



Creating team spirit and a culture of excellence among course participants



Author

Michael Mintrom, *The University of Auckland*



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Why care about team spirit and a culture of excellence?	3
How to create team spirit and a culture of excellence	4
<i>Structural features of the course that support the practice</i>	5
<i>Work of the instructor</i>	6
<i>Broader contextual factors shaping the good practice</i>	7
<i>Evidence of impact: linking the course to learning outcomes</i>	7
<i>Discussion</i>	9
Conclusion	11
Bibliography	11
Appendices	13
<i>How these results have informed subsequent developments</i>	13
<i>Post-Intervention qualitative student survey</i>	14
<i>Quantitative data notes</i>	16
<i>Data</i>	17

Acknowledgements

Michael Mintrom wishes to thank course participants for their cooperation in various evaluations of the course during the past few years. Thanks are also due to Mark Inglis, Barbara Kensington-Miller, Tim Page, Ruth Peterson, Sushila Pinto, David Tippin, Jacqui True, Kirsty Weir, and Claire Williams for their advice and support at various stages in the development of course evaluations, statistical reports, and earlier drafts of this document. Of course, the author accepts full responsibility for any mistakes or errors remaining in this report.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Executive Summary

Across studies of leadership, innovation, creativity, and how to achieve success in life, the twin themes of team work and striving for excellence recur. The practice of building team spirit and a culture of excellence had its starting point in a desire to close knowing–doing gaps among learners, and to reduce the tendency for people to acquire relevant information during training sessions but not apply it on the job. This method of teaching embeds behaviours and practices that improve student achievement during learning and enhance subsequent task performance.

In 2006 the University of Auckland created a course founded on the notions of building team spirit and a culture of excellence. The course, *Politics 767: Managing Research Projects*, has since been offered every year in the same format. By using empirical evidence gathered from student grades before and after the course over a period of time, comparing those grades with those of a control group, and evaluating interview data from cohorts of course participants, we are able to trace the improved performance and attitudes of students. The outcomes in terms of student learning and subsequent performance offer compelling grounds for promoting team spirit and a culture of excellence in many educational settings.

Why care about team spirit and a culture of excellence?

In 2006 at the University of Auckland a postgraduate course, *Politics 767: Managing Research Projects*, was developed that embodied the pedagogical practices of creating a team spirit and encouraging the emergence of a culture of excellence among the students. Team-work is integral to the course because of the potential for group settings to promote better knowledge acquisition. The notion of a “culture of excellence” was introduced so that the time students spent together could be maximised to improve their subsequent performance on original research projects. This course has been offered every year since inception by the same instructor in the same format, allowing for an analysis of its effects. Through the acquisition of grade assessments, before the course, and for work submitted in courses following this one, we performed a post-intervention impact analysis. In addition, qualitative information gathered from students evaluating their personal achievements during the course point to increased levels of engagement, diligence, and communication. The outcomes in terms of student learning and subsequent performance offer compelling reasons for promoting team spirit and a culture of excellence among students.

Rather than simply imparting knowledge to others, under this model of teaching, instructors become architects of choice, enablers, and coaches. Making this transformation can be hard. Instructors must cede some control of learning processes. But the change can be enriching. Motivated students can do amazingly creative things to promote group learning. Their efforts can make us more motivated, positive teachers, eager to unleash potential in others (Quinn, 2000). This teaching practice also does a great deal to effectively equip students for the kind of work they will do as knowledge workers on graduation



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



(see Appendix 1) (Davenport, 2005). Following claims made by others, I argue that instructors can encourage the emergence of team spirit and a culture of excellence. Strategies for encouraging team spirit and a culture of excellence can be isolated, taught, and learned. The purpose of this publication is to identify and share with others those strategies that promote team spirit and a culture of excellence among course participants.

