

EVALUATION REPORT
for the
PILOT PROJECT
of the
FACULTY OF BUSINESS FRESHMAN SEMINAR
FB1001 (AY 2011/12)

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INTRODUCTION

The Freshman Seminar for the Faculty of Business was piloted in the academic year 2011/12. The Seminar was spread across two semesters, with two classes of roughly 50 students in each class. Each class met once every two weeks. All of the students were non-local, approximately 90% of them being from Mainland China, the others coming from Taiwan, Vietnam and Thailand. The schedule of the seminars and corresponding in-class exercises is set out below. In addition to the activities associated directly with the classroom sessions students were required to complete (and repeat) the PolyU SAARD, the Library's On-line Information Literacy Certificate, and to participate in one 5Alive course and two 5Alive events, as graduation requirements.

Seminar	Full Title	In-class Exercises
L1	Introduction to Freshman Seminar	Cultural Intelligence Survey
L2A *	Learning-to-learn	What is learning, and a good answer?
L2B *	Hong Kong's Economy	How to raise a good question?
L3	Introduction to the Entrepreneurship Project	Initial reflection on entrepreneurship
L4	The Purpose of Business	Critique on mission statements
L5	Managing Money for Business	Financial statement analysis
L6	Creativity Workshop	9-dot puzzle, Christmas tree game
L7	Ethical Reasoning and Behavior	Babson Framework (rationalizing decisions on free-riders), Defining Issues Test (version 2)
L8	Managing People	Survival game
L9	Managing Markets	The marketing game
L10	Managing Operations	Outing to Starbucks at East TST or LibCafe, staffing a coffee shop on a virtual floor plan
L11	Global Outlook	Sharing on cross-cultural encounters in groups, Hofstede's measures of cultural dimensions
L12	Reflection of Year One at PolyU	Reflecting on relative strengths as at the outset, and development across the year, with evidence.
L13	Entrepreneurship Project Presentation	N/A

* Due to the relatively distinctive nature of the first and second half of the 2nd seminar, I have used L2A and L2B to denote them respectively, to better codify students' concerns on related matters.

Assessment was made up of three components. First, the students were required to complete an Initial Self-Appraisal of their own standing with respect to the subject learning outcomes, at the beginning of the programme - 30% of the total mark. Second, they were required to complete and report on an Entrepreneurship Project (40%). Finally, they were required to complete a Reflective Essay, supported by a portfolio of materials (30%). The Initial Self-Appraisal was very poorly done with nearly half of the students gaining 'D' or 'F' grades, simply because they did not meet the very clear written criteria required for a 'C' or better. In view of that performance, students were given a 'second chance' in that the final Reflective Essay was divided into two parts, the first part being a 're-visit' of the Initial Self-Appraisal, whose mark would replace the first one given. Despite that, and several

explanations of the requirements, a significant proportion of the students still failed to take notice of the rubrics. In the overall assessment the distribution of marks was somewhat below that for these students in most subjects. After the marks had been distributed 16 students complained that they did not know the subject counted for GPA (they had clearly been told), and that senior students or students from other faculties had told them that they need not put effort into the subject (misinformation).

ACADEMIC RESULTS AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION

No students failed, although a small number came close to not meeting completion requirements (they were given alternative tasks to carry out). Three out of 94 (3.2%) were given 'A' grades, 40 (42.6%) 'B' or 'B+', 45 (47.9%) took 'C' or "C+" and 6 (6.4%) 'D' or 'D+'.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THE EXIT SURVEY

Interim feedback was taken from students at the end of the first semester, but the Exit Survey, completed on an anonymous basis, was the most important vehicle for evaluation.

