

Co-designed Student Support for TM354 Software Engineering

Dr Cathryn Peoples



Problem Statement

"The physical and temporal separation of tutor and student, and between students themselves, can lead to feelings of isolation. The lack of interaction and discussion between students on non-cohort based courses lessens the richness of the learning experience and omits a significant element of the constructivist approach to learning."

[Croft, Dalton, Grant, "Overcoming Isolation in Distance Learning," Journal for Education in the Built Environment, 2010.]

Experience during 2018J indicated that there was an opportunity to improve student retention and engagement in the module...

5 students from R08 deferred TM354 in 2018J

3 students from R08 needed extensions for both TMA 01 and 02

The objective of this study is to identify if student engagement can be achieved by increasing the amount of support provided to students, and by providing it in a way which responds to their needs

I asked students of 2018J about their experience of TM354 ...

Student Case Study 1 18J

STUDENT D

"I find tutors very ... formal, which makes them difficult to approach for fear of judgement or criticism. I think email makes it more formal."

"In every module I've taken so far I've felt quite alone with the study. Somehow the remote study distance between the student and the tutor needs to be bridged."

"I wait to be asked if I need it (help), to ensure that I'm not being a nuisance. I have no idea of what I have potentially missed out on over the years with the OU. (I find the whole OU process quite daunting)."

"Sometimes just little things, but I always leave them unanswered as I feel awkward spamming emails to a tutor."

Age: 51, Gender: Male, Av. TMA results: 90, 63, 84, R03

Student Case Study 2 18J

STUDENT L

"This year having a tutor that understood my personal circumstances was immensely helpful."

Age: 33, Gender: Female, Av. TMA results: 92, 68, 99, R03

I have used Slack for several years to engage project students ...

[Slack, <https://slack.com>]

Student Perspectives on Slack

"It's a brilliant tool for communicating with one's tutor and sharing information."

"Quick and easy to communicate with tutor. Not too instructive and not as formal as email."

"If not all tutors use Slack or something similar to keep in touch with students then I think they ought to."

I am interested now to understand if Slack (among other techniques) can be used to support a delivered module such as TM354 ...

A screenshot of a Slack interface titled 'general | TM47019B Slack'. The left sidebar shows channels like '#final-year-project', '#general', and '#random'. A message from Cathryn Peoples (@Cathryn_Peoples) on March 20th says 'Thanks Cathryn, do i still need to use ...'. Another message from Cathryn Peoples on March 22nd says 'I'm going to put yours into this system now, Kevin.' and 'Great, Jonathan.'. A message from Carbs (@Carbs) on March 22nd says 'Thank you.'. A message from Cathryn Peoples on March 24th says 'Dear Students, Please note the addition of LO10 in TMA 02: LO10: identify and address the legal, social, ethical and professional issues that may arise during the development and use of computing and IT systems. This LO is distinct to the LOs assessed in TMA 01.' Michael Mountain (@Michael_Mountain) replies with a thumbs up emoji. A message from Cathryn Peoples on March 25th says 'Reminder: <https://calendly.com/c-j-peoples>'. A message at the bottom says '+ Message #general'.

Research Objectives

1. Gain an understanding of the student perspective on techniques to bridge the gap between them and ALs.
2. Trial personalised support plans with students.
3. Examine the effectiveness of Slack in a delivered module.
4. Examine the cost-benefit impact of increased personalised support.
5. Examining the extent to which tutors would accept making themselves