How to create a team spirit and culture of excellence

Experimental tests of self-determination theory have generated extensive evidence indicating that people's propensity for curiosity and self-motivation can be enhanced or diminished by contextual factors (Deci & Ryan 1985; Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman). Key contextual factors are those that allow people: (1) to be self-directed, (2) to feel competent, and (3) to feel supported in their efforts. These insights are very relevant to teachers, particularly at the tertiary level, where we are training people to be creative, pro-active knowledge workers. The quality of the training they receive will materially influence their ability to perform in the future. This has broader economic and social implications. Field studies have shown that students demonstrate more intrinsic motivation and creativity in problem-solving when teachers promote student autonomy, offer specific feedback to encourage skill development, and create supportive, collaborative learning environments (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The efforts to promote team spirit and a culture of excellence in this course were designed to create a very positive learning environment and to help students close the gaps between knowing how to manage a research project effectively and actually doing it. Evidence from subsequent student task performance and student reflections on the impact of the course indicates that the practices adopted have sustained, positive impacts on learners (see Appendix 2).

Group situations that build individual confidence have certain key elements that inspire a culture shift from blame and isolation to mutual respect and responsibility. Whether a sports team, business unit, or other functional entity, key steps are essential in creating a successful organisation (Moss Kanter, 2004a, 2004b). As well as keeping lines of communication open, fact-based feedback should be made available to all team members. Participants should be encouraged to use individual and group performance metrics to monitor and enhance their own performance, not to sort and punish. There should be a collective definition of success and a determination to show mutual respect and solidarity. Small achievements should be valued and encouraged and activities promoted that require collaboration between team members.

In the workforce, knowledge workers normally move from project to project and might find themselves working on several teams at once and reporting to different team leaders. Depending on the task, the team will take different forms. Teams should be small so that the product is only possible through contributions being made by all team members. As teams are formed, members should be given incentives that discourage shirking and promote cooperation.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



The following actions are essential in creating an environment conducive to teamwork and excellence (Mintrom, 2003). They were promoted in *Politics 767: Managing Research Projects*.

1 Clarify Team Goals

Each member should be able to identify the purpose of the team and what he or she will get out of participating in it.

2 Align Incentives

All team members should be aware of how their participation will affect their performance evaluations; they should know that the product of their teamwork will be valued.

3 Manage Task Assignment

Breaking a major task into manageable components for individuals creates ownership and responsibility.

4 Clarify Process Steps

This enables team members to understand expectations and undertake to adhere to agreed completion dates.

5 Keep Communication Open

In the class environment this communication works both ways from student to instructor and back again. Regular report-back times ensure that problems are discussed and actions and expectations are clarified. Students are also encouraged to develop good communication habits among themselves as peers and teammates.

6 Accentuate the Positive

Teams must find ways of reducing language and status barriers. This can be achieved through informal interactions or at the point when activities are being assigned in such a way that opportunities for interaction are maximised.

Structural features of the course that support the practice

Politics 767: Managing Research Projects rests on the notions of self-empowerment, positive feedback, teamwork, and open communication. Specifically, this course is tailored so that skills are enhanced or learned through commitment to self and others. The environment is regulated but allows for choice:

- Students are allowed to choose from a limited menu the types of assignments they will do and the topics they will cover;
- Students are required to produce a “Statement of Intent” at the start of the course, laying out what they will do in it;



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



- Student work is collated weekly and placed in electronic files that all students can retrieve and read;
- A preliminary lecture is delivered explaining how to perform effectively in teams;
- A team-work grading template is provided where the delivered product accounts for 50% of participant grades and performance grades given by team peers account for the other 50%;
- Students in teams are given the responsibility of grading each other on their participation efforts;
- After the teamwork has been completed and graded, team members are required to email each other making positive comments on each other's performance;
- The instructor works as a coach, offering continuous, specific, but positive feedback on low-stakes contributions to group learning (e.g., reading summaries and notes), and suggesting ways to improve future performance (tailored to individual students);
- Clear grading templates are circulated in advance of assignment start dates. The templates break down tasks and indicate their contribution to the overall assignment grade;
- Regular emails are sent by the instructor to all course participants as a group, highlighting new examples of student work to be downloaded, praising good efforts, and encouraging even better future effort from the whole student group.

