KEYS courses – 597 students
- Took faculty-based KEYS courses – 330 students

This comparison showed that in most cases the students taking faculty-based KEYS papers had more favourable retention and success rates in their mainstream programmes than did the students taking the general KEYS papers.

Completion and retention rates in this summary are based on the completion codes of grades in the main programme (not KEYS). Below is a list of completion codes – only codes 2, 3 and 4 are used to calculate completion and retention, the other are interim codes:

1	Still to complete course	Completion =	$\frac{2}{(2 + 3 + 4)}$
2	Completed course successfully		
3	Completed course unsuccessfully		
4	Did not complete course		
5	Practicum to complete	Retention =	$\frac{(2 + 3)}{(2 + 3 + 4)}$
6	Yet to complete - Level 9&10		
7	Extension or under moderation		
0	Still to complete course, valid ext		

AUT Health Faculty, 2008

<b>Taken Keys</b>	<b>No. Of students</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Retained</b>
Faculty-based KEYS	330	92%	97%
All KEYS	597	89%	94%
No KEYS	2697	83%	90%

This data could be broken down showing impact on students of different ethnicities: the picture showed that Māori and Pasifika students gained 6% and 4% respectively when KEYS courses were delivered as part of their mainstream programme rather than as generic courses.

<b>Pasifika students in Health Faculty 08</b>				<b>Māori students in Health Faculty 08</b>			
Taken Keys	No. Of students	Pass	Retained	Taken Keys	No. Of students	Pass	Retained
Faculty-based KEYS	22	85%	88%	Faculty-based KEYS	28	93%	94%
All KEYS	52	81%	88%	All KEYS	57	87%	92%
No KEYS	201	68%	80%	No KEYS	284	77%	85%



Asian students and Pākehā students gained less from the integrating of KEYS courses into their mainstream programmes: each showing an improvement of 2% in the pass rate. For Asian students the biggest impact was in simply taking any KEYS course– with a differential of 9% between the 620 who did not take any KEYS courses and who passed their main programme at the rate of 78% and the 121 Asian students who took KEYS courses and passed at the rate of 87%.

Asian students in Health Faculty 08				Pakeha students in Health Faculty 08			
Taken Keys	No. Of students	Pass	Retained	Taken Keys	No. Of students	Pass	Retained
Faculty-based KEYS	88	89%	97%	Faculty-based KEYS	192	94%	98%
All KEYS	121	87%	95%	All KEYS	269	92%	95%
No KEYS	620	78%	89%	No KEYS	1282	89%	92%

### Why this programme is important

Very often mainstream lecturers express a wish for increased learning support for their students but the financial resources allocated to learning centres throughout NZ and Australia has remained static or in some cases has decreased in the last five or six years. Mainstream lecturers may also feel alienated from TLAs and may not fully understand the activities they undertake with students. This can lead to mainstream lecturers having a lack of confidence in TLAs.

In addition, generic learning skills programmes struggle to provide relevance to mainstream programmes and, if they wish to require students to submit writing for evaluation and feedback, run the risk of adding to the burden of assessment tasks already being experienced by students beginning their tertiary study.

A programme which embeds academic skills development in a programme of study and which uses an already existent assessment task as 'practice' requires TLAs and programme lecturers to work together on objectives, lesson plans and marking criteria. During the process of such cooperation, professional relationships are strengthened. For students, the opportunity to learn about academic skills in the context of the demands of a specific course (practising literature searches, reading and note-taking of relevant articles for the purposes of writing a compulsory assessment) contextualises these skills, offers personal contact with TLAs and provides a chance to discuss their learning with support staff who are not, finally, going to be assessing them for their mainstream programme.

### Publication

Watt, L. (2005). Why linking content to teach writing skills is a good idea. *The International Journal of Learning*, 12(7), 357-362.

### Critical success factors of this programme

- Close and trusting relationships between faculty/discipline lecturers and TLAs.
- Several joint meetings of TLAs and faculty/discipline lecturers to clarify objectives, lesson plans and marking criteria of the embedded academic skills course.

- Agreement on an assessment which students could submit to TLAs for formative feedback prior to the due date for their mainstream programme.
- Preparation of a resource bank of handouts, reading materials and exemplars for TLAs to use with these students.
- Provision of an informal, discursive learning development environment, where experienced academics who are not involved in evaluating students for their mainstream programme, demonstrate, model and discuss academic skills in supportive and demystifying ways: creation of an environment in which no question is a stupid one.
- Ability to track retention and success of students in Student Management System.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

- Faculty identifies a cohort of students for whom they would like to provide this embedded academic skills development.
- Course and assessment task are chosen.
- TLAs and faculty/discipline lecturers meet to clarify the objectives of the academic skills development programme.
- TLAs develop programme materials and meet to discuss teaching strategies.
- Faculty timetable students into classes and timetable the assessment task on a date which enables the students to have submitted it to the TLAs and received feedback on it.
- TLAs ensure assessments are marked in a timely fashion which enables students to take on board formative comments and submit final assessment to mainstream lecturer.
- Student completion of the Academic Skills Development paper is recorded in the Student Management System and the results used to report to the faculty.

### **Contact details**

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## Improving Student Success in Introductory Statistics

### Key words

Introductory statistics; improved pass rates; collaboration; student skills development

### Brief description of the programme

The statistics instruction and support programme is provided by the SLCUA in collaboration with the Statistics Department in the Faculty of Science. The Co-ordinator of the programme (a Senior Tutor) is appointed part-time at both the SLCUA and the Statistics Department. The Co-ordinator is therefore well-informed and knowledgeable about the stage 1 credit courses in the Statistics Department (as the person teaches in these courses) as well as the learning and performance skills topics that the SLCUA deals with (e.g. how to study effectively, manage time and other resources, prepare for tests and exams, etc.).

Workshops and one-to-one tutorials are provided through the programme. The workshops include pre-semester preparation, revision of topics dealt with in the stage 1 statistics lectures, revision and preparation for term tests, and revision and preparation for exams. Many of the workshops are run in half day blocks on Saturdays so as to avoid potential clashes with students' regular lectures and tutorials. The one-to-one appointments deal with both statistics knowledge and skills in general, as well as specific topics that have been dealt with in the statistics courses. Attendance and use of the programme is completely voluntary for students.

The instructions provided in the programme deal with very similar materials and topics as those dealt with in the Statistics Department lectures, tutorials and other learning resources. However, the programme provides instructions at a pace that would suit the students attending/participating (that is, delivery can be slowed and repeated when students need this), more examples and exercises are provided, as required (particularly on difficult topics), and various approaches to studying are dealt with as appropriate. Furthermore, students view this programme as being provided by the SLCUA, and many are therefore less apprehensive about asking "dumb" questions and/or getting worried about what their statistics professors might think.

The SLCUA programme therefore complements the instruction and support provided in the Statistics Department very well. It should be noted that this is a case of enhancing what is already a highly regarded and effective teaching programme as the team that teaches the stage 1 courses in the Statistics Department has won a national Tertiary Teaching Excellence Award in 2003 – hence they are already teaching extremely effectively in the department. However, by providing further opportunities for revising, reflecting, questioning, clarifying, practising, and so on, the SLCUA programme described

## INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

### Provider

The Student Learning  
Centre, The University of  
Auckland

### What the programme addresses

Pass Rates of students  
taking Introductory  
Statistics

here provides a means for many students to take greater advantage of the excellent teaching being provided through the Statistics Department.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

Staff members of both the Statistics Department and the SLCUA are aware that students who use the SLC programme described here generally do well and the majority pass their statistics tests and exams. Pass rate statistics from Semester 2 of 2004 were analysed and reported in a paper which was published in 2007 (details below). The analyses revealed:

- Significantly higher course pass rate for students who used the programme (84.4%, compared to 69.8% for those who did not use the programme).
- Significantly higher final exam pass rate for students who used the programme (71.6%, compared to 62.8% for those who did not use the programme).

Evidence was also obtained showing that the instruction provided in the programme was beneficial to students' performance – and not just the motivation to do well:

- Students who attended a mid semester test preparation workshop obtained a significantly higher pass rate (83.3%) compared to other users of the programme who did not attend that particular workshop (test pass rate = 68.6%).

Further, evidence was obtained indicating that those who made use of the individual consultations provided as part of the programme likewise had a very good course pass rate (82.4%).

### **Why this programme is important**

This programme is important because statistics is necessary in many subject disciplines including those that are not math-related, like business and economics, psychology, education, many of the social sciences, and most of the health sciences. However, significant numbers of students who do not consider themselves "good in maths" enter tertiary studies with insufficient preparation for statistics, and thus struggle (and sometimes fail) in meeting the statistics requirements of their courses.

This programme provides a good example of a strategy that works and delivers tangible evidence of its effectiveness. It is also a good example of how subject departments and centrally provided learning support facilities can collaborate well in addressing identified student academic needs. In addition, the programme's effectiveness highlights the importance of providing appropriate learning development and support for students – to enable them to take maximum advantage of high quality instruction being provided in their subject department.

### **Publication details**

Manalo, E., & Leader, D. (2007). Learning center and statistics department collaboration in improving student performance in introductory statistics. *College Student Journal*, 41, 454–459.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Collaboration between the department involved (Statistics Department) and the SLCUA from the design of the programme through to its implementation.

- The Co-ordinator and TLAs employed to provide the instruction and support are knowledgeable and skilled in the subject area where supplementary instruction and support is offered.
- The Co-ordinator and TLAs employed in the programme work closely with other learning centre staff and are therefore well-versed in the many factors that could affect students' success or otherwise in their studies (e.g. time- and self-management issues, motivation, approaches to studying and revising, etc.). Students are therefore able to work in an environment where the tutors are also able to advise them on such matters as how best to study for upcoming tests, and what strategies they could use to better remember important statistical procedures.
- The Co-ordinator and TLAs teach (or have taught) in the department concerned, but they are employed for this support function through the SLCUA. Therefore, students can seek their advice and support when they are at the SLCUA, and the students do not have to be concerned about faculty/discipline lecturers or anyone else from their department seeing them seeking advice/assistance.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, to support student learning and achievement in a particular subject area, the following are crucial:

- Identifying (with the appropriate staff in the subject department) the student performance issues that need to be addressed (e.g. pass rates, retention, quality of writing, etc.).
- Designing and planning the support programme together with appropriate staff in the subject department. An important issue to discuss would be resourcing.
- Agreeing on the implementation procedure for the programme/strategy to use, and the criteria to be employed in evaluating its success or otherwise.
- Keeping good records, including data about past student performance in the courses in question (where these are available). These are important in subsequently being able to demonstrate the impact of the programme/strategy being used.
- Ensuring that the staff employed to teach and provide support have the necessary knowledge and skills to not only cover content, but also appropriate learning and study management strategies.
- Maintaining regular communication with the faculty/discipline lecturers and tutors teaching in the programme as well as the faculty/discipline staff who were involved in its development and implementation. It is important that problems and challenges are identified and addressed early where possible.

### **Contact details**

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## Improving Students' Success in the First Year of the Bachelor of Nursing Degree

### Key words

Academic writing; process; critical thinking; reflective thinking; discussion

### Brief description of the programme

For five years a TLA from Student Learning Services at Wintec (SLSW) has been providing a programme of regular, voluntary workshops for first year nursing students, linked to the courses that set written and oral assessments. The workshop topics are planned around 'appropriate start times' in relation to the due dates of the assignments and a programme is distributed near the beginning of each semester. In 2009, the student portal software application has made it possible to email all relevant students with the timetable, any changes and reminders about the workshops.

Initially, the International Centre requested assistance for the international students studying nursing. Students from overseas are new to the New Zealand (NZ) education system and adapt more quickly to NZ expectations, with support. They and New Zealand resident students often need NZ style study skills, writing and English language support. Until this year the TLA offered two sessions of each workshop: one for the English as an Additional Language (EAL) students who could contribute at their language speed; and one for the NZ/fluent English speakers. The students chose which class to attend. In 2009 the number of recently arrived EAL students was low so students simply chose the class time that suited them best. Also in 2009, for the first time, the first year nursing co-ordinator timetabled the workshop times into the nursing programme so nursing tutors could not make changes to their tutorial times that affected the learning centre workshop times.

The workshops are planned and TLA facilitated: they introduce and reinforce the importance of research, referencing, thinking and writing skills, and effective learning processes. They include: clarification of criteria; exercises and examples related to the topic; they encourage discussion and questions; and provide handouts that capture the tutorial material and prompt independent thinking. Students are expected and encouraged to participate which means the workshop plans need to be flexible and the tutor able to 'keep control' so all students get value from the session. The workshop format gives students the opportunity to build or fill in the gaps in their assignment writing skills.

The material put on Moodle (computer teaching platform) by the nursing tutors for the students is regularly accessed by the TLA. Content such as assignment criteria and instructions are printed, lecturer PowerPoint presentation slides, tutorial material and notes to students are viewed, and these all inform the workshop preparation. At times the TLA contacts the appropriate nursing tutor to verify his/her understanding of what is required.

## INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

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### Provider

Student Learning Services,  
Waikato Institute of  
Technology

### What the programme addresses

Improving students'  
understanding of the  
processes involved in  
completing successful  
assignments

Thus, the workshops are carefully aligned to support the teaching of the nursing department.

The workshop planning recognises the importance of examples and models to, for example: explain what something means (e.g. cultural context as a concept); to help students understand how to include theory in their writing; to show paraphrasing and how it is referenced; and to show writing models (e.g. an essay introduction). Students (with good results) have willingly provided copies of their assignments to offer authentic examples to support the workshop teaching.

### **Why this programme is important**

People enrolling on the nursing degree come from a wide range of educational backgrounds and life experience. Many New Zealand citizens and residents do not have experience of tertiary study and may not have studied 'academic' courses at high school. Many are enrolled nurses or mature students who lack confidence in their skills and learning ability. Students who were recently at school may be computer savvy and confident. However, a challenge for many students (NZ, NZR, International, school leaver and mature) is around the use of language; the workshops help extend their vocabulary and guide the development of their thinking and written communication. The workshops teach the needed skills in the context of the assessments the students are required to complete so they gain specific and relevant support.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

#### **Essay results:**

Although not statistically significant the pass/fail information is worthwhile recording. From a class total of 138 students, 85 (62%) passed and 53 (38%) failed. Of the 15 students who attended a workshop on the essay, 11 (73%) passed, and 4 (27%) failed. Thus a higher proportion of the students who attended the workshop passed the essay.

#### **Student Evaluation:**

Forty-five students who attended a workshop on another essay were asked to indicate how helpful they found the workshop, on a scale of 1 (very helpful) – to 5 (not very helpful). Thirty-six circled 1 or 2 and five students circled 3.

Comments included:

*Gave me a better understanding; a great way to develop my ideas for my essay; thank you, the way you re-worded the essay topic helped me understand; confused me a little; has highlighted important features to include; saw I had the right information but needed a different way of structuring my essay; good information, helpful points and hints; it gave me a head start.*

Students were also asked to indicate their view of the teaching from 1 (excellent) – to 5 (poor). Thirty-seven circled 1 or 2 and four students circled 3.

Comments included:

*Teaching style great; easy to follow, good speaker; very friendly and approachable; easy to understand; too many questions from audience; a little more detail.*



### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Access to information department tutors put on Moodle. Appropriate and 'correct' information is vital in preparing and teaching these workshops. An occasional evaluation has indicated concern that something said in the workshop was at variance with what a department tutor had stated. As there are several nursing tutors often giving slightly different interpretations, the SLSW tutor needs to take care not to add to the choices.
- Collaboration with the Nursing Department tutors. Their support is essential: to clarify criteria or content matters; to recommend students attend; to inform the SLSW tutor of changes in topics, due dates etc.; to protect the workshop times when they offer additional tutorials.
- Well-planned workshop content and well-informed tutors.
- A relaxed atmosphere and open discussion to encourage students to ask questions and share their thinking without embarrassment.

(Students who are struggling with academic writing benefit from 1-1 tutoring following a workshop.)

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, to support student learning and achievement in a particular subject area, the following are crucial:

- A proposed development of this programme would be to collect evidence of future written assignments to measure persistence of the benefit to students.
- Identifying (with the appropriate staff in the subject department) the student performance issues that need to be addressed (e.g. pass rates, retention, quality of writing, etc.).
- Designing and planning the support programme together with appropriate staff in the department. Important issues are timetabling of the workshops and early setting of assignment due dates so a programme can be drawn up and available when the students begin the course.
- Agreeing on the implementation procedure for the programme/strategy to use, and the criteria to be employed in evaluating its success or otherwise.
- Keeping good records, including data about past student performance in the courses in question (where these are available). These are important in subsequently being able to demonstrate the impact of the programme/strategy being used.
- Ensuring that the staff employed to teach and provide support have the necessary knowledge and skills to not only cover content, but also appropriate learning and study management strategies.
- Maintaining regular communication between the tutors teaching the programme as well as the subject department staff.

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## Peer Collaboration can Encourage Relationships that Benefit Student Success

### Key words

Collaboration; relationships; co-teaching, retention and success; learning support services; one-to-one appointments; bi-cultural

### Brief description of the programme

The programme began with the incorporation of Māori perspectives and experiences into the learning content of national curricula, specifically the economics programme in the New Zealand Diploma in Business. The approach was initiated to support BoPP's strategic direction for Māori participation which includes a number of directives such as the promotion of understanding 'Te Ao Māori' in all programmes, and supporting staff to effectively teach and respond to the distinctive Māori student profile. Research conducted within the institution had confirmed that Māori students wanted to see their culture reflected in their learning, but that this must be introduced in a manner that allowed them to be comfortable with its inclusion.

The programme was initiated in 2007 in a collaboration between a faculty/discipline tutor (tutor) for economics within the School of Business Studies, and a then new-to-the-institute TLA within Kahurangi Student Services at BoPP (KSS). This peer collaboration allowed the development of Māori content for economics and a co-operative delivery approach which were important practices that moved the initiative from concept to realisation. It involved co-teaching a portion of an economics class on international trade. This was an integrated lesson that provided a historic and contemporary review of Māori contributions to New Zealand's success as a trading nation. The content was related to the larger lesson on international trade, and not an extraneous 'add on'.

The relationship between the two colleagues progressed strongly into a highly cooperative partnership with mutual respect about what each had to offer. Both colleagues continue to work closely together on areas that can improve the learning of students within the economics programme. This includes the sharing of resources as well undertaking other co-teaching opportunities where TLA involvement would be beneficial. An example of the partnership is the tutor consulting the TLA about assessments, allowing access to content material and encouraging students in class to regularly consult the TLA for learning support.

Statistics gathered within BoPP have highlighted that the number of economics students accessing learning support with the TLA, and in particular the number of one-to-one appointments, has increased since this bicultural initiative was introduced. The programme focused on enhancing the learning of Māori students through the inclusion of cultural content and has seen the number of Māori students successfully completing the economics paper increase from previous years. The statistics also highlighted that there has been an overall

## INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

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### Provider

Kahurangi Student  
Services, Bay of Plenty  
Polytechnic

### What the programme addresses

A collaboration between a Learning Centre staff member and an economics teacher to introduce aspects of Maori culture into a business programme and how this collegial relationship improved student success and retention

increase in the number of economics students including both Māori and non-Māori who have successfully completed since the initiative.

