

MMH299 Evaluation Report

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Introduction

In the Faculty of Business and Law, a business communication unit was first offered on the Burwood campus as an elective in the BCom. Following a review of the BCom, and the development of the Faculty's statement on the attributes of their graduates in response to the Teaching and Learning Management Plan, *MMH299: Business Communication* was developed as a core unit in the program. It is now offered to all students on all campuses, off-campus and internationally. In second semester 2002, approximately 450 students were enrolled. In October, on-campus students studying the unit were surveyed about aspects of their experience. In particular, feedback was sought on students' perceptions of the development of graduate attributes and communication skills, assessment processes, and the use and value of unit resources. The survey was delivered to students during the final tutorial classes for semester; 332 responses were received: 255 from the Melbourne campus, 54 from Geelong and 23 from Warrnambool (10 of whom were studying off-campus). This report presents the findings of the survey and makes recommendations about future developments.

Summary of key findings

- Overall, 45% of students rated the unit highly; a further 46% thought it was moderately valuable. Only 5% thought it had minimal or no value.
- Over half the students believed their studies had contributed quite significantly to the development of most attributes, and approximately a further third believed there had been some development.
- The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that studying the unit led to increased knowledge and understandings about business communication skills and their application.
- There was quite a degree of ambivalence overall about the extent to which assessment activities helped develop skills; between 30% and 40% neither agreed nor disagreed with statements relating to this.
- Teacher assessment was valued more highly than peer and self-assessment. Written and oral assessment tasks were valued equally, and face-to-face tasks were valued more highly than those done on computer.
- Most assessment tasks were valued highly or moderately by 85% of students. The journal activity was perceived to be less valuable.
- The resources used most and deemed to be most valuable were the textbook and FirstClass communication/advice.
- Resources more likely to be used minimally or not at all were the audio-visual materials and the audio-streamed lectures.
- Overall the level of usage of resources warrants their continued inclusion in the unit.

Student demographics

Age: Almost half the students (48%) were aged 18-20, with a further 47% aged 21-25. Only 5% were older.

Gender balance was reasonable with slightly more males (52%) than females (47%).

Work experience: A quarter of the students worked full time (25%), nearly 60% worked part time, 10% did not work. The rest did not respond. (See Table 1.)

- All but 2% of part time workers were in paid employment. Although some students did not respond, the data suggests most full time workers and about 2/3rds of part time workers were in business-related jobs. A third of part time workers were in non-business-related jobs.
- As might be expected, a higher proportion of mature-age students (over 21) were in full time paid employment and a higher proportion of 18-20 year olds were in part time employment (35%).
- 37% of students had worked less than one year, 46% had worked for 2-5 years and 5% had worked more than that. Differences across age groups were not as wide as might be expected:

Table 1: Type of work experience: paid or unpaid

Work experience	Paid	Unpaid	N/A	No response
Full time: 83 (25%)	73 (22%)	0%	0%	10 (3%)
Part time: 196 (59%)	132 (40%)	6 (2%)	0%	58 (17%)
None: 32 (10%)	0%	0%	32 (10%)	0%
No response: 21 (6%)				

Table 2: Type of work experience: business-related or non-business-related

Work experience	Business related	Non-business related	N/A	No response
Full time: 83 (25%)	45 (14%)	4 (1%)	0%	34 (10%)
Part time: 196 (59%)	68 (21%)	34 (10%)	0%	92 (28%)
None: 32 (10%)	0%	0%	32 (10%)	0%
No response: 21 (6%)				

Value of the unit

Overall, **45% of students rated the unit highly; a further 46% thought it was moderately valuable. Only 5% thought it had minimal or no value.** Proportionally:

- 18-20 year olds were a little more likely to rate the unit highly (47% compared with 38% mature age), and mature age students more likely to rate it moderately (53% compared with 18% 18-20 year olds).
- Males (46%) were slightly more likely to rate the course highly than females (44%).
- Part time workers (47%) were more likely than full time workers (38%) to value the unit highly.
- Although campus numbers varied considerably, a higher proportion of Warrnambool students rated the unit highly; a slightly higher proportion of Geelong and Melbourne students rated it moderately.