Work of the instructor

When given appropriately, performance feedback can have more impact on student performance than many other factors, including the learning environment and curriculum content. However, while feedback can be used to optimise participant performance, it is important that this feedback is delivered by a team leader, teacher, or instructor in a constructive manner, which enhances learning. As well as clarifying goals, effective feedback includes assessment of progress and suggested actions for attaining specified goals (Hattie & Timperley 2007).

As noted by Quinn (1996, 2000), other forms of directed leadership on the part of the instructor can model the behaviour required to build a culture of excellence. Rather than applying techniques to change others, Quinn's philosophy centres on leadership behaviour that create self-change. Significant personal growth is achieved through enriched relationships, greater challenges, and higher self-regard. Crucially, this evidence on enhanced learning and longer term impacts is highly consistent with findings from experimental tests of the effects of teaching practices that accord with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci et al., 1981).



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Broader contextual factors shaping the good practice

The practice of building team spirit and a culture of excellence reported here occurred in a course conducted in a traditional university setting. *Managing Research Projects* has been delivered in seminar rooms and small lecture rooms, with student numbers ranging from 22 to 38. No special supports had been required. However, the communications between the instructor and the students, and the practice of collating and sharing student work among all course participants, utilised email and a software system that allowed electronic file sharing between the instructor and course participants. While the practices here have been utilised and refined in a postgraduate course, they could also be used in many other educational settings. Given that the course requires specific, coaching-like feedback to be delivered by email to each student on a regular basis, the approach could become difficult to implement with classes containing more than 40 students.

Evidence of impact: Linking the course to learning outcomes

The evidence concerning learning outcomes was generated using (1) a post-intervention quantitative analysis of student success in *Managing Research Projects*; and (2) qualitative responses from post-intervention surveys of students from the 2009 and 2010 cohorts (see Appendix 2). The following discussion provides an overview of the data and analysis associated with both forms of evaluation, and the findings.

The course, *Managing Research Projects*, has been offered by the same instructor using the same content and teaching methods annually since 2006. The ultimate objective of the course is to assist students to become self-motivated, highly-competent, and creative researchers. The course is non-compulsory. Students who have taken it frequently continue with their studies and complete a BA(Honours) dissertation containing original research or a Master of Arts in Political Studies by thesis, again based on original research. They conduct those original research projects under the supervision of a range of instructors, matched by substantive interest. All grades for the original research projects are determined in consultation with examiners or assessors from other New Zealand universities¹. Names and grades of all students who completed the BA(Hons) dissertation and MA by thesis in Political Studies were collected for the years 2006–2010. The total number of students was 137. They comprised the population for the subsequent analysis reported here. The average grade these students received for their original research project (dissertation or thesis) was 6.6 (s.d.=1.5), where 6 is equivalent to a B+ and 7 is equivalent to an A–. The students were then assigned to two groups. The 78 students who had previously completed the course were found to have an average grade for their original research project of 7.0 (s.d.=1.3). The 59 students who had never taken the course were found to have an average grade for their original research project of 6.1 (s.d.=1.7). The difference of 0.9 is substantively significant, as it could mean the difference between a B+ grade and an A– grade. The

¹ The instructor of the course on managing research projects has no potential to propose student grades on the subsequently completed original research projects, except in the limited number of cases where he is the supervisor of BA(Hons) dissertations. Supervisions of both honours dissertations and masters theses are spread across all fourteen members of the Department of Political Studies. This clarification has been provided to reassure readers that this post-intervention quantitative analysis offers a fair test of impact.

difference is statistically significant ($t = 3.63$; $d.f.=1,135$; probability the means are the same <0.00). This basic comparison of means analysis suggests that the course has a positive effect on student outcomes. Note, also, that there is a reduction in the variance of grades for those students who have previously completed the course (see Appendixes 3 & 4). In sum, this bivariate analysis would suggest that prior participation in the course contributes to a step-up improvement in subsequent student performance in completing original research work, and reduces variance in that performance.