The peer collaboration has also provided a model that could be employed throughout the institution when trying to find a possible way forward in enhancing the learning of Māori students through the inclusion of Māori content. Some other teaching staff within the business school have shown an interest in undertaking a similar collaboration within their specific subjects. A current collaboration in the development stage is incorporating Māori perspectives in another NZ Diploma in Business subject, Leadership and Strategy.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

The TLA's student statistics show that:

- Since the collaboration, the number of one-to-one appointments for the TLA with economic students from 2006 – 2008 has increased 102%. In 2006 there were just 38 appointments whilst in 2008 there were 87 one-to-one appointments. This equates to an increase in the amount of support provided towards the economics students by the TLA.
- Along with the increase in appointments, the percentage of economic students accessing learning support with the TLA has also increased from 21% of the class in 2006, to 37% in 2008: an overall increase of 76%.

BoPP's success and retention statistics for the economics paper show that:

- Students successfully completing economics from 2005 – 2008 are as follows:

<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
71%	71%	92%	81%

The statistics identifies an improvement of 14% from 2005 to 2008 in students successfully completing.

- Māori students successfully completing economics from 2005 – 2008 are as follows:

<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>
50%	48%	-	69%

Māori student statistics for 2007 were unavailable; but a comparison of 2005 and 2008 identifies 38% improvement in Māori students successfully completing economics.

With the TLA's student statistics in conjunction with the institution's student success data it can be assumed that there is a positive correlation between the increased success within the economic subject and the introduction of the collaboration.

### **Why this programme is important**

This programme is important because economics is a compulsory subject for students undertaking the New Zealand Diploma in Business. There are still challenges for students especially for Māori

students within the Business School of Studies at BoPP. There are significantly smaller numbers of Māori students studying business at the polytechnic compared to other areas within the institute. Statistics within the institution on Māori students undertaking business studies still show variability in regards to successful outcomes; Māori success rates for New Zealand Diploma in Business subjects are improving but are still behind non-Māori rates. Statistics have highlighted a correlation between the peer collaboration and the increased number of students accessing learning support. Statistics also identified a correlation to the improvement in students, both Māori and non-Māori, successfully completing economics. The programme supports BoPP's strategic direction for Māori participation by effectively teaching and responding to the distinctive Māori student profile and the government's Tertiary Education Strategy for success and retention.

### **Publication details**

Heke, J. (2008). My culture in my learning. In E. Manalo, J. Bartlett-Trafford, & S. Crozier (Eds.), *Walking a tightrope – the balancing act of learning advising: Refereed proceedings of the 2007 Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) Conference* (pp. 24–38). Auckland, New Zealand: ATLAANZ.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- A clear and open working relationship between peers that encourages the development of ideas and opportunities.
- Discipline tutor and TLA both adding value through contribution of information, knowledge and resources.
- Students are encouraged and made aware of the contribution that learning support can provide towards their success.
- The availability of one-to-one appointments with a TLA in aiding success and completion in subjects that have otherwise been deemed difficult.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, to support student learning and achievement in a particular subject area, the following are crucial:

- Identifying programmes that can benefit from closer collaborations between TLAs and content tutor.
- Designing and planning how the programme can support not only the success of the student but enhance their learning experience.
- Ensure that the TLA has the necessary knowledge and skills to support content.
- Content tutor should provide the TLA with the necessary resources including assessments and text.
- Regular communication between the TLA and the tutor.
- Regularly evaluating the success of the programme and strategising collaboratively on improving

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## Student Engagement- Relationships above Everything Else

### Key words:

Foundation learning; Māori Kahurangi Team; team teaching; Māori; retention and success; literacy

### Brief description of the programme

In 2003, two TLAs were appointed to KSS to support students in literacy/numeracy development. Each TLA was assigned to a number of foundation programmes. The Māori TLA was assigned to the Certificate for Preparation for Tertiary Education (PTE) programme as a high number of Māori students were enrolled in this programme.

The Vocational Tutor for the PTE programme was a European female who had previously worked in the KSS and was a familiar colleague to the TLA.

Initially support was primarily offered to the Vocational Tutor where she would direct students to the KSS to work on a one to one basis with the TLA.

This strategy was found to be ineffective as students were required to attend sessions in their own time and often viewed the support as 'extra work'; some also viewed the support as 'remedial', which is a common experience of many foundation learners. In order to engage more students and provide more meaningful contextualised literacy support it was agreed that literacy support would be more effective if embedded within the programme context in the students' classroom.

In 2005, the Manukau Institute of Technology model of literacy team teaching was explored. A visit to the Manukau Institute of Technology and ongoing communication ensued, leading to the adoption of this model. For the following year it was decided that the literacy tutor would be present in the classroom for two days per week.

At this time, the PTE programme was a Level 2, 17 week programme which aimed to prepare students for further study.

Students ranged from 16 years to mid 50s and the majority were female. Forty-one percent of students were Māori. The majority of students had left school early with little or no formal qualifications or were students who had success at school but lacked the confidence to move into tertiary study. Many had negative experiences and perceptions of education. Two students were second language learners and a number of students were primary caregivers for dependants.

## INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

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### Provider

Bay of Plenty Polytechnic

### What the programme addresses

A team teaching approach to embedding literacy in a Foundation Learning programme; retention and success of Māori students

## **Preparation**

Prior to starting the programme, preparation involved unpacking unit standards to identify literacy/numeracy strands, and lesson plans were devised or shared between the two tutors.

The TLA's role was defined as a teacher-aide type role with some teaching. It was agreed that while the Vocational Tutor assumed the main teaching role the TLA would circulate around the classroom, observing student reactions and participation, model questioning and generally support students in class. There was a clear intention on the part of the teaching team to ensure that the students would not perceive any subservient role or lesser status of either the TLA or the tutor.

## **Working with students**

Within the first week of the programme all students completed a diagnostic assessment where at risk students were identified and individual learning plans (ILP's) were devised.

Literacy support was embedded into planning and teaching, in groups, in a class setting and in one to one situations. During the programme three study evenings were available for students to catch up on assignments at the KSS. These evenings were labelled 'fish and chips' nights and were supported by both tutors. This particular initiative aimed to encourage students to utilise the institute's services thus creating a sense of belonging to this academic learning environment.

Individual appointments were arranged in class time to meet with students. This time proved to be invaluable as staff were able to gauge where students 'were at'. Although the focus for these discussions was their academic progress, students were able to discuss how study and learning fitted in with the reality of their lives. Study was not seen as an isolated event. Information would be shared by both staff members as the success and wellbeing of every student was important to both.

As the staff became more comfortable with each other the collegial agreement transformed into a partnership and an environment was created where the two staff members were able to tag teach, observe each other give feedback, support one another to explain concepts more clearly, share experiences, learn from one another and the students, model, share the students' challenges and successes and set goals. Students were able to choose who they went to for support both academically and personally and this was acceptable to both staff members.

Both staff members believe that the success of this team teaching experience was due to the positive relationship between them. The students were not only the recipients of two teachers for the price of one, they were able to observe and participate in an environment where diversity was modelled and validated, where staff could model teaching and learning in their classroom.

## **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

To support the perceptions of the TLA and faculty/discipline tutor that their team teaching approach was proving beneficial for students and enhancing their confidence as well as academic performance, statistics relating to success and retention were gathered for the year prior to the initiative (2005) and for the first year of the team teaching approach. The term retention refers to students who are enrolled into the programme and remain until its conclusion. Success refers to students who remain and who achieve a pass grade and graduate from the programme. Two separate measures have been included to show the effectiveness of the 2006 programme.



## 2005

- Total Retention of all PTE students = 71% Success = 48%
- Māori Retention = 56% Māori Success = 44%

## 2006

- Total Retention of all PTE students = 71% Success = 94%
- Māori Retention = 70% Māori Success = 100%

### Pathway into further study (2006)

- 81.25% of students who succeeded went onto further study. While a comparative number from 2005 is unavailable, staff involved with this programme in earlier years all agreed this was an unprecedented number of students who chose to progress into other higher education qualifications.

### Anecdotal evidence

The following comments provide a sample of written feedback received from student participants about what they liked about the programme and the ways in which they used the programme:

- *I can now manage my time and do a list of things to do. Paraphrasing for interviews has been enormous.*
- *Renee and Michelle are both enthusiastic teachers and I found myself caught up in the 'want to learn, give me more' attitude.*
- *I thought teachings were exceptional the tutors were always well prepared in terms of assignments and lessons.*
- *Without PTE I would not have coped with Kahikatea. PTE gave me a solid base on which I can continue my education. I often refer to handouts and notes I have from PTE.*
- *Variety of subjects, lollies, class trips, new and effective techniques for study, fitness.*
- *Convenience. Support. Help was far more accessible. More personal attention. Two heads = more ideas*
- *At least I knew what tutors were doing and never got confused.*
- *Having a fresh approach to teaching  
It certainly made a difference, both enhanced each others teaching skills.*
- *They are wonderful teachers who got love and open minded. Most students of PTE needed some help from them.*
- *Kahurangi Māori Kaupapa. Lovely ladies- caring, sharing, nurturing. Access to stapler, gluestick etc that I can't keep at home because of everyone else using them and not putting them back.*
- *Kahurangi, Library, EDC, both tutors more convenient place to come*
- *Seek support with my assignments am I doing ok. Whether I should continue my study. Sometimes we just talked.*
- *A lighter friendly chat, academic advice or advice about things Māori.*

### Why this programme is important

Due to the historical and unique profile of the PTE student, resourcing in staff is vital.

For a staff member in this role, the teaching is demanding, and sharing the challenges and the successes of this role lightens the load and provides a platform for individual and peer reflection. The scope of goals and developments for the programme and the learner were shared and limitless.

Collaborative teaching approaches allow for a sense of support for the staff involved. Successful lessons can be shared as can difficulties or challenges, thereby helping 'off load' and move forward.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

The team teaching relationship

- Knowing each other and building trust
- Share the successes and challenges which are able to be identified within the student profiles
- Identifying similarities and acknowledging and celebrating differences
- Backgrounds in teaching
- Shared passion for student success
- Holistic approach to teaching and learning
- Teaching styles, expectations of students
- Classroom management
- Student engagement
- Interests
- Experiences
- Respect for tangata whenua/ diversity/ the foundation learner.
- "I am a teacher but I am also Māori, and a mother." Being able to realistically connect to the learner's life experience is not always something a tutor can learn, it is lived. To have at least one of the team with such attributes makes for a powerful teaching and learning duet.
- Embedded commitment by the institution to recognise the aspirations and learning needs of the iwi through whanau; effective intervention to reduce the disparity of Māori learner outcomes; a commitment to grow the capacity of staff to recognise the unique attributes of the Māori learner within the mainstream context; and the introduction of the strong concepts of manaaki within the learning environment are all key elements.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Know the faculty/discipline tutor, build the relationship, share teaching and planning, classroom management, strengths, differences, life experiences.
- Know the programme. In order to contribute to planning and development the TLA must have prior knowledge of assessments, timetabling, literacy/numeracy demands.
- Know the learner. Understand the learner profile. For the Māori learner, it certainly helps to understand or experience the lifestyle patterns of both the learner and their whānau networks.
- Define the roles.
- Decide and plan for: collaborative teaching, complementary/supportive team teaching, or teacher aide approach. Roles must be defined prior to the arrangement to establish trust between the tutors. The staff need to be seen as equals in order for students to value their contribution.
- Plan for the commitment the role entails – Time for meetings, planning, catching up, in and out of class, groups, 1-1. Ensure the approach is supported by managers.

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# The Impact of Tailored Essay Writing Workshops on Students' Coursework Essay Grades in a First Year Biology Course

## Key words

Academic essay; content; student skills development; writing; biology; university; structure; science

## Brief description of the programme

In semester one 2006 the SLCUA was engaged to deliver two sets of essay writing workshops, one prior to each of the two coursework essays, to students enrolled in 'Antarctica: The Frozen Continent', a stage one course in the School of Biological Sciences. The course content consisted of coursework (a 5% literature research assignment and two 10% essays) and exams (a 25% in-course test and a 50% final exam). To complete the course successfully, students had to pass both the coursework and exam components.

The first essay question concerned the physiological issues related to the formation of ice within organisms and particularly within living tissue, and the adaptations that have evolved to allow the survival of Antarctic fish in these conditions. The expectation was that research would be biased towards academic journal articles, and therefore the appropriate material for satisfactorily answering the question would be technical in nature covering, for example, subjects such as haemoglobin, glycopeptides, enzyme function in relation to temperature, and the structural changes involved in the formation of ice. The essay required thorough research, the formation of a logical argument with appropriate evidence, and sufficient and accurate referencing. The second essay question explored a topical debate and was opinion based. The expectation for this topic was that research would involve internet searching and sourcing information from periodicals with a much smaller percentage of material coming from peer reviewed sources. The data was less technical and therefore more easily understood, but the challenge was using the research appropriately whilst constructing a persuasive argument, and writing in a style that reflected the opinion-based nature of the information.

The SLCUA ran two sets of optional essay writing workshops, which were not part of the course assessment. A three hour workshop was run four times before each essay; these were conducted on different days and at varying times to accommodate the students' diverse timetables. Both sets of workshops were run approximately two weeks prior to the hand-in dates for each assignment. Students were advised of the workshops through the course guide, through an on-line learning management resource, through email and by several lecturers during course lectures.

The workshop content was devised by the SLCUA following discussions with the faculty/discipline lecturers. A comprehensive workshop handout was prepared that covered: the academic writing style; the essay writing process and time

## INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

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### Provider

The Student Learning  
Centre, The University of  
Auckland

### What the programme addresses

The essay writing workshops were designed to clarify the writing standards expected at university within the biology context, to make explicit the requirements of each essay question, and to review the necessary writing, research and time management skills required to excel in the assignments.

management; how to analyse a question; research, effective academic reading, critical thinking, and methods of note taking from reading; the construction of an argument, mind-mapping and brainstorming, organising ideas and planning an essay; essay and paragraph structure, paraphrases and quotations, drafting; the essay introduction, body, and conclusion; referencing; revising, editing and proofing; and common problems encountered with essay writing. The exercises in the handout were specific to Antarctica and in particular the essay question.

The workshops were designed to include a maximum of 40 students to allow interaction between the students. Group work was a focus of the workshops, and exercises were generally conducted within groups of three to five students. Tutors also interacted with individual students and groups during the exercises. Both the first and second workshops covered the same material but with a slightly different focus. The first workshop dealt primarily with scientific writing style and the writing process. The second workshop commenced with a review of the students' experiences of writing the first essay, the markers' comments on their individual work and their personal view of their areas of difficulty. Additionally tutors helped individual students to interpret the markers' comments and made suggestions for improvement of their work.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

The results from this study indicate that attendance at the essay writing workshops was beneficial to students: The mean score and the pass rate for workshop attendees were significantly higher than for non-attendees (Table 1); and, the mean score and pass rate for the second essay was directly correlated with workshop attendance (Table 2).

Table 1

<b>Attendance</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>Range of marks</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Pass rate</b>
1st essay (E1)				
Attended WS1	94	4-20	13.14	86%
Did not attend WS1	152	4-20	11.61	71%
2nd essay (E2)				
Attended WS2	80	4-20	14.79	94%
Did not attend WS2	152	4-20	13.06	82%

Table 2

<b>Attendance</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>Range of marks</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Pass rate</b>
2nd essay (E2)				
Attended neither WS	116	4-20	12.92	81%
Attended only WS1	44	8-19.5	13.58	87%
Attended only WS2	30	4-20	14.23	90%
Attended WS1 & WS2	48	7-19.5	15.08	96%

The most significant result was for students who did not attend the first workshop but did attend the second. This group gave clear support for the effectiveness of the workshops as the same group of students gained significantly higher marks for the second essay compared to the first essay: 75% of students who attended only the second workshop improved their mark in the second essay (Figure 1).

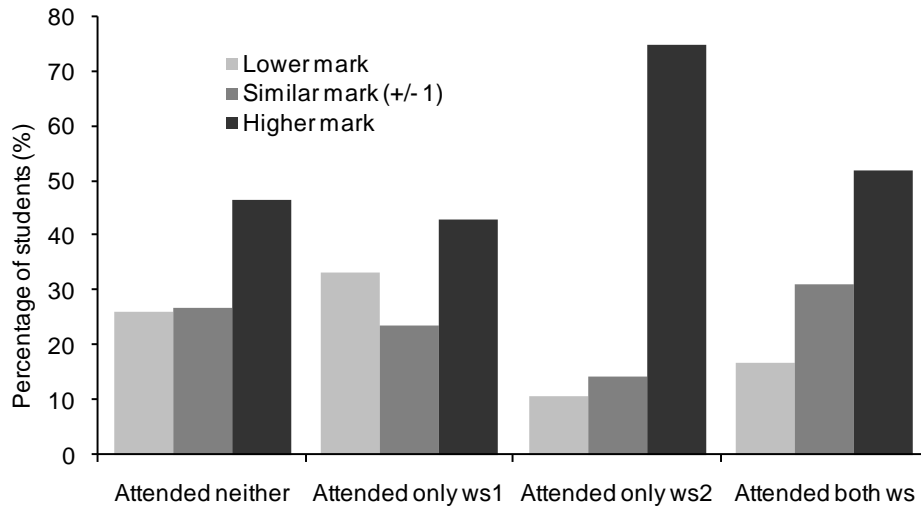


Figure 1

Assessment of essay two compared with essay one, indicating the percentage of students that achieved lower, similar (where the score was +/-1 out of a possible 20) or higher marks in the second essay based on workshop attendance.

### Why this programme is important

This programme was developed in response to students' poor performance on the essay component of the course in previous years and the high proportion of non-native English speakers enrolled on the course. The results indicate that attendance at the workshops improves students' writing skills and consequently the assignment grades that they can achieve. Given that students must pass the in-course component of the course separately to the exam component, success in the in-course essays is critical to achieving a pass in the overall course. The course is one of only a few stage one biology courses that has an essay writing component, and therefore the workshops teach basic skills and techniques that can benefit the students over the course of their study at university and on into their future careers.

Within this course there is also little opportunity for student interaction as the course content is primarily delivered online. The workshops, to some extent, counter this lack of community amongst the students and it is believed that the workshops have a positive effect on students' engagement with the subject material. A sense of connection and belonging to a community of learners can play an important role in students' success.

Another complexity to the course is that it is offered as a credit for General Education as well as for Biological Sciences. Therefore, enrolled students' prior knowledge of the conventions of writing for science is highly varied. This stimulates anxiety among many of the students undertaking the course as a General Education credit. Feedback from the formal workshop evaluations indicates that attendance at the workshops greatly improves motivation and many students leave the workshop

with a clear direction, and an understanding of the process required to produce a quality piece of writing that is discipline appropriate.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Good communication and collaboration between faculty/discipline lecturers and TLAs.
- Student engagement with the workshop material through group work and open discussion.
- Variety in the activities undertaken during the workshops to provide for different learning styles.
- Tailored subject specific activities and exemplars used in the workshops.
- The teaching staff employed to provide the instruction and support have some understanding of the subject material.
- Allowing time within the workshop for reflection and responding to questions raised through this process, both publicly within the group and privately with individual students.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Target courses that have an in-course essay component whose students may need support in this area.
- Establish good working relationships with faculty/discipline lecturers.
- Set up meetings between course coordinator, faculty/discipline lecturers, tutors and markers, and TLA prior to the start of the course to discuss requirements and expectations to ensure consistency in the information delivered to students.
- Prepare tailored teaching materials and handouts appropriate to the essay topics and questions.
- Ensure that the staff employed to teach and provide support have the necessary knowledge and skills to cover the required learning and study management strategies, and the discipline appropriate writing style.
- Provide a clear framework of the essay expectations and guide students through the essay writing process. Encouraging students to broaden their thinking, stimulating independent thought and self-directed learning.
- Provide activities during the workshops that allow students to think creatively around the essay topic to provide tangible starting points for research and essay planning.
- Promote student engagement through the use of activities that progress students through their assignment, and topic-appropriate teaching materials and exemplars.