Development of graduate attributes and communication skills

Students were asked the extent to which they believed their studies had contributed to the development of particular attributes and skills. Table 3 indicates the level of development on a scale where '1' represents no development and '5' represents extensive development. Overall the data shows that **more than half the students believed their studies had contributed quite significantly to the development of most attributes**, and approximately **a further third believed there had been some development**. Less than 20% of students overall believed there was little or no development in respect to any attributes. In particular:

- Most significant development occurred in the areas of *oral and written communication* – over 60% nominated 4 or 5, and no more than 7% nominated 1 or 2.
- There was also reasonably significant development in *willingness to learn* about business communication and a *desire to continue learning* in the future – more than half the students nominated 4 or 5. No more than 15% nominated 1 or 2.
- While there was less *extensive* development in the areas of flexibility and adaptability, ethical judgement making and skills to implement change, some development did occur in these areas – around 80% nominated 3 or 4.
- The least development occurred in ethical judgement making. It is possible that some students did not fully understand the meaning and implications of this attribute.

Table 3: Level of development of attributes

ATTRIBUTE	1- No development	2	3	4	5 Extensive development
A willingness to learn about business communication.	6 (2%)	25 (8%)	112 (34%)	140 (43%)	45 (14%)
Oral communication skills.	2 (1%)	21 (6%)	105 (32%)	158 (48%)	45 (14%)
Written communication skills.	3 (1%)	17 (5%)	95 (29%)	159 (48%)	58 (17%)
Flexibility and adaptability.	7 (2%)	36 (11%)	150 (46%)	111 (34%)	24 (7%)
Self-confidence.	6 (2%)	31 (9%)	123 (37%)	129 (39%)	43 (13%)
Ethical judgement making.	13 (4%)	49 (15%)	154 (46%)	94 (28%)	21 (6%)
Skills to implement change.	9 (3%)	53 (16%)	136 (41%)	110 (33%)	23 (7%)
A desire to continue learning in the future.	12 (4%)	38 (11%)	101 (30%)	114 (34%)	67 (20%)

The majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that studying the unit led to increased knowledge and understandings about business communication skills and their application.

As shown in Table 4:

- Almost 3/4's of the students thought the communication skills taught were relevant to them and they now have a better understanding of essential factors involved in communication processes.
- Two-thirds agreed they have a better understanding of the principles and practices of modern business communication, and 60% believe they can communicate more effectively in a variety of business contexts.
- Over half the students agreed they are better able to analyse and solve communication problems, have a better understanding of the complexity of communication, and are better able to apply intercultural communication skills in an international context. However, feel there was more ambivalence in respect to these skills with a third of the students neither agreeing nor disagreeing. It may be that some students have not yet been in a situation where these skills can be tested unambiguously.

- No more than 11% disagreed that the unit did not lead to increased knowledge and understandings about business communication.
- Only a third of the students agreed the unit helped prepare them to undertake the B.Com internship. It may be that some students were confused about the statement given there were 8% who did not respond and 37% who neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 4: Perceptions of development of communication skills

Skills	SD	D	Neither A/D	A	SA
The communication skills taught in the unit were relevant to me.	1 (0%)	18 (5%)	74 (22%)	152 (46%)	85 (26%)
As a result of this unit, I have a better understanding of the essential factors involved in the process of communication.	2 (1%)	21 (6%)	66 (20%)	174 (52%)	69 (21%)
As a result of this unit, I have a better understanding of the principles and practices of modern business communication.	0 (0%)	17 (5%)	89 (27%)	171 (52%)	54 (16%)
As a result of this unit, I am better able to analyse and solve communication problems.	2 (1%)	33 (10%)	125 (38%)	144 (43%)	28 (8%)
As a result of this unit, I have a better understanding of the complexity of communication.	3 (1%)	32 (10%)	106 (32%)	140 (42%)	51 (15%)
As a result of this unit, I believe I can communicate more effectively in a variety of business contexts.	0%	23 (7%)	108 (33%)	153 (46%)	47 (14%)
As a result of this unit, I am better able to apply intercultural communication skills in an international context.	5 (2%)	30 (9%)	122 (37%)	143 (43%)	32 (10%)
The unit helped prepare me to undertake the B. Com internship NB* 8% did not respond to this statement.	36 (11%)	32 (10%)	124 (37%)	90 (27%)	24 (7%)

Assessment issues

Extent to which assessment activities helped develop skills

There was quite a degree of ambivalence overall about the extent to which assessment activities helped develop skills; between 30% and 40% neither agreed nor disagreed with each statement in Table 5.