Questions arise about the differences in the prior preparation of the students included in this post-intervention impact analysis. Is it possible that students who took the course were already better prepared to conduct original research work? Could it be that those who were most interested in research chose to take the course? Unfortunately, it is impossible to gain information that would directly and accurately measure these attributes of the students. However, the prior cumulative grade point averages (GPA) of all 137 students included in the study were analysed. For the whole group, the prior cumulative GPA was 5.5 (equivalent to an average grade between B and B+). For those 59 students who did not take the course, the average prior cumulative GPA was 5.55. For those 78 students who had taken the course the average prior cumulative GPA was 5.46. There is neither a substantive nor a statistically significant difference here (in a comparison of means test, $t=0.37$, $d.f.=1,135$, probability the means are the same <0.714) (see Appendix 3).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to simultaneously test for the influence of prior preparation and the impact of the course on subsequent performance on an original research project. The model took this form:

The outcome variable, the student's grade on an original research project, is assumed to be a function of two predictor variables: (1) the student's previous cumulative grade point average; and (2) whether or not the student had previously completed the course on managing research projects.

The multiple regression analysis contained 137 student cases from 2006 to 2010. (All data are presented in the appendix to this report.) The results of the regression analysis clearly demonstrate the positive effect of having previously completed the course on managing research projects, even while controlling for previous cumulative GPA.

Predictors of Student Grades on an Original Research Project

1 Predictor Variable	2 Coefficient	3 Standard Error	4 t-statistic	5 Probability coefficient=zero	6 Standardised coefficient
Took course	0.993	0.170	5.83	0.000	0.321
Prior GPA	0.763	0.059	12.93	0.000	0.711
Constant	1.858	0.352	5.27	0.000	–



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Summary Statistics:

Number of observations = 137
F (92,134 degrees of freedom) = 98.27
Probability > F = 0.0000
R-squared = 0.5946
Adjusted R-squared = 0.5886

Discussion

The estimated coefficients of the predictor variables tell us that, while prior cumulative grade point average is a good predictor of student success when conducting an original research project, whether or not students had previously taken the course on managing research projects was also a strong predictor of success (see column 2 in the table above, and the high t-statistics in column 4). Indeed, participation in the course was estimated to add almost 1 full grade point to the grade of the student on the original research project. For example, this model predicts that a student with a prior GPA of 6 (= B+) who did not take the course on managing research projects would receive a grade of 6.4 (=B+) for an original research project, such as an honours dissertation or masters thesis². However, if the same student had taken this course prior to completing the original research project, the model's predicted grade for their honours dissertation or masters thesis is 7.4 (=A-)³. The standardised coefficients – reported in column 6 of the table – confirm that a student's prior GPA will serve as the strongest predictor of the grade for their honours dissertation or masters thesis. A 1 standard-deviation increase in a student's prior GPA (1.4) would raise the estimated grade on the research project by 0.711 of a standard deviation (equivalent to 1 grade point). But most significantly for our purposes, the standardised coefficient for a student having completed the course on managing research projects – also reported in column 6 – tells us that the shift from not enrolling in the course to enrolling in the course (a shift of 2 standard deviations) would raise the estimated grade on the research project by 0.641 of a standard deviation (also approximating 1 grade point)⁴. This careful, controlled analysis should assure readers that a positive relationship exists between student completion of this course and subsequent success in the management of original research projects.

A videotaped focus group held in 2009 involved eight students who were then enrolled in the course to discuss how they were experiencing the course. The transcript of the focus group showed how the course served to change student practices, making them more positive about the outcomes they

² Predicted grade for a student with a prior GPA of 6 who did not take the course = 1.8 (Constant) + 0.763*6 (Prior GPA coefficient*Prior GPA). This becomes 1.8 + 0.763*6 = 6.4.

³ Predicted grade for a student with a prior GPA of 6 who took the course = 1.8 [Constant] + 0.763*6 [Prior GPA coefficient*Prior GPA] + Took course coefficient. This becomes 1.8 + 0.763*6 + 0.993 = 7.4.