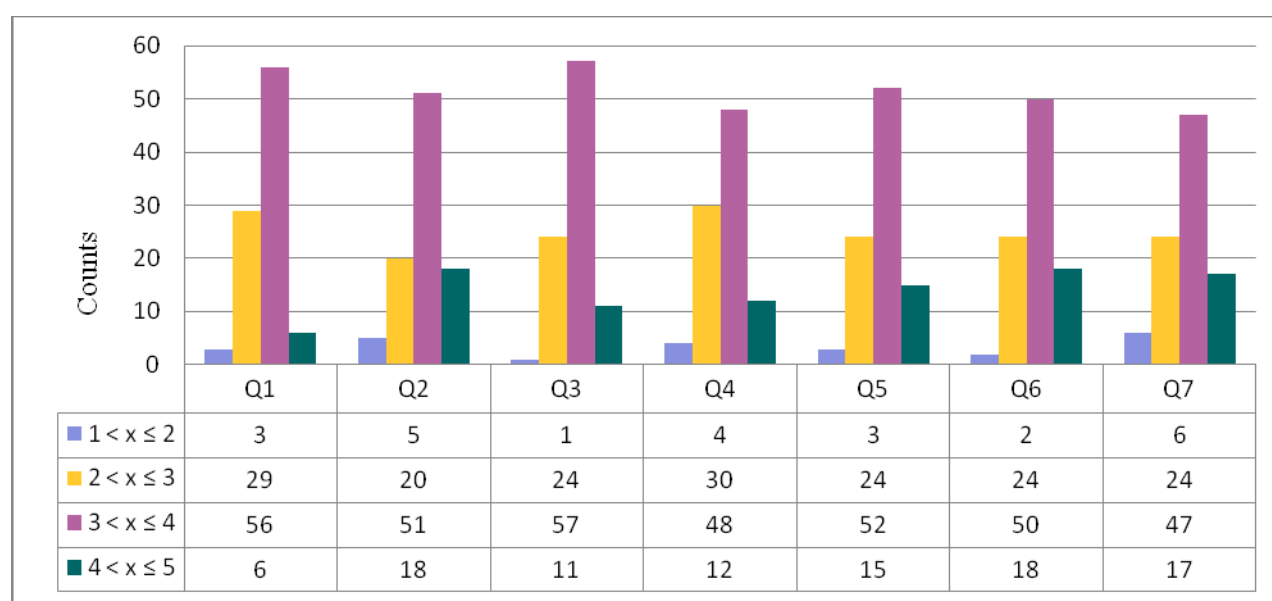
In the first seven questions, students were told to declare, on a 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each of the learning outcomes had been achieved.

1	2	3	4	5
STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE

The learning goals are:

1. Evaluate your own entry-level performance with respect to the 'generic' learning outcomes which are to be achieved in all of the BBA programmes.
2. Apply more creative thinking to your university studies.
3. Understand principles of learning at university level and evaluate your own development with respect to 'learning to learn'.
4. Identify the major ethical issues which arise in respect of university life and understand your own level of ethical reasoning.
5. Understand the nature of Business and management education and the structure, standing and direction of the Faculty of Business.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of the entrepreneurship process and different entrepreneurial skills.
7. Demonstrate awareness of global issues in business practice.

The Table below shows the distribution of responses.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Mean	3.69	3.87	3.84	3.72	3.84	3.89	3.80
Median / Mode	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
STDEV	0.64	0.78	0.63	0.74	0.72	0.73	0.81
Skewness	-0.38	-0.47	-0.13	-0.16	-0.27	-0.18	-0.35

As the table shows, the mode response was 4 indicating that students ‘agree’ that stated learning outcomes were met. In terms of mean scores there was very little variation across the seven different subject outcomes.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

