



Prepare or Go: An analysis of enforcing tutorial preparation requirements in an accounting course

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Prepare or Go: An analysis of enforcing tutorial preparation requirements in an accounting course

ABSTRACT: The tutorial is often seen as the primary vehicle that provides students with the opportunity to actively engage with the subject materials, their teacher and their peers. Although preparation for class is an expectation, students' lack of preparation for tutorial work is widespread. This results in a reality where not only the unprepared student's engagement is problematic but the experiences of their peers and the ability of teaching academics to facilitate learning is also compromised. Using an action research approach, this paper discusses the rationale, implementation and results of requiring students to provide evidence of adequate class preparation in order to attend tutorials for a financial accounting course. This requirement repositioned students from passive consumers to co-producers of their learning, transforming the nature of tutorials although it had no significant impact on student evaluations or results.

INTRODUCTION

Education is not a spectator sport: it is a transforming encounter. It demands active engagement; not passive submission; personal participation, not listless attendance
(Rhodes, 2001, 65 cited in Gump, 2005).

Whilst agreement with this statement would be unanimous, the corridors of academia abound with faculty lamenting the lack of work by many students. A common complaint is that, due to fact that often the majority of attending students have failed to prepare the work required, tutorials regularly degrade into 'mini' lectures. How can we address this and does it matter? There are numerous reasons why students may fail to complete the requisite preparation prior to tutorial attendance: lack of time; lack of commitment or motivation; competing commitments such as paid employment or social activities; misunderstanding of the purpose of tutorials; prior tutorial experiences and expectations, and poorly structured tutorials that provide little incentive to do the work (see for example, Fogarty, 2008; Baderin,

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3 2005; Hassel and Lourey, 2005). Given these compounding reasons a multi-faceted approach
4 is clearly required. This paper focuses on one strategy within such an approach: enforcing
5 tutorial preparation as a necessary precondition for tutorial attendance: in other words,
6 allowing only students who have prepared to attend tutorials.
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13 In the first section of the paper, I discuss the literature which considers the purpose of
14 tutorials, student engagement, attendance, participation in and preparation for tutorials and
15 the nature of students as higher education consumers. The second section overviews the
16 action research methodology utilised in this study. In the third section, I outline the context,
17 motivation and rationale behind introducing the tutorial preparation requirement and the
18 nature of the requirement. The fourth section details its evaluation, implementation (including
19 how concerns were addressed to minimise potential problems and issues), impact including
20 findings from tutor evaluations, and student performance and evaluations and comments
21 (both positive and negative). The next section includes my reflections on the success of this
22 requirement. In the final section I conclude with a discussion of the usefulness and
23 appropriateness of this requirement.
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40 LITERATURE REVIEW

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42 The higher education literature emphasises the importance of students' engagement
43 with and involvement in the learning process; that active learning is important. As Weaver &
44 Qi (2005) observe 'students who actively participate in the learning process learn more than
45 those who do not' (p. 570). Undergraduate accounting subjects often employ a lecture plus
46 tutorial class arrangement. Whilst active learning is not restricted to 'in class' time, tutorials
47 are normally considered to provide the opportunity for students to actively engage with the
48 subject materials, their teacher and their peers (Herrmann, 2014). Although there are
49 variations in how tutorials are conducted, typically tutorials are small groups of students that
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Serve as platforms for students to test their understanding of issues covered during large-group lectures through discussions in more depth, answering questions, and analysing .. cases (Baderin, 2005, p. 100).

Thus, tutorials are a place for students to discuss, learn from their mistakes and learn from their peers. However the literature is replete with the apparent failure of the tutorial to achieve its objectives (Baderin, 2005). Numerous sources lament the lack of student engagement in tutorial classes; be this non-attendance, failure to participate in class discussions or lack of preparation (Rocca, 2010; Self, 2012; Braun and Sellers, 2012). This is underpinned by concerns about the lack of study time, and poor study habits of many students.

