First Year Student Experience of a Learning Skills Module: Information to drive Improvements

Author: Darvree Downey PhD PGDHE
Learning-to-Learn at Third Level Module

Background:

- Drivers for change:
  - Learning skills deficit impacting students throughout their college years
  - First Year Retention Issues

- Introduced as a module for all the first year students in ITT in September 2012

- Developed by an in-house multidisciplinary team

- Based on Irish & international examples of learning skills modules
Module Aims:

- To help students adapt to a third level educational environment
- To encourage students to become reflective, independent learners
Theory & practice of:

- Active learning strategies
- Study skills
- Group work
- Communication skills
- Self-management & Personal Development
- Information Skills
- Academic writing

How?
Assessment of the Module

100% CA

- Group Project
- In-class writing skills exam
- Learning Journal - Reflective entries and in-class use
Context of this Study

- Finding out if *content & delivery* were fit-for-purpose

Why?

- To improve delivery in 2013 & beyond
Students surveyed

- First year Science students
  - Pharmaceutical Science (Level 7 & 8)
  - DNA & Forensics (Level 7 & 8)
  - Sports Science (Level 7 & 8)
  - Bio-analysis (Level 6 & 7)

- 12% mature students

- 104 students out of a possible group of 150
Methodology

1. Survey of students (anonymous)

2. Additional information from reflective journal entries
Student Perception of the need for the module

Statement: “I do not need L2L classes because I already know how to study”
Why did over the half the students surveyed think they did not need such a module?
Understanding the Difference between 2\textsuperscript{nd} & 3\textsuperscript{rd} Level

Statement: “L2L classes helped me understand the difference between learning at 2\textsuperscript{nd} & 3\textsuperscript{rd} level”
Comments on what was useful

Group Work: 31% positive comment, 7% negative comment

Study Plans & Time Management: 21% positive comment, 13% negative comment

Reflection: 22% positive comment, 25% negative comment
Actions:

Changes to Module

Content & Delivery
Implemented Winter Semester 2013

Contextualisation:

- Connection between ability to reflect and
  1. Performance in assessments
  2. Performance at job interview

- In-class exercises on reading skills:
  - Use of notes from theory modules
  - Use of discipline-specific articles of interest
Implemented Winter Semester 2013

Change in timing:

- Group project Week 7 instead of Week 4 i.e. once information sourcing and referencing has been fully covered
- Assessment information covered earlier in term:
  - GPA calculation exercise
  - How to structure a lab report
Is the Learning-to-Learn module delivering what students need?