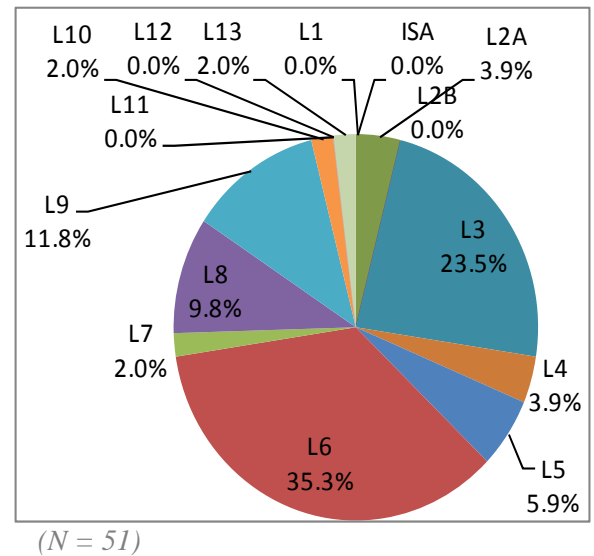
In order to evaluate student views in more depth they were also faced with five open-ended qualitative questions, probing into their perceptions of the interest and usefulness of the programme, in addition to reflections and suggestions for improvements.

Students were allowed to comment on as many issues as they liked, and the vast majority did respond with something of insight, although to a varying extent. In the summary given here, responses have been divided into 3 broad categories, namely lectures and assignment, in-class exercises and the learning process.

Q1: What did you find was the MOST INTERESTING part of the Freshman Seminar programme?

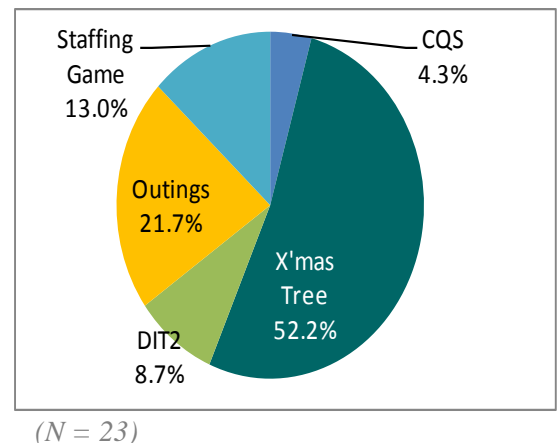
i) Lectures & Assignments

Creativity (L6) was deemed as the most interesting one, followed by the introduction to the entrepreneurship project (L3). While the latter session only took 3 hours, the project effectively spread over the foundation year and some students were very satisfied by the progress they've achieved over the year. Next came Managing Markets and Managing Operations, which were pretty close to each other. None considered the introductory mass meeting (L1), the lecture on Hong Kong's Economy (L2B) or global outlook (L11) as the most interesting.



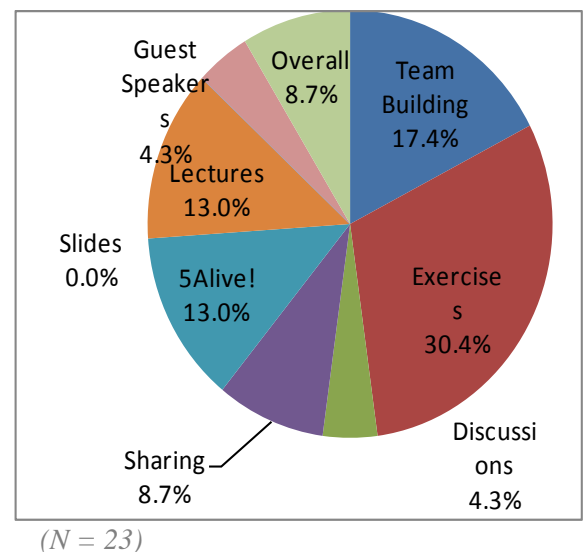
ii) In-class Exercises

The Christmas tree game in L6 was seen as the most interesting game, consistent with students' interest in the lecture itself. Outings to the nearest Starbucks Cafe or LibCafe to gain a realistic view on operations management, followed by a simulation game on staffing a coffee shop, did arouse our students' interest for L10. Only a couple of students thought that the questionnaires, such as CQS and DIT2, were the most interesting components.



