

## The SAI Journal Project Overview – Kim Heyes and Marcin Wozniak

The project aims to promote innovation and collaborative working by setting up a journal for all student levels across the MMU Cheshire Campus, with a view to rolling it out to the whole university after this pilot project. It has been shown that through involving students in building their own output for their academic work, self-efficacy and academic skill levels increase considerably (Coffield et al. 2004). By putting together a journal, the students will gain workplace skills around the process of this, including how to peer review work, how to make decisions as an editorial board, how to create an effective layout and how to promote the journal (amongst others). Students will work in partnership with other students and staff to achieve the outcomes.

Increasing self-efficacy has been shown to positively influence behaviour, for example those who become involved in showcasing their own work will then take ownership of the quality of this, thus working harder to achieve a better outcome. This behaviour could then be transferred to other areas, such as university coursework. Heller and Cassady (2015) found that environmental factors can be significant predictors of academic achievement, which builds upon Johnson et al's (2007) study which shows that community cohesion within an institution is essential for students to excel.

Feedback from academic staff gathered by Marcin Wozniak (SEST) at Cheshire Campus suggest that student lack of engagement with academic journals have a negative impact on academic performance of students. The project will also act as a cooperative inquiry where we will aim to find out what issues student may be facing when accessing or reading academic journals, and explore ideas on how these issues could be solved. Initial feedback suggested that students may not feel confident to publish their work as they may not want to be criticised. This led to setting up the SAI Journal Submission Drop-in, where students are able to meet members of the editorial team and ask questions about the process of submitting an article and available support. Additionally SEST have set up 'Reading and Writing Retreats' to help students engage with the reading and writing process, and to build a supportive academic community.

### **Reading and Writing Retreats**

Reading retreats have been adapted from 'Structured Reading Groups' (Macpherson- Parrott and Cherry, 2011) and aim to engage students with critical reading of academic journals. The aim is to develop their depth of understanding, and help them to participate in active discussions about read materials, through critically analysing and summarising gathered information. Within the workshops, students take on various roles within the reading process: *Discussion Leaders* develop possible discussion questions to aid understanding around the main points of the assigned reading; *Passage Masters* locate a few important passages within an article; *Creative Connectors* make connections to other important ideas explored in the session, and to other cultural, social, political, and economic ideas; *Devil's Advocates* challenge the ideas in the article by developing a list of critical, thoughtful questions and arguments that might be raised by critics of the authors or by those with different points of view; and *Reporters* take notes during the discussion and summarize its main points. After the discussion, the reporter writes a brief summary of the group discussion. Different roles give students responsibility within a group task, engages them with deep reading and a better understanding of the concepts within the reading. The interaction within the session and social aspect of the group supports collaborative

learning and community cohesion whilst developing transferable skills needed within academic studies or for future employment.

Writing Retreats offer dedicated writing time and space to progress in a supportive, non-surveillance environment, increasing the motivation to write (Moore, 2003). Participants write down ideas, using a number of techniques, such as goal setting, writing and sharing. Retreats are open to students and staff, offering insights to academic research happening on campus at all levels, which can also lead to future student and staff partnerships on projects.

The benefits of a peer review system is to get students used to the way other academic journals work, and to remove the idea of the academic journal or article as something alien to a student. Student involvement in the process may help further support our understanding on how to engage interest of other students in taking part in projects that can broaden their employability perspectives (Harland et al, 2016). Often post-graduate (and sometimes under-graduate) students are told to publish their work but have no idea how to do it, and the experience of submitting articles is daunting. By getting students to participate in this process from undergraduate level, hopefully the process will be less daunting, and will encourage more students to put their work forward. This will also promote ManMet as a leading research institution.

### **The Research Project**

The research will be informed by McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory of sense of community, and using their models of community cohesion along with the sense of community scale (SCS), a questionnaire was formed. Alongside this, the practice of action inquiry (Torbert, 2006) will allow for hearing individual student voices through students involvement in the process of cooperative inquiry. Students will become co-researchers and their input will support the design of the SAI Journal and contribute to development of further recommendation for good practice in engaging students with reading academic journals and publishing their work.

By applying a mixture of how the MMU student community feel through a questionnaire on community cohesion and work ethics, and narrative stories of those involved in the project, we can measure how successful the project is answering our research questions.

### **Participants**

Recruitment drives for participants have included leaflets, word of mouth, posters and a stand in the 'student zone' (a prominent area in the cafeteria). To date, there have been 15 participants involved with the running of the journal. The participants are aged between 19 and 60 with an average age of 31 years. The majority are female (9), however the time spent working on the journal is equally split between the males and females. Most of the participants reported high levels of community engagement before embarking on the project, although there is not a strong sense of belonging at the Cheshire campus. 92% of the participants were already confident in their academic abilities, but all of the participants felt that community engagement and extra-curricular activities were important to their future employability. However, participant recruitment is ongoing until the end of the project in March 2017, so the nature of these results is expected to change in the final report.

### **Summary**

The journal is continuing to recruit members and will produce a second publication in April 2017. The study will be concluded in 2017 and expects to show an increase in community cohesion. We encourage all students to become involved with the journal, regardless of perceived academic ability. The journal community is already proving to be a supportive and fun environment, and the team are well on their way to creating a successful legacy.

### **References**

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