### **Contact details**

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## Turning Around Failure – A Success Story from the Trades

### Key words

Mathematics and numeracy; Level 2, Level 3, Level 4 learning; transition; electrical engineering students

### Brief description of the project

Students enrolled to become registered electricians at the end of their study must undertake two years of study at the BoPP. In the first year they must complete the 16-week first semester National Certificate in Electrical Engineering Level 2 as a pre-requisite to enter the Level 3 course in the second semester. In the second year they must complete the Level 4 course and finally they must complete on-job units and two external exams.

Prior to 2007, only 20% of our students who had enrolled to become tradesman electricians were achieving the national pass rate. Investigation by the vocational tutor for this course found the most telling factor to be their relative lack of numeracy skills. The students attempting Level 4 mathematics calculations did not have a proper understanding of the Level 3 numeracy skills required; accordingly they had progressed to the Level 3 programme without a proper understanding of the Level 2 numeracy skills required. This is because each level builds on conceptual understandings taught previously. In some cases, it appears that students have found techniques which enabled them to pass assessments at lower levels, but have not completely assimilated the learning required to transfer knowledge and skills to a higher level of numeracy study. The solution to increasing successful pass rates at Levels 3 and 4 was therefore determined to be intervention at Level 2.

This observation prompted discussion between the vocational tutor and the KSS's TLA's expert in mathematics. It was clear that the staff needed to start at the beginning and develop a method to improve the learners' basic numeric skills at Level 2 as a solid foundation to successfully completing the level 4 external exam.

The Level 2 programme runs over 16 weeks for four days of the week. The maths that students need to cover in the programme is quite daunting for those who have struggled with schooling: Pythagoras theorem, trigonometry, metric conversion, and transposition, general maths (includes calculator operation, fractions, percentage, area, volume) and mechanics.

It was decided to implement a programme of additional study time outside the course curriculum. The students were advised that they would have to attend an additional half day every week until they had passed each maths assessment. For those with strong competency and higher qualifications this took about a month; for others the time varied between 6 and 10 weeks but a few were still attending the tutorials for up to 16 weeks.

## INTEGRATED WITHIN SPECIFIC SUBJECT DISCIPLINES

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### Provider

Kahurangi Student  
Services, Bay of Plenty  
Polytechnic

### What the programme addresses

Improving the basic  
numeric skills of electrical  
engineering students at  
level 2 as a channel into  
their level 4 learning

To begin with there was just the vocational tutor and one TLA involved. However, an unusually high number of Māori students enrolled in 2007, and the Māori numeracy and literacy learning advisor volunteered to join the project. Together the staff implemented an approach that could address the needs of the learners in an effort to reduce barriers in maths and improve success and retention. A range of strategies were either planned in professional conversations or evolved as the semester proceeded. The tutorials broke down the maths from course content into discrete modules and developed a range of quality exercise sheets and formative assessments for each. While from the outside this could have looked as if this was over-assessing, in practice it allowed staff to recognise very quickly which students were struggling. The response was to place the students in small groups according to their needs, and arrange one-to-one tuition for those who didn't progress.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

The following table of results for the success and retention of students during the years 2003-2005 (prior to implementation of the programme) shows a disturbing downward trend in the success rate of the students, despite the fact that they were retained throughout the course.

Table One: Level 2 student success and retention 2003-2005

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number Enrolled</b>	<b>Number Withdrawn</b>	<b>Number Completed</b>	<b>Number Passed</b>	<b>Number Failed</b>	<b>Retention %</b>	<b>Passed %</b>
<b>All students</b>							
2003	23	1	22	18	4	96%	82%
2004	48	7	41	30	11	85%	73%
2005	53	2	51	35	16	96%	69%
<b>Māori</b>							
2003	7	0	7	6	1	100%	86%
2004	6	2	4	3	1	67%	75%
2005	3	0	3	1	2	100%	33%

This can be compared with the results in Table Two from 2007, which showed a dramatic improvement - not just in completion of the course, but also in achieving the qualification.

Table Two: Level 2 student success and retention 2007

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number Enrolled</b>	<b>Number Withdrawn</b>	<b>Number Completed</b>	<b>Number Passed</b>	<b>Number Failed</b>	<b>Retention %</b>	<b>Passed %</b>
<b>All students</b>							
2007	49	2	47	46	1	96%	98%

Of the 49 Level 2 electrical students enrolled in 2007, 2 students withdrew to employment in other fields, 1 student did not complete the course and 46 students successfully completed the

programme. *All of the Māori students involved successfully completed all of their maths assessments.*

### **Why this programme is important**

Given the poor national pass rates for our students it was imperative that the informal analysis carried out by the vocational tutor was acted upon. This project served to minimise the numeric barriers faced by these students. The staff also made gains with an almost coincidental new recognition for a student-centred 'tuapapa' for teaching and learning practice, as the project was delivered.

Academic and attitudinal changes occurring within the classroom as observed by the staff and evidenced by the data, have been attributed in large part to the tutorials for a number of reasons:

- The students did not 'graduate' from the tutorials until they were considered to be fully prepared for the course assessment, which heavily reduced the re-sits required by students.
- A classroom culture specific to the tutorials meant that as the attending numbers reduced, the remaining students reconfigured themselves as a working group to continue strategies of peer support. Nobody was left to 'feel like a dummy'.
- Student self-evaluation of their ability in maths during the interview process was found to be mostly 'confident'. However, when confronted with actual course content, this self-assurance took a blow. It was during the tutorials that student confidence was observed to be reinstated to each individual's personal perception.
- For those who identified the need for some assistance with maths at the interview stage, the compulsory nature of the tutorials were an opportunity for them to assess themselves against the new learning without being 'separated out'.
- Increased student confidence in numeracy flowed into other learning throughout the year.
- There were increased numbers of enquiries and commitment to pathways to higher learning from the students.
- The students were making firm plans for 2008.
- The project staff alongside the students were confident that employment prospects for participants had vastly improved as a direct result of the deeper understanding they had developed for numeracy.

### **Publication details**

A paper discussing these results was presented to the National Bridging Conference, held at Unitec in Auckland, September 2007.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Time and low student to teaching staff ratio.
- The willingness on the part of the student to attend tutorials outside their normal class curriculum.
- Utilising the goodwill generated by the students to help each other.
- Allowing Māori students their tikanga of community support to be brought into the tutorial classes.
- Being prepared to shift the power base between learner and teacher. Allowing students to engage in a variety of learning formats such as peer tutoring and learning; consultative problem-solving, community learning and goodwill.

- Drawing on natural leadership ability and encouraging strong role models within the classroom.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

- Discussion and collaboration between the vocational tutor and the TLA at the start of the semester is critical for a good student-to-tutor ratio.
- Tutorials were necessarily held outside the course curriculum. While attendance could not be demanded of the students, they were all advised at the interview that attendance was expected. There was 100% 'buy-in'.
- Early intervention response to determine the student's learning status and identify needs for small group teaching and learning or individualised one-to-one tuition.
- Developing a range of quality exercise sheets with answers, as formative assessments to prepare students for their course's summative assessment.
- Breaking the numeric principles into distinct modules of learning.
- Allowing students opportunities to discuss, show and share their individual strategies for problem solving as a catalyst for building a whole range of strategies upon which they can draw.
- Let them practise, practise, practise.

### **Contact details**

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## Decoding the Academic Discipline: Content Support through a Peer Tutor Programme

### Key words

Peer tutoring; cooperation between departments and learning support; content support

### Brief description of the programme

The LDC at AUT coordinates, trains and pays for a programme of peer tutoring in which senior students (Peer Tutors) deliver tuition sessions to students who are enrolled in the same programme which they have recently successfully completed.

The Peer Tutors deliver their sessions of tutoring in the spaces of the LDC's Self Access Learning Labs, the administrative staff of which organise the appointments, timetables, marketing and pay details for the scheme.

TLAs identify content areas that students routinely ask for support in. The Peer Tutor Coordinator then contacts the relevant academic department, which nominates one or more potential peer tutors who are then interviewed. Appropriate selection is made, taking into account matters such as personality, communication skills and enthusiasm. The Peer Tutors are then trained and a contract drawn up for the semester, guaranteeing them an agreed number of paid hours per week.

### Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance

In 2008, for the first time, the Student Information System (ARION) was used to generate data showing impact of the Peer Tutor programme on student success and retention. Success and retention of students in their mainstream programmes could be obtained and comparisons made between those who had used LDC Peer Tutors and those in the same mainstream programme who had not.

Completion and retention are based on the completion codes of grades. Below is a list of completion codes – only codes 2, 3 and 4 are used to calculate completion and retention, the other are interim codes:

## PEER TUTORING PROGRAMMES

### Provider

Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre, Auckland University of Technology

### What the programme addresses

Improved retention and pass rates of Asian and Pasifika students through the provision of peer tutoring

1	Still to complete course	Completion =	$\frac{2}{(2 + 3 + 4)}$
2	Completed course successfully		
3	Completed course unsuccessfully		
4	Did not complete course		
5	Practicum to complete	Retention =	$\frac{(2 + 3)}{(2 + 3 + 4)}$
6	Yet to complete - Level 9&10		
7	Extension or under moderation		
0	Still to Complete Course, valid ext		

In three faculties there was a positive correlation of students who received peer tutoring with their success and retention in their mainstream programme:

Faculty	Seen Peer Tutor 2008	No. of students	Pass	Retained
Applied Humanities	Y	18	78%	91%
	N	1304	74%	83%
Business	Y	32	87%	92%
	N	3997	82%	89%
Design and Creative Technologies	Y	11	82%	85%
	N	695	75%	85%

When looking at ethnicity, it appears that Peer Tutors were most helpful in enhancing the academic performance of Asian students who were also the most frequent users of the service. Pasifika students also benefited from the service. For both these groups of students, it may have been particularly helpful for senior students to decode the culture of the discipline and the academic environment for students who are new to the institution. For Māori students, on the other hand, the pass rates of those who used the Peer Tutor scheme were lower than those who did not, while for Pākehā students there was no impact on success and retention. More research would be needed to explore this data further, through surveys and interviews.

Ethnicity	Seen TLA Tutor 2008	No. of students	Pass	Retained
Asian	Y	36	92%	95%
	N	3314	80%	89%
Pākehā	Y	25	88%	92%
	N	3328	88%	92%
Māori	Y	12	66%	80%
	N	740	74%	81%
Pasifika	Y	17	67%	88%
	N	930	58%	71%

## **Why this programme is important**

There is a myriad of disciplines in any institution and early in the life of Te Tari Awhina, a decision was made that TLAs would concentrate on learning skills, not on discipline support (which was seen as the responsibility of departments) - except for the three 'core languages' of the institution which were defined as English, Te Reo Maori and mathematics. However, at times, significant numbers of students presented with pressing content needs and, to meet those needs, a Peer Tutor programme was set up during the late 1990s. Peer Tutors are senior students who have often recently been through the same paper as the students whom they are tutoring and can give content support as well as sharing unofficial knowledge, such as, where to find second hand textbooks, useful websites, etc.

To provide a Peer Tutor programme which delivers content support, using senior students who have recently experienced the curriculum being encountered by their tutees and who are mandated by the relevant academic department, allows the institution to deliver strategic support for students who need to be inducted into the knowledge, skills and attitudes of a particular discipline and department. Clearly, this support may be of particular value to first or second generation immigrant students: represented in the statistics above by Asian and Pasifika students. The fact that the Peer Tutors are paid, trained and supervised by the LDC means that their teaching skills and interaction with students is monitored in a low-key but rigorous manner.

## **Critical success factors**

- Identification by TLAs of content areas in which tuition is frequently requested by students.
- Networking by TLAs with faculty/discipline staff.
- Confidence of academic departments in the LDC to select and train Peer Tutors.
- Two half day training sessions delivered by TLAs.
- Delivery of peer tutoring within the premises of the Self Access Learning Labs, enabling informal monitoring of the Peer Tutors.
- Excellent administration through Self Access Learning Lab administration staff.

## **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

- Gain budget for such a programme – can start with a small amount – Peer Tutors paid at two steps above the minimum administration step.
- Identify curriculum areas frequently requested, e.g. anatomy, chemistry, accounting.
- Liaise with academic departments and obtain recommendations of senior students.
- Interview students and choose students who demonstrate cultural, pedagogical and communication skills.
- Train successful Peer Tutors and negotiate hours – agree to pay a weekly wage based on these set hours.
- Provide spaces for tutoring to occur where learning support staff are able to observe teaching sessions.
- Provide letters of appreciation each semester to Peer Tutors.
- Report on efficacy of Peer Tutor Programme to departments involved.

## **Contact details**

- Jeanette Wikaira, Self Access and Online Coordinator, Te Tari Āwhina the Learning Development Centre, AUT, < Jeanette.wikaira@aut.ac.nz >
- Fe Day, Head of Centre, Te Tari Āwhina the Learning Development Centre, AUT, <Fe.Day@aut.ac.nz>





## PASS – Peer Assisted Study Sessions Supporting First Year Learners

### Key words

PASS; Peer Assisted Study; student success; collaborative learning; learning communities

### Brief description of the programme

Te Puna Ako Learning Centre (TPALC) at Unitec Institute of Technology (Unitec) trialled a PASS scheme for the first time in Semester One of 2008. PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) programmes have been established in a number of tertiary institutions across Australasia to provide supplemental study assistance (Murray, 2009). PASS programmes usually target first and second year courses, most often in areas with particularly demanding content such as business, sciences and computer science. PASS has multiple purposes which include:

- Reducing attrition within targeted subjects.
- Improving student grades within targeted subjects.
- Assisting students to make a successful transition to tertiary study
- Fostering independent learning.
- Developing transferable skills.

### TPALC's role

A staff member at the TPALC co-ordinated the scheme and worked in conjunction with faculty/discipline lecturers to identify first year compulsory courses with historically low pass rates. PASS was initially trialled in three first year courses: a Bioscience course, a Principles of Biology course, and an Information Systems in Business course. High achieving past students from the relevant courses were recruited as PASS leaders and before semester began these leaders undertook a two day training course provided by TLAs. This training was focused on providing PASS leaders with the skills and knowledge to model effective approaches to learning and included sessions on topics such as group facilitation, group dynamics, and session planning. Following this initial training the TLA co-ordinating PASS provided on-going support to the leaders through meetings, observations, assistance with session planning and liaison with faculty/discipline staff.

### The role of the PASS leader

In addition to the PASS sessions, PASS leaders were paid to attend 50% of the first year course's lectures and to prepare for their PASS sessions. PASS was available to all students within the targeted course and participation was voluntary. The weekly one-hour sessions began in week two and ran until the end of the semester. Sessions were closely linked with course content with each PASS session being focused on the review of the past week's lecture material. In terms of the planning for the PASS sessions, leaders prepare

## PEER TUTORING PROGRAMMES

### Provider

Te Puna Ako Learning Centre, Unitec Institute of Technology

### What the programme addresses

Improving student learning and success in core first year courses which are recognised as possessing difficult content

exercises based on their lecture attendance, access to course texts/online course material and their own experience of the course. These resources are then used as a basis of the activity in a session. While PASS leaders provide direction and structure in the sessions, at the beginning of each session leaders discuss with students what course content they would like to review. Students in typical PASS sessions might:

- Review lecture notes or textbooks to identify important concepts.
- Work through practice exercises and discuss solutions to problems.
- Compare lecture notes.
- Complete diagrams / process charts.
- Prepare glossaries.
- Identify and discuss exam strategies.
- Identify questions that need to be followed up with lecturers.

### **Outcomes at the end of the trial**

PASS operated well in two of the three courses that were part of the trial. However, it did not work well in Information Systems in Business. It is difficult to identify the exact reasons why PASS did not connect with students in this course. It is important to note that at the beginning of the trial in Information Systems in Business only 4 students out of a total of 29 signed up for PASS. From the outset there did not appear to be significant interest in this kind of peer learning experience. Furthermore, there was anecdotal evidence from the PASS leader and students who attended PASS that attendance was low in the standard course lectures. Despite promotion of PASS and lecturer and departmental support, PASS failed to attract more than one or two students per session on average over the course of the semester.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance in two PASS courses**

The analysis of the attendance records, student evaluation and final grades for Principles of Biology showed that:

- There was significant student interest in the PASS scheme. A total of 20 out of the 54 students enrolled in the course attended at least one PASS session. Attendance varied over the course of the semester with an average of 12 students attending each session by the end of semester.
- The feedback from students was very positive with most students commenting on the value of being able to ask questions in a supportive environment and being able to have group discussions. In the PASS evaluation 91% of students indicated that participating in PASS had improved their understanding of subject content.
- The students who regularly attended PASS achieved significantly higher grades on average than those who did not participate regularly. Eight out of 54 students attended seven or more PASS weekly sessions and these students earned an average final grade of 75%. This can be compared with those who did not attend PASS earning an average final mark of 54%.

The analysis of the attendance records, student evaluations and final grades for Bioscience 1 shows that:

- There was significant student interest in the PASS scheme. Attendance over the semester varied but by the end of the semester 28 out of 36 students had attended at least one voluntary session, with an average of 15 students per week attending the study sessions.
- The feedback from students was very positive with most students again commenting on the value of being able to ask questions in a supportive environment and being able to have group discussions. In the PASS evaluation 83% of students indicated that participating in PASS had improved their understanding of subject content and been an enjoyable learning experience.
- The students who regularly attended PASS achieved significantly higher grades on average than those who did not participate regularly. Nine out of 36 students attended seven or more PASS weekly sessions and these students earned a final grade average of 70% compared with those who attended PASS once or not at all earning an average of 45%.

While it is difficult to isolate the exact contribution PASS made to student learning in these two courses, there is an indicative positive link between regular attendance and higher grades in these courses supported by the PASS scheme.

### **Why this programme is important**

The PASS programme is important because it provides students with a collaborative learning experience that is closely linked to course content. PASS sessions allow students to revise lecture material, discuss difficult concepts, undertake activities and build up a knowledge of discipline-specific approaches to study. Moreover, students who participate in PASS may become part of an engaged learning community and will have opportunities to get to know their peers as well as their PASS leader. PASS leaders also benefit by developing interpersonal and group facilitation skills as well as deepening their familiarity with course content. In addition, the establishment and management of the PASS programme has also contributed to closer working relationships between TLAs and faculty/discipline lecturers from the participating departments.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- The provision of regular study sessions built into the timetable that are focused on reviewing course material covered in the past week's lectures.
- Having a successful senior student who possesses recent experience of the course and can relate to the students' experiences of the course lead the PASS sessions.
- The emphasis in PASS sessions on collaborative learning through discussion and group activities to help students build their knowledge of course content and study skills.
- Providing students with a relaxed 'lower stakes' learning environment in which they can feel comfortable about asking questions without fear of a course lecturer forming negative impressions of the student's knowledge or ability.
- The relationships built between students, students and PASS leaders and connections to other support (including academic support) through the sessions.
- Ongoing monitoring and support from a trained and experienced PASS co-ordinator.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Attending the PASS Supervisor training offered by the Australian National Centre for PASS at the University of Wollongong. The two day course provides attendees with valuable insights into how to establish a PASS programme, what the major hurdles can be and how to avoid/mitigate

some of these issues. In addition, attendees receive a body of useful resources/templates to aid in the administration of the programme.