iii) Learning Process

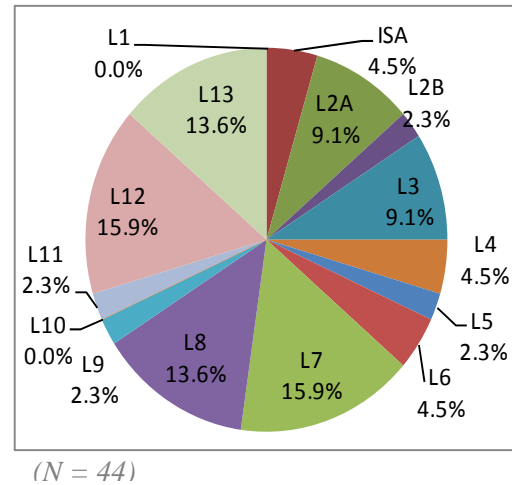
Students were mostly fond of collaborative work on practical exercises, discussing among themselves for coordinated sharing in front of fellow classmates. 5Alive! events were felt to broaden their horizons, and inviting guest speakers helps make our lectures more appealing. One student mentioned "the integration between teacher and students", and three students found nothing to be particularly interesting.



Q2: What did you find was the LEAST INTERESTING part of the Freshman Seminar programme?

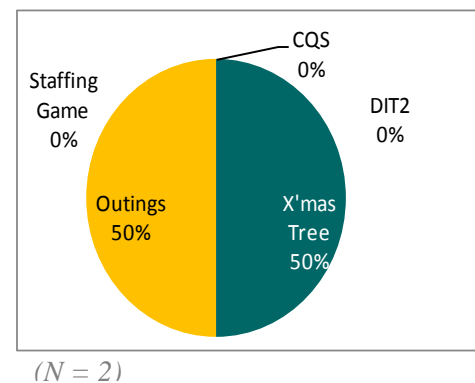
i) Lectures & Assignments

The “least interesting” opinions were widely spread across the sessions, suggesting no consensus. Seven students each (out of 44 responses) found ethical reasoning (L7) and Reflection (L12) the least interesting while 6 each were not interested in compiling business reports (L13), or managing people (L8). As an illustration of the variation of opinions, 2 students found the Creativity session (most often found to be the most interesting) to be the least interesting.



ii) In-class Exercises

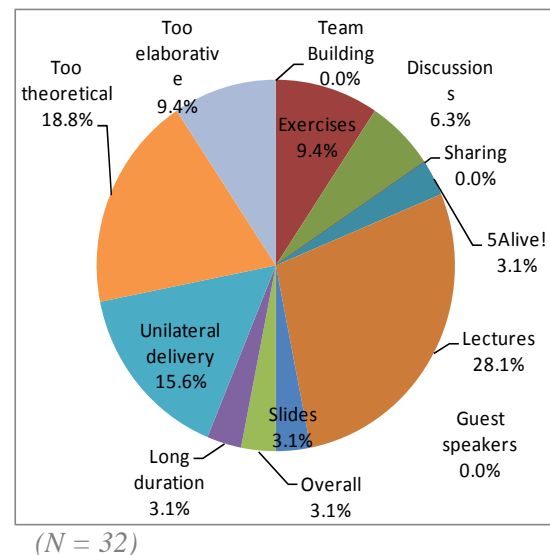
Only two students gave opinions here, one disliking the very popular Christmas tree game, and the other complaining about ‘advertising for Starbucks’ in the coffee shop visit session. While the CQS and DIT2 questionnaires were not rated as “most interesting” by any of the students, neither were they rate as ‘least interesting’.



iii) Learning Process

Of the 32 students who gave an opinion in this domain, 28.1% found lectures the least interesting and others commented on them being too theoretical (18.8%) or elaborative (9.4%).

Despite one-half of the seminar time being allotted to students’ involvements, comments were made that “the time of teaching principles is too long”, “too many theoretical knowledge”, “some theories are far from daily life”. Another supposed that even for some kind of “theorizing talk”, “the professor can make it more attractive”.



On the other hand, nine students made comments like “nothing particular boring” or “all are interesting”. As one student expressed it “hard to say; I think everything has its own benefit to students”.

Overall, and from class observation, students disliked sitting down and being spoken to, and enjoyed being active and (preferably) outside the classroom.

