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Undergraduate engagement with their tutors' original research

A work in progress report

Carey Hime, Nick Dimmock and Miggie Pickton

Library and Learning Services Conference

18th June 2014

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Outline

- Introduction and literature
- Methods and data collection
- Data analysis and key findings
- Implications for practice and reflections

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Introduction

- URB@N project: a joint student/staff research project
- The research team: Carey, Nick and Miggie
- LLS Research Support Team interested in:
 - enabling and promoting open access to university research e.g. through [NECTAR](#), [Northampton Open Journals](#)
 - could these services be used in support of teaching and learning?
- ...leading to the broader question of how researchers used their research in teaching and what effect this had on student learning

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Background

The 'teaching-research nexus' – conflicting findings:

- Fox (1992): teaching and research activities are antagonistic, competing for time and resources
- Healey *et al.* (2010): students perceived clear benefits to their learning from staff research, but disadvantages too
- Stappenbelt (2013): qualitative studies of staff perceptions report a mutually beneficial relationship at the individual level, but quantitative studies report little or no correlation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness
- Verburch *et al.* (2007): consistent empirical evidence is difficult to retrieve

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Literature review

Perspectives on the teaching-research nexus: some studies

Student	Academic staff	Both
Ball and Mohamed (2010)	Bennett (2011)	Buckley (2011)
Deakin (2006)	Boyd et al. (2012)	Verburgh et al. (2007)
Guerin and Ranasinghe (2010)	Douglas (2013)	Visser-Wijnveen et al. (2012)
Healey et al. (2010)	Elen et al. (2007)	Zamorski (2002)
Neumann (1994)	Gottlieb and Keith (1997)	
Robertson and Blackler (2006)	Shin (2011)	
Turner et al. (2008)		



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Project plan

- Identify area of research interest
- Submit proposal for URB@N project
- Conduct literature review to establish current knowledge: methods used and previous findings
- Construct questionnaire
- Gain ethical approval
- Conduct pilot study
- Commence full study

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The questionnaire

- Semi structured interviews with closed and open questions
- Based on questionnaire created by Healey *et al.* (2002)
- 15 questions addressing:
 - Students' awareness of research activity at the university in general and of their tutors' research activity specifically
 - Students' engagement with their tutors' research
 - The impact of tutors' research activity on student learning
 - Students' ability to access tutors' research outputs

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Data collection

- 31 participants from contrasting disciplines (two campuses)
- Sampling method: opportunity/convenience sampling
- Questionnaire administered face to face
- Data captured anonymously
- Planned to use an iPad to capture responses directly to a Google form
- Initial pilot study

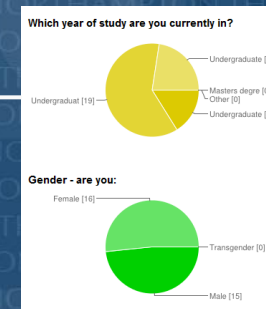
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Data analysis

- Google Drive summary of responses: great
- Full response spreadsheet: not so great
 - A pain to navigate in Drive itself
 - CSV export scuppered by commas in response options
 - Hacky solution: split responses by `/,\s[A-Z]/`
 - Better solution: **plan ahead**
 - Avoid or take care with multiple choice answers
 - Stress test with detailed responses
 - Bonus caveat: you can't remove responses from the spreadsheet



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Data analysis

Anyway...

- Basic analysis via built-in summary
- Some additional Excel work (via Drive export)
- (Eventual) CSV export allows deeper processing with SPSS or custom scripts (e.g. cross-referencing responses)

```
[You actively searched for your tutor's research] => Array
(
  [count] => 5
  [ids] => Array
  (
    [0] => 2
    [1] => 3
    [2] => 4
    [3] => 12
    [4] => 28
  )
)
```

- Further analysis may inform follow-on research

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Key findings

- Very positive results
- 2/3 aware of tutors' research
- 2/3 of above aware of use of research in teaching
- Lots of sharing & discussion as a result

Talk to your tutor about it	11	26%
Talk to another student about it	10	24%

- 52 positive impacts vs. 4 negative

It has increased your understanding of the subject	8	15%
It has stimulated your interest and enthusiasm for the subject	13	25%
It has made you more keen to attend classes	5	10%
You have greater confidence in the currency and credibility of your tutor's knowledge	8	15%



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Student comments

- “I know one of my tutors has published a book. We haven't really used it in a class activity for anything but we did have a discussion about it which was really interesting to hear about.”
- “I think engaging with tutors’ research definitely helps students to develop a relationship with them. It's great to see what their interests are and see their successful results.”
- “I have a lot more respect for my tutor after reading her research. I trust that she knows the subject she's teaching.”
- “It's really inspiring when tutors tell us about trips they've taken and projects they're doing. It gives me ideas of things I could do when I graduate and what the field is really like to work in.”

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Implications for practice

- Students have a high level of awareness of their tutors' research activity and are generally positive about it
- The largest numbers of students learned about it through lectures, reading lists and via social media (Facebook and Twitter were most commonly cited)
- They would like to hear more, but only if it is relevant to a lecture topic or assignment
- Students chose lecture slides and class discussions as their favoured ways for tutors to integrate their research into teaching

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Reflections

- Having an undergraduate student in the research team was a huge asset (thank you Carey and the URB@N scheme!)
- Having struggled with extracting raw data from the Google form we would not recommend this tool for further use
- The face to face interviews allowed us to field test the questionnaire; next time we would consider presenting it as an online survey
- This is a work in progress. We would like to pursue this research topic, perhaps in conjunction with academic colleagues – any volunteers?

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Questions?

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