- Identifying courses that are recognised by students as possessing difficult content and have historically low pass rates. For students to attend voluntary classes, in addition to their regular lecture times, there must be a perceived need to attend.
- Timetabling the PASS sessions into 'good slots' that follow the lecture times as much as possible. PASS sessions also need to be scheduled to allow all students in the course to attend at least one PASS session. Because of the voluntary nature of PASS, times such as Friday afternoon are best avoided.
- Strong support of the programme from the faculty/discipline lecturers. A positive working relationship with faculty/discipline lecturers is important for a number of reasons: faculty/discipline lecturers provide course information to the TLA; and (in conjunction with TPALC staff) organise the timetable/book rooms; help identify suitable leaders; and promote PASS to students.
- Provision of adequate training and on-going support for PASS leaders. The relationship between the PASS leader and the students is extremely important for PASS to work well. Therefore, leaders need access to good support so they can facilitate the PASS sessions effectively.
- Careful consideration needs to be given to implementing a PASS programme in a course where there are significant attendance issues. If students are not attending timetabled lectures regularly they may not be interested in attending additional voluntary sessions.

### **Contact details**

- Catherine Mitchell, Learning Development Lecturer at Te Puna Ako Learning Centre, <cmitchell@unitec.ac.nz>

### **Reference**

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## Preparing Postgraduate EAL Students for Thesis Writing

### Key words

English as an additional language (EAL) students; postgraduate thesis and dissertation writing; writing skills development; better completion rates

### Brief description of the course

Since 1999, the SLCUA has been running a 9-day intensive course for English as an Additional Language (EAL) students who will be undertaking a postgraduate thesis or dissertation in the following year. The course is conducted over a two-week period in November, soon after the completion of the second semester examinations. This period is appropriate for delivering the course as it is usually when prospective thesis/dissertation students start making plans for their research and discussing these with appropriate staff in their departments.

Attendance of the course is voluntary. Over the two-week period it covers the following aspects of thesis/dissertation writing:

- (i) Planning (which includes clarification of thesis expectations, the elements of a thesis proposal, choosing and refining a thesis topic, designing research, writing an ethics application, self management, and working with the supervisor).
- (ii) Transition from planning to process (which includes generating ideas through reading, and structuring a thesis).
- (iii) Process (which includes organizing ideas, reviewing the literature, thinking and writing critically, preliminary writing, effective use of technology, writing a literature review, and approaches to writing).
- (iv) Transition from process to product (which includes writing techniques for sentences and paragraphs, and redrafting).
- (v) Product (which includes editing and proofreading skills, and presentation skills).

The students who come to the course come from a wide range of subject disciplines, so the TLAs who teach the course make it clear from the beginning that there are important differences in the way theses and dissertations from different subject disciplines are organised and written. The common features of good theses/dissertations are highlighted, and the course focuses on developing students' skills in demonstrating research competence through the writing they produce. Students are also encouraged to discuss topics and issues covered during the course with their supervisors or prospective supervisors.

As with most other learning centre courses, this course is highly interactive with lots of exercises for the participating students so that they can try applying the various skills using their own research ideas. The students are also encouraged to ask questions and raise issues throughout the course, as these questions and

## FOUNDATION SKILLS PROGRAMMES

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### Provider

The Student Learning  
Centre, The University of  
Auckland

### What the programme addresses

Completion rates of  
postgraduate EAL thesis  
writers

issues occur to them.

### **Why this course is important**

This course is important because the single biggest problematic issue that most EAL students encounter in their tertiary studies is writing. The biggest and most challenging piece of writing that most postgraduate students need to produce to meet the requirements of their degree is the thesis or dissertation.

Most New Zealand tertiary institutions have a significant proportion of EAL students, comprising a mixture of international and new immigrant students. For some institutions in particular (i.e. those that offer research based postgraduate degrees), the proportion of EAL postgraduate students is likely to increase because of factors like the Ministry of Education's aspirations to attract more international doctoral students. Thus, courses like the one described here, which provide postgraduate EAL students with the necessary up-skilling to better manage and write their theses and dissertations, address a genuine need and are therefore crucial in the current tertiary education environment.

### **Tangible evidence that this course has a positive impact on student performance**

A paper describing this course was written in 2005 and published as a journal article in 2006 (see publication details below). The paper reported on the retention and completion rates of the 72 students who had participated in the course between 1999 and 2002. The following were the key findings:

- There was a high overall *retention* rate of 92%.
- There was a high overall *completion* rate of 84.5% (for Masters and PhD students). For Masters students only, the completion rate was even higher at 98.3% (numerous PhD students were still completing their thesis at the time the report was written.)
- The Masters students completed their thesis very efficiently: all but one of them completed and submitted their thesis *within one year of enrolment*.
- The completion rate for the Masters students (98.3%) was significantly higher compared to the completion rates for three of the biggest faculties in the University for the same period.

Feedback received from students about this course has also been consistently positive. In course evaluation forms, the average ratings given by the students for the 'overall quality of the course' have been higher than the university averages. In response to open-ended questions on the evaluation forms, students have reported the following as the aspects that they liked best or that they found most helpful:

- the knowledge they gained from the course.
- the range of topics covered.
- the course instructors.
- the clarity of ideas presented.

### **Publication details**

Manalo, E. (2006). The usefulness of an intensive preparatory course for EAL thesis writers. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5, 215–230.

### **Critical success factors of this course**

- The intensive nature of the course means that there is sufficient time available to cover most of the key organisational/planning considerations, and management and writing skills, involved in thesis/dissertation writing.
- Likewise, because the course is run over 9 days, there is sufficient time available to incorporate lots of exercises to get student participants to apply the considerations, methods and skills to their own planned theses or dissertations. Thus, many potential and actual difficulties in application are identified and addressed during the course.
- The TLAs who plan, organise, and teach the course possess considerable experience in working with postgraduate thesis and dissertation students, including students from EAL backgrounds.
- The course is provided at the right time of year for the target students concerned: as noted earlier, the period immediately after the second semester exams is usually the time when upcoming thesis and dissertations students start planning. The course also provides a good guide for how students can best use the summer months, following the course and prior to the start of the first semester, to give themselves a head start in work necessary for their thesis or dissertation.

### **Action plan that can be used in providing a similar course**

To organise and provide an intensive course like this, to prepare postgraduate EAL students for thesis or dissertation writing, the following would be helpful:

- Identifying (with the appropriate faculty/discipline staff) the thesis/dissertation issues that need to be addressed (i.e. what problems EAL thesis/dissertation writers most frequently encounter; what staff consider to be the most useful skills for EAL thesis students to develop).
- Incorporating the above suggestions with what TLAs (who will be teaching the intensive course) know would be helpful in facilitating effective management and implementation of the thesis/dissertation writing process – to plan and structure the contents of the course.
- Considering the most appropriate time to offer the intensive course to students. This consideration needs to take into account the students' workload, the viability of their attending an intensive course (which is usually only possible during the study breaks), and the proximity of the course to the time when the students would actually start on their thesis or dissertation.
- Keeping good records of the students who attend the course so that it may be possible to track their progress (with their permission/agreement as appropriate).
- Ensuring that the TLAs employed to teach the course possess the necessary experience, knowledge and skills not only about thesis and dissertation writing, but also about working with EAL students.

### **Contact details**

- Associate Professor Emmanuel Manalo, Head of the Student Learning Centre, University of Auckland, <e.manalo@auckland.ac.nz>
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## Online Skills Survey

### Key words

Early identification; early intervention; literacy; numeracy

### Brief description of the programme

Student Learning Services at Wintec (SLSW) has developed an online assessment tool to identify students' learning difficulties so early intervention strategies can be applied.

The tool, referred to as an Online Skills Survey, is an early intervention computer programme which provides information about the individual literacy and numeracy skills of new students. It aims to provide faculty tutors with an awareness of the students who may be academically at-risk and the patterns of skill areas with which students have difficulties. Consequential interventions can be provided by the faculty/discipline tutor and/or through small group and individual learning with the SLSW's TLAs. The SLSW can also provide appropriate additional accommodations including note-takers, reader/writers and use of adaptive technology.

At the beginning of the first semester of 2009, 630 new students from 30 programmes completed the Skills Survey within the first few weeks of each programme's start date. The tool is suitable for Level 1 - 3 programmes, although some specifically targeted Level 4 programmes participated. Programmes involved were from the hospitality, hairdressing, beauty, tourism, computing, business, horticulture, floristry, generic foundation, construction, motor industry, mechanical, electrical, and veterinary nursing disciplines.

The tool development process involved researching existing online and paper-based literacy and numeracy assessment tools both nationally and internationally. Different models were explored and an awareness of the types of items able to be included within the confines of the electronic medium became apparent.

Prior to the decision to develop a Wintec Online Skills Survey, extensive research for an existing national or international on-line or paper-based tool was made. Different models were explored and the various methods used to assess literacy and numeracy skills were considered. An awareness of the types of items able to be included within the confines of the electronic medium became apparent. A suitable tool that was adult appropriate with content and vocabulary relevant to New Zealand students was not located. However, the scoping exercise provided key information to assist with the development of a tool, some of which included using non-fiction text, readability levels, clarity of questions and instructions, having a minimum number of items to provide reliability and instructional design.

Moodle, Wintec's Course Management System, was used to develop the tool as an online module. It involves a series of quizzes, drop-down boxes, fill in the gap and drag/drop activities. The reading text can be provided electronically or

## FOUNDATION SKILLS PROGRAMMES

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### Provider

Student Learning Services,  
Waikato Institute of  
Technology

### What the programme addresses

Retention rates, successful  
outcomes, timely detection  
of students with learning  
difficulties

from a paper copy. All of the results can be graded electronically except for the written task, which can only be graded manually. Faculty/discipline tutors have access to whole class results, individual quiz results and individual student responses. The results are clear and easy to interpret with the opportunity for more computer literate faculty tutors being able to move result information into Excel spreadsheets for more in depth data analysis.

The skills surveyed focused on identifying specific reading comprehension skills using non-fiction text pitched at the newspaper level – literal and inferential/evaluative questions, vocabulary knowledge, spelling, grammar usage, sequencing, and basic writing and maths skills (e.g. calculations and maths problems within context). The stages within the TEC Learning Progressions were considered when developing the question items.

In order to validate the Skills Survey and ascertain if it would indeed identify at-risk students before it was introduced to the Wintec-wide student Levels 1-3 and 4 cohort, eight programmes representing 102 students, participated in a pilot study. Four were paper-based trials; the remaining piloted the e-version. Some were new students: others were mid way through their semester which enabled faculty/discipline tutors to moderate the findings. Tutors all concurred with the pilot results confirming the identified at-risk students. High patterns of need were identified in reading comprehension at inferential/critical level, spelling, maths equations and maths within context. Quiz items from the pilot were analysed and amendments were made. In response to student feedback, an alternative reading text and related quiz items were developed, giving faculty tutors the option of choosing the appropriate version for their students.

As the Skills Survey was a Wintec Executive initiative to help improve retention rates, Heads of Schools supported the implementation of the tool. Staff training about the purpose of the Skills Survey (purposely not referred to as an assessment), the pilot findings, survey use, and how to access, assess and interpret the results was provided. Training took place in computer laboratories giving faculty/discipline tutors the opportunity to trial the tool themselves. However, faculty/discipline tutors who did not use computers within their teaching environment were more reluctant to explore the tool's possibilities.

The task of scheduling classes in computer laboratories to complete the Skills Survey was instigated and established in liaison with programme managers and faculty tutors. The significant challenge of accessing sufficient computer facilities for all 30 programmes at the beginning of the year was overcome, resulting in the survey being completed over 46 sessions.

TAs facilitated the survey sessions for all the 30 programmes taking the opportunity to further support faculty/discipline tutors in accessing the grades and interpreting the results. This was an effective strategy. As students were completing the survey, faculty tutors were able to read the results giving faculty/discipline tutors immediate 'buy-in' to the tool's potential usefulness. This opportunity helped dispel fears of the computer tool being too complicated to use.

The anticipated concerns that students who were not computer literate would be disadvantaged when completing the survey did not become an issue. The two 'computer reluctant' students had the opportunity to use paper-based copies. However, some initial computer programming gremlins became problematic. Although, theoretically, all newly enrolled students had access to Wintec's computer network, some had difficulty using their passwords for the first time and could not access the tool. A hotline facility to computer services became essential. To meet the Skills Survey's purpose of identifying student needs at the beginning of their programmes it is expected that

computer access will be an ongoing problem. Paper-based copies of the survey were available for students whose access remained unavailable, with an average of four students per class using these copies.

### **Why this programme is important**

The On-line Skills Survey helps to identify students with potential learning difficulties early in their programme so that faculty/discipline tutors and support services can provide timely intervention strategies before the students either withdraw or start failing assessments.

The project was in response to the findings of a Wintec Student Outcome Report (2007) that explored the reasons underpinning the 60% student retention rates at Wintec. The report identified at-risk students as those who were not attending class on a regular basis, had pre-existing learning difficulties, had failed assessments and were in a pattern of re-submitting, were students from low-decile schools, were first generation tertiary students and were second chance learners. The research findings also attributed the retention rate to students being under-prepared for tertiary study, having poor literacy, numeracy and/or study skills, failing to develop good social/study networks with their peers, being in the wrong programme and changing life circumstances leading to withdrawal. Recommendations from the report resulted in three key successful intervention strategies with at-risk students being established, including attendance monitoring, assistance with developing peer networks and early identification of learning problems and targeted support. The on-line Skills Survey focuses on the third identified intervention strategy.

Currently, incoming students follow a process which attempts to determine their readiness for tertiary learning and their likelihood of success. If students do not enrol online they are typically managed through brief pre-enrolment interviews at an open, busy enrolment centre. As many students either choose not to disclose that they have learning needs or they do not realise they do not have the skill level that is expected of their programme, it was decided that an initial assessment tool would help to identify the at-risk students. Initially it was envisaged that the Skills Survey would be used as part of the enrolment process, but technically this proved to be non-viable. The reliability and validity of students completing an online assessment at home was investigated, but later abandoned, as was testing in a controlled environment prior to enrolment despite being a time when online enrolments were being encouraged. Ultimately the decision was made to administer the Survey to students as an early part of their class schedule.

### **How this programme can have a positive impact on student performance**

It is too soon to provide tangible evidence to show that identifying students' learning needs at the beginning of programmes and implementing intervention strategies has been effective.

Grade results in the at-risk category indicated the following levels of concern: 7% of students' results indicated concerns with literal reading comprehension; 8% inferential reading comprehension; 42% spelling - of whom 16% were very high-risk; 14% sequencing sentences; 58% basic math calculations; and 40% contextualized math problems. In other quizzes, decimals and fractions were challenging for most participants with further analysis revealing that there was little understanding of place value.

After the completion of the surveys, TLAs and faculty/discipline tutors communicated about the identified at-risk students and possible intervention strategies that could be established. These included: SLSW individual and small group learning support; learning consultations with individual students to identify a need for note-taker, reader/writer and adaptive technology accommodations;

TLAs providing math up-skilling sessions in class and/or additional out-of-class workshops and faculty/discipline tutors adapting their delivery to help address the identified needs.

In one programme identified with a 50% maths need, the programme manager arranged for an experienced faculty/discipline tutor to team teach and model maths sessions with a less experienced tutor. Faculty/discipline tutors provided pre-course maths sessions, either within or outside their scheduled timetable.

Faculty/discipline tutors who attended workshops to review the Skills Survey or completed questionnaire forms gave positive feedback on its usefulness. Comments on how they may have adapted their teaching approach to meet the needs identified from the results included:

- Using different teaching styles and activities in class.
- Teaching basic maths before teaching GST.
- Really going over what an assignment actually says.
- Changing the format of some written assessments.
- Faculty/discipline tutors formally meeting to discuss their students, including high achievers and set up intervention strategies for those at-risk.
- Ensuring students identified are obtaining adequate understanding.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

The project will:

- Enhance student success and learning
- Provide information so that early intervention strategies can be implemented for identified students.
- Provide programme managers and/or faculty tutors with an early indication of students' possible learning needs.

Improve staff perceptions by:

- Providing faculty/discipline tutors with a mechanism to identify students with potential difficulties.
- Gaining faculty/discipline tutor 'buy in'.

Improve community perceptions by:

- Reducing the number of students who do not complete their programmes because they are not prepared for or well supported in their tertiary study.

Bring about a student centred philosophy by:

- Providing students with an understanding of their readiness, strategies and support systems available to guide them to become independent learners.

The project will be complete when:

- An assessment tool is implemented and the resulting information it generates is used to assist students.
- Associated policies and procedures are in place.

The project will be a success if:

- Students are successful in their learning.
- Early intervention learning support has been offered to identified students.
- Programme faculty tutors respond to the survey results and consider the students' potential difficulties in their teaching practice.

Risk Factors:

- Failure to meet milestones.
- Project not ready by set date.
- Staff expertise not available to develop or identify pre-assessment tool.
- Staff resources not available to work on the project.
- Staff refuse to use the tool.
- Staff resourcing is not adequate to provide the identified learning support.
- Tool is not effective for identifying learning needs for specific vocational areas.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Develop a 'terms of reference' document.
- Establish a project team to explore the parameters of the project including: its name, purpose, target group, when and how it will be implemented and implications involved pertaining to assessment appropriateness, reliability and validity.
- Identify key faculty/discipline tutors and programme managers to become critical colleagues and champions for the development, piloting and implementation process.
- Explore and review current on-line assessment tools.
- Research current theory, statistical principles and practice regarding literacy/numeracy assessment tools and the TEC Learning Progressions.
- Work collaboratively with instructional designers from the outset to develop the pre-assessment tool and understand the possibilities and restrictions of your institution's Course Management Systems.
- Pilot the tool within a controlled environment and review it for appropriateness, levels, usability, ease of instructions, grading tools, reliability and validity.
- Adjust tool as appropriate.
- Explore marketing strategies that encourage staff associated with selected level programmes, to see the benefits of using the tool.
- Develop recommendations, procedures and policies for managing and maintaining the pre-assessment tool (e.g. data, security, etc.).
- Develop and review criteria to evaluate the success of the tool.
- Establish an agreed timeline to ensure the implementation of the tool.

### **Contact details**

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## Developing Independent Learners: What Students and Staff Have to Say About the Difference Learning Support has Made to Them

### Key words

Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs); success and retention; academic achievement

### Brief description of the approach to student support

TLAs in tertiary education support learning in many areas within their institutions. The following is an example of the range and complexities of study support offered at the BoPP. This includes non-credit workshops, team-teaching, working collaboratively with staff, and one-to-one consultations. The ability to offer class and individualised responses, tailored to needs which vary across cohorts, programmes and disciplines, makes a very significant contribution to students' achievement outcomes, even though it can be hard to quantify. For this reason, it is important to consider the testimony offered through the voices of our customers: students and staff.

The provision of learning support is considered critical in the first semester of study and therefore the KSS team take an active part in the first two weeks of the students' introduction to tertiary study. TLAs deliver a Learn2Learn week-long course before the semester starts that offers workshops including generic study skills and some subject specific 'catch-up' courses. TLAs attend and speak at all faculty and programme orientations as well as running 'find your feet' sessions which alert students to the various services available to them.