The literature suggests that time spent studying has declined significantly. Babcock and Marks's review (2010) found students out of class study time had decreased by over 40% from 1961 to 2003 to 14 hours per week, less than half of university prescriptions. This decline has remained stable since the mid 1980's and is not associated with the type of college or employment commitments of students. Babcock and Marks (2010) posit two reasons for this decline. First, this decline may be due to falling standards. Over this time they argue student empowerment via student evaluations has increased, rewarding 'easier' instructors and creating 'perverse incentives' (p. 5). This is linked to grade inflation (a phenomenon widely cited in the literature; see for example Hassel and Lourey, 2005; Wallace and Wallace, 1998) and a shift in faculty incentives towards research. Second, students' recognition that employers value grades less than other factors (such as college reputation). McCormick (2011) supports the view that the decline in study time may be associated with the increased emphasis on research, consistent with Sperber's 'non - aggression pact' between faculty and students when 'we began asking less of our students during this period and their performance fell to meet our expectations' (p. 39). In accounting education the lack of time on study has also been noted. Fogarty (2008) argues that students have individual and

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unconscious study time budgets that are relatively inflexible meaning that time demands for one course with reduce time spent in others. All these researchers note that the quality of study time is important; in other words it is not just the amount of time students spend studying but how they spend this time.

Given the evidence that study time is reducing and is limited, it is not surprising that attendance at and preparation for class is problematic. The issue of falling attendance in class has been widely investigated with various research considering incidence and reasons for non-attendance (e.g. Rogers, 2002), association with performance (e.g. Gump, 2005; Self, 2012) and the efficacy of various suggestions to improve class attendance (e.g. Rogers, 2002). The literature suggests that absentee rates of one third are not uncommon (see for example, Rogers, 2002; Self, 2012) with this rate increasing in the latter half of the semester. Self (2012) notes that prior research suggests that the majority of factors influencing attendance are ‘outside of the control of faculty members’ (p. 225). There is evidence of a positive association with class attendance and performance; i.e. that students who regularly attend classes have better grades (e.g. Crede et al, 2010). However this association is a complex one. A number of studies have found that student characteristics (such as GPA prior to course, motivation, and study habits) are associated with attendance (e.g. Self, 2012; Gump, 2005). In other words, ‘better’ students in terms of these characteristics have superior performance/outcomes and such students are also more likely to attend class. Rodgers (2002) found that increasing the attendance rate had no significant impact on performance. In the accounting context Schumulian and Coetzee (2011) found only a low correlation between attendance and academic performance. These findings support the premise that it is not attendance per se that is important. As Braun and Sellers (2012) assert ‘required attendance, without required preparation, does not improve the quality of in-class discussion and learning activity’ (p. 270). This links back to the importance of the quality of study time and endorses

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3 Nonis and Hudson's (2010) findings that 'study time has no impact on performance if a
4 student is not actively concentrating or paying attention' (p. 236).
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9 The failure of students to meaningfully participate in class, and suggested actions to
10 address this, is also considered extensively in the literature (see for example, Rocca, 2010).
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12 There is debate about whether attendance and /or participation should contribute to student
13 grades. Support for this is found from studies that find attendance and participation increase
14 if grades are awarded (Self, 2012). Others suggest that attendance or participation of
15 themselves do not necessarily reflect achievement or mastery of subject content, and are
16 impacted on by other factors such as culture and language and thus should not be contributors
17 to grades (Gump, 2005).
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28 Rocca's (2010) review noted that commonly only a third of students participated at all
29 with half never participating, citing a number of reasons why students did not participate,
30 including larger classes, confidence, language ability, instructor attitude, critical versus
31 supportive environment. Research into class participation confirms that preparation for class
32 is a necessarily *precondition* for maximising participation and learning outcomes. Rocco
33 (2010) concluded that learning improves and motivation increases when students 'prepare for
34 class and participate in discussions' and that advanced preparation was a key means to foster
35 the confidence required for effective participation and to counteract classroom apprehension
36 (p. 192).
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50 Dallimore et al's (2010) study of management accounting students found a positive
51 association with learning outcomes and increased participation and that 'increased
52 preparation for class not only increases a student's comfort participating, it also encourages
53 the student to participate more frequently' (p. 626). Yet in the accounting context Fogarty
54 (2008) notes that preparation is problematic:
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3 accounting educators are regularly stunned by the low absolute level of preparedness demonstrated by
4 students...The time-honoured habits of successful study (e.g. careful reading, summarizing chapters,
5 and problem practice) are more honoured in the breach than in the observation (p. 229).
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8 These factors, low participation and associated lack of preparation, both have a
9 potential impact on not only students learning in tutorials, but on their perceptions of the
10 benefits and role of tutorials. Baderin (2005) found that in contrast to faculty perceptions,
11 only 15% of law students considered tutorials a more important learning method than
12 lectures. In Hassel and Lourey's study (2005) only 17% of students believed that 'learning
13 was contingent on [class] attendance' (p.5). Baderin (2005) posited that the lack of perceived
14 importance of tutorials could be due to lack of engagement by students in tutorials, or by
15 students' prior tutorial experience. There was little located in the literature specifically about
16 the impact of non-participating tutorial attendees on other students, although Bianchi, 2004,
17 noted that the key driver of dissatisfaction for international students was the poor
18 performance/participation of other classmates (p. 404). The influence of peers and peer
19 behaviour has been examined explicitly in other areas. For example, in the context of
20 academic integrity peer behaviour has been identified as an influencing factor in students
21 own behaviours (see for example, Christensen et al, 2010; McCabe and Trevino, 2001). The
22 lack of participation in tutorial classes is not only a problem for students. Pop-Vasileva et al
23 (2011) found a key factor associated with higher levels of job stress for Australian accounting
24 academics was 'minimal participation in classes' by students (p. 430).
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48 It would seem self-evident that preparation impacts on learning. However given the
49 perspective of students as customers (see for example, Eagle and Brennan, 2007) *should* we
50 require or even expect students to prepare for class, or should this be 'left' to customers'
51 discretion? After all isn't the customer always right? The literature argues that this view of
52 customers is outdated and that the nature of customers in the service context, which includes
53 higher education, identifies different requisite levels of customer participation, from low (e.g.
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3 simply attendance is required) to moderate to high (Kotze and du Plessis, 2003; Mark, 2013).

