



PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title:

Implementing Lessons Learned on Embedded Study Skills Provision for First Year Undergraduate Students of Politics and International Relations

Principal Investigator : Dr Carmen Gebhard

School / Department : School of Social and Political Science/Politics and IR

Team members : Prof. Julie Kaarbo, Ms Luba Zatsepina

For further information, please contact:

Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following : nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Brief Report (maximum 500 words)

The project focused on modifying and improving provision of embedded subject-area specific study skills training for first year undergraduate students of Politics and International Relations. Study Skills sessions (each 50 minutes long) were led by co-applicant Ms. Luba Zatsepina who was assisted by 3 experienced tutors. The sessions were delivered over a period of 9 weeks in Semester 1 (16/17) as a compulsory component of Introduction to Politics and International Relations (IPIR) course. The students were divided among five study skills groups with approximately 75 students per group. Each interactive session consisted of a 10-15 minutes presentation and various group activities with students. These included: smaller group discussions each led by a tutor; computer generated activities i.e. constructing bibliographies, spot plagiarism tests, marking old IPIR essays/exams; frequent Q&A sessions with students aimed at gaining insight into what they expect from study skills sessions and what their concerns/issues are regarding university-level studies. Various teaching styles were also trialed in order to determine the most effective format.

The following findings were generated from observation and direct communication with first-year students who attended the sessions:

- Students experience high levels of anxiety when it comes to managing university workload and preparing for their assignments;
- Students generally find study skills sessions useful, although considering the noticeable decrease in attendance; it could be more efficient to deliver the sessions once a fortnight, rather than every week.
- Students prefer less formal interactive sessions rather than lecture-style formats;



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- Students prefer study skills sessions to be sharply focused on preparation for their actual assignments rather than general help such as effective reading or note taking.

The previously used model of 'embedded' study skills provision was implemented and it can be concluded that even though study skills sessions were presented as 'compulsory' student attendance dropped dramatically once it became obvious that attendance is not monitored during the sessions. However, those students who attended every week said that they felt more confident and better prepared for their assignments and found the sessions very useful for a successful transition to university-level study. In particular, international students emphasized the usefulness of study skills sessions for familiarizing themselves with the UK system.

31 student representatives from IPIR course gave oral feedback to Prof. Kaarbo and Ms. Zatsepina with regards to study skills sessions, which concluded that students were generally happy with the adopted model of study skills provision and found it useful for their course assignments. All materials regarding the content and provision of study skills sessions have been passed over to the new course convenor and partially implemented again in the academic year 2017/18.

Please contact Ms. Luba Zatsepina (lzatsepi@exseed.ed.ac.uk) or Dr Carmen Gebhard (c.gebhard@ed.ac.uk) for any further details.

Financial statement (please delete as appropriate):

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:

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