This early establishment of a relationship encourages students to seek familiar faces when faced with problems as the semester progresses, with TLAs supporting students on a one-to-one basis covering all levels of learning, and assisting staff with classroom delivery of generic skills such as essay writing, referencing, time management and oral presentation - often tailored to the specific needs of a programme. TLAs also teach subject specific workshops on a regular basis especially where traditionally, students have struggled to understand. Some of these workshops include biology, maths, accounting, and economics. Essentially, TLAs offer whatever support is necessary for individuals to achieve successful outcomes. This diverse role requires flexibility in response to continual changes in the challenges of higher education, and a holistic approach to develop independent learners who can walk flexible career paths.

First year students have a diverse range of backgrounds. The main objective with new students when they visit the KSS is to assess or divide their problems into manageable components, for example personal, academic, or social. Many students can come with negative experiences of previous education. The kind of instruction and support that is offered is based on the ethos of

## FOUNDATION SKILLS PROGRAMMES

### Provider

Kahurangi Student  
Services, The Bay of Plenty  
Polytechnic

### What the programme addresses

Improving students' understanding and use of the appropriate material and structure to produce content of an acceptable academic standard for their programme of study

whanaungatanga, based on relationship-building rather than the normal hierarchical tutor-student regime.

Evaluation of the TLAs' contribution to student retention and success is at times difficult to measure. However, one contributing factor appears to be the centralised system of student support where in one place a team is gathered that has a range of complex skills, knowledge and abilities to service what could be termed generic education needs. Other important factors are the knowledge and skill base of the TLAs, and their ability to build supportive relationships with the student to allow them to work towards independence and ownership of their academic journey. The following comments from students illustrate these factors:

Knowledge:

- *You are a star, I got an A, the marker was very happy with grammar and sentence structure as well as APA referencing.*

Developing relationships:

- *An example of her dedication to students includes providing help for me when I was overseas for a month to complete my second year research project. I collected substantial amounts of data but was not sure how to work with it. I emailed (name) and obviously she spent some time thinking about my objectives and offered valuable advice on how to manipulate the data to show my objectives. She is kind hearted, supportive and someone I trust and have great admiration for.*

Developing independent learners:

- *(Name) has a brilliant way of guiding students to achieve what they want. We are thinking for ourselves by the second year.*
- *She took the time to help me understand when I wasn't quite getting it. Some of the things I have learnt from (name) I will carry with me forever.*

Tutors and lecturers are also highly appreciative of the input from TLAs:

- *I really want to thank you for the session you took with the Diploma in Graphic Design students on Monday afternoon regarding essay writing and time management. They found it incredibly beneficial and seem really on task with their summative essays. So thank you!!!!!!*
- *The session you took today on essay writing skills was absolutely fabulous and just what was needed. Spot on, I could not have asked for better. We will be calling on you again next year without a doubt. Thanks.*

### **Brief description of TLAs' work within programmes**

A TLA who had completed the Ministry of Education Learning 4 Living Numeracy programme (Ministry of Education, 2008) was requested to support mathematical skills and statistical data analysis in three programmes, two at foundation level and one at degree level. Upon consultation with the vocational tutor, the expected outcomes were to reduce the historically high numbers of re-sits. The secondary objective was to equip the students with basic numeracy skills that could be carried into everyday life.

By using the MoE diagnostic material and progressions, the TLA was able to identify areas of numeracy weakness within the class. In the first group, the tutorials ran for six weeks for three hours



per week, and 35 students took part in the first term. The main challenge was that students were disinterested in theory and were only motivated by the practical work in their programme. The TLA reassessed her approach to go beyond normal classroom management and introduced more interactive numeracy activities.

The numeracy programme has only been trialled since the start of 2009, but so far results are promising: 29 of the 35 students passed the unit the first time, a significant increase on last year when the unit was taught without the MoE framework. Classroom evaluations indicate one critical factor that contributed to this successful outcome was that the TLA had completed the numeracy programme and was able to contribute this academic application in a situation where a vocational tutor did not have the time or the same approach to retention and success.

The second foundation learning group was involved in a similar trial with the TLA taking a contextual maths lesson weekly for 10 weeks for 1 hour, with 50 students. The diagnostic and progressions were applied to 10 students to assess across the class. The challenge in this class was the number of students. Forty students sat the unit and 39 were successful the first time, providing clear, if informal evidence of the value of this learning support for the vocational tutor and the students. The ongoing learning from this exercise is to embed the methodology in day-to-day teaching, delivered next time by the vocational tutors, but still supported and assisted by specialised Foundation TLAs.

The third example of TLAs' support using the Learning 4 Living Numeracy programme in a targeted programme saw the TLA teaching alongside and supporting the faculty/discipline tutor with statistic modules. As a consequence of the work on these three programmes, the TLA is also in high demand for one-to-one consultations in economics maths, programming maths, and the collection and analysis of fieldwork data. Again, this type of assistance is typically more intensive during the students' first semester or two of study, and reduces as the student becomes a more independent learner.

Feedback from the programme coordinators of these three different courses attests to the value they place on the TLAs' contribution:

- *Your department services extend to one third of my first year students and drops off proportionally the second year. The service itself is an integral part in achieving our students' academic goals.*
- *I want to convey a big thank you for your help and support that has enabled me to teach statistics. Your help is invaluable especially when I had to teach a stats model to marine studies students, (a new module for me). The third year AUT BA Applied Science students also appreciate your help with their stats and scientific support; it is good for us to know we have got a stats guru in the learning centre we can all depend on!*
- *Just a note to say thank you for all your assistance with my students. I have had a great deal of feedback how helpful you are not only with accounting but also around areas of report writing, study methods and planning. And thank you for helping me with any issues that come up - it is good to talk to someone outside my office.*

### **Critical success factors**

- Ongoing support from senior management to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration.
- A culture of professional development and higher qualifications that supports the training of staff in programmes such as MoE's Learning 4 Living Numeracy programme.

- A commitment to the provision of foundation learning as a basis to provide a pathway for students into higher qualifications.
- An understanding of the diversity of our student body (including school leavers, second chance learners, mature students, international students and students with disabilities) and a commitment to provide learning support services that can meet their needs as individuals, allowing all to move towards independent learning and reach their full potential.

### **Action Plan for implementing strategies for independent learners**

- Identify the learning issues with a view to a holistic approach. Break down into manageable components, recording the support and/or actions that may be required. An example is literacy and numeracy needs, or essay writing skills time management.
- To achieve this:
  - Establish relationships early in the academic year with both tutors and students.
  - Identify workshops that will be effective in helping with study.
  - Run workshops relevant to needs.
  - Meet regularly with teaching staff.
  - Facilitate peer tutor support.
  - Provide TLA support.
  - Sponsor buddy systems in class.
- Once the options have been reviewed make decisions that fit the situation. For example, a series of appointments may need to be made to monitor individuals or group learning issues. If personal issues are hindering the learning, then counseling may have to be arranged.
- The buddy system may not exist as a formal policy in many institutions, however an informal arrangement can be made with the tutor and the student.
- Move towards developing independent learners by reducing dependency on appointments.
- The critical factor for positive outcomes is the relationship between student, staff and TLA based on trust and respect rather than a hierarchal regime.

### **Contact details**

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### **Reference**

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## Tertiary Level Writing and Study Skills Course

### Keywords

Academic writing; tertiary study skills; research, critical thinking; retention

### Brief description of the programme

This is a 25 hour (one week) course offered prior to the beginning of semesters, for the past 12 years. It is provided through Adult Community Education funding, which enables it to be fee free to students. Normally, three or four additional course occurrences are scheduled during the year, with at least half of these being specific to students beginning nursing and midwifery degrees. This is because of the substantial number of health studies students who enrol in the course, in comparison to students from other disciplines.

The Study Skills and Writing Course is provided by SLSW. The co-ordination and teaching is provided by three senior SLSW TLAs. Two TLAs have extensive knowledge and expertise in teaching subjects that are fundamental to writing for academic purposes, learning processes and managing tertiary studies; the third TLA has had extensive teaching/management background in the science department and now works part time in the SLSW providing science support for students. In addition, library staff and a computer instructor contribute to the programme. Some departments are proactive in endorsing the course and advising their students of it. The SLSW liaises with the Enrolment and Information Centre who are very committed to informing students about the course.

The course is scheduled from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm, Monday to Friday. A TLA introduces a writing task (a short essay) as the focus of in-class work, and recommends students work during their own time on the daily homework tasks clearly listed on the programme. The essay writing is guided by a marking criteria sheet which is collected with the essays on Friday, for TLAs to write comments, before returning them by mail. The approach throughout the course is relaxed, supportive, and interactive as students 'learn by doing' the skills and strategies being taught. The sessions introduce and reinforce the importance of research, referencing, critical thinking and writing skills and processes. The programme is prepared for one, two or three groups (of 20) and is regularly reviewed in the context of previous course evaluations, student enrolment trends and the institution's current and future directions. A booklet of the handouts, PowerPoint slides and exercises used during the course is given to each student.

The course is predominantly aimed at adult students who are transitioning into tertiary studies, and for whom tertiary education is a new experience, often fraught with unknown academic expectations. Some are recent school leavers; however the norm is that many are returning as second chance adult learners. Included in the target group are some returning students who may have struggled during their first year of tertiary study and have self selected or been directed by a faculty tutor to attend the course as a preparatory step. In the

## FOUNDATION SKILLS PROGRAMMES

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### Provider

Student Learning Services,  
Wintec, Hamilton

### What the programme addresses

Increasing students' understanding of the processes, skills and expectations of academic writing and tertiary study. The course supports first year undergraduate students to transition into tertiary education and contributes to subsequent student retention and performance

past, some departments that interviewed students as part of their enrolment processes, have recommended a number of students undertake the SLSW course prior to commencing their studies within the faculty/discipline.

A common characteristic among students is the diverse range of abilities and prior learning experiences. Needs can range from struggling with simple sentence and paragraph construction, to those who are seeking psychological confirmation of their academic readiness. Almost all students present with gaps in their knowledge about academic expectations. Therefore, instruction and content is designed with the aim to clarify expectations about writing conventions, academic vocabulary, referencing, critical thinking, realities of managing one's personal life and study commitments. Providing students with immediate and non-judgmental feedback is critical to develop successful learning strategies and build confidence.

### **Why this programme is important:**

Student completion and retention rates are key measurement factors of TEC's goal of improvement in student success rates. ITP investment plans now commit institutions to targets regarding student success. In 2008 Wintec's Student Experience Team piloted a project to identify, for early support intervention, students 'at risk' of being unsuccessful. Prior to this, Wintec's 'Student Outcome Report' (2007) outlined at risk students as including second chance learners, those who are the first in their families to study for a tertiary qualification, students from low-decile schools and those who are under-prepared for tertiary study for a variety of academic and personal reasons. The Study Skills and Writing Course is one means of providing early intervention support to improve students' first year learning experiences and subsequent retention.

### **Tangible evidence that this programme makes, or made, a positive difference to student performance**

The effectiveness of this programme is assessed and guided by the institution's Student Evaluation of Teaching, Modules and Programmes (SETMAP) principles and processes. Students are asked to rank the course content using a three point scale of: not helpful, helpful and very helpful (Tables 1 & 3). They are also asked to comment on and rate teaching delivery on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Tables 2 & 4). The final two questions seek students' recommendations about improvements and general closing comments.

In 2009, as in previous years, the SLSW provided two consecutive courses during January and February. Both courses provided a suite of study skills, writing and research related sessions and a guided essay topic that was appropriate to the given cohort. The second week's timetable was designed as a four day occurrence as it historically coincides with a statutory holiday. The courses attracted 39 enrolments for week 1 and 38 enrolments for week 2. Evaluation ratings indicate 99% of respondents identified sessions as helpful or very helpful (Table 1) and 98% rated the course as helpful or very helpful (Table 3).

Table 1: Students' rating of course content

**Week 1: Study Skills and Writing Course (5 days)**

- How helpful do you think each session was in preparing you for tertiary study?

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Not Helpful</b>	<b>Helpful</b>	<b>Very Helpful</b>
Thinking and learning	1	11	17
Essay structure and process	0	4	25
Note taking	0	13	16
Time management	1	8	20
Reading strategies	0	10	19
Sentences and paragraphs	0	4	25
Library orientation	0	7	22
Essay research and planning	0	6	23
Quoting, paraphrasing and referencing	0	3	26
Learning to use databases	0	9	20
Summarising	0	12	16
Drug calculations	0	0	29
Editing and proof reading	0	11	18
Learning to use databases	0	6	22
Introductions and conclusions	0	13	16
Learning science	0	3	26
Using Mytec and Moodle	2	9	17
Reflective writing	0	12	17
<b>Mean</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>7.83</b>	<b>20.78</b>
<b>Mean as %</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>27.20</b>	<b>72.00</b>

99% of respondents identified sessions as helpful or very helpful

Table 2: Students' rating of teaching delivery

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Mean rating</b> (N= 29)
Tutors were well prepared	6.0
Tutors were professional in attitude	6.3
Tutors treated students with respect	6.4
Tutors made good use of examples and illustrations	6.3
Tutors provided feedback which was useful and constructive	6.2
Tutors stimulated my interest in the subject	6.2
Tutors seemed to know their subject matter well	6.6
Tutors facilitated my understanding of the study skills needed at a tertiary level	6.3

Table 3: Students' rating of course content

**Week 2: Study Skills and Writing Course (4 days)**

- How helpful do you think each session was in preparing you for tertiary study?

Topics	Not Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful
Thinking about learning	0	13	18
Essay structure and process	0	7	24
Strategies for dealing with course content	0	17	14
Note taking	0	13	17
Sentences and paragraphs	0	12	19
Time management	2	13	16
Reading strategies	1	13	16
Library orientation	0	17	16
Planning, introductions and conclusions	0	8	22
Quoting, paraphrasing and referencing	0	8	22
Active learning techniques	2	15	13
Using databases	1	10	18
Editing and proofreading	0	11	20
Reflective writing	0	11	20
<b>Mean</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>5.41</b>	<b>8.23</b>
<b>Mean as %</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>59.5</b>

Hence, 98% rated the course as helpful or very helpful.

Table 4: Students' rating of teaching delivery

Questions	Mean rating (N=31)
Tutors were well prepared	6.4
Tutors were professional in attitude	6.7
Tutors treated students with respect	6.9
Tutors made good use of examples and illustrations	6.5
Tutors provided feedback which was useful and constructive	6.5
Tutors stimulated my interest in the subject	5.9
Tutors seemed to know their subject matter well	6.6
Tutors facilitated my understanding of the study skills needed at a tertiary level	7.0

**General comments over week 1 and week 2 included:**

- It was a positive time with lots of good information.*
- I found this course extremely helpful for starting my degree, both for home life (getting family organised) and understanding workload.*
- Was a great course. I'm glad I attended. I have a better understanding on how to study and write essays, and what's expected of my work.*
- Made me realise I can achieve.*
- Non-judgemental, very fair and patient. Feedback great.*
- It made a difference that they knew and felt confident in teaching it.*

A few comments related to extending some teaching sessions and solving occasional computer user issues. The latter can arise as a factor of timetabling (fee free) preparatory courses prior to students' being fully enrolled on their course proper. The Enrolment and Information Centre were able to prioritise these enrolments and hence reduce student anxieties.

Overall, the 2009 course evaluations reflect a high level of student satisfaction in academic and psychological readiness to commence their course proper. These results are consistent with student evaluations that have been gathered over the past 12 years. It is recognised, however, that such data also has its limitations. As the SLSW continues to gather data on the effectiveness of such interventions, the next step must be to examine student success data in order to track the academic performance of study skills programme attendees and compare this to overall class grades and outcomes. Therefore it is not just the programmes TLAs offer which must continually evolve to meet our students' needs, but also the work our profession needs to do to keep improving the measures by which we evidence the difference we are making to our students.

### **Critical success factors of this programme:**

- Course builds students' academic and psychological readiness to transition into tertiary studies. Students have gained: instruction in a number of essential study skills and writing strategies, full awareness of support services/staff and supportive peer relationships.
- Students' awareness and regard for academic expectations are raised by engaging in an essay writing task and associated homework schedule. Through this approach, emphasis is placed on both the learning task and the importance of learning how to manage one's study and personal priorities. They are also guided by regular formative feedback during the week. Students receive their marked essays by return mail, with comments that focus on reaffirming existing skills and clarifying how other areas can be developed further.
- The timing of the course, prior to semester start dates, aims to increase accessibility to students and lessen pressure on competing commitments.
- No fee attached to course reduces financial constraints upon students.
- This teaching area needs be viewed as a specialist role where staff are knowledgeable and competent in teaching learning processes and academic writing discourses.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme:**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Identify and form collaborative relationships with key faculty/discipline tutors and programme managers (of first year courses) to achieve dual input and promotion of the course.
- Identify and form collaborative relationships with key staff in Enrolment and Information Services to ensure timely and accurate promotion of the course to key stakeholders.
- Promote the view of learning support as a specialised teaching area where staff are knowledgeable and competent to cover writing discourses, learning processes and study management.
- Create a student centred learning environment that allows time for self reflection and revised writing on the essay topic.
- Embed a self-directed writing schedule into the timetable that models how students can manage their study and personal obligations during the week.
- Prepare a study skills and writing handbook and provide this for students.

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## Tuhia ki te Rangi: a Writing Wānanga Initiative to Improve the Writing Capacity of Māori and Pasifika Students

### Key words

Cultural practice; practical essay writing; academic learning; FATs - fun activities; korero poto – discussion sessions; Tuākana – tutor mentoring; small group work; student–tutor relationship; staff collaboration; sense of belonging; connectedness

### Brief description of the programme

'Tuhia ki te Rangi' (TKTR) is the incorporation of Māori and Pasifika cultural practices in teaching academic writing skills while students work on an essay assignment. Key writing process functions (e.g. how to get started, planning research and writing and organising ideas into paragraphs) are taught and developed through a variety of activities including Akonga Tauira, ako and korero poto. It is expected that students will produce a draft of their essay assignment over the two and a half day wānanga.

The TKTR model insists on cultural practices to enhance students' capacity to connect their home life with university study. A cultural approach recognises the diversity of styles and learning practices among students; thus facilitation is more sensitive to individual and collective identities.

The TKTR objectives include providing the opportunity for the development of academic learning skills, building relationships among students, between students, Tuākana (tutor/mentor) and other staff, and students with the university. This is a collaborative initiative supported by SLCUA's Te Puni Wānanga and Fale Pasifika programmes, and Tuākana Arts (the tutor/mentor programme to support Māori and Pasifika students in the Faculty of Arts) and is promoted through the Tuākana tutor/mentor networks, email and the student intranet.

Participation requires students to agree to the kaupapa of the wānanga through signing a contract with the Tuakana Arts coordinator. Within the contract are expectations to be adhered to by students and what students can expect from the wānanga. For students, this includes working on one essay assignment only, bringing all necessary resources, being committed to actively participate in all wānanga activities with enthusiasm and conducting themselves with a high level of care and respect for self and others.