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5 In the higher education context students must be high-participating if the goal of higher
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8 education is to be achieved; that students co-create/co-produce the 'product' (Mark, 2013; Ng
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10 and Forbes, 2009). High participation is where:

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13 The customer works in partnership with the service organisation to help assess the need for service,
14 customise the design and delivery of the service and produce a portion or all of the service for
15 him/herself. The customer therefore, be regarded as a co-producer, co-creator ..who contributes effort,
16 time or other resources to the service production process (Kotze and du Plessis, 2003; p. 188).

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19 Establishing appropriate expectations or role clarity is identified as a critical factor in
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21 facilitating the requisite high level of customer participation in this setting (Kotze and du
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23 Plessis, 2003; Mark 2013; Redding, 2005). Influencing this are customers understandings of
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25 expectations, their own experience and 'the behaviour of other customers who are present in
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27 the service setting' (Kotze and du Plessis, 2003, p.189). Much of the literature here argues
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29 in the higher education context that students do not recognise their required role as active
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31 participants and co-producers of their own learning, that expectations are not made explicit or
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33 enforced and that staff are, at least at times, complicit in undermining student engagement
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35 and expectations by teacher-centred approaches (Trout, 1997; Taylor 2010: Kotze and du
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37 Plessis, 2003; Ng and Forbes 2009).

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43 The literature therefore reinforces the view that both absence from class and lack of
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45 participation in class is problematic throughout the higher education sector. A key conclusion
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47 is that failure of students to effectively engage in tutorials is underpinned by a failure to
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49 adequately prepare for class. Further, the view of the student as a co-producer of higher
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51 education outcomes, not a passive consumer, suggests that expectations of students must be
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53 made explicit and that students need to expend the effort required to reach the high level of
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55 participation necessary if the goals of higher education are to be realised.
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METHODOLOGY

As noted previously this study utilised an action research approach. Action research has been advocated both in the accounting education literature and in the broader education literature as a systematic means of implementing and evaluating change in educational practices (Baker & Logan, 2006; Paisey & Paisey, 2005; Kember, 2002; Swann & Ecclestone, 1999). A useful definition of action research is provided by Stringer, 2007:

Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. Unlike traditional experimental/scientific research that looks for generalizable explanations that might be applied to all contexts, action research focuses on specific situations and localised solutions (p. 1).