⁴ The variable indicating participation in the course is coded 0 (for no participation) or 1 (for participation). The standard deviation for the variable is 0.5. So a shift of two standard deviations takes us from 0 to 1. This shift (of 2*0.321) is predicted to result in a grade-point increase equivalent to 0.642*1.4 = 0.896, or almost 1 full grade-point. This estimate is consistent with that produced using the unstandardised Took course coefficient listed in column 2.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



achieved. They reported developing a sense of duty to themselves, their teammates, and the instructor. More systematic qualitative information on the impact of the course on student practices was gathered through post-intervention student surveys administered to the 2009 and 2010 cohorts of students. In each case, the surveys were conducted several months after the course had ended. Details of the survey and representative responses are presented in the appendix to this report.

Team spirit was enhanced by positive feedback which reinforced the need to support each other towards a collective goal of excellence. Allowing teams to select their own presentation topics ensured that team members were enthusiastic; team members 'wanted to participate so it was less stressful and more fun to do'. Constructing the grading of teamwork to include a peer assessment component helped create a sense of accountability to teammates. This passing of some grading responsibility to the students themselves also developed their appraisal skills in ways that benefitted their own performances. Individual skills were complemented through opportunities for students to learn from one another. Positive feedback written between team members at the end of team assignments reinforced an impression of achievement. Teamwork helped forge bonds that encouraged deeper discussions of coursework and allowed for peer review opportunities extending beyond the course.

A culture of excellence was dependent on the collective idea that no one would underperform in the course. The instructor's belief that all students could achieve highly as a group motivated students to exert themselves. The creation of a statement of intent early in the course committed students to completing tasks by a certain date, which gave them additional motivation to achieve concrete, individual goals. Students felt it was unusual and inspiring for a lecturer to talk about everyone achieving – 'it is motivating when you hear that he believes all of us have what it takes to get an A+, you believe he has faith in you and so you feel you have a lot more capacity to achieve.' Observing the high standards of work from others in the class provided motivation for individuals to improve their work standards, and take their cues from work modelled by their peers. The continuous supply of work, created by a course structure designed around regular submissions of small tasks encouraged students to complete their work to a high standard and on time. Many small deadlines taught students time management skills and instilled a belief that they could accomplish their goals. Constant encouragement from the instructor, positive feedback, and advice on how to improve future work provided motivation for students to pick up their performance, and offered specific guidance on how to do so.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Conclusion

Effective team work and the pursuit of excellence are crucial ingredients for promoting creativity, knowledge generation, innovation, and the development of new products and services (Chesbrough, 2006; Goleman, 1998; Moss Kanter, 2004). Given this, the practice of building team spirit and a culture of excellence among course participants not only could influence other tertiary educators, but it should do so. The practice could be applied with positive effects in many courses, ranging broadly in their substantive content. The practice reported here was developed in a postgraduate Political Studies course. However, the development of the course was informed by insights from literature spanning a range of disciplines, including business, economics, education, political science, and psychology. The practice of building team spirit and a culture of excellence in educational settings is highly relevant to the pursuit of social and economic advancement.

Bibliography

- Bennis, W. (2003). *On becoming a leader – updated and expanded*. New York: Basic Books.
- Canfield, J. (2005). *How to get from where you are to where you want to be*. London: Harper Element.
- Chesbrough, H. (2006). *Open innovation: The new imperative for creating and profiting from technology*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Davenport, T. H. (2005). *Thinking for a living: How to get better performance and results from knowledge workers*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Davenport, T. H., & Harris, J. G. (2007). *Competing on analytics: The new science of winning*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. R. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., Nezlek, J., & Sheinman, L. (1981). Characteristics of the rewarder and intrinsic motivation of the rewardee. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 40, 1–10.
- Florida, R. (2002). *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77, 81–112.
- Kelley, T. (2001). *The art of innovation: Lessons in creativity from IDEO, America's leading design firm*. New York: Currency/Doubleday.
- Mintrom, M. (2003). *Working in teams. People skills for policy analysts*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 118-141
- Mintrom, M. (2009). Universities in the knowledge economy: A comparative analysis of nested institutions. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis*, 11, 327–353.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