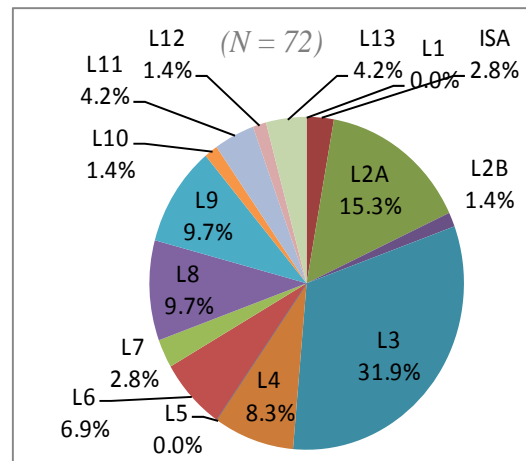
Q3: What did you find was the MOST USEFUL part of the Freshman Seminar programme?

i) Lectures & Assignments

The most frequently cited “most useful” activity (23 out of 72 students commenting) was the Entrepreneurship Project.

Eleven students rated the metacognitive training (L2A) most useful, teaching them to think independently and critically, alongside effective ways of studying.

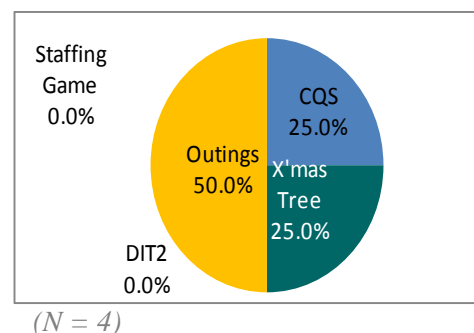
Apart from that the “most useful” opinions were spread across all of the other sessions, except the introduction (L1) and the Managing Money (L5) sessions.



While the creativity workshop (L6) was found to be most interesting by 18 students, only 6 found it to be most useful.

ii) In-class Exercises

Only 4 students referred to in-class exercises as being “most useful”.

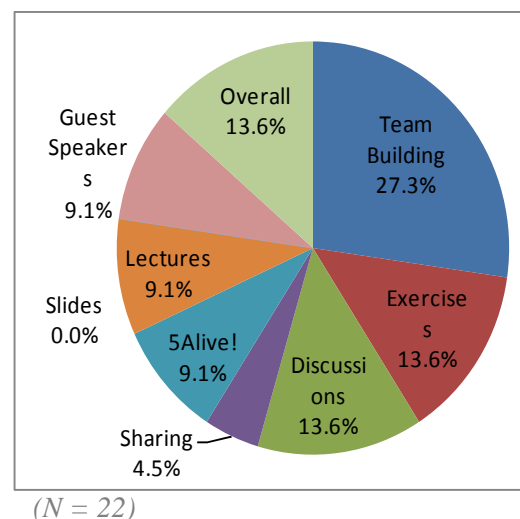


iii) Learning Process

Twenty two students referred to aspects of the learning process as being “most useful”, most notably the team building associated with the Entrepreneurship Project.

The 5Alive! events helped “demonstrate awareness” and “establish the basic understanding of globalization”, as 2 students put it respectively.

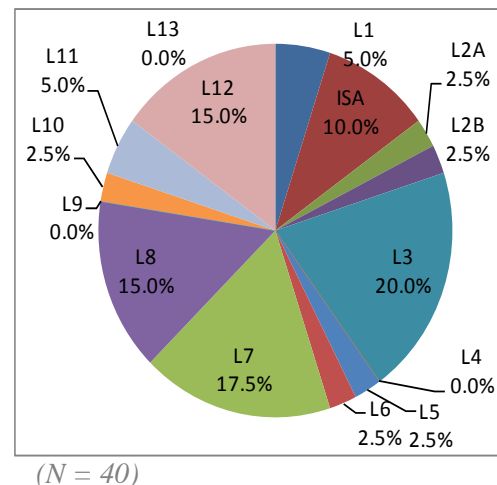
The practice of inviting field scholars to deliver professional seminars, say, “on specific topics like management” was welcomed by some of our students.



