

3 July 2020

Final Report: Academic Fellowship (30 Sep 2019 – 8 May 2020) Redesigning CX110 (Roman Culture and Society, core module)

Overview

This project undertook to redesign the syllabus and teaching methods for the core module for 1st Years in the Dept of Classics and Ancient History, CX110 Roman Culture and Society, embedding academic key skills and research skills into the syllabus in an integrated fashion. It supported first-year students in their transition from school learners to academic researchers, and enhanced the inclusiveness of the module both by supporting students from all educational backgrounds in gaining the skills needed for Honours-level study and by using technology-enhanced learning so that students with anxiety or learning disabilities could participate as active learners without having to speak out directly in front of their peers. It was led by Alison Cooley (module leader), in collaboration with David Swan (PGR student/ teaching assistant), Catriona Matthews (Academic Services Development Manager) and Chris Vernon (Subject Librarian). In addition, the project progressed alongside the Professional Development Portfolio devised by Kathryn Woods (Faculty DSEP).

There were two main strands to the project:

- 1) designing new ways of embedding generic academic study skills and subject-specific research skills into the teaching of the module; experimenting with technology-enhanced learning techniques in order to improve inclusiveness and to allow for the module's Moodle page to accommodate resources for an extended classroom
- 2) giving students the opportunity to visit, engage with, and evaluate a major international exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, so that students gained experience both in analyzing material and visual objects from the Roman world in a museum setting and in reflecting upon methods of public engagement for research. This also involved collaborative teamwork in writing a review of the exhibition for publication.

Fifty-two 1st-year ug students from the Dept of Classics & Ancient History were enrolled in CX110, of whom four were students from WP backgrounds, and sixteen were registered with disabilities. No joint honours students opted for the module this year.

Academic Study Skills

Our project aimed to help first-year undergraduates from all backgrounds make the transition from schoolwork to university study. Students on degree courses taught by the Department of Classics and Ancient History enter from a wide variety of pathways and educational backgrounds. Some students have studied Classical subjects at A level (or equivalent), whilst others are approaching the Classical world for the first time. Few, if any, students, though, will have studied the full spectrum of Classical Antiquity (with texts, ancient history, archaeology, visual and material culture). Some have had the opportunity to develop research skills by undertaking the Extended Project Qualification, whilst others not have been offered this at school. One of the main challenges of the first year is to support students in making the transition from school learning to Honours-level study.

In addition, many students are reluctant to speak out in lectures and seminars, particularly in the first year, and this can be not just the consequence of a lack of confidence on their part, but can reflect a student's diagnosis of anxiety disorder or of a condition on the autistic spectrum. In the course of this project, we explored how technology-enhanced learning can enable students to participate as active learners without having to speak out directly in front of their peers, using Padlet and Mentimeter. These digital tools were successful in encouraging all students to participate in the module.

By integrating interactive activities around research tools and techniques into the module's syllabus, students developed confidence as academic researchers. Study skills sessions embedded within the module's two-hour lecture slots integrated methods of technology-enhanced learning, in order to encourage active learning. Interactive exercises using Padlet and Mentimeter were designed in order to allow students to view class responses afterwards, situating the module teaching within an extended classroom. These virtual forms of interaction fostered inclusiveness by taking account, in consultation with staff from Disabilities Services, of challenges faced by students with anxiety or who have conditions on the autistic spectrum. These interactive digital resources, designed by David Swan, Catriona Matthews, and Chris Vernon will be available for use in subsequent years in teaching the module.

In addition, subject-specific research skills were integrated into the module more explicitly. Students encountered key disciplinary approaches (including archaeology, visual culture, epigraphy, numismatics, textual and literary criticism) as well as interdisciplinary theories (eg relating to foodways, literacy, family, childhood, death and burial). The lecture time dedicated to academic skills equipped students with a comprehensive knowledge of the research tools and methodologies available to them, to enable them to develop as independent researchers and to choose Honours-level modules that suit their interests. Some of the research tools are specific to our discipline and are not generally encountered by students before university – such as using classical commentaries on literary texts and studying with original artefacts. Other research methodologies, such as critical thinking, are shared in common with other disciplines, and were incorporated into weekly lectures, via new technology-enhanced activities in order to ensure accessibility to all students. The inclusion of the Library in the design and delivery of these activities facilitated a 'joined up' approach to education. This ensured that students could make connections between their subject, their research, and the support and resources held in the Library. Overall, the redesign of the module has prepared students to launch into their Honours-level study in their second year confidently and with the research tool-kit they need.