- Moss Kanter, R. (2004a). *Confidence: How winning streaks and losing streaks begin and end*. New York: Crown.
- Moss Kanter, R. (2004b). *How leaders create winning streaks*. Harvard Business School Working Knowledge Publication, December 13, 2004. Retrieved May 2011 from <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/4539.html>.
- Murnane, R. J., & Levy, F. (1996). *Teaching the new basic skills: Principles for educating children to thrive in a changing economy*. New York: The Free Press.
- Pausch, R. (2008). *The last lecture*. New York: Hyperion.
- Pfeffer, J., & Sutton, R. I. (2000). *The knowing-doing gap: How smart companies turn knowledge into action*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Quinn, R. E. (1996). *Deep change: Discovering the leader within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Quinn, R. E. (2000). *Change the world: How ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary results*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68–78.
- Tharp, T. (2003). *The creative habit: Learn it and use it for life. A practical guide*. New York: Simon & Schuster.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Appendices

1. How these results have informed subsequent developments

The success of Politics 767: *Managing Research Projects* has been recognised in four ways at the University of Auckland:

1. Three different graduate advisors in the Department of Political Studies have consistently made strong recommendations to BA(Hons) students that they enrol in the course.
2. A peer review performed in 2008 by the Head of the Department of Sociology contained glowing remarks on the pedagogy of the course and suggested it be treated as an exemplar for graduate student teaching in the Faculty of Arts. (A peer reviewer outside Political Studies was selected so that the course could be viewed in a broader perspective – this reviewer also had experience teaching courses on research methods.)
3. A presentation on this topic was accepted for inclusion in the 2009 University of Auckland Teaching and Learning Showcase.
4. The presentation at the 2009 Teaching and Learning Showcase was subsequently reviewed in *aCADdemix*, the magazine of the Centre for Academic Development at the University of Auckland. Among other things, this review stated: “In his inspiring presentation on creating team spirit and a culture of excellence in a postgraduate course, Associate Professor Michael Mintrom (Political Studies) included video clips of students reflecting on the experience. The clips were convincing: the students were visible, audible and articulate. ... The work with the students showed.”



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



2. Post-intervention qualitative student survey

To obtain qualitative evidence on the impacts of this course, a post-intervention student survey was devised and administered to the 2009 and 2010 cohorts of students several months after the end of the course. All the students who completed the course were contacted by email and asked to provide responses to six open-ended questions about the course. Students responded using a purpose-built website that assured anonymity and allowed easy collation of responses. The response rates in each cohort were 43% (15 students out of 35) and 64% (16 out of 25) respectively.⁵ These are reasonably good response rates, especially given the time delay from the end of the course. The questions are presented here, along with representative student responses.

Q1. *Specific practices in Politics 767 were intended to build team spirit among students. (These included the collation and sharing of weekly contributions to group learning, the presentation on working in teams, the impromptu team work in the seminars, and the team-led presentations.) In what ways would you say you have become better at team work as a result of taking this course?*

Representative Responses:

- a) I think the group work and peer reviews really forced the students to work harder as not just individuals but as a member of a team. This meant that team members had to communicate and more importantly compromise to get the best overall mark. I felt that in this class communication, flexibility, and diligence are promoted rather than how 'smart' the individual student is. These qualities are required (if not necessary) outside of classroom situations: communicating clearly what you want, and what you expect of others; being flexible with others' opinions; and keeping up to date with your work for everyone's benefit.
- b) Knowing that other students are depending on me working to a deadline has encouraged me to be more proactive in working with other people and has moved me to put more effort into my work.
- c) I suppose I am less secretive with my ideas now, before I used to want to protect any ideas I thought were good, now I've realised that fleshing out ideas with others actually makes your work better! That was something that was discussed a lot throughout the entire paper.

⁵ Starting in 2010, the Department of Political Studies capped postgraduate courses to allow a maximum class size of 25.