TKTR is expected to help students successfully participate in their courses through the development of academic learning skills, in particular essay writing. The wānanga environment is conducive to supporting students' academic success, developing collaborations (i.e. strong study and social networks), and building confident interaction and engagement with peers, the University of Auckland environment and teaching staff. Additionally, the wānanga provides

## PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT MĀORI AND PASIFIKA STUDENTS

### Provider

Te Puni Wānanga and Fale Pasifika - The Student Learning Centre, The University of Auckland

### What the programme addresses

The writing wānanga is a retreat that provides an opportunity for stage one Māori and Pasifika Arts students to improve and develop their academic writing ability, build their confidence and grow their knowledge

an opportunity for students to contribute to and be part of a Māori and Pasifika community of students and staff, and to be nurtured in leadership amongst Māori and Pasifika students, and tutor/mentors.

Tuākana tutors/mentors facilitate 'korero poto' (content discussion) sessions, working with groups or individuals. They are expected to be models of excellent behaviour and leadership, respond to content knowledge questions, provide guidance and reinforce study activities and instigate enthusiasm and fun. Tuākana participate in the organisation of the wānanga; being well informed enables all involved to share the same vision, in particular, communicating and promoting this to students.

Activities such as powhiri whakatau, mihimihi and whakawhanaungatanga endorse cultural identity and establish connections whereby relationships can be fostered. For example, students making whakapapa connections, doing the same course or having attended the same school. Kai is a further opportunity to build rapport between students and staff in a relaxed informal setting. With this engagement, trust is established and staff become more approachable and valued by students.

Korero mai are informal feedback discussions for students to report on their writing progress and provide an opportunity to acknowledge their accomplishments and value their performance. Feedback is executed either individually or in group activities to minimise embarrassment. FAT (fun activities) are object lessons that emphasise fun and intentionally remove students from their intense study activity. Study is often perceived by students as an unpleasant activity. Hence, FAT provides an opportunity for students to laugh at each other or themselves stimulating positivity and reenergising their motivation to persevere with their writing.

Akoranga Tauira (learning skills tutorials) are 30-minute, activity based academic learning skills sessions. Each session uses a task-based strategy whereby students practice before applying the skills to their own writing process. Chunking the tasks as part of the overall writing process helps students to manage and progress their individual writing; as each task is completed, confidence and motivation is increased. Most tasks use templates that have proven a valuable tool to guide thinking, maintain organisation of information and provide a tangible outcome. Tuākana reinforce the development of each skill through monitoring the application and continued discussion to provide clarity around content in relation to the essay. Keeping to 30-minute sessions is essential to ensure a student-led approach is maintained ensuring independent learning. It is also important to keep sessions succinct so that students remain in an active flow during the writing process.

Ako (student study periods) are goal oriented sessions – time and task rigorous, to advance students' writing progress. Students either work individually or in groups, as this is not a restricted time to sit and just write; students are free to participate in a variety of learning activities (e.g. content discussions, teaching their information or brainstorming).

Korero Poto is a content based session facilitated by Tuākana and led by students. Content is taught when necessary. However, students remain in control of the learning through asking questions or seeking insight through facilitated discussions. This is also an opportunity to get to know their Tuākana, form relationships, affirm knowledge and identify areas to be improved.

## **Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance**

Student Evaluations indicate the value of wānanga activities:

- Overall participants agreed to a high level of satisfaction with TKTR:  
Mean = 6.428 (on a scale of 1-7, where 1 = very poor and 7 = excellent), SD = 0.306.
- Akonga Taurira – of the eight skills sessions, those that were valued most highly included:
  - Making a plan of attack: Mean = 6.48.
  - Analysing your question and planning your research: Mean = 6.48.
  - Writing body paragraphs: Mean = 6.09.
  - Developing an argument: Mean = 6.05.
- Korero poto: Mean = 5.89.
- FAT: Mean = 6.15.
- Kai: Mean = 6.45.
- Venue: Mean = 6.7.
- Tuākana mentor tutor support: Mean = 6.7.

### **Student evaluation comments**

What were your expectations for the writing retreat?

- *To be helped and supported along the construction of one essay.*
- *To meet new people and have fun during the course of the retreat.*
- *To get help on essay preparation and a way to make writing assignments less stressful.*

What expectations were met during the retreat?

- *It is always good to feel supported. I am not alone with my learning difficulties.*
- *Well supported and met new people. Completed my essay to draft stage.*
- *More than expected. They helped me read between the lines of the essay question and also put paragraphs in logical order and also by linking each paragraph.*

What did you find most helpful with regards to the academic skills sessions?

- *The diagrams and whiteboard explanations.*
- *The discussion between the students and the tutors.*

What did you enjoy about the location?

- *I felt at home.*
- *Meeting all the nice friendly people.*
- *The atmosphere and how the tutors were awesome in providing an amazing event.*

What was effective about being with other students?

- *The experience and knowledge shared together and focus and commitment we all had.*
- *Talking it through; understanding and helping each other – especially through 1st year at uni.*
- *Good to work with people in our same stage – facing same problems.*
- *To know that you're in the same boat as others.*

What was effective about having content discussions with Tuākana mentors?

- *They helped enlighten things where I did not fully understand.*
- *They helped us a lot and they were enthusiastic and happy to be there.*

What did you enjoy about TKTR?

- *Tutors know what I need to know in my study.*
- *Meeting new people doing the same thing.*
- *The social interaction between peers and tutors.*
- *The discussions about writing skills and also getting my essay plan done. It was great and fun at the same time.*
- *Thank you so much for the opportunity. I have learnt so much in the two day course. Made new friends. But most importantly I have the confidence in understanding and actually starting an essay. I am on the road to A+.*

### **Essay assignment pass rate**

2007 - 22/26 students successfully passed their essay assignment

2009 - 11/12 students successfully passed their essay assignment

At face value this statistic only represents those who successfully passed their essay. However, in a broader sense, it is an indication of success related to the circumstances and expectations of each student who attend TKTR. These expectations correspond with needed improvement in various aspects of the writing process and also include having a supportive learning environment and the confidence to communicate with their peers and academic teaching staff. Prior to TKTR, students' prior experiences were mixed, with some students being successful in passing an essay assignment, others not passing or submitting, and some yet to submit a first essay. Recognising that students are at different levels in their writing performance, success could mean being able to plan an essay or writing a well structured essay, submission, as well as passing. Success in this instance includes any movement towards the achievement of a passing grade depending where they are at with their current essay performance.

The circumstances of each student are identified during the signing up to TKTR process.

### **Why this programme is important**

TKTR has established the following:

- Sustainable relationships among students, and between students and staff.
- Provided a teaching approach and learning environment that is culturally safe and connects students with the university community.
- Students thrived in the TKTR environment towards an improved level of independent learning and assignment completion.

### **Publication details**

- OShea, M., & Tarawa, M. (2008, November 19 – 21). *Tuhia ki te Rangī: Writing Retreat for Māori and Pasifika students*. Paper presented at the ATLAANZ Conference, Whitireia Community Polytechnic, Porirua, New Zealand.

### **To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:**

- Utilise culturally appropriate learning strategies.
- Collaborate with tutor/mentor programmes or similar.
- Be located to a suitably resourced space where students can work away from distractions.
- Conduct the workshop over at least two consecutive days.

- Merge learning skills with subject content.
- Attention to work on one essay assignment only.
- Evaluate essay assignment achievement prior and post attendance at TKTR.
- Create a strategic plan to improve on identified areas of concern during and post TKTR.
- Assess the improvement on individual areas of concern post TKTR.
- Compare individual performance on the one paper worked on in TKTR across other papers to gauge successful transfer of writing skills.

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## National Institute of Creative Arts and Industry<sup>1</sup> (NICAI) Tuākana<sup>2</sup> Research Assistant Training Programme

### Key words

Cultural practice; theory in practice; practical application; tutor/mentoring; small group work; leadership; Māori and Pasifika community of students and staff; research skills

### Brief description of the programme

In 2007 the programme was developed through consultation with the NICAI Associate Dean Research, other NICAI faculty who engage research assistants, and the Tuākana coordinators. A research skill set was determined corresponding with the aims of the initiative (as above) and the research requirements for NICAI built into a two day programme. The programme includes the following research skills: conducting interviews, data analysis, effective literature searching, kaupapa Māori and Pasifika methodology, literature review, research design, research proposals, research reading, time management, and writing a research report. The programme also utilises the expertise of Māori and Pasifika researchers, Māori and Pasifika NICAI graduates operating in their field of practice, and current NICAI Māori and Pasifika postgraduate students to facilitate sessions. For example a senior Pasifika academic from the Faculty of Education facilitated a 'research methodologies' discussion and a recent Māori Fine Arts PhD graduate delivered 'combining higher-level research with creative practice'.

An important part of the programme was to ensure that participating students would be rewarded for their already outstanding academic achievement. Students received a letter of congratulations with an invitation to participate in the programme, were paid for their attendance and hosted on the university marae. To further develop research capacity it was important that students got to put into practice what they had learned and gain experience in research. A pool of research assistant positions was created through an invitation to NICAI staff requiring research assistants either funded or non-funded. Ten students were then selected and deployed into the available research assistant positions.

### Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance

Two graduates participating in the NICAI Tuākana Research Assistant Training Programme indicated an interest in doing postgraduate studies but were not committed. As a result of the initiative both graduates and one other participant were committed and enrolled in a postgraduate course of study.

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Creative Arts and Industry (NICAI) includes the following departments: architecture, planning, fine arts music and dance

<sup>2</sup> Tuākana is a peer tutor mentor programme for Māori and Pasifika students

## PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT MĀORI AND PASIFIKA STUDENTS

### Provider

Te Puni Wānanga and Fale  
Pasifika - The Student  
Learning Centre, The  
University of Auckland

### What the programme addresses

To enhance the research  
skills of Māori and Pasifika  
students in NICAI,  
encourage their enrolment  
in postgraduate  
programmes, reward  
outstanding undergraduate  
achievement and create a  
pool of research assistants  
for NICAI staff active in  
research

Two students were involved in paid research projects; one of these two students, on completion of the research task, has gone on to be employed in two other research projects providing support for their postgraduate studies, and is ambitious to develop an academic career.

Another student has used the skills learned to develop a paper that was accepted by a peer-reviewed international conference.

All students have continued involvement in Tuākana peer mentor/tutoring.

### **Why this programme is important**

Through supporting students' growth as learners and researchers, there has been an increase in the number of Māori and Pasifika students doing postgraduate courses within NICAI.

Providing a pool of trained research assistants will:

- enhance NICAI's research potential.
- contribute to the growth of Māori and Pasifika researchers.
- expand research into Māori and Pasifika areas of interest.
- add to the existing knowledge.

The programme provides an opportunity for students to work across disciplines, to network culturally with other high achieving students and to be inspired by Māori and Pasifika staff and alumni.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Student profiling – to identify programme candidates.
- Utilise culturally appropriate learning strategies.
- Collaborate with appropriate faculty staff.
- Utilise Māori and Pasifika practitioners and research experts.
- Retreat of at least two consecutive days.
- Create a pool of research internship opportunities.
- Mentors – experienced researchers and practitioners.
- Postgraduate degree course pathways.

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## Wānanga Pukenga Ako Study Skills Course for Māori / Pasifika

### Key words

Holistic cultural pedagogical practice and strategies; flexible delivery; habitus; educational experiences; Māori students; Pasifika students

### Brief description of the course

Wānanga Pukenga Ako (WPA) simply translates as Study Skills Course and is a one-week writing and study skills preparation course, funded by the Ministry of Education's Adult Community Education funding arm. No fee is connected to the course for New Zealand citizens or permanent residents over 16 years of age. The one-week summer course is usually offered two weeks prior to the beginning of the academic year. Because of the brevity of this course and its specific teaching content (general writing and study skills), it is also identified within Wintec as a module.

Although this course originally sat under mainstream Student Learning Services, it was transferred to Te Kete Kōnae (TKK), the new Māori / Pasifika Support Centre, where "Māori and Pasifika presence and identity on campus is promoted" in a way that aligns with Wintec's strategic direction. This transfer was seen as both logical and ethical:

- Staff at TKK are not only qualified to teach the same course content as is offered on the mainstream equivalent, but they are also bi-lingual and practitioners of Māori and Pasifika customary protocol.
- The course itself is underpinned by the philosophy, values and customs of Māori / Pasifika and these are likewise upheld in the TKK department. This is a natural position to start from when meeting the study skill needs of Māori and Pasifika students.

### Instruction and support provided

Being a general study skills course for Māori and Pasifika, the provision of clear instruction and support access is integral. The course is set at Level 3, but allows for a wide range of students who enrol on the course (sometimes ranging from Level 1 to Level 3). Such a mix could be a cause for concern; however, there is sufficient content variance and tactical teaching delivery to ensure all levels of academic skills are catered for:

- Facilitated and directed independent learning/study time.
- Facilitated and directed group activities.
- More than one TLA.
- Opportunities for one-to-one, group, wānanga, class tutorials (before, during, after class).
- Holistic cultural pedagogical practices and strategies are utilised (whakawhanaunga, manaakitanga, whakamana tangata, tautokotanga, etc.).

## PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT MĀORI AND PASIFIKA STUDENTS

### Provider

Te Kete Kōnae, Waikato  
Institute of Technology

### What the programme addresses

This preparatory course addresses the academic study skill needs of Māori and Pasifika students who are enrolled in study at Wintec or are considering studying at a tertiary institute

- Variance in teaching delivery that supports main learning styles.
- Māori and Pasifika tuakana/teina processes are adopted.

Acknowledging that not all students know their cultural inheritance, course instruction and support is offered predominantly in English, but allows space for Māori or Pasifika language streams.

### **Who provides the support?**

Although TKK can carry the teaching of the course, TKK works collaboratively with the mainstream study skills support service and school departments to ensure materials used are relevant and sufficiently varied for the students. Opportunity is given for team teaching, not only with teaching staff in TKK, but invited guest tutors who provide extensive teaching outside of our scope (e.g. science, library database, etc.).

We also work with other support services such as the Student Association within Wintec (SAWIT), Kaumatua, Tirohanga (former Māori Department), and tutors of the many Māori related courses across the other campuses (Te Kuiti, Thames, Avalon). At the end of the course, these service providers join students around a hakari (shared lunch) during which they inform students of what is available through their facility. This aligns with TKK's, and therefore Wintec's, philosophy of community teaching and support.

By the conclusion of the course, students are empowered to identify areas in which they need assistance and know how to request this, or come with peers via appointment during the year as needed.

### **Target group:**

WPA targets Māori and Pasifika students and is funded through the Ministry of Education's Adult and Community Education (ACE) funding arm. In order to meet the ACE funding criteria, there is a need to meet the ACE priorities:

- Raising foundation skills, encouraging lifelong learning, targeting learners whose initial learning was unsuccessful, strengthening communities and strengthening social cohesion (<http://www.tec.govt.nz/templates/standard.aspx?id=2689,nd>)
- The total amount of teaching hours required is a maximum 40 hours
- The target group has to be adult, New Zealander, permanent resident, over 16 years and not in school full-time.

### **Importance of this course**

Durie (2003) suggested that when looking at educational advancement, a good starting point is "to enable Māori to be citizens of the world, to live as Māori and to enjoy a high standard of living" (p. 228).

In 1997, a project commissioned by Te Puni Kōkiri was conducted by Richard Jefferies (1998), looking at barriers to Māori participation in tertiary education. Its purpose was to "analyse the range, nature and extent of barriers to Māori participation and achievement in tertiary education" and to "develop strategies and solutions" (p. 89) for potential Māori students. The findings indicated some consistent "inter-related factors that acted as barriers for Māori in tertiary education" (p. 90). It was the first substantial piece of first-hand feedback from Māori providers and students.

Current government funded research (Mā te huruhuru, 2007; Te Kotahitanga, 2003), as well as the latest TEC Strategy (2008-2012) identified Māori and Pasifika as having a higher proportion of academic gaps resulting from historical education experiences and environments.

WPA provides an environment that fosters student cultural well-being, philosophies and values, alongside academic learning. The antithesis to this is:

- A prescriptive or generic approach to learning (i.e. for all students). This would be setting Māori and Pasifika learners up for failure or even disadvantaging them from reaching their goals and aspirations.
- Placing students at a level that does not reflect their true potential. Collected information during the WPA course can ensure that students develop from their true place of knowledge and not an assumed position that they think they are at.
- Lack of knowledge around what is expected from the tertiary institution can be a hindrance to student achievement. Providing them space and time to understand tertiary institute expectations can cement their enjoyment and safety within it.
- Unrealistic expectations placed on returning mature students who have been out of the education system for many years. Identifying gaps at this level is important to sustain student interest and aspirations and therefore retention. Some WPA tutors come with Adult Literacy (Te Ako mō Te Ora – Learning for Living) experience.

### Evidence of positive impact this course has on students

Some students who participated in the WPA 2009 course not only self-referred after they completed the course, but also brought a number of their peers to the centre. Since February 2009, 552 contacts have been made by the Māori Learning Advisor (all students), while the Pasifika TLA has recorded 5 contacts (due to study leave of TLA and low numbers of Pasifika students). These statistics do not reflect complete numbers as not all contacts had been entered at the writing of this report (especially Pasifika).

However, there is ample qualitative and anecdotal evidence to show that the WPA course, and its extended workshops thereafter, contribute to the transition of a student into tertiary study and mainstream learning environments and therefore the success of the student.

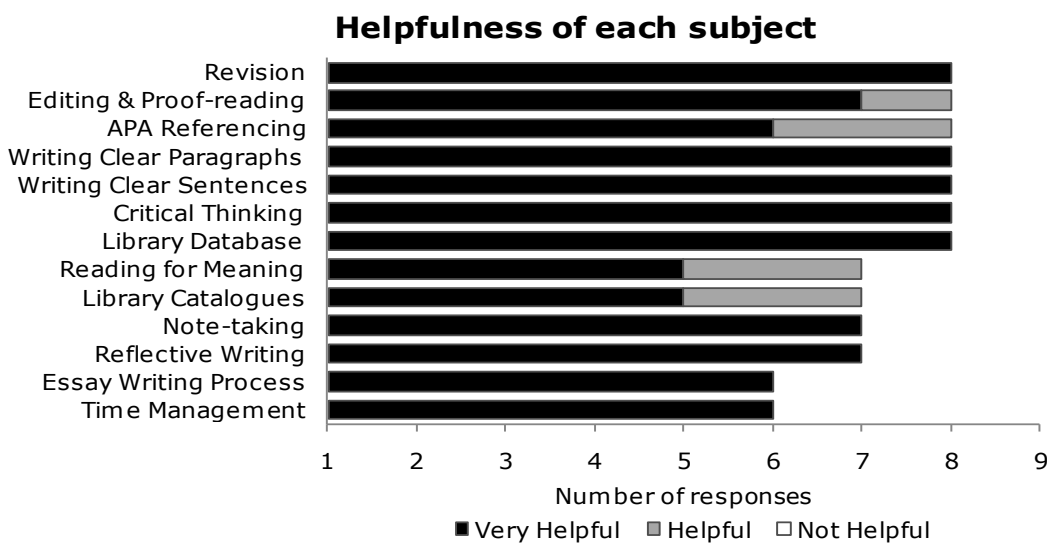


Figure 1: Average ratings from 2009 WPA intake of students about the helpfulness of each subject covered in WPA.

Feedback from the 2009 students emphasises how WPA is attuned to the holistic needs and the unique learning styles of Māori and Pasifika.