Syllabus:

- Week 1: Introduction to Study Skills; How to Engage in Lectures; Note-taking exercise; Reflecting on your skill-set
- Week 2: How to approach academic print materials; Reading exercise
- Week 3: Thinking with objects; Website evaluation
- Week 4: Finding and evaluating online resources
- Week 5: Alternatives to internet search engines
- Week 5: Seminar – Ostia and the Roman Economy (archaeology)
- Week 6: Exhibition visit
- Week 7: Planning RCS Essay 1; Feedback exercise
- Week 8: Approaching Roman literature - Using commentaries
- Week 9: Good academic practice; Referencing; Essay-marking exercise

- Week 9: Seminar – Writing a review of Pompeii exhibition
- Week 10: Understanding assessment criteria
- Week 11: Benefiting from feedback
- Week 14: Seminar – Annotated Online Bibliographies
- Week 15: Oral presentations
- Week 17: Seminar – Roman literature
- Week 20: Seminar – Interpreting visual and material culture; group presentations

Student reflection on study skills

The following represents a sample of the reflections included by students in their Professional Development Portfolios. It is particularly interesting to see that some students have become conscious of the shift in academic practice required for University study.

- Prior to university, I had little understanding of the process of academic writing or the amount of research that went into a single essay. Thanks to the study skills sessions, I was eased into these rigorous demands gradually, and by the time of my first assessment I found myself able to manage my time much more effectively. The study skills sessions also helped me with many of the specific requirements of assessments, such as taking notes on articles, writing bibliographies, and learning how to plan an essay effectively. As a result, I feel like these sessions have helped substantially with the stress that comes with deadlines, as well as improving the overall quality of the work I produce. A fear that my work would not reach the quality expected by the university was a significant issue for me in the initial weeks of my course, but through the study skills sessions I also came to understand that good results were entirely achievable as long as I managed my time effectively and put in the work, and for this and the specific help they provide I am thankful for the study skills sessions.
- During the Roman Culture and Society skill sessions on a Friday afternoon, the following topics have been covered in order to improve our essay skills as well as developing the necessary skills needed to do well in this degree. These topics included; reading an essay, finding a website which is useful to our research, evaluating online resources, alternative to internet search engines, feedback and analysing an essay, understanding what plagiarism is as well as understanding how one marks an essay. These were instrumental in understanding how to correctly write an essay and the best ways to achieve a good grade. The topics covered within the RCS study skill session also enabled me to comprehend how to efficiently look through different articles, essays and journals and to pick out the necessary information and disregard those which are not necessarily true. Moreover, the work that we did on marking and giving feedback on essays was important in regard to my own essay as I then knew what was necessary to include and what wasn't, as well as understanding how marks were attributed to the essays and why they were attributed. Overall, the Roman Culture & Society study skill sessions were very beneficial to my development in this course and enabled me to understand what I need to do in the future to improve my future essays.
- My study skills talks have been helpful and have aided me in a variety of ways throughout the year. One such thing we were taught as methods by which to research, for instance, removing the focus on search engines like google and redirecting us to sites such as Jstor, which I used multiple times when researching for my own essays. We also focused on citation and types of sources to use in an essay, primary and secondary as well as archaeological survey data, that can all lead us to form an argument effectively. The study skills sessions helped me realise all the resources at my fingertips as such, be it

source books, surveys or the traditional primary sources. The study skill sessions were also directly beneficial on my essay writing, for instance, the analysis of sample essay questions and answers was incredibly helpful. By seeing what makes a good essay distinct from a bad essay, I was able to try and emulate the desirable characteristics into my own essay writing. The formulation of an argument in conjunction with citation was displayed in these examples which was particularly important, teaching me methods to bring sources in without clouding my overall voice and line of argument. This and the previous point are in tandem, as both influence essay production.

- Through the study skills sessions in Roman Culture and Society I have learned many useful skills to apply to my essay writing. I found this useful because University essays have different expectations to A-Level essays, so having it laid out and explained clearly was helpful. I particularly found helpful the work on how to reference and write bibliographies as this is something I had never really had to do before; therefore, having a short session on how to do this was helpful. Having this at the end of a lecture was helpful because we were all in the correct mindset to focus and take good notes. Discovering how to find useful sources was also useful as this is something new to University, as well as having guidance on how to avoid plagiarism and make the most out of the resources we have provided, for example things such as the library search and J-stor.

Last Supper at Pompeii Exhibition

A trip to the exhibition 'Last Supper at Pompeii', at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (5 Nov 2019, Week 6 autumn term), offered students the opportunity to learn about curation, public engagement in research, and learning/ teaching from ancient objects. This particular exhibition offered a perfect opportunity to encourage students to explore artefacts that are specifically relevant to Roman imperial history, which is at the heart of the module, from the comparative interdisciplinary perspective of looking at food and foodways. It also offered the opportunity for the students to learn about public engagement in research via museum exhibitions, and to gain an appreciation of the constraints and possibilities offered by exhibitions.

