



# INTER-DISCIPLINARY PEER MENTORING FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SCHOLARSHIP OF LEARNING AND TEACHING



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## - Priority Focus and explanation of PATS variation

The focus was Quality Assurance. The lecturer in the Faculty of Arts wanted to maintain a level of student engagement and satisfaction in a unit they have not previously taught.

### Why

The lecturer was given an opportunity to deliver an existing second year unit that has previously been taught by a highly engaging lecturer with consistent excellent student satisfaction results. The unit had approximately 250 students enrolled for the semester and it was previously delivered as one 2-hour seminar each week, with pre-lecture resources, use of Moodle and assessments. As a result, the new lecturer wanted to include learning activities that were new to the unit to drive engagement, while meeting the high standards established by the previous lecturer.

### People

An inter-disciplinary peer partnership was established. The mentee lecturer was from the Faculty of Arts (School of Social Sciences) and the mentor from the Faculty of Science (Chemistry). The mentor was selected due to their reputation as an excellent lecturer that uses unique and creative learning activities in chemistry lectures and lab tutorials, as well as being a year level coordinator. The mentor was also chosen for their enthusiasm towards PATS, wanting to develop their own mentoring skills and assisting peers in improving their skills and co-learning.

The partnership also involved a PATS Coordinator from the Office of the Vice Provost (Learning and Teaching) who participated in three meetings during the course of the partnership and was able to enhance the reflective practice of the partners through leading discussions on progress and key learnings.

### Timeframe

Semester 1, 2015

### Scope: Unit

A single unit taught within a degree program in the Faculty of Arts.



### - Key Outcomes

#### PATS variation – outputs and outcomes

Two key goals for this PATS variation were to use new and different learning activities to engage a large student cohort and honouring the legacy from the previous lecturer – the standards they achieved and the impact this may have on delivering the unit and measuring student satisfaction.

The lecturer instigated the PATS process, and requested a mentor that could assist with quality assurance. PATS provided the mentor and lecturer with a suggested structured framework that allowed for more focused discussion and helped form a sharp purpose for the partnership. The new lecturer introduced new activities into the unit, one being mapping the unit in a visual way, to help illustrate the timeline and influence of theories and practice. This was further supported during the seminars with readings, the use of archival footage and discussions. In addition, the lecturer introduced a group assessment, where students working in small groups had to develop and present a poster (as they would in an academic conference). To increase the prestige of this activity, the lecturer decided to conduct this activity in a public space within the university open to all academic staff and students.

To increase the success of these activities, and given the size of the student cohort, the lecturer was able to influence and negotiate for a new, more suitable space for the weekly seminars and secure resources, such as a Teaching Assistant and the space and equipment required for the poster activity.

The new lecturer received a comparable student satisfaction score to that of the previous lecturer. The previous lecturer received a median of 4.13 out of 5 and the new lecturer achieved 4.11.

#### System level impacts

Within Monash University, this PATS case demonstrates ongoing impact of PATS at IMPEL levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

1. **Team members:** the peer partnership provided a collegial experience of professional development and support in quality assuring a unit.
2. **Immediate students:** the peer partnership addressed how to best engage a large cohort of students in new and different ways, changing the unit's structure, space and support for students.
3. **Spreading the word:** the partnership has contributed to spreading PATS into new departments and faculties. Due to the success of the poster activity, the lecturer has been approached to coach and mentor others within the Faculty to implement the activity into their own units. Additionally, the poster activity is used as a prime example by the university's Educational Designers for how other academics can increase engagement within their own units.
4. **Narrow opportunistic adoption:** the peer partnership contributes evidence of the success and impact of PATS, adapted for quality assurance purposes.
5. **Narrow systemic adoption:** This cross-Faculty peer- partnership is evidence of ongoing adoption of PATS within the institution (Monash University).
6. **Broad systemic adoption:** The peer partnership has been promoted within the university as a self-nominated professional development initiative by highlighting the features and benefits of the cross-disciplinary variation. In addition, the partnership have also engaged in scholarship with the acceptance of a paper for the 2015 International Society of the

Scholarship for Learning and Teaching conference on cross-disciplinary mentoring for teaching leadership.



### - Learning

#### 1. Barriers and opportunities

Entering into the partnership, the lecturer had concerns about the size of the student cohort, the possible chaos of the activities and trepidation in teaching a new unit. This was counterbalanced by the lecturer's determination to make changes to the structure, space and support required for the unit. This urgency meant that the partners met frequently pre-semester which tapered off over time.

The PATS process and tasks were amended to suit the timelines the lecturer was working towards. Not all PATS tasks or worksheets were completed, as the partners felt that some issues had been addressed in a more informal way. However, the key PATS tasks that were greatest value were goal setting (to pin point the actual purpose of the partnership), exploring the internal and external barriers in more practical ways (which lead to more decisive action) and the mid- and end semester student feedback loops (as they reinforced that the unit's structure and activities worked well in driving student engagement).

#### 2. What worked well

While the activities and overall unit was deemed a success, the key aspect that worked well was the inter-disciplinary nature of the partnership. The partners felt that this made for a more intellectually stimulating experience, fostering collegiality on learning and teaching practices, rather than on a deeper understanding of curriculum or discipline traditions. This nature of the relationship, plus the support and suggestions offered from the mentor, boosted the lecturer's confidence in overcoming perceptions on how activities will be managed and received. The benefits of the inter-disciplinary nature of peer mentoring will be explored further by the partners through scholarship and co-authoring papers on the issue.

#### 3. What didn't work well

The mentor did observe a number of the lecturer's seminars. In providing feedback, the mentor felt they gave insufficient feedback and relied upon their intuition in identifying what worked well, and not. However, the mentor was more interested in observing student engagement and evaluating their response. The mentor felt that the peer observation tool needed to be pared back allowing for closer alignment to the goals of the partnership and specific issues identified by the lecturer. This also highlighted the need for PATS mentors to be trained in peer observation techniques and providing effective feedback. This has ignited a passion in the mentor on the importance for peer observation and how it can be engineered.

The partners also acknowledged that time is needed to digest and reflect on the experience well after the partnership officially ends. Reflection and reflective practices have been deepened by the involvement of the PATS Coordinator – a feature they recommend for all PATS partnerships. This could be extended by increasing connections with other PATS partnerships running at the same time with mid- to end-semester facilitated group discussions, as they would be highly valued in creating a community of practitioners focused on teaching improvements.

#### 4. What was learnt

There were a number of insights from this partnership, primarily the significance of inter-disciplinary peer mentoring.

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Specific insights from the experience included a fresh perspective on student engagement and the importance of social inclusion in learning. While an outgoing, confident and entertaining teacher can impact engagement there are a range of other things that can be done. This also reinforced the need for assessments to cater for the diversity of the student cohort. For instance, some students who were highly engaged during the seminars, online and produced good quality essays openly admitted to not seeing the value of the group assessment and produced an underwhelming poster. In contrast, some less engaged students produced high quality posters supported by excellent presentations.

### 5. National System Impact

IMPEL Level 5: Systemic changes at participating institutions leading to changes for all relevant students.