- *When I first heard about TKK, my first impression (or thought) was "I can't speak or understand Te Reo". I felt ashamed, whakamā. If I had known about the course before the July intake of 08, I would have most certainly attended. And instead of starting my degree in nursing, I would have learnt (realised), that I needed to start the Health Studies module first. This is where TKK['s] awahi and teachings from the beautiful tutors guided my decision.*
- *I would like to thank all tutors for their help in preparing me for my course. Hopefully this information will benefit me when I have to use it. I have learnt so much over the week. Thank you.*
- *The prayers and songs were AWESOME. It helped me to acknowledge first, then focus on my studies. I had no prior academic study skills or knowledge of what the tutors were asking for re: assignments. Now I am not afraid to ask.*
- *Karakia, himene, mihi. Kia mau te wehi i a koutou. Everyone had a say in all areas of this course, the support was more than above excellent. Looking forward to another round.*

Table 1. Rating of Tutors using a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) by 2009 WPA participating students.

	Scale						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Well Prepared</i>					1		7
<i>Professional</i>							8
<i>Respectful</i>							8
<i>Use good examples, etc.</i>							8
<i>Provided constructive feedback</i>							8
<i>Know their subject matter</i>						1	7
<i>Stimulated interest</i>						1	7

Elements of the course (essay-writing processes, referencing, reflective-writing, report-writing) were put into workshop deliveries and taken to the satellite campuses. These transferable elements proved successful. For example, one faculty/discipline tutor at the Thames campus was quick to acknowledge that students who participated in the referencing workshop had passed their referencing assessment because of attending the workshop compared to those who chose not to attend. None of the students who attended the workshop had to resubmit, while those who did not attend were required to resubmit their referencing work.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Students are able to produce written evidence of the skills they have just learnt by the end of the course. Although these are at varying levels, we are able to monitor the student's progress; this happens in three phases:
  - The first step is to ensure that the student can develop, build and/or activate prior knowledge.
  - The second step is to assess what knowledge they have learnt.

- The final phase is to know where to take the student from there. Students who perform below the given criteria are recommended for a learning consultation (literacy assessment). Results from these can be made available to the course tutors (with consent) on how to support the students' learning needs. This avoids perceived embarrassment of being sent for a literacy assessment by a faculty tutor later on.
- Lots of time is given to group discussion, drawing from students' prior knowledge and examples, encouraging co-teaching (student and tutor teaching), and regular question and feedback opportunities (kotahitanga).
- Complementary materials given are varied to align with the learning styles of the students (e.g. handouts, examples, PowerPoints, reading materials, case study material, etc.).
- The course book is designed to be utilised throughout the whole year and beyond. It is filled with study skills, exemplars, exercises and templates as a complementary resource of academic reading and writing guides for any programme.
- Time is being set aside to develop an online complementary module that works alongside the face-to-face delivery. This is seen as a natural progression as many of the programmes begin to offer flexible delivery to their students.
- Students shape the room to suit their needs (set-up). Often this is in the shape of a horse-shoe which fits with Māori / Pasifika cultural dynamics (not one person being singled out or set apart from the others). Also, after the first day (whakawhanaunga, orientation/introduction, etc.), students are given opportunity to participate in the morning 15 minute karakia – songs and prayers are provided or students can contribute their own. These cultural protocols add to the preparation of the students' learning for the day. Each day is also concluded with a karakia.
- Participating TLAs (not all Māori or Pasifika) are skilled in a variety of academic fields and supporters of Māori / Pasifika tikanga and protocol. This is a telling force when weighed up against a number of teaching strategies that consistently maintain a mono-cultural approach. Here, the student and their cultural habitus are valued (whakamana tangata) and not separated (whakamana Tangata) from their learning, thus avoiding starting in a deficit position.
- The course allows students to develop support relationships with their peers and with tutors.
- Students have access to TTK facilities which provides a seating space, kitchenette and whānau room – useful for studying, interviews, one-to-one / group teaching. Hot drinks are also provided (manaakitanga).
- The students are provided a homework timetable which models how to manage their homework over the week with a focus to complete the assignment task/question within the timeframe given.
- No fee is attached to this course for New Zealand citizens as per the ACE funding criteria.
- Assessment is formative and is based on critical feedback.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this, and gain measured results, the following are crucial:

- Identifying new entrant target groups (Māori / Pasifika) through the enrolment centre (mail, phone, email) and making connection immediately.
- Targeting courses/tutors as internal stakeholders in the success of their Māori and Pasifika students.
- Targeting whānau/fanau and community as external stakeholders in the success of their members.

- Qualified Māori and Pasifika tutors (preferably fluent in an indigenous Māori/Pasifika language and cultural protocols).
- Timetable WPA course into the calendar so there is no conflict with students' chosen programme of study.
- Provide two essay assignment questions of equal or similar difficulty that promote cognitive and metacognitive responses.
- Preparation of teaching materials, environment and resources are critical and should be resilient in all learning styles.
- Evaluative feedback on course content and teaching deliveries towards best practice.
- Clear instruction, delivery and exemplars around each study skill.
- Participatory and co-construction delivery and discussion.
- Align assessments to the latest TEC Learning Progressions using aligned cultural pedagogical practices and strategies.
- Embed literacy objectives into the lesson plan.

### **Contact details**

- Tania Oxenham, Academic Māori Learning Advisor at Te Kete Kōnae, Waikato Institute of Technology (Wintec), <Tania.oxenham@wintec.ac.nz>

## Impact of Learning Services on Assignment Writing Skills of First Year Bachelor of Nursing Students.

### Key words

Assignment writing skills; improved pass rates; greater collaboration between TLAs and faculty staff

### Brief description of the programme

Learning Services at the Eastern Institute of Technology (LSEIT) has been providing assignment writing assistance to individual nursing students for a number of years. However, while annual reports have disclosed the number of students receiving assistance and the hours of assistance provided, there has been no investigation into the relationship between students receiving learning support and the student pass rate.

In March, 2009, LSEIT investigated methods of measuring the impact on nursing students receiving assignment writing assistance. Fifty eight first year Bachelor of Nursing (BN) students from the February intake in 2008 participated in this investigation.

BN students are strongly encouraged by lecturers in the Health and Sports Science Faculty to seek assistance from LSEIT. However, it is up to individual students to make appointments with TLAs and they come for the assistance in their own time; this demonstrates a large degree of commitment on the part of students. The BN programme co-ordinator believes nursing students are more likely to request assistance because part of their work involves encouraging patients to seek help. Also, the fact that the majority of nursing students are mature females is likely to have some influence.

The courses chosen for this investigation are Nursing Knowledge and Health and Kawa Whakaruruhau. The assessments consist of one assignment (50%), one presentation (10%) and an examination (40%) for each course. Students have received assistance from a TLA for both the assignment and presentation and, to a lesser extent, for exam preparation.

### Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance

Table 1. First Year BN Students receiving study assistance, Semester One, 2008

	<b>Received Assistance</b>	<b>Did not Receive Assistance</b>	<b>Total</b>
Passed	36	10	<b>46</b>
Failed	1	10	<b>11</b>
Withdrew	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>58</b>

## ONE-TO-ONE ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS

### Provider

Learning Services, Eastern  
Institute of Technology

### What the programme addresses

Pass rates of first year  
Nursing students

Of those students who received assistance from Learning Services, 97% passed both courses while the pass rate for those students who did not receive assistance was 48%.

It is acknowledged that factors other than assistance received from TLAs may affect student pass rates. However, these results suggest that the assistance provided by LSEIT has had a significant impact on student success rates.

### **Why this programme is important**

This programme is important as assignment writing is a major form of assessment in the BN programme. Students often have difficulty interpreting assignment questions, and many of them lack the skills required for academic writing. Receiving extra assistance enables students to gain both competence and confidence in assignment writing techniques. Question-interpreting skills and writing skills are also necessary for sitting examinations. Future analysis of LSEIT practice will focus on collecting data to compare pass rates between those who attended LSEIT programmes and those who did not.

Students have indicated, both verbally and in writing, that receiving assistance from TLAs has enabled them to pass the course.

### **Critical success factors of this programme**

- Collaboration between the BN programme co-ordinator, BN lecturers and TLA has led to an investigation into the most effective ways of assisting students.
- Availability of highly-skilled, motivated, and empathetic TLAs.
- Identification of students who have significant difficulty with assignment writing and who may need more intensive assistance.
- Ability for students to self-refer and receive individual assistance.
- Removal of stigma associated with students requesting assistance. Receiving extra help from TLAs is seen as the 'normal' thing to do.
- Provision of a non-threatening and relaxed environment.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

To implement a support programme like this and gain measured results, the following actions are crucial:

- Liaise with faculty/discipline staff.
- Investigate strategies to provide effective assistance to students on programmes with low pass rates.
- Ensure TLAs have required academic and mentoring skills.
- Keep accurate records of assistance provided.

### **Contact details**

- Heather Martin, Manager Learning Services at the Eastern Institute of Technology, Hawke's Bay, <hmartin@eit.ac.nz>



## Staircasing with Support: One-to-One Provision of Learning Skills Tutoring

### Key words

Learning support; Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs); one-to-one learning skills tuition

### Brief description of the programme

At AUT, TLAs are available to students through email, website, display boards and through administrators in the LDC reception offices (four sites). One-to-one sessions are delivered through drop-in sessions and by appointment. Students are encouraged to come for help as soon as they encounter difficulties and to develop independent learning strategies. Last-minute accessing of these services to gain help for meeting assignment deadlines is discouraged and proof-reading is not available, though help with developing academic English skills is provided.

### Tangible evidence that this programme has a positive impact on student performance

The Student Information System (ARION) has been used to generate data showing impact of the one-to-one provision of learning skills tutoring on student success and retention. Success and retention of students in their mainstream programmes was obtained and comparisons made between those who had used TLAs and those in the same mainstream programme who had not.

NB: Notes of calculations of success and retention.

Completion and retention are based on the completion codes of grades. Below is a list of completion codes – only codes 2, 3 and 4 are used to calculate completion and retention, the other are interim codes:

1 Still to complete course	Completion =	
2 Completed course successfully		2
3 Completed course unsuccessfully		(2 + 3 + 4)
4 Did not complete course	Retention =	
5 Practicum to complete		
6 Yet to complete - Level 9&10		(2 + 3)
7 Extension or under moderation		(2 + 3 + 4)
0 Still to complete course, valid ext		

## ONE-TO-ONE ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS

### Provider

Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre, Auckland University of Technology

### What the programme addresses

Students' effective management of course requirements through the provision of one-to-one advice and assistance

The statistics for the whole university showed that attending one-to-one learning skills tuition was positively correlated with higher rates of student success and retention, so that AUT's overall pass rate of 82% was contributed to by the higher pass rate, 89%, of students who attended learning skills sessions. This is only a correlation, no claims of causality are being made; however, the picture is an interesting one:

<b>Received one-to-one tuition</b>	<b>No. Of students</b>	<b>Sum of Code2</b>	<b>Sum of Code3</b>	<b>Sum of Code4</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Retained</b>
N	13922	33702	2846	5021	81%	88%
Y	1442	4068	228	269	89%	94%
Grand Total	15364	37770	3074	5290	82%	89%

When it comes to ethnicity, it is clear that one-to-one tuition is important for Māori and Pasifika students, who are equity priority groups for the NZ tertiary education system. In particular, such provision appears to make a 22% positive difference for Pasifika students. Asian students, who access these services most, also receive a 12% advantage, while for Pākehā students, the impact is 4%. The rates of those who do not access these services indicate that Pasifika students are most in need of support with two out of five students failing. This is followed by Māori students, with one out of every four students failing. With the provision of one-to-one learning skills tuition, both these groups attain a pass rate of 82%.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Seen TTA Staff</b>	<b>No. Of students</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Retained</b>
Māori	N	1059	75%	81%
	Y	135	82%	87%
Pasifika	N	1197	60%	71%
	Y	185	82%	89%
Asian	N	4256	80%	89%
	Y	454	92%	96%
European	N	5213	88%	92%
	Y	374	92%	95%

While the impact of learning skills provision was greatest in pre-degree programmes, where students attending learning skills sessions had pass rates which were 16% better than students who did not attend such sessions, this positive relationship was observed in both undergraduate (6%) and postgraduate (4%) students. There is a positive correlation with retention at all levels and this may have an impact on staircasing as the student feedback cited below shows.

<b>Award Grouping</b>	<b>Seen TTA Staff</b>	<b>No. Of students</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Retained</b>
2 - Pre-Degree	N	2753	68%	80%
	Y	280	84%	89%
3 - Undergraduate	N	10134	84%	90%
	Y	999	90%	95%
4 - Postgraduate	N	1035	89%	95%
	Y	163	93%	98%

Student feedback indicates gratitude for this provision and the following narrative from an unsolicited letter of appreciation contextualises the experience for one specific student. She is a mature permanent resident, a woman of Asian descent who began at AUT in 1992 studying English at weekend courses and who went on, nine years later, in 2001 to attain a Certificate in English, then a Certificate in Business, NZ Diploma in Marketing and finally graduating with a Bachelor of Business degree in 2008. (Note: the text below reproduces the letter as written by the student for whom English is a second language):

*In the year 2003 when I first approached Learning Development Centre, I met Karen [names changed for confidentiality] and she was very nice and friendly. Ever since then, I usually consulted Karen when I needed help for difficult assignments. During my hard times Karen gave me a lot of support. For example, in the year 2008 when I was writing "Motivation and Sale Performance" assignment I found it extremely difficult and was struggling to complete it, what I most needed help on was choosing the right materials and matching the assignment criteria and as my class lecturer was overseas for a holiday, Karen was patient and sympathetic as she guided me and explained to me how to analyse the assignment criteria, she also encouraged me to rewrite several drafts. As a result, my result for this assignment was 24/30. I think that without the help of Karen I would not have received this score and would have still been struggling. From time to time, Karen guided me to complete several other assignments to achieve higher marks.*

*Viliamu also gave me a lot of support. During the year 2007, I often meet up with Viliamu once or twice a week when I need help in my assignments. When Viliamu helped me in a particular assignment called "sales management" I got an A grade and when he helped me for the "integrated marketing communication" assignment I got 39/50. I have really appreciated his help and I feel he has given a lot of effort and time for helping us students.*

*The other Te Tari Awhina staff members that I have also consulted were.... [staff names]. These professional academic staff members really love their jobs and put a lot of effort in helping their students and I really admire them.*

*The other 3 admin staff I would give thanks to: these administrators also showed me they are always willing to help students. For example, if I needed to make appointments to see lecturers from TTA, these admin staff would try their best to put me into the time that I can fit in. As a result, I really appreciated heir help.*

*In reviewing the success of my academic journey over the past few years, I feel that I owe a lot of it to the help that I received through the service provided by AUT's Learning Development Centre. Now I finish my degree study at AUT, I would like to give my feedback to AUT that in my experience Learning Development Centre is essential for students especially students who like me has English as a second language. I would like to express that thank you AUT provides Learning Development service to the students.(sic) (Jie, 2008, personal communication)*

### **Critical success factors**

- Employment of Māori and Pasifika TLAs with a mandate to prioritise Māori and Pasifika students. NB: in 2008 the five Pasifika staff in TTA saw 67% of the Pasifika students who

were served by the LDC while the other 14 non-Pasifika staff saw only 33% of the Pasifika students. With Maori students, each Maori staff member had an average of 69 Maori student visits during 2008, while non-Maori staff in TTA only had 30 each.

- Providing access to one-to-one appointments through efficient administration systems.
- TTA links services provided with Student Management System through use of ID numbers and is thus able to provide statistics on a wide variety of parameters without asking intrusive questions of students or requiring them to fill in another form.
- The AUT Student Management System had been modified to include a Contact Management System for TLAs (and other LDC staff).
- Generating regular reports of impact on students' success and retention in mainstream programmes.

### **Action plan that can be used in implementing a similar programme**

- Employ Māori and Pasifika TLAs as well as other TLAs who serve the general student group.
- Aim for diversity in discipline backgrounds, age, gender, academic skill specialisation of TLAs.
- Make enhanced success of all students the business of all TLAs.
- Mandate Māori and Pasifika staff to prioritise Māori and Pasifika students – at the same time allowing Māori and Pasifika students to select other lecturers from the TLA team as they wish.
- Provide ready access for students to make one-to-one appointments through staff emails and phone numbers (on the website and on display boards in each centre); as well as through the LDC administrators.
- Collect ID numbers of students attending sessions.
- Enter data into Contact Management System.
- Run reports each semester of both activity and impact of services on overall success and retention of students.

### **Contact details**

- Jennifer Naeem, Senior Lecturer, Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre, AUT, <Jennifer.Naeem@aut.ac.nz>
- Fe Day, Head of Centre, Te Tari Āwhina, the Learning Development Centre, AUT, <Fe.Day@aut.ac.nz>

**PART B:**

**CASE STUDIES OF STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES**

**(NB: All names are pseudonyms)**



## Alice

### Travel and tourism

In April 2008 Alice, a first year travel and tourism certificate student was found on the stairs in a distressed state. Another student came to the Learning Centre to inform us. I went to get Alice and took her into my office; she was in tears and appeared overwhelmed with the whole student life scenario. She has a physical disability and on assessment it was quickly identified that she felt it separated her from the norm. I took the time to try and divide her problems into manageable parts. Confidential consultation with her tutor alerted her to the situation and we arranged a peer support person to befriend Alice. I made a series of appointments with Alice over the next six weeks to help her understand and catch up on her studies. Academically and socially Alice struggled with the first semester. However, being able to work with a TLA on a one-to-one basis meant Alice was able to gradually adjust and produce good results with her assignments. Another significant outcome was her social integration with her peers, in fact, so much so that on a class tour she sang to tutors and students with a 'voice like an angel'. Alice graduated and has returned this year to complete a Diploma. Alice has developed learning skills and coping skills that have enabled her to become an independent learner and participate in student life. Her visits to the centre are few and far between and meeting her in hallways and stairwells, I see a more confident and happy student. Other significant differences that have been observed include finding her own peers for group work and her newfound confidence that what she has to offer is significant.

The approaches to generic learning skills and beyond are sometimes difficult to quantify. However, Alice's success is tangible evidence that TLAs help to retain and produce independent learners.

Her father had this to say:

*"We are pleased with the support that the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic has offered our daughter Alice. She has felt able to approach Kahurangi Learning Works when she has needed help. She has always received a friendly welcome and has felt better for the input. Alice has received support, guidance and reassurance to help her through tough times on her course.*

*Alice is sensitive to the way she is treated and both you and other staff have shown warm and caring attitudes which Alice really appreciates. It is reassuring to us as parents to know that you are there as a learning advisor to help her personally and with her studies".*

## Carl

### Carpentry

One of the most successful stories I can recount as a TLA belongs to a student in the 2008 Certificate of Carpentry Level 4 programme at the BoPP. This person was dedicated to his learning but struggled to retain some mathematical information at assessment time. It was decided between the vocational tutor and the TLA that this student could spend one hour of allocated workshop time per week to concentrate on his calculations.

Each week, Carl would come to our designated study area and together we would go over whatever calculations he was faced with for any upcoming assessments. His specific programme needs were made to run parallel with embedding numeracy strategies that could be transferred across all his learning, whether it was in the workplace, in his everyday life or in study. One such example of this was to help him recognise number facts in both additive and multiplicative workings. He seemed in awe of unknown (or perhaps forgotten) facts such as  $5 \times 7$  equals the same as  $7 \times 5$ , and using doubling or halving as a methodology to move from say a simple  $2 \times$  table to the  $4 \times$  table. As Carl became more practised in this area he gained a little more speed and a little more confidence. This was reflected in his ability to make mental estimations that would confirm or question his final answers. The learning was further reinforced using graphic organisers as a method for visualising calculation processes.

