

## **2B The immersion approach to teaching research skills to first year psychology undergraduates – Can we run small research projects on a large scale?**

Presenters: Jason Bohan, and Larissa Szymanek, Psychology

The conventional approach to teaching research methods and statistics in psychology are taught in laboratory-based classes where students participate as a subject in an experiment and are given a prepared data set to analyse along a prescribed set of guidelines. This is believed to scaffold their learning and introduce them to methodological concepts. However, whilst this conventional approach delivers a homogenous student experience, students report such classes as dull and feel that they do not develop their research knowledge or capabilities (Barry, 2012; Rowley, 2008). We report a novel attempt to teach research methods and statistics in a large Level 1 class (N=650) with the aim of enriching student engagement and independent critical thinking skills through guided development of student-generated mini-experiments.

Taught over three tutorial sessions, students were actively engaged in the development of 'novel' research questions, data collection and analysis, culminating in an oral presentation of their results to their peer group. In tutorial 1, tutors assisted small groups of 4/5 students in generating hypotheses on set topic areas (.e.g. age-related differences in memory). Students used resources available on Moodle to run their projects. In tutorial 2, tutors helped students understand, analyse and interpret their data. In tutorial 3 students presented their research findings in a talk delivered to their peers in the tutorial group. Students and tutors recorded a reflective diary of their experiences using Mahara and we assessed students' self-perception of their research methods knowledge before and after the activity.

In this presentation we will report on how this project developed over time and the administrative challenges faced in organising and running such projects in a large class with graduate teaching assistants as tutors. We also review the student and tutor experience throughout the project and discuss whether this practice is applicable to other disciplines.

### **References**

- Barry, J. (2012) Do students who get low grades only in research methods need the same help as students who get low grades in all topics. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 18 (2), pp.116-125
- Rowley, M., Hartley, J, & Larkin, D., (2008) Learning from experience: the expectations and experiences of first-year undergraduate psychology students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 32:4, pp.399-413.