Q2. *Students in Politics 767 were frequently encouraged to contribute to a culture of excellence and group learning. (This was done most explicitly through instructor emails to the whole class and individualised emails containing feedback on assignments). What practices used in Politics 767 have continued to help you strive for excellence in your current studies/work?*

Representative Responses:

- a) The emphasis on presentation (the proposal in particular) and the excellence of the student-led seminars demonstrated the importance of doing more than just what is necessary. Being able to see the work of other students was very interesting and motivating.
- b) Having my work viewable by all other students made me extra careful when composing questions or writing literature reviews. Being conscious that other students could see what I had written made me strive to produce good work. Identifying slapdash or shoddy work from other students made me look more carefully at my own work.
- c) I guess the culture made you feel better about taking more risks – by challenging us to generate a culture of excellence, I felt we were pushed to exceed beyond, even our own, expectations. I feel that what I learnt in this paper better equipped me for real world project work.

Q3. *Reflecting on your practices now, please list up to 3 ways that participation in Politics 767 has developed your ability to manage research projects.*

Representative Responses:

- a) Planning and seeing the overall project before starting; focusing more on the overall concept, and quality of presentation; and time management.
- b) I now consistently try to use the project management tools learned in the course, to plan my time and prepare for deadlines. Although I am still struggling to adhere completely to these plans, I am more aware of their value as a benchmark to compare my progress to. 1) For example, I refer to a Gantt chart timeline that I made as part of preparation for a dissertation project. Despite some of my goals being slightly optimistic, it gives me a clear idea of how much progress I have made and what tasks I have yet to complete. 2) The use of project management has also made me more aware of how other people are involved in the projects I work on. This made me realise how people related to the project can be a useful resource, but also need to be included in the planning of the project so that coordination problems do not occur. 3) The process of identifying potential bottlenecks in the course of the project has been helpful to me in that it has prepared me for the likelihood that things will not always go smoothly or as predicted, especially whilst carrying out a large research project such as a dissertation. Now when I encounter such setbacks, I am less surprised and therefore less stressed while I attempt to resolve them.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



Q4. Reflecting on your practices now, please list up to 3 ways that participation in Politics 767 has developed your sense of intellectual independence and confidence.

Representative Responses:

- a) My confidence was certainly boosted by taking this course, which showed that completing an independent research project was not daunting and rather is a process that can be managed well to get the best results.... I have also found that despite completing your research independently there is a huge support network of other students and friends to discuss your work with, including many of whom have taken the course, and we can share our problems and also give encouragement to one another.
- b) Politics 767 gave me a taste of academic achievement that I hadn't experienced since early high school and was a real confidence-booster. I aimed to do as well in my other papers as I did in 767, with fairly good results. The expectation that my work needed to improve has helped instil an expectation that I will continue to improve through critical self-assessment.
- c) The course allowed independent research which helped me to concentrate on topics that I was interested in. This gave me more confidence and intellectual flexibility to concentrate on what I was passionate about as a scholar.

Q5. Please list any other changes in your practices that have resulted from your participation in Politics 767.

Q6. Finally, please use the space below if you have any other thoughts on how Politics 767 was of benefit to you and/or your fellow students.

3. Quantitative data notes

- **Student:** This dataset comprises all students who completed BA(Hons) dissertations or MA theses in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Auckland from 2006 until 2010, and for whom grades were available as of October 2010.
- **Cum GPA:** Each student's cumulative GPA achieved before original research project (BA(Hons) dissertation or MA thesis) was conducted.