The learning environment also seemed to impact on Carl's ability to retain information. He often found himself distracted in the classroom environment and had nervous memory blocks during assessments. To address this difficulty, Carl was encouraged to talk out loud to himself as he went through his workings. When we worked with this strategy he found that he could sometimes correct himself because he could hear his errors as he talked through the process of a formula. To enable Carl to use this new-found learning tool, he was permitted to complete some of his assessment re-sits in a room by himself at the learning centre. This change in environment proved very successful.

Carl has successfully completed his programme and secured an apprenticeship for 2009 following on from work experience at a local construction firm. While mathematical calculation was the study barrier Carl faced, he actually gained much more than simply finding strategies to deal with numeric problems. He became visibly happier. He conversed more; he expressed his thoughts more openly without feeling 'stupid', his self-esteem soared with every milestone achievement. Carl had learnt to trust himself and his ability to learn; his self-esteem was reinforced with the tangible gains of graduation and productive employment.



## Chris

### Management

In May 2006, I had just begun working as a TLA, when I first met Chris in a one-to-one appointment. Chris was a young student undertaking his first papers towards a Certificate in Management. He had come into the learning centre at the direction of his faculty/discipline tutor to get support on how to write a report. Chris showed me his first attempt at writing a report and, looking at what he had constructed, it was obvious he had not grasped what was required for the assessment.

Working together we deconstructed the assessment; this is when I first started to notice that Chris would repeat everything that I would say. He would listen then paraphrase verbally what I had just said to him and this was repeated throughout the appointment. At first I found it frustrating and was uncertain whether he comprehended what we were doing. Chris left the appointment with pointers for rewriting his report. A week or so later, Chris came in to show me the changes that he had made to his report; there were grammatical errors and the language was simple but he had grasped what we had discussed in the previous appointment.

A few weeks later, Chris came into the centre all excited to tell me the mark he had received for his report; Chris got an 'A'. He told me he was excited as it was the first 'A' he had ever received. I found out from him that he had left school when he was fourteen and that he had been finding it difficult to understand what was being asked of him. He repeated what people were saying as a way to try and understand what was being conveyed but found it difficult with the written assessments. Over the next few months we worked closely until a time when he started to feel more comfortable that support was not needed.

Over the next year and a half, Chris would come in occasionally to get some pointers and to let me know how he was going. Chris moved on from the Certificate in Management, to graduate with a Diploma in Business. A couple of months after graduating, Chris came into the centre to tell me that he had been successful in getting an internship with a bank. He said that he was appreciative for all the support that was given to him and that he might not have got there otherwise.

## Graham

### Education

Graham (pseudonym) is now a first-year teacher who is loving his work at a local primary school. Yet four years ago, he almost gave up after his first month's study. Graham had been an average student during his secondary years, but had never really tried very hard either. After leaving college he travelled widely on his overseas experience, gaining confidence in his competence and capability in a range of casual jobs, mostly in the hospitality sector. Back in NZ with a toddler and another child on the way, Graham wanted to settle down and work in an area with more long-term satisfaction. Recognising that he enjoyed working with people, and loved his sport and being back with extended family in his hometown, the choice of teaching as a career had seemed like a good fit.

The reality of academic study was a little different to his expectations, however: lectures and workshops, a lot of reading to do, and several assignments, all due in a short time span. Home-life was busy too. Graham approached the course administrator to talk about the university's refund policy – he was beginning to think he'd made a serious mistake and wasn't up to the challenge. He was referred to the principal lecturer, who suggested that Graham visit the learning centre for some assistance with note-taking and time management. Working with Graham on his own, away from the 'busyness' that he felt was overwhelming him, it was relatively straightforward to plan a schedule and work out some strategies that he could trial. As for the assignments, we tackled the first of these together, brainstorming the topic, making a plan, using the internet and library databases to look for suitable references, assembling relevant material and developing a structure. With all this work done, Graham wrote his first draft according to the detailed paragraph plan we'd developed, and brought it back to me to view. He'd actually enjoyed the task, and had found his forte in a gift for written expression and finding new perspectives on well-rehearsed discussions. I made a few suggestions, but his essay needed very little revision – and he got his first A.

Over the next three years, I read a great number of Graham's assignments – and, with his permission, actually used two as examples in workshops with different student groups of how to approach a task – a literature review and a position paper. By now Graham didn't need much guidance; rather he was coming to share his successes and usually to parade a favourite new word or two. For a while it was 'nascent', but I also remember 'seminal', 'cerebral' and 'copacetic' cropping up in each piece of writing until they were superseded! Last year, Graham was nominated for, and received, an Adult Learners' Week award for being an Outstanding Adult Learner – a personal success story and an inspiration to his classmates.

Clearly there will have been a range of factors which contributed to Graham's success, but he certainly credits the study support he received at a crucial time as being a significant motivator. The education system has gained an outstanding young teacher.

## Jessie

### PhD

In October 2006, Jessie made an appointment with me because of an impending 'absolutely final' deadline (at the end of February 2007) to submit her PhD thesis. The problem was that she felt that there was so much to do and so much to write that finishing by the deadline seemed impossible. Because of personal circumstances, she had already had a period of suspending work on her thesis and had sought and obtained prior extensions on the deadline. She also felt that her supervisor was at a point where she viewed the remaining work to be done as Jessie's responsibility (apart from a willingness to read and comment on drafts of the work).

Jessie had earlier attended some doctoral skills development workshops that I had taught and reported that she had found those very helpful. This time, during her appointment, she expressed very serious doubts about completing and even questioned whether it was worth the effort to try.

Although the subject discipline of Jessie's PhD is one I am familiar with, I knew very little about her actual research topic. During the appointment, I focused on getting her to explain to me (and write as she was doing so):

- what the different parts of her thesis were going to be;
- what she had finished and still had to do in each part;
- the main purpose and "logical structure" of the parts that were yet to be done (or still required a considerable amount of work);
- the logical next steps for her to take;
- what would be possible for her to achieve by her next appointment with me (in about a week's time).

We then went through the 'how and when' of getting that work completed, including anticipation of 'unforeseen' problems that could get her off track – and ways of effectively dealing with those.

After her first appointment, Jessie sent me an e-mail message in which she wrote:

*Meeting with you is by far the best step I've taken in my PhD of late! I reflected on the advice you gave and it was like a light switched on - I am delighted, I had the best writing week last week and I have all but finished a complete reconfiguration and redraft of the introduction. I have just one section of the last chapter and the introduction section of the introduction to write.*

*The key things that switched the light on were you asking what the PhD was about - that enabled me to immediately get rid of extraneous issues. Also getting me to think about widening the parameters of the chapter headings was instrumental in reconfiguring what I hope is a tighter more focused intro. I kept repeating "It's a report which has helped [me] to stay on a straight line" (hopefully) - I am very indebted - as it has also recaptured my confidence in the project.*

*I was astonished at how easily things just fell out when I started thinking about it differently- Thank you.*

Jessie made a few more appointments with me after this, mainly to report on her progress and to discuss any writing or structuring issues she found challenging.

I never read any of her drafts (her supervisor did some of that). During the appointments, I mainly asked her questions so that she could arrive at satisfactory answers to the issues she was uncertain about.

She submitted her thesis by the deadline in February 2007. Subsequently, she also only had minor emendations to make to the thesis before it was passed.

## **Karen**

### **Business Management**

Right from the first day at Polytech, Karen knew she would make use of the learning centre. She hadn't done well at school and, as an older student, was very nervous. She wasn't even sure she was capable of gaining a qualification. In addition, she was juggling family commitments and an avocado orchard. Therefore, when the TLAs introduced themselves at orientation, she made the decision to head straight over to find out more of what they could offer. She knew she needed to develop strategies and keep herself motivated.

When Karen got her first assignment, she was very nervous. She brought it to me and commented that there was "no way she could write a 300-word essay". I worked alongside her by guiding and helping to motivate her. Passing that first assignment was the greatest motivation she could have received to continue with her study.

At the beginning of the first semester, Karen came to see me about once a week but by the second semester, she was only coming about once a month. She came when she needed help to 'get on track again'. Although she didn't use the learning centre much after this, I contacted her early in her second year to ask her to share some of her experiences. I had just met a first year student who was in the same place as Karen had been a year previously. Karen shared her experiences and methods of reading and note-taking with this student, demonstrating the different colours and sections she'd used to help her categorise her studies.

Karen is now in her third year, working towards her Bachelor of Business Management with a major in accounting. She became a student mentor at the beginning of 2008 and has played a key role in the mentor community. Karen has just been elected as the student representative on the Polytechnic Council. From her hesitant start, Karen now has confidence in her personal and academic abilities and has become the voice of the students at Council level.

## Leonie

### Politics

Leonie is a final year Arts student, majoring in Politics, who was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Leonie had received mixed academic grades over the course of her academic career and experienced ongoing frustration due to her inability to complete assignments on time and to her satisfaction. Leonie was receiving assistance from the Mental Health Coordinator to address her anxiety and self-esteem concerns and was referred to the learning centre's Learning Disabilities Programme.

Given that Leonie was newly diagnosed, it was necessary to ensure, at the outset, that she understood how her impairment might, potentially, impact on her academic performance. For example, students with ADD often experience the absence of an inner voice reminding them to complete a task now (instead of later). In Leonie's case, this was leading to overdue and/or hurried assignments. I therefore proposed to Leonie that I act as her external goalkeeper, ensuring that she meet her academic deadlines. We subsequently analysed her existing academic study habits to establish which patterns of behaviour did or did not work for her. This gave Leonie the opportunity to identify aspects of her study behaviour which needed to change.

When working with students with ADD, I have observed that they often display strong learning style preferences. Leonie's learning style was therefore assessed using an in-house assessment tool. She was (and is) a strong visual learner, preferring diagrams and graphs over dense text. This highlighted a major issue for Leonie, as her chosen discipline was Politics, which is, by necessity, text heavy. Leonie's learning style informed my future teaching practice as I endeavoured to give her all resources in visual format. Furthermore, she was given a memo for her course coordinators, which outlined her disability, how it tended to manifest and what the faculty/discipline lecturers and tutors could do to help. Disclosure was difficult for Leonie, however she knew that an awareness of her disability might ease the process of asking for an extension later in the semester.

By the end of our first session Leonie had established some clear academic goals and an action plan detailing how to achieve them. She had committed to meeting on an ongoing basis with the possibility of extra academic coaching during the semester break. After each session Leonie received a follow-up e-mail outlining the goals for the upcoming weeks with an action plan, broken down into papers and/or assignments. Leonie used this e-mail as an ongoing guide and as the starting point for our subsequent session, when we would ascertain whether she was on task and meeting her goals. The e-mail was also forwarded to the Mental Health Coordinator who met with Leonie on alternate weeks and further reinforced the goals.

Leonie worked diligently to improve her study and test taking habits for almost three semesters and is now starting to reap the benefits. She has consistently achieved her goal of handing in all assignments on time, despite having a very heavy course load in the most recent semester. She achieved one of her best grades ever during summer school (B+) and she was delighted to learn that she meets the academic criteria for acceptance into the Bachelor of Arts Honours degree. Leonie is secure in the knowledge that she has the skills to proceed with postgraduate study.

Skills training and goal keeping can make a difference to the quality of the educational experience of students with ADD. Our challenge is to identify and assist these often very able students at the outset of their tertiary career and before they experience the frustration of failure.

## **Maggie**

### **Social Services**

In April 2009, Maggie (pseudonym) a first year student embarking on a degree in Social Services attended a study skills consultation at the learning centre. During this appointment she was very distraught as she conveyed her anxieties and waning confidence. Maggie described some of her learning apprehensions such as feeling inadequate to engage in class discussions and struggling to comprehend text beyond its literal meaning. Her course fees had placed significant financial weight on her husband and family. She was deeply concerned about not succeeding and was considering withdrawing.

Maggie agreed to a subsequent academic assessment which was provided through the learning centre. Indications from this assessment were that Maggie: was reading near to the level expected of the programme, but had no previous experience reading for academic purposes; and that she would be capable of managing the reading areas of the course with on-going support in developing academic level reading skills. I worked intensively with Maggie once a week over one semester to develop new and existing reading strategies.

A learning plan was devised for Maggie with the main aim of developing a suite of reading strategies to facilitate her reading comprehension and confidence. It was important that this instruction did not add an extra burden to her existing course pressures, yet was an integral part of her growth as a learner. Instructional processes were aligned with the Reading with Understanding learning progressions (Tertiary Education Commission) so that over several weeks, a range of reading strategies were embedded into reciprocal reading activities that used her course texts as a basis. Maggie also agreed to keep a reading portfolio in which she collated copies of reading extracts, reading instructional material, a glossary of general and specialised vocabulary, and reflective comments.

Maggie continued to be very anxious and often distraught about her reading abilities. However, about midway through semester one, Maggie reflected on a conversation with her husband. She recalled that her brain would not allow her to continue past a particular word until she had applied some of the comprehension strategies that I had been modelling throughout our learning consultations. By doing this, she successfully extracted the meaning of the particular passage and felt a realisation of self empowerment. This was a significant milestone in starting to reverse her mind-set about her reading inadequacies. Other students began asking Maggie to explain extracts from their course texts and this also affirmed her sense of academic confidence.

Maggie now attends learning support with a student peer. They receive coaching in a number of reciprocal reading strategies (using course texts), and continue to write reflections in their reading portfolios. Their progress indicates that by semester two both students will be knowledgeable about the key reading strategies and their original reading levels will be raised to better engage with their course readings. Maggie has decided not to leave her programme.

## **Malia**

### **Pasifika postgraduate**

In 2007, Malia, a young Pasifika postgraduate student within the Faculty of National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries (NICAI), attended my workshops on "Working with Māori and Pacific Island communities" and "Writing a Research Proposal". After the workshops, she approached me and asked if she could have an individual appointment to discuss some aspects of her research. Malia also informed me that her supervisor recommended that she seek my assistance should she have any queries regarding the process of undertaking research. At our first meeting, Malia and I discussed how to work more effectively with Pacific people, in particular with Tongans, as her field work would be conducted overseas. We discussed issues such as language because she expressed her discomfort regarding her ability to communicate appropriately with the people in their native tongue. I suggested that she take a person who is respected in the community where she will be conducting the research or a close relative to provide the translation. Malia and I also discussed the importance of observing cultural protocols when conducting research. During the write-up of her thesis, Malia consulted with me regarding certain Tongan terms as well as some mechanics of grammar. At the end of the second semester of 2007 Malia completed and submitted her thesis and, in May 2008, she graduated with First Class Honours.



## Sam

### Nursing

Sam (pseudonym), originally from the Philippines, attended high school in New Zealand, completing in 2008. He won a scholarship to study nursing and this determined his career choice. He was offered a place on the nursing degree based on school passes in science subjects and some aspects of English. I soon found he had a good vocabulary but inadequate understanding of sentence, paragraph and essay construction.

The story of the importance of one-to-one learning advice is told through the notes recorded by the TLA:

*This is the 3rd time Sam has seen me about this (500 word 'starter') essay. He was very nervous. The essay still had many 'ideas' he had made up - comparisons where there could be none, thoughts about male nurses, superior and inferior people etc. He was misreading material. I worked to find parts I could commend as appropriate and found a few. He was upset that it was still not satisfactory and talked again about what he could do instead of nursing. He was very concerned about the fees and explained that he had a scholarship. I listened, counselled and tried to arrange for him to see a counsellor (not available immediately).*

*(2 days later) I met Sam by chance on the campus - he was very upset; one of his tutors had told him she couldn't understand any of his portfolio entries - summaries, explanatory paragraphs etc. This reinforced my concerns and I asked if he knew about the Certificate in Health Studies and Concurrent English, thinking he may like to transfer. I went with him to the Nursing Department and Enrolment Centre to investigate this but before things proceeded he decided he would continue in the degree.*

*I worked with Sam in further appointments and drop-in times, helping him shape the essay through suggestions, questioning, requesting clarification where his sentences or phrases had no meaning, emphasizing the importance of writing 'simply' in his own words; constantly aware of not 'doing it for him'. Eventually, he had an essay that generally met the essay criteria and it received C+. I was concerned about the amount of time and assistance I had given him but in his planning and drafting of the following assignments I could see he had transferred the teaching/learning. The student achieved an A on a subsequent 1500 word essay (a reflective topic), and a B+ for a 1500 essay in the Human Growth and Development paper following two one-to-one appointments and a couple of 'drop-ins' for each essay.*

Intensive one-to-one learning advice and support at the outset of this student's degree study definitely helped him to achieve a pass grade, overcome some of the extreme stress he was experiencing and build up the knowledge and skills essential to his success in the first semester of the nursing degree.

## **Susan**

### **First year nursing student**

In March 2004, Susan (pseudonym), a first year nursing student, came into my office; she was in tears and said she couldn't cope with assignment writing and perhaps she wasn't "cut out" to be a nurse; she wanted to "give the whole thing up" and go back to helping her husband on the farm.

After talking with her it was obvious that she was a very capable person who really wanted to be a nurse. However, she was feeling overwhelmed with assignment writing and study in general. I suggested she had some assistance before making the decision to withdraw. I arranged for Susan to see Joanna, one of the TLAs, who stayed on later that afternoon to make sure Susan received assistance straight away. Susan and the TLA met on a regular basis for a number of weeks. Over time, Susan became confident enough to work on her own and during the second and third years of her study, we saw very little of her in the learning centre.

Last month, I visited a friend in the Coronary Care Unit and the nurse caring for him was Susan. Susan came up to me and pointed to her registration badge and said, "Look, I'm a qualified nurse thanks to you and your team". I left the hospital feeling proud that the learning centre had helped Susan get to where she is today. I also know that without the highly dedicated team of TLAs, other students in a similar situation to Susan would have withdrawn if they had not received immediate assistance from a TLA.

## **Tanya**

### **Applied Social Services**

I first met Tanya when she attended a two-week Introduction to Tertiary Studies course prior to starting her Bachelor of Applied Social Services programme. Tanya hadn't been in the classroom for more than 27 years. She had been humiliated at school and had developed low self-esteem. However, the safe nature of the course, and being with other people like herself who hadn't studied at tertiary level before, provided Tanya with the opportunity to begin regaining self-esteem. As one of the TLAs facilitating the course, I could see how Tanya developed in confidence and skill during this period. According to Tanya, "this course wasn't a 'one stop fits all' type of course and it helped me find my level and ability without too much stress".

I lost contact with Tanya once she began her Social Services Programme. She hardly used the learning centre during the first year and struggled her way through her academic work. However, she began using the centre again in her second year. She would arrive for sessions with her tape recorder and capture our entire session which she listened to again later. One of Tanya's challenges was trying to understand assignment questions. Even though she would talk to her tutors about them, she would still come away confused. I showed Tanya how to draw diagrams to clarify these questions. This kind of representation helped her grasp what was expected although sometimes it meant she would need to rewrite large sections of her work when she realized she had gone off on a tangent. Sentence structure was another challenge for Tanya but slowly, working at her pace, I helped her reflect on her work and find simpler and clearer ways of writing.

By the time Tanya graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Social Services she had gained confidence in her ability and found her strengths. Despite the challenges Tanya faced when she began tertiary study, she used the services available to help her overcome her difficulties. In my opinion, it was the willingness to ask for help, eagerness to develop skills and openness to doing tasks a new way that contributed to Tanya's success.

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