Q4: What did you find was the LEAST USEFUL part of the Freshman Seminar programme?

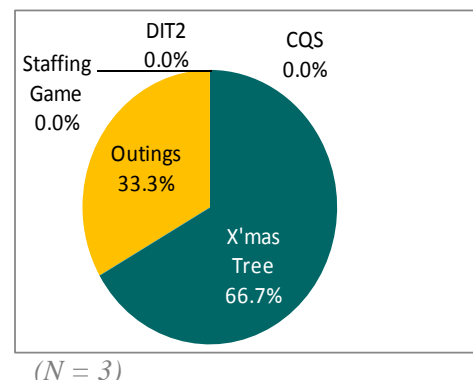
i) Lectures & Assignments

Of the 40 students who gave “least useful” ratings in this domain, the largest proportion (8 students) referred to the Entrepreneurship Project, alongside the larger number who rated it “most useful”. Seven students found ethical reasoning (L7) the least useful, while 6 each found Managing People and Reflection the least useful.



ii) In-class Exercises

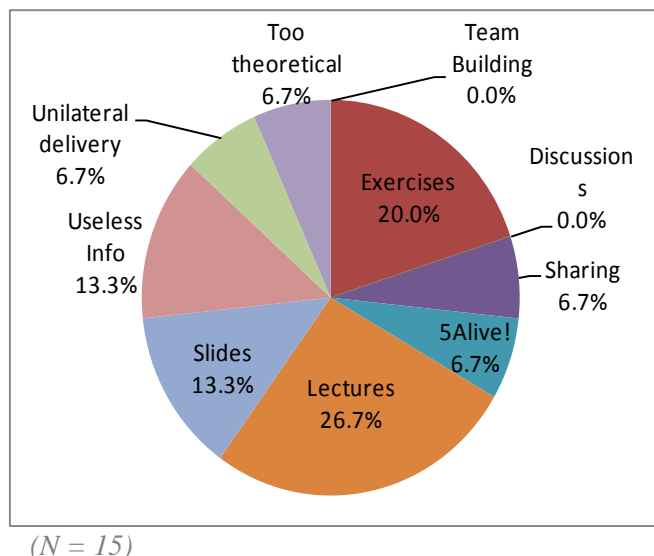
The responses here again illustrated the variation in student responses, and the distinction students make between “interest” and “useful”. Of the 40 students who viewed some aspects in this domain to be the least useful 66.7% referred to the Creativity game and 33.3% referred to the “outings”.



iii) Learning Process

Of the 15 students who made “least useful” comments in this domain, the largest proportion referred to “lectures”, followed by “exercises”. Two students referred to “meaningless information” without specifying what that was.

At the same time 17 students commented that they found nothing to be the least useful, with comments like “nothing actually”, “I don’t know”, or the most straightforward “no” or “I think all knowledge is useful. There is no useless knowledge. You may need a specific knowledge one day in the future”?



Q5: Please put down any comments / suggestions you have regarding your study experience in the Freshman Seminar.

Since students' responses are idiosyncratic, plain text is used here.

i) General

As a student puts it “I learn how to study at University and how to make an entrepreneurship project. I really appreciate this programme and the efforts that Prof. Davies made. However, it will be much better if adding some games in it to make it more interesting.”

ii) Duration

11 students are indicating that the 3-hour lectures being too tiring, some suggesting breaking up the lecture into 2 halves on a weekly basis “because it will better educate student in case we will forget the content of last class”. That was despite each seminar having a 15 minute break in the middle, and not all taking up the full three hours.

iii) Course Content

One student praised the “clear structure and purpose”, while another one noted “it would be better if an outline could be provided at the first class” (it was!).

iv) Events

“Maybe we can have many outdoor activities, such as the Starbucks and LibCafe survey.” Going outside the classroom is clearly attractive to most students, but needs to contribute to the learning outcomes.

v) Placements

“Maybe organizing some placement is needed”. Clearly, it’s beyond the scope of these seminars to provide placements for 600 students, and WIE is an integral component of their programmes. Nonetheless, it would be helpful to incorporate some kind of interaction with companies into the programme.