- Just over half the students agreed or strongly agreed that assessment activities increased awareness of business communication and 50% believed they helped to develop designated practical business communication skills.
- 47% agreed the assessment provided timely feedback which reinforced learning and encouraged the productive use of a range of resources.
- 40% agreed assessment motivated them to learn about business communication and 38% believed it contributed to the Deakin Advantage. It is possible that some students were unclear about what it is despite the fact it was mentioned in introductory lectures.

Table 5: Extent to which assessment activities helped develop skills

Assessment activities:	SD	D	Neither A/D	A	SA
NB: Due to missing responses, some percentages do not total 99-100%.					
Motivated me to learn about business communication	4%	15%	40%	30%	10%
Increased my awareness of business communication	1%	8%	30%	48%	12%
Helped develop practical business communication skills	1%	5%	36%	44%	13%
Provided timely feedback which reinforced learning	2%	11%	38%	39%	8%
Encouraged me to use productively the range of resources	3%	10%	39%	39%	8%
Contributed to the development of the Deakin Advantage	5%	11%	42%	30%	8%

Most helpful assessment for meeting learning objectives

Teacher assessment was valued more highly than peer and self-assessment. Written and oral assessment tasks were valued equally, and face-to-face tasks were valued more highly than those done on computer. As indicated in Table 6:

Categories of assessment

- Teacher assessment was valued most highly by over half the students; a further 41% rated it moderately valuable.
- Peer assessment was thought to be moderately valuable by over half the students. Mature age students, and those working part time were slightly more likely to value it. However, over a quarter thought it was of minimal or no value.
- Self-assessment was thought to be moderately valuable by 61% of students.

Assessment tasks

- Oral and written assessment tasks were valued highly by 40% of students and moderately by 50%. Less than 10% thought they had minimal or no value.
- Face-to-face assessment tasks were valued more highly than those done on the computer, though 18-20 year olds were slightly more likely to value them. Computer tasks were least valuable for 25% of students,

Table 6: Usefulness of categories of assessment for meeting learning objectives

Assessment type	High value	Moderate value	Minimal value	No value
Teacher assessment – where your tutor judged the value of your work	176 (53%)	135 (41%)	18 (5%)	1 (0%)
Peer-assessment - where fellow students judged the value of your work	60 (18%)	184 (55%)	72 (22%)	13 (4%)
Self-assessment - where you judged the value of your own work	61 (18%)	202 (61%)	60 (18%)	3 (1%)
Written assessment work	132 (40%)	167 (50%)	27 (8%)	2 (1%)
Oral assessment work	137 (41%)	168 (51%)	23 (7%)	0 (0%)
Assessment tasks done face-to-face	96 (29%)	176 (53%)	43 (13%)	4 (1%)
Assessment tasks done on the computer	63 (19%)	182 (55%)	70 (21%)	13 (4%)

Perceived value of assessment tasks

Most assessment tasks were valued highly or moderately by 85% of students. The journal activity was perceived to be less valuable. More particularly:

- Almost half the students valued highly the group oral presentations and a further 45% thought it was of moderate value.
- The group written proposal was valued highly by a third of the students and a further half valued it moderately (51%).
- Document creation and portfolio was highly valued by over a third of the students; a further 45% valued them moderately.
- Exam tasks were rated moderately by 40-45% of students with about one fifth rating them highly. Mature age students were more likely to find them highly valuable.
- The journal was highly valued by 16% of students and moderately valued by 39%. 37% thought it was of minimal or no value. This may be because it was a hurdle task with no marks allocated specifically to it.

Students' comments support this data. Across all age ranges, the oral presentation was seen to be the *most beneficial* assessment task: 43% nominated it, 21% nominated document creation tasks while 14% preferred the proposal and 11% preferred the portfolio work. The journal was regarded as the *least beneficial* assessment task by 34% of students. Other tasks thought to be less beneficial were: document creation (17%), proposal (13%), portfolio (7%)

Clearly, assessment tasks that suit some students do not necessarily suit others. However, by continuing to expect a range of assessment incorporating oral and written activities, assignments and exams, particular preferences are not advantaged over others, ensuring more equitable outcomes.

