



Learning through collaboration: A case study in student peer review



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So my name's Daniel Casey. I am a third year PhD candidate at the School of Politics and International Relations. This semester, I am convening POLS 3041, which is called Applied Policy Project. It's designed as a capstone course for the Bachelor of Public Policy designed to round out the students knowledge across their years studying public policy and give them an opportunity to apply their learnings to a policy project or a policy area that they are particularly interested in.

And so across the course of the semester, they choose one topic, it can be anything from the importance of moving freight from road to rail. or changing the age pension asset test or improving cyber securities. And then over the course of the semester, working through the issues associated with our policies.

So one of the techniques we're using in the course this semester is called like a peer review process. Basically what that involves is they're assigned to work with a peer read that other person's essay and go through it as if they were the minister of the depth. And in the actual workforce, very rarely do you just write your product, give it to your boss, end of story.

There is usually. A process of interaction, iteration, where you sit down with someone, whether it be your peer or your boss, and say, what do you mean by that? Can you explain that paragraph? And so that process is designed not just to help the writer improve their writing, but also help the student provide that peer review.

And so that's the process they go through. In groups, Jane reads Rob's paper, Rob reads Jane's paper and then they sit down together and discuss what worked. And what, what didn't work. The tutorial or the workshop about a week and a half before the assessment is due is when we will do this peer review feedback.

If the, this semester the tutorials are on Monday, so by the Friday beforehand they had to upload a draft into SharePoint folder or Google Doc or whatever might work for you as a lecturer. And that then provided the other student with a weekend, a little bit more to read, provide comments. So I think the, there's a number of things that are required to make this work.

It only works if the students do actually read the other person's essay. Now, I think that actually encourages attendance because there is a collective action thing going on. Otherwise, you have far too much silence. The authors aren't getting the feedback that's important. It does need to be, from my experience, experience a smaller course.

In this course, the 25 students, they all picked their own subjects. So they were all genuinely interested and passionate. A lot of people pick topics that were relevant to their other degrees. And another sort of key thing that is required to make sure it works is that everyone can pick their own topic.

I think the value I see in this technique is the ability to give and receive feedback. Yeah. People in, in the office often struggle to know both how to receive feedback in a honest, positive way, but also how to give feedback in a way that is constructive. I have provided some academic reading on giving and receiving feedback.

I think in future years, that's something I'd probably work on a bit more. I think the wins that I've seen has When Zoom sessions go on longer than expected. When people don't want to take a break in the middle. When I can hear the students still talking about the policy issue as they get into the lift after class.

It's clearly engagement, so I think that's a big win. I think one of the Key ways this is valuable for me as an educator. Action has come out of the last piece of assessment. Because I get to see a draft in prior to the peer review and then the final, it means I get to see how they've taken on board or not feedback, both from me and the rest of their group.

It gives me a lot more comfort that they've actually learned and understood that. I did read all of the essays beforehand so that if there was a silence I could keep the conversation going. You need to give both yourself and the students enough time to read the draft. So actually mapping out the timetable became quite hard because you have the due date of X, you then need the peer review workshop.

A week beforehand. They then need to have handed that, the draft, in three, four days beforehand. They're needing to come up with a draft. two weeks before the due date. A number of students, I think, were concerned that how could they possibly give good advice when they know nothing about age, pension, etc.

And what I said to them was often in the real world, the person reading it knows about the same as you. So a lot of the time your product right across be it government or the

private sector has to be targeted at an educated but lay audience and that is you. So if you as a student don't understand what your peer is writing.

Don't assume it's because you don't know enough. So the question that you want to ask, chances are that's a question that the minister would want to know too. The deputy secretary would want to know also. So I think I'd recommend you try out this type of approach where you have a smallish class of committed, engaged, enthusiastic students.

Overall I had fun with it. I was unsure. This is the first course that I've convened so I was very hesitant about it. It was a process that I really enjoyed because I got to learn things. I enjoyed it. Give it a go, be honest with the students. I told them this was the first time I was doing some, something like this. I think that helped as well.