The various models suggested for action research all emphasise a step approach, taking action, the role of critical reflection, and the participant role of the researcher. Further iterations/repetitions of the steps are often involved in such research. The approach based on Grundy and Kemmis as outlined and used by Baker & Logan (2006, p. 4-5) was adapted in this study. This involved four steps. The first was the planning stage which involved reflection by the lecturer to define the problem and decide what could be changed. As action research in this context is driven by the beliefs of the individual lecturer and the specific context it is essential that the beliefs and context that inspired the change are outlined (Paisey & Paisey, 2005, p. 2). These are described in the next parts: context and motivation. The second step involved taking action; implementing change by introducing the tutorial preparation requirement. Third, observations that form the basis of critical reflection on the success (or otherwise) of the action taken were made: in this case via student and tutors surveys, student evaluations and analysis of student performance. The final step involved reviewing and reflecting on the changes and repeating the steps. In this instance, although there have been two subsequent iterations following initial implementation (in Year 1) as reflections did not result in the perception of the need for substantive changes in the tutorial preparation requirements these iterations are not discussed separately.

CONTEXT AND NATURE OF THE TUTORIAL PREPARATION REQUIREMENT

The course is a first semester financial accounting course in the second year of a three year accounting program with on average 450 students attending on campus and 80 studying off campus; 40% of these are international students. It is a highly technical course focusing on the application of accounting standards. Students are expected to attend a 1 ½ hour lecture and a 1 ½ hour tutorial each week, although attendance is not compulsory.

The format for tutorials required tutors to work through with students a sub-set of questions (usually two questions) relating to a particular topic. Although on average eight topic questions were set each week students were provided with answers to the majority of these and only the specified sub set of questions were scheduled for discussion in tutorials. The rationale for this was that it seemed counterproductive for students to prepare answers to a sequence of increasingly complex technical questions if students could not determine if they were on track. By providing answers to most questions this allowed students to attempt these questions, then check their understanding before attempting more complex questions. The remainder of the tutorial involved students, in groups, undertaking a range of activities (including preparing answers to unseen questions, usually based on past examination questions). These group activities allowed students to discuss problems and procedures with other students, make and share mistakes (a key activity for learning) in an environment where the tutor could assist, encourage and correct. All tutorial answers and activities were provided online to students at the end of the week for revision purposes.

Motivation: The ‘trigger’

Lack of preparation by students is not a new phenomenon. What then made me introduce this requirement, with the associated additional work, aggravation and potential downsides? For a number of years my tutors (primarily casual staff) complained about students’ lack of preparation and the difficulty in balancing the needs of the few students who

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3 had in fact prepared with the majority who had not. I have noticed this as well. This was
4 particularly problematic for the casual staff whose continued employment is directly
5 dependent on student evaluations of their teaching. If such staff preferenced those few
6 students who had prepared (that is conducted the tutorial as intended) this would likely
7 alienate the unprepared students and result in negative evaluations. Over the previous few
8 years I noticed tutors increasingly angry and more frustrated as the number of students
9 adequately preparing fell to one or two in many tutorials across many courses. As one tutor
10 noted:
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It is a sad fact from my experience teaching over nearly 9 years that students are doing less and less. This places more pressure on teachers to teach as more students are preparing less, they don't understand basic concepts and this often requires unnecessary time to get across to students. While it would be easy to just put [answers] on a board and let the students fend for themselves, I feel that I need to give students the best possible opportunity to understand the topics we cover, hence, if they haven't prepared, it is then harder for teachers to do the best possible job they can.

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30 Some four years earlier, in response to tutors concerns about lack of preparation and
31 participation by students a number of changes were made. Students had been surveyed in the
32 previous year about their extent of preparation and what factors impacted on this. Of those
33 who responded only 11 % indicated that they always prepared the tutorial work and almost
34 one quarter indicated they never (or almost never) prepared the tutorial work¹. Comments by
35 students did note that some students perceived too many tutorial questions, although tutors
36 noted that most students attempted NO questions (i.e. did not do a few questions and then run
37 out of time). Key factors students indicated impacted on their preparation included that
38 answers would be made available, assignments or other work due, tutors explained answer
39 thoroughly anyway, no time due to other (non-study) commitments and the fact that no marks
40 were awarded for tutorial preparation/participation. The changes made to the course in
41 response to this included the introduction of a series of multiple choice tests to replace a
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¹ It should be noted as these surveys were undertaken by students attending the lecture it could be assumed that those not attending the lectures were more likely not to have done tutorial work and so in fact preparation of tutorial work was even lower than these responses suggest.