Table 7: Usefulness of particular assessment tasks for meeting learning objectives

Assessment task	High value	Moderate value	Minimal value	No value
Assignments – 70%				
Group oral research presentation – 10%	48%	45%	6%	0%
Group written proposal – 10%	35%	51%	11%	2%
Document creation – 20%	37%	46%	14%	2%
Portfolio – 20%	37%	45%	13%	2%
Journal activity based on group processes – (hurdle task). 8% did not respond.	16%	39%	28%	9%
Examinations – 30%: NB: in respect to exam data, there were 30% of missing responses for each of the three items below, probably because surveys were delivered prior to the exam.				
MCQ questions – 15%	18%	45%	5%	2%
Document analysis – 10%	22%	40%	6%	2%
Short answers – 5%	18%	44%	5%	2%

Use and value of unit resources

The value of unit resources correlated closely with the extent of usage. **The resources used most and deemed to be most valuable were the textbook and FirstClass communication/advice.**

As detailed in Tables 8 and 9:

- The resources used most extensively were the FirstClass communication/advice (56%), the textbook (45%), and nearly 2/3rds of those who used them regarded them as very useful. 42% used the lecture outline notes extensively and of them, 46% found them very useful.
- Resources more likely to be used routinely were websites (45%), study guide (41%) and textbook (46%). Of students who used these, 40% found the websites very useful and half found them moderately useful. 34% found the study guide very useful, and 46% found it moderately useful.
- Resources more likely to be used minimally or not at all were the audio-visual materials (72%), the audio-streamed lectures (76%), and the career resources (67%). Students who used them were more likely to see them as moderately rather than very useful.
- While electronic readings were used by 86% of students, 42% used them minimally and 17% found them to be not useful.

The level of usage suggests it would be beneficial to maintain the full range of resources. Since the data has been derived from on-campus students, it is not surprising that most of them did not use the audio-streamed lectures and audio-visual materials. These resources are likely to be used more by off-campus students. It would be useful to survey this cohort about the range and value of resources.

Table 8: Level of usage of resources

Resource	Used extensively	Used routinely	Used minimally	Did not use
Websites	28%	45%	24%	2%
Audio-visual materials	3%	23%	42%	30%
FirstClass communication/advice	56%	35%	8%	1%
Study Guide	22%	41%	28%	8%
Textbook	45%	46%	7%	1%
Electronic Readings	10%	33%	42%	14%
Lecture outline notes	42%	35%	17%	6%
Audio-streamed lectures	7%	16%	26%	50%
Deakin's career resources/services	6%	26%	37%	30%

Table 9: Usefulness of resources

Resource	Very useful	Moderately useful	Not useful	N/A and NR
Websites	40%	50%	3%	5% ---- 2%
Audio-visual materials	8%	34%	16%	38% ---- 4%
FirstClass communication/advice	63%	31%	3%	1% ---- 3%
Study Guide	34%	46%	10%	8% ---- 3%
Textbook	62%	31%	3%	1% ---- 3%
Electronic Readings	16%	46%	17%	17% ---- 3%
Lecture outline notes	46%	39%	7%	8% ---- 3%
Audio-streamed lectures	12%	21%	15%	48% ---- 3%
Deakin's career resources/services	14%	37%	14%	32% ---- 4%

Conclusion

From the students' point of view, it appears that the unit has been very successful. Quite a high percentage rated it highly and most students believed their studies in the unit helped them develop the desired attributes and business communication skills. Although the student cohort was quite diverse, many believed there had been significant development and very few considered there had been no development. Assessment tasks were moderately to highly valued though there was some uncertainty about the extent to which they helped skill development.

Recommendations

The evaluation data suggests there is a need to position the unit as a model for other B.Com units in respect to the development of graduate attributes and skills, and the successful use of a range of assessment categories and tasks. More specifically, there is a need to:

- Attend more explicitly to attributes important in business contexts such as ethical judgement making, flexibility and adaptability, and skills to implement change.
- Review the use of the journal in the unit. If it is deemed to be a valuable activity that contributes to learning outcomes, journal entries need to be monitored more frequently and followed up with some tutorial or online discussion based on issues raised.
- Consider strategies to encourage students to use electronic readings more extensively. It may be preferable to have fewer readings and expect students to complete tutorial tasks based on them.
- Survey off-campus and off shore students about the assessment activities and resources used in the unit. Different results may arise due to their differing needs.