Grade point equivalents: A+ = 9, A = 8, A- = 7, B+=6, B=5, B-=4, C+=3, C=2, C-=1

- **Took Politics 767:** *Managing Research Projects*: 1=Yes, 0=No (Yes means Politics 767 was completed prior to the completion and grading of the original research project).
- **Research Project Grade:** The grade the student received for the BA(Hons) dissertations or MA theses. Less than 10% of these students were supervised by the course instructor for Politics 767, *Managing Research Projects*. All such work is subject to external assessment or examination by academic staff at other New Zealand universities.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



4. Data

Student	Cum GPA	Took Politics 767	Research Project Grade
1	6.5	0	6
2	6.8	0	7
3	4.2	1	5
4	5.6	1	6
5	8.3	0	8
6	8.5	0	9
7	4.5	0	7
8	4.1	1	8
9	6.5	0	7
10	5.3	0	6
11	5.3	1	8
12	5.1	1	6
13	4.4	1	8
14	5.3	0	4
15	8.6	0	9
16	3.2	1	7
17	6.7	1	7
18	5.0	0	5
19	5.8	0	6
20	4.4	1	7
21	4.8	1	5
22	6.7	1	8
23	4.4	0	5
24	4.8	0	3
25	7.5	1	8
26	7.0	0	7
27	4.6	0	6
28	8.5	1	9
29	6.3	1	7
30	6.0	1	7
31	4.4	1	6
32	6.0	1	8
33	6.2	1	9
34	3.1	1	6
35	5.9	1	8
36	6.0	0	5



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



37	5.0	0	8
38	4.0	1	6
39	6.3	0	7
40	3.0	0	3
41	8.2	1	9
42	6.0	0	5
43	7.0	1	8
44	6.6	1	8
45	5.3	1	7
46	6.1	1	7
47	5.5	1	6
48	5.9	1	8
49	5.5	0	8
50	5.8	1	6
51	7.0	0	7
52	5.3	0	6
53	5.3	0	6
54	4.5	1	7
55	6.2	0	6
56	5.4	1	7
57	3.8	1	6
58	6.0	1	6
59	5.0	0	3
60	5.5	0	6
61	1.5	1	3
62	5.6	1	7
63	8.1	1	9
64	5.0	1	8
65	4.5	0	5
66	6.6	1	8
67	5.3	0	5
68	5.4	1	7
69	7.4	1	9
70	5.6	1	7
71	6.6	0	7
72	5.2	1	7
73	4.9	0	6
74	6.7	1	7
75	6.6	1	8



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



76	6.2	0	6
77	6.0	0	6
78	8.0	1	9
79	2.7	0	3
80	3.7	0	5
81	7.5	1	9
82	3.5	1	5
83	5.7	0	8
84	4.7	1	5
85	6.8	1	8
86	6.0	1	7
87	3.1	1	5
88	5.9	1	8
89	6.9	0	7
90	6.3	1	7
91	4.3	0	5
92	4.0	0	4
93	3.2	1	5
94	5.5	1	6
95	7.4	1	9
96	5.3	0	6
97	6.5	1	8
98	5.3	1	8
99	4.8	0	6
100	4.7	0	7
101	4.6	0	7
102	4.0	1	7
103	4.6	1	6
104	4.5	1	6
105	3.8	1	6
106	4.8	1	7
107	6.6	0	8
108	3.6	1	5
109	4.8	0	7
110	5.1	1	7
111	5.2	1	7
112	5.5	1	6
113	6.4	1	7
114	7.7	1	9



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-

Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook



115	7.0	0	9
116	5.2	1	7
117	4.2	0	1
118	7.0	1	9
119	7.0	0	7
120	7.0	0	7
121	4.4	1	6
122	2.0	0	2
123	2.1	1	6
124	5.3	0	6
125	3.0	1	4
126	2.8	1	6
127	7.9	0	8
128	6.8	0	8
129	4.5	0	7
130	4.4	0	6
131	6.1	1	8
132	7.7	1	8
133	3.7	0	6
134	7.0	0	7
135	6.8	1	8
136	6.6	0	7
137	4.8	0	6



This work is published under the [Creative Commons 3.0 New Zealand Attribution Non-commercial Share Alike Licence \(BY-NC-SA\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). Under this licence you are free to copy, distribute, display and perform the work as well as to remix, tweak, and build upon this work noncommercially, as long as you credit the author/s and license your new creations under the identical terms.



Supported through the Good Practice Publication Grant scheme 2010. Published as part of the Good Practice Publication Grant e-Book: www.akooteaoroa.ac.nz/gppg-ebook

