Identification of Students’ Perceived Needs in terms of Academic Skills in Business Management, HWU

Olwyn Alexander (Director of EAP) O.Alexander@hw.ac.uk
Kate Hughes (Lecturer in SML) kate.hughes@hughes-scm.com
Stephanie Ashby (SML Recruiting, Administration & Marketing) S.A.Ashby@hw.ac.uk
Aim: to determine students’ perceived needs in terms of Academic Skills within a model of engagement

- **Overview** of in-sessional Academic Skills HWU
- **Strategic Framework** for syllabus:
  - Approaches to evaluation
  - Problems with these
  - Our project
- **Research Design:**
  - Best-Worst Survey
  - Semi-Structured Interviews
- **Results & Interpretation**
- **Key Findings**
- **Conclusion**
In-sessional Provision of Academic Skills

Since 2009 School of Management & Languages (SML) has provided Academic Skills classes for:

- Translation and Interpreting
- Strategic Project Management
- Logistics & Supply Chain Management
- International Fashion Marketing
- International Business Management
- Accounting & Finance

Funded by 5% top-slice of overseas students’ fees
Strategic Framework: CEM Model (1)
Needs analysis which informs Research

- **Prior Research:** Interviews & discussions with academic staff: what constitutes successful/unsuccessful performance Sloan, Porter & Alexander (2013)

- **HW Academic Skills course evaluations with students:**
  - Why did you leave/What would make you stay? (2011)
  - Ranking statements describing reasons for attending/not attending (2012 based on 2011)
  - Module feedback from subject modules (2009-2012)
Research Design & Results

**Best-Worst Survey (before exams S1)**
- 21 statements listing important aspects of Academic Skills
- Derived from literature, needs analysis, syllabus, pre/post-course questionnaires

**Semi-Structured Interviews (during S3)**
- Questions relating to the results of BW
- Identify students’ understanding of terms, opinion of AS, dissertation
**Example of Best-Worst Survey**

**How to Answer**

Below is an example showing how to answer the questions. In this example, _Learning how to write in an academic style_ is the **MOST** important factor and _Combining several sources to write a definition_ is the **LEAST** important factor in this group of five.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>What is <strong>MOST</strong> important to you? (Select ONLY ONE answer for each question)</th>
<th>Choose between:</th>
<th>What is <strong>LEAST</strong> important to you? (Select ONLY ONE answer for each question)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Seeing examples of essays written by other students</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Finding out what my lecturers expect in coursework</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Learning how to write in an academic style</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Combining several sources to write a definition</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Understanding how to use Harvard referencing</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you have studied the example above, please start the survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Skill Description</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Understanding what critical evaluation involves</td>
<td>12.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning how to write in an academic style</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Understanding how to structure an essay</td>
<td>8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Finding out what my lecturers expect in coursework</td>
<td>8.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Understanding how to interpret exam questions</td>
<td>7.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Getting the best possible grades</td>
<td>6.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Seeing examples of essays written by other students</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Working with texts and tasks related to our degree subject</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Getting feedback on my academic skills</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Getting help with academic skills at the time I needed it</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Understanding how to search for and select sources</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Understanding how to read in an efficient way</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Combining several sources to write a definition</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Discussing strategies for sitting exams</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Understanding how to use Harvard referencing</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gaining confidence to use English</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Being in a supportive environment</td>
<td>1.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Being able to discuss academic skills with other students</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Understanding the concept of scholarship</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Understanding how Turnitin is used to detect plagiarism</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Gaining confidence to ask questions in class</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All Cohorts 165 students**
MOST IMPORTANT

12.43 Understanding what critical evaluation involves
8.50 Learning how to write in an academic style
8.25 Understanding how to structure an essay
8.19 Finding out what my lecturers expect in coursework
LEAST IMPORTANT

All Cohorts

1.75 Being able to discuss academic skills with other students
1.53 Understanding the concept of scholarship
1.33 Understanding how Turnitin is used to detect plagiarism
1.31 Gaining confidence to ask question in class
English/German/Scandinavian Students
47 students

36.44 Learning what my lecturer expects in coursework

13.77 Learning what critical evaluation means
Chinese / Thai Students
65 students

16.55 Learning what critical evaluation means

6.58 Learning how to write in an academic style
All Other ESL
47 students

15.12 Learning how to write in an academic style
10.72 Learning how to structure an essay
9.25 Learning what critical evaluation means
Interview Statistics
24 students from Logistics Cohort – 3 programmes
Interview Statistics
Male-Female

![Bar graph showing male and female interview statistics.](image-url)
Interview Statistics
Nationalities in Cohort

- China: Interview, Cohort
- Cyprus: Interview, Cohort
- France: Interview, Cohort
- Germany: Interview, Cohort
- Greece: Interview, Cohort
- India: Interview, Cohort
- Malaysia: Interview, Cohort
- Netherlands: Interview, Cohort
- Poland: Interview, Cohort
- Portugal: Interview, Cohort
- Taiwan: Interview, Cohort
- Thailand: Interview, Cohort
- UK: Interview, Cohort
- USA: Interview, Cohort
- Vietnam: Interview, Cohort
Interview Comments

- We didn’t know critical evaluation was important
- Only went as the lecturer told us to... we didn’t know that we needed it
- I have studies English for years – but I needed AS to be able to do well in the course
- Learnt critical evaluation through AS, assignment feedback, and as I started doing the dissertation
- I thought the AS lecturer was joking
- Really important for all students – a way to gain a deeper understanding of the UK system
Conclusion

- Model (and the follow up survey) triangulate the idea that critical evaluation is a key skill for PG students to succeed in UK.
- Contextualisation, Embedding, and Mapping is critical for academic skills to be seen by students as relevant.
- Students’ primary focus is on critical evaluation & exams.
- This has resulted in:
  - a review of the course materials to highlight critical evaluation as a concept that underpins all AS activities and tasks.
  - Increased interaction between AS and content lecturers about required AS for cohorts.


