

Micro-Teaching: Sharing the Wealth of Knowledge

Project Leads:

XXXX – PhD student in HaSS School

XXXX – PhD student in SAgE School

Staff Sponsor:

XXXX – Senior Teaching Fellow in HaSS School

Planning and Rationale:

The lack of available teaching opportunities is a pervasive concern among postgraduate students at Newcastle University. Most job postings for Teaching Fellows and Lecturers – advertisements that would otherwise be of immediate interest and relevance to University alumni – require teaching experience, and neither doctoral programmes nor postgraduate fellowships offer many options for acquiring this necessary experience. Specifically, while some students may have opportunities to work as demonstrators and/or markers, other students do not; significantly, few if any students have chances to practice giving academic lectures, leading small-group sessions, or preparing lesson plans.

The most recent PRES (Postgraduate Research Experience Survey) results for Newcastle provide evidence of this concern: overall student satisfaction with teaching opportunities (Question 8) is less than that in other areas. In several schools in particular, satisfaction rates are worryingly low. This survey data is supported by recent conversations at PGR Staff Student Committees, in which students have repeatedly raised concerns about the lack of teaching experience.¹ Our primary objective, therefore, is to provide opportunities for PGR students to gain experience in giving academic lectures, leading small-group sessions, and preparing lesson plans.

Our secondary objective is to provide informal opportunities for PGR students to gain the necessary skills for their research: language acquisition, budget planning, archival research, website design, even photography. These are skills that PGR students often need for their research, but that – because of their highly specialised nature – cannot easily be provided with the context of the Research Training Programmes or Doctoral Training Centres (to which only some students have access).

Our goal is to set up a University website to facilitate a programme of micro-teaching given by and for postgraduate research students. This website will allow us to match interested parties – students keen to know more about a particular subject – with students able and willing to teach those relevant topics. Our intention, once we have gauged interest, is to facilitate a variety of teaching formats (dependant on the number of interested students and their needs): lectures and demonstrations, small-group tutorials, and one-on-one mentoring. We will also use the website to collect the materials that students design and use in teaching: PowerPoint presentations, handouts, lesson plans, etc. In this way, we will not only

¹ Because this is a sample, no specific schools have been identified. In a genuine proposal, you might want to provide more concrete data and/or excerpts from minutes of specific meetings.

be facilitating opportunities for PGR students to teach; we will also be providing a resource from which they can learn from one another.

We believe that our project will enhance the research development of PGR students within our team as well as across students across the University. The students who teach, of course, will directly enhance their teaching skills (Engagement and Impact) as well as their communication methods and use of communication media (Communication and Dissemination). They will also build their skills in Working with Others (e.g., supervision, mentoring, influence and leadership). The students who participate as learners will have the chance to improve in a number of research skills areas, depending on what subjects they study: languages, innovation, information literacy, income and funding generation, etc. In organising the website and facilitating the micro-teaching platform, the project team members will enhance a number of key skills:

- Information literacy and management / Communication media (in setting up and running the website)
- Influence and leadership / Collaboration / Team-working (in working together and getting other students involved)
- Financial management (in managing the budget for the project)
- Networking (working with students across schools)

Project Management:

Our team consists of three student members across one SAgE School, one HaSS School, and an FMS Institute (XXX, XXX, and XXX); our staff sponsor is a senior teaching fellow from XXXX. The roles of our team members are as follows:

- Project Lead #1 – Organisation and promotion / management of student intern
- Project Lead #2 – Web design
- Student #3 – Assistance with promotion and web design
- Staff sponsor – Providing overall advice on teaching and teaching resources / liaison with other schools as necessary²

As explained in the rationale above, our intended beneficiaries are all PGR students at Newcastle who may be interested either in teaching or in learning one of the topics taught. We will have a more specific idea of how many students will be involved, as well as what subjects will be taught, once we begin our project.

Our project will follow four key phases, outlined below:

Phase #1: Assessing interest in and ability to teach specific subjects. In the first phase of our project, Project Lead #1 will work with a student intern to survey existing PGR students in all subject areas. Our goal is to find out three things: which students are interested in teaching, what subjects they are able to teach, and what subjects other students need to learn for their research. We anticipate that potential

² In a genuine proposal, real names should be used.

subjects may include languages, photography, web design, budget planning, archival research, and software usage (e.g., InDesign, PhotoShop), but we need to have a more accurate understanding of what skills can and should be taught.