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3 minor assignment; the aim to keep students on task during the semester, encourage tutorial
4 preparation as the tests followed the tutorials and to provide feedback on technical topics.
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6 Also changes were made to the tutorial format (as outlined above questions to be discussed
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8 were limited and group activities introduced) in an attempt to make tutorials more active and
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10 student centred, driven by problems identified by students, but this format was less successful
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12 than anticipated. Whilst feedback from students about these changes were positive the
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14 problem of lack of preparation by students persisted. In fact the attempt to make the tutorials
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16 more active and student centred was frustrated and compromised by the continuing lack of
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18 student preparation. Group activities could not be effectively undertaken by students who had
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20 not prepared; they simply did not have the knowledge to 'have a go'.
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28 The defining catalyst for introducing an explicit preparation requirement for tutorial
29 attendance however was when I conducted a tutorial for a tutor who was ill. At the start of the
30 tutorial I asked who had prepared; I do this to get a 'sense' of how to conduct the tutorial.
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32 Only one student (1) indicated they had prepared. However during the tutorial it was clear
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34 from their responses that a further student (2) had prepared. At the conclusion of the tutorial
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36 student 1 approached me, frustrated and angry, saying he was getting little use from the
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38 tutorials as often he was the only one who had prepared, was fed up being with students who
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40 didn't know anything and didn't care, and asked if instead of attending tutorials could he
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42 simply come and see me during consultation times to review his work. I approached student
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44 2 and asked why she had not indicated that she had prepared when clearly she had. The
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46 student claimed that she was embarrassed to admit she had prepared as 'no one prepares for
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48 tutorials'. It was this response that shocked me. I could understand students not preparing
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50 for various reasons but this response suggested a culture had evolved where lack of
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52 preparation was not only acceptable but indeed the norm; i.e. the default position.
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Hence the problem my action research aimed to address was:

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3 How could I ensure that students adequately prepared for tutorials so that the efficacy
4 of tutorials could be realised?
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7 **The decision: What to do?**
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9 I first reflected on the tutorial format and content. Was there something in this that
10 deterred preparation or that I could change to encourage it? Informal discussions with both
11 tutors and better (prepared) students indicated that the tutorial format and content was not
12 problematic *if* students had prepared. One option was to encourage student preparation by
13 awarding marks for this. The literature suggests that assessment (or marks) matters and is a
14 key driver of student activity (Ramsden, 1992; Papagiannidis, 2007). I rejected this on two
15 grounds: pedagogical and pragmatic. In the first year accounting courses, in the initial
16 semester weekly preparation was marked for effort, and then in the second semester marked
17 randomly for correctness. These approaches in first year were seen as a way to transition
18 students from the regulated and monitored environment of secondary education towards more
19 self-directed learning. The accounting discipline had agreed that beyond first year these
20 transitional arrangements should not continue. I also believed marking students' tutorial
21 work would undermine the formative emphasis (mission) of tutorials. Whenever marks are
22 awarded there is a tendency for students to associate these with certain minimum presentation
23 standards and correctness. This was not my view of what tutorial preparation should be.
24 Preparation can be muddled, messy and wrong. A tutorial is a place for students to learn
25 from their (and others) mistakes and clarify any misunderstandings; not to be worried about
26 how it will affect final grades. This formative role of tutorials was paramount in my mind.
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52 The option of awarding marks for preparation was also rejected on pragmatic reasons.
53 The cost involved in paying for such marking would not be insignificant. University policy
54 restricted both the number of assessment items and marking loads in associated courses.
55 Further I believed that other assessment items (specifically a series of on line tests that
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3 allowed students an actual checking of their knowledge after having completed the work) was
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5 more beneficial for student learning outcomes, as this allowed student to check
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7 understandings and competencies after tutorials but prior to the final examination.
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11 Given these reasons I decided that I would impose a course requirement that tutorial
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13 attendance in this course was only allowed if students provided evidence of preparation for
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15 the sub-set of questions (usually two) scheduled for discussion in tutorials. Each student's
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17 preparation would be checked at the beginning of the tutorial and if not adequate, then the
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19 student would be required to leave.
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22 23 24 **Overall strategies and principles**