OTHER MEASUREMENT RESULTS

As part of the programme, various measurement tools were used, including the self-reported Self Assessment of All Round Development (SAARD), provided by the Student Affairs Office, the Cultural Intelligence Quotient questionnaire (CQS, also self-report) developed by Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, and the Defining Issues Test – Version 2, provided and graded by the University of Alabama.

The SAARD was completed by students in September 2011 and then repeated in March 2012 towards the end of the subject. Students were told to use it to help them with their Initial Self-Appraisal and final Reflective Essay. It covers 14 aspects of students’ development. Comparison of the mean scores for the group at the beginning and at the end of their first academic year showed mainly very small changes in students’ self-reported scores. For

Creativity, the score increased by 6.5%, Critical Thinking 4.8%, Lifelong Learning 4.0% and Communication 3.9%. Other changes were all less than 3%. For Healthy Lifestyle, Entrepreneurship and Social and National Responsibility the scores actually fell, though by less than 1% in every case. One other finding which emerged was that for most of the 14 dimensions, the standard deviation across the group fell, indicating some convergence on their self-perceptions.

The CQS was similarly measured in September 2011 and March 2012. For all four sub-dimensions of Cultural Intelligence; Metacognitive; Cognitive; Motivational, and; Behavioural, the scores increased across but the increases were relatively small in both absolute and relative terms.

The DIT-2 test has been used in many universities and research programmes as a direct measure of students' ability to reason ethically – based upon Kohlberg's theory of moral development. In the Faculty of Business at PolyU it has been used to test students early in their programmes, and at a later stage. The results, in this group of Mainland students, showed that PolyU students score very well when compared with the benchmarks available for the test. As freshmen, they typically exhibited scores which were higher than US sophomores and seniors (though lower than US Masters students).

USE OF THE BLACKBOARD SYSTEM

Blackboard was used to provide materials for the students, and they were required to submit their basic business idea for their Entrepreneurship Project via the system. They were encouraged, but not required to post comments about the subject, but virtually none of them did that. The system was not effective in some respects – videos loaded onto Blackboard would not play properly and had to be accessed via YouTube instead.

As with previous learning management systems, students do not find them 'naturally' useful. If they are forced to use them, they will do so, but the real benefits remain elusive.

OVERALL EVALUATION

An overall evaluation needs to draw on a range of sources, including both student and faculty members' perspectives. From the student perspective, as the analysis above shows, the learning outcomes were reasonably well met, with no "outliers" in terms of either success or failure. Students' views on which parts of the programme were most and least interesting and useful were very diverse, with no clear indications with respect to which parts of the subject should be expanded or deleted. There was a general preference for more active learning and less lecturing, though the more active sessions were sometimes seen as more interesting but less useful.

From the faculty members' perspective, students were a little less engaged than could be wished for, and often seemed to have difficulty relating attributes which are important for business people, to a business programme. Classroom behaviour was typical for PolyU with some students quite happily ignoring frequently repeated exhortations to keep away from their iPhones and iPads during class. Students' performance in the Initial Self-Appraisal was surprisingly disappointing, showing an inability to follow clear instructions. Ultimately, however, this was a reasonably successful piloting of the subject.

Concerns for the future relate to the 'scalability' of the system - with 600 students in the coming year - and the differences which may be experienced with Hong Kong DSE students, as opposed to Mainland students who have just completed the 'gao kao'. A group of Lead Tutors has been established and they will take the subject through its second year, building on the first year experience. A further concern is that three hour sessions tend to be forced into inconvenient time slots. Many of the classes for 2012/3 are timed at 8:30 in the morning or Saturday morning. In order to cope with the likely attendance problem, fairly draconian attendance rules are being put in place. Whether that will inculcate good habits into the students or just make them resentful of the subject remains to be seen.