Phase #2: Mapping out an initial teaching schedule. We want to be able to advertise an initial teaching schedule that will promote our eventual website. Once phase #1 has been completed, Project Lead #1 will work with the staff sponsor to develop a coherent teaching schedule for Semester 1 in 2014/15. We anticipate that this will include a variety of teaching formats (lecture, small group sessions, one-on-one mentoring) as well as days/times of the week (so as to meet the needs of full-time and part-time students).

Phase #3: Promotion. Once the schedule has been set and all “teachers” have agreed to participate in Semester 1, we will work on promoting the schedule to academic units across the University. This will involve an initial branding and set up of our website (Project Lead #2 and Student #3) as well as the distribution of promotional materials around the University (student intern). Our objective here will be to design promotional materials for Semester 1 as well as a website that will continue to suit our purposes in the long term.

Phase #4: Longterm Website Design. Once the Semester 1 teaching schedule has been set and is running well, we will turn our attention to the sustainability of our project. Our goal here is to design the website in such a way that it both promotes our project (Phase #3) and facilitates discussions between potential PGR “teachers” and “learners.” We hope to continue to add teaching sessions – on repeat and new topics – for Semester 2 and in future academic years. As noted above, we will also be posting materials prepared by PGR “teachers” to provide others with an idea of the types of materials used in the classrooms and to share good practice. The website will thus need to be able to facilitate discussions, promote an existing timetable, allow people to sign up as “teachers” or “learners,” and post documents and files from teaching sessions. Phase #4 will also include an evaluation of impact so that we know what about the website and the teaching programme is working well, and what should be improved in future iterations.

After the four outlined phases, our project will need only a small amount of upkeep. A webmaster will need to check uploaded materials and refresh the schedule, and a project lead will need to work with other interested parties to set a schedule each semester. Neither of these responsibilities will be terribly time consuming, and they will not require additional funding past this year.

Our timeline is as follows:

	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February
Phase 1	✓	✓						
Phase 2		✓	✓					
Phase 3			✓	✓				

Phase 4					✓	✓	✓	✓
PGR Event								✓

Support and Funding:

To support the development of our project, we have outlined the following funding needs:

Item	Calculations	Total
Student intern x 2	£6.92 x 50 hours each	£692
Color printing of promotional materials	4 A0 posters x £50 each (University print services) Colour fliers x 100 = £84 Apple-shaped candies = £30	£314
Web Design	Quote provided ³	£1050
Software Development Budget	TBD based on students' needs, see below	£2000
		£4056

We have budgeted £2000 for software needs, to include licenses for any software packages that will be taught in the mini-classes and that are not already owned by the University (or are not accessible for use in this format). This could potentially include InDesign, language learning software, etc, but we will not be able to finalise this list until Phase #1 has been completed. All software purchased would continue to be used in the future by PGR students teaching these topics and would be made available for installation in subject-area PGR spaces.

Impact and Dissemination:

We are very keen to make sure that our project is beneficial for PGR students and their development needs. To this end, we will be measuring impact in several ways:

- Interviews with students involved as “teachers” and as “learners” – to be videoed and made available on the website as a form of promotion (with the permission of our subjects)
- An evaluation provided to students at the end of every teaching session
- A SurveyMonkey survey sent to all PGR students at the start of Semester 2 2014/15 asking if they are aware of the project and, if so, how they feel about it

In Phase #4, as we are planning the long-term sustainability of our project, we will take these evaluations into account.

³ In a genuine proposal, you would want to include a quote for any large, external costs.

Our objective is to promote (and therefore disseminate information on) our project throughout late summer and autumn of 2014. However, we will also be participating in the PGR Innovation Fund event in April/May 2015 to further share our project and report on its success/challenges. If appropriate, we will also consider submitting a proposal to speak at a national conference (such as the Three Rivers Learning and Teaching Conference) or through a Doctoral Training Centre event.

Administrative Considerations:

Our proposal has been approved by the relevant Heads of School; they have each sent emails of approval to the PGR Innovation Fund contact. We also have the approval of our individual supervisors.

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