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26 My initial enthusiasm for this decision turned to anxiety. Most colleagues were
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28 supportive and indeed believed something needed to be done about the lack of tutorial
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30 preparation by students but were sceptical. When advised of my intentions a number of
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32 colleagues responded with comments such as: 'you're brave'; 'you won't be allowed to do
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34 that'; 'tutors won't enforce this'; 'be prepared for poor student evaluations'. In light of such
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36 comments (perhaps somewhat cowardly) I sought approval from more senior managers in the
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38 faculty prior to implementation. Approval was granted on the basis that the decision was
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40 consistent with policy (the student code of conduct required students to adequately prepare
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42 for all classes) and the aim was improve the efficacy of tutorials. However approval was
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44 granted with some provisos. These were that students who did not attend tutorials were
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46 provided with adequate access to assistance when they had completed the work, and that
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48 guidelines were provided to tutors to ensure any issues with students (such as students
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50 refusing to leave a tutorial if they had not prepared) were appropriately managed.
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57 Hence a requirement coupling preparation with tutorial attendance was introduced in line
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59 with the following strategies and principles:
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- This was to be applied on a no exception, no blame and no excuse basis. This requirement was not to be seen as a punishment or accusing students of being lazy or the like. The emphasis was that if a key purpose of tutorials was to check understandings there was no utility in unprepared students attending. Further unprepared students would not be able to contribute to activities. This stance was consistent with the underlying rationale and also addressed pragmatic concerns. It was accepted that at times students would have legitimate reasons for not being able to prepare (due to illness, work and family commitments). However allowing exceptions to the preparation requirement in such circumstances would continue to undermine the effectiveness of tutorials and leave tutors open to negotiation and arguments with students. Students could apply to the course coordinator for an alternative tutorial if unable to attend their scheduled tutorial for legitimate reasons but the preparation requirement still applied.
 - The requirement for preparation was assessed on students adequately attempting the tutorial work, not on correctness. Tutors would check (via a brief perusal) every students work at the beginning of every tutorial to determine if an adequate attempt at the work had been made.
 - Certain safety nets were provided to ensure that students not attending tutorials, for whatever reason, could still receive any assistance required. Students who failed to attend any of the first few tutorials were contacted by their individual tutors to determine if there were any problems causing the student's absences and to offer assistance. Consultation times with a number of teaching staff were advertised and students could attend any of these consultation times, even if the staff member was not their allocated tutor.

- Expectations and requirements were articulated explicitly and clearly to students and teaching staff, reinforcing the rationale and ensuring consistency in implementation.

EVALUATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND FINDINGS

The preparation requirement has been imposed for three years. No substantive changes have been made to this requirement over this period. In years one and two students were invited to complete an online survey (which included both closed and open questions) specifically about this preparation requirement on a voluntary basis. The results of student responses are included in the following analysis².

Information was also derived from informal discussions with tutors. However, recognising that tutors are dependent on me for continued employment, and that this could bias responses made to me personally, tutors were also surveyed each year. This survey was conducted online, with anonymous responses and on a voluntary basis³.

Implementation: Tutors

The tutors (primarily casual staff) would be at the front line of implementing the preparation requirement. Without their support and commitment it would not work. In the first year of implementation, tutors initial reactions differed. A number were elated; 'it's about time', 'fantastic'. One simply withdrew their services: this tutor normally undertook one evening class with mature age students and felt it was unfair to exclude students who had family or work commitments that impacted on their study time. The remaining tutors supported the requirement in principle but were apprehensive about how or whether they could apply it. In particular, actually asking students to leave and also responding if a student

² In year 1 the response rate was 29%. In year 2 the response rate was 16%. Compliant with ethics requirements at this university the survey advises students (and tutors) of anonymity and that the results may be used in research and publications.

³ The lowest response rate from tutors was 75%.

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3 refused to leave was of concern. All however were concerned to varying degrees, about the
4
5 possible impact on student evaluations.
6
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8
9 Detailed advice, both in written form and in tutors meetings, was provided about how
10 to apply the requirement and how to manage any recalcitrant students. I also decided to
11 attend all initial tutorials (24 in all). In each tutorial I clarified the preparation requirement,
12 explaining this was a course requirement and not a decision made by individual tutors. In
13 these first tutorials I assisted in the checking of preparation and I (not the tutor) ejected any
14 students who had not prepared adequately. In hindsight my decision to attend these initial
15 tutorials was a defining action and I continue to do this each semester. It confirmed
16 expectations, modelled to tutors how to manage students, and deflected any antagonism of
17 students about the requirement from tutors. I was the ogre; not the tutors. In effect this set the
18 scene. As is explained later, after their first tutorial, as students understood the requirement
19 and that this would be enforced, unprepared students simply did not attend. Hence there were
20 few instances in subsequent tutorials where teaching staff needed to request that students
21 leave.
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40 In subsequent years tutors have indeed championed this preparation requirement.
41 However, there remains some anxiety by tutors in enforcing this requirement. Despite a low
42 turnover of tutors (less than 20%) in each year around one third of tutors were apprehensive
43 about enforcing this requirement:
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51 *It is always difficult asking a student to leave when they have made the effort to turn up.*