Students were given a worksheet to complete during their visit to the exhibition, and seminars during Week 9 autumn term were devoted to evaluating the exhibition. Each seminar group was set up in Google docs so that the students could work together to produce a review of the exhibition. Seminar tutors guided the groups in their work, helping students to identify images that were copyright-free for use in the review, offering constructive criticism as the students composed their reviews, and prompting reflection by posing questions along the way. All four groups composed a 500-word review by the end of the seminar. These were submitted to the editorial board of *Reinvention*, and two were chosen for publication:

- Isabelle Green, Shayni Solanki, Archie Green, Stephanie Young, Megan Woodberry, Oscar Fanti, Rhianna Pike, Georgia-May Brown
[Dining and Dying at Pompeii : Last Supper at Pompeii Exhibition Review](https://doi.org/10.31273/reinvention.v13i1.587)
<https://doi.org/10.31273/reinvention.v13i1.587>
- Edward Summers, Sabah Nawaz, Elysia Dale, George Seager, Peter Novis, Millie Coster, Matthew Jenkins, Cameron Hill, Daisy Sutherland
[Exhibition Review: Last Supper in Pompeii - too much death not enough food](https://doi.org/10.31273/reinvention.v13i1.588)
<https://doi.org/10.31273/reinvention.v13i1.588>

In this way, these students have additionally gained experience in submitting their work for publication and the processes around publication. As well as encouraging the students to think

about the academic content of the exhibition, this exercise also introduced them to critical evaluation of public engagement in research. Working with the editorial team at *Reinvention* was a rewarding experience for all concerned. Feedback from *Reinvention*: 'Thank you so much for your support with these reviews, they're a wonderful addition to the issue and we would love to do something similar in the future.'


A student's report on the project

- 1) The exhibition really made a huge impact on my studies in RCS for the year. It inspired me with ideas for my essay based around the Roman diet. I used information gained from the exhibition to spur on my research and further reading. I also included images I took at the museum within my essay as sources to complement my writing. I have a keen interest in the physical objects of the Roman world, and any opportunity to see these in real life helps to fuel my interest and understanding of classics as a whole. I even returned with my family to the exhibition later on in the year as I enjoyed it so much and wanted to show them how interesting the collections were!
- 2) The follow-up seminar was a great way to reflect on what we had seen in the exhibition, I loved looking through the companion book to the exhibition and even purchased a copy for myself afterwards. It was my first experience drafting a review for a journal so it was a great way to understand the way that process works.
- 3) The study skills sessions were helpful in giving advice that we could take forward within all aspects of our studies. I found the advice on searching the library catalogues extremely helpful as this is a key aspect of preparing research for an essay, especially as I often have to work from digital copies and E-Books, it was great to see how I can find and access these with ease.

Teaching Assistant Reflection

I led six of the in-lecture study skill sessions, on topics including how to engage with lecturers, how to respond to feedback, and how to develop an effective bibliography. I was responsible for developing the online resources, creating activities using Padlet, Mentimeter and Moodle. These activities are now available online for future teaching of the module and I created guides on how to use the software so future teachers can make their own activities. These guides have been shared amongst the Researcher Development team in the Doctoral College to enhance their teaching, demonstrating a further 'joined up' dimension of the project.

My role in the project was beneficial to the students, the wider course and to my own personal development. The students benefited from increased confidence as they gained a wide and deep knowledge of the skills that they would need in an academic environment. This in turn proved beneficial to the course as a whole: the students developed a good grounding in research skills in the first term that would otherwise have taken time to develop throughout the entirety of the course. Finally, developing my digital



literacy has significantly improved my teaching skills. This is particularly beneficial in this current setting and I have transferred the skills developed running this course to my role as an Online Tutor of the WOLC module, in addition to leading transferable skills workshops online to postgraduates as part of the Getting it Done Programme of the Doctoral College.

**‘Bridging the skills gap’ – A novel approach to delivering Academic Skills Development
– A conference presentation delivered at Digifest 10.03.2020**

At Digifest 2020 Catriona Matthews delivered a short presentation providing an overview of our project and reflecting on its outcomes. The presentation commented on the use and success of flipped, blended, and active learning approaches in bridging the divide between ‘library’ and subject specific skills. The presentation concluded that the initial pilot was successful in engaging students with academic skills more comprehensively. It also proposed that with reconsiderations of the schedule, addition of multiple speakers to break up delivery, and continued close working between the Library and department staff the approach could continue to be a success. This opened up discussions with other attendees about the use of dedicated academic skills courses prior to the start of term time and challenges of the flipped classroom model.