52 *It's not a good feeling kicking them out but students were pretty good about it.*

53
54 *Initially, I was apprehensive as I thought that some students may not accept leaving and be aggressive
55 or reluctant to do so in class.*
56

57 Half of all tutors indicated that problems did occur, but that these were isolated,
58 predominately in early tutorials and that tutors were able to manage these.
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1
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3 *There were situations when the student would argue to be allowed to stay rather than leave quietly*

4
5 *After the first few weeks, almost all came with enough preparation*

6
7 *One student was asked to leave and simply didn't do so.*

8
9 Over the three years of this requirement only two students have been referred to me (as
10
11 course coordinator) for refusing a tutors request to leave the tutorial.
12

13 14 **Implementation: Students**

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17 As this was a unique requirement (as other courses did not enforce preparation
18 requirements), and particularly in Year 1, unexpected by students, it was essential to inform
19 students explicitly. This was done by a series of emails to students, both before the start of
20 the semester and before the first tutorial (which followed the week after the first lecture),
21 announcements in online forums, and initial lectures. These explanations were framed within
22 the context of the dual responsibilities of teaching staff and students (both what students
23 should expect from teaching staff and what is expected of students), why it was important for
24 students to prepare, the need to actively engage in the learning process and the purpose of
25 tutorials. Further, extensive guidance was provided in the form of a set of FAQ's which
26 covered questions from 'why is this required in this course', 'what is adequate preparation',
27 'what do I do if the dog ate my homework', 'do I have to leave if the tutor asks me' to 'where
28 can I get help for this course'.
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47 **Acceptance or non-acceptance of requirement.**

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49 The majority of students indicated that they believed the requirement was reasonable
50 (77% in the first year the requirement was introduced, Year 1, and 81% in the subsequent
51 year, Year 2).
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57 *It is good to have this requirement because it means that when you have done all of the work that you
58 can contribute to class.*

59
60 *Attending tutorials where part of the class hasn't prepared is very frustrating for those who have. Time
is lost by redoing the work some have already done meaning further understandings cannot be gained
by attending the tute.*

1
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3 *As a uni student when we opt to study we have to do subsequent practice and preparation to achieve*
4 *intended outcome; otherwise it would not make any sense to come ..*
5

6 The positive comments here, focused on acceptance of responsibility, the detrimental impact
7
8 of ‘non-preparers’ on tutorials and improved learning outcomes (be this due to more useful
9
10 tutorials or forcing completion of course work during the semester).
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13
14 A number of students were vehemently opposed to and resented this requirement in
15
16 principle.
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20 *It's illogical based on the fact that students PAY for tutorials, except can't attend them?*

21
22 *It is a student's choice to prepare for a tutorial or not. University is meant to be all about individual*
23 *learning and therefore it should be just that. We choose to prepare for tutorials and pass the course,*
24 *or, we choose not to and fail the course. We're adults now and don't need rules put in place to ensure*
25 *we do our homework, they do that at primary school.*

26
27 *I think we are old enough to do work and should not be forced to do it*

28
29 *We are fee paying students and part of that fee is the tutorial, I don't believe the uni has the right to*
30 *deny access in the first place but we are paying for it, it should be up to us to be prepared or not to be.*

31 These centred on questioning the university’s right to exclude students from class as they are
32
33 paying ‘customers’ and also resentment at the perceived paternalistic approach. Their view
34
35 was that the decision as to whether to do the work or not should be the students and
36
37 attendance should not be dependent on this. None of the comments made by students
38
39 opposed to this requirement considered the impact of non-preparers on tutorials or on other
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41 students. These comments appeared to preference the rights and needs of the individual
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43 student. These comments appeared to preference the rights and needs of the individual
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45 student.
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48
49 It should also be noted that despite supporting the preparation requirement in
50
51 principle, comments made by *many* students indicated they viewed the specific rules applied
52
53 in enforcing this too harsh or inflexible. Adverse comments can be classified into three main
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55 streams. The first was that leniency should be made for special circumstances or to allow
56
57 students to attend a few times without preparing:
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There are always instances out of people's control where they may not have been able to attend to their
tutorial work diligently, for example, being ill or having sick children to care for.

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I feel as though the requirement is too strict and that there should be some flexibility to the requirement. I believe there should be a 2 or 3 week 'chance' which you can use throughout the semester to go and not have work completed.

In my personal opinion if the student has a valid reason (eg: medical certificate) the student should be allowed.

Second, that this requirement disadvantaged students as they benefit from attending tutorials even if they have not completed the work:

No one should have to miss out on valuable information provided in a tutorial simply because (for whatever reason) they have not prepared for it.

As a mature age student, there are times when I simply cannot complete all of the tutorial work prior to a tutorial. However, I usually find it extremely worthwhile to 'sit in' on a tutorial... To hear the tutor run through the questions and give explanations to specific examples can be really useful for learning.

We can still learn things from listening to others in the tutes.

Third, that the assessment of what was adequate preparation was unfair. The decision as to whether or not preparation was adequate necessarily involved some discretion by the individual tutors. However there was comprehensive guidance provided both to tutors and students about this. Further students who had attempted the questions but where preparation was deemed not sufficient were provided with advice about what was deficient in their preparation but were allowed to stay in the first such instance. Although a very few students indicated that their particular tutor was stricter than others, the main complaints here concerned having to attempt all of the specified questions or apprehension about whether their attempts would be judged as adequate.

As long as students have completed part of the tutorial work, they should be allowed into the tutorials.

I've always 75% prepared but too intimidated to attempt to go in case of being asked to leave.

As outlined previously, for most weeks students only had to show preparation for two questions, and in fact a number of students supporting this requirement indicated that due to the limited number of questions, the preparation requirement was not onerous.

Preparation & Attendance

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3 The majority of students indicated that they normally prepared for tutorials even if the
4 preparation requirement was not imposed (71% in Year 1; 75% in Year 2). This contradicts
5 the earlier survey of students (where only 11% indicated always prepare), my own experience
6 in previous years and that of tutors. This requirement was introduced because *very* few
7 students were preparing and this was confirmed by the student survey some years earlier.
8 Indeed, even if 50% of students had been preparing it is unlikely I would have even
9 considered introducing this requirement. Students own evaluations suggested some
10 inconsistency as the majority (66% in Year 1; 70% in Year 2) indicated that they were more
11 likely to prepare for tutorials due to this requirement.
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25 As would be expected this requirement resulted in students missing some tutorials,
26 although for a significant percentage of respondents (46% in year 1 and 40% in year 2) this
27 requirement did not affect their attendance. This does not imply necessarily that such
28 students attended all tutorials; reasons (other than this requirement) could be the cause of
29 non-attendance. For the majority (88% in Year 1 and 97% in Year 2) the preparation
30 requirement resulted in not attending on average 1.3 (between 1 and 2) tutorials (refer Table
31 1) out of a total of 11 in the semester. (Insert Table 1 here)
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43 Of note is that when asked to *compare* tutorial attendance in this course to other
44 courses in the same study period, the majority of students (61% in year 1 and 56% in year 2)
45 indicated that tutorial attendance was not less than in other courses in the same semester.
46 This is in line with tutors' responses where the majority (67% in year 1 and 62% in year 2)
47 did not indicate tutorial attendance was less in this course compared to their tutorials in other
48 courses. In fact some students commented that the lack of preparation by students in other
49 courses contributed to their non-attendance in other courses:
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I've stopped attending tutorials for another course.. because I'm frustrated with the lack of preparation and I fail to get any further conceptual questions answered because the tutor has to go through answers that other students have not done!

I stopped attending the tutes for one of my classes this semester simply because I was gaining nothing from it - no discussion, no nothing - and everyone would just listen to me answer the tutor.

Learning Outcomes & Tutorial Effectiveness

Evaluations for both tutors and students asked about tutorial participation, the overall usefulness of tutorials and learning outcomes. These are summarised in Table 2. (Insert Table 2 here). The majority of both students and tutors in both years found differences between tutorials in this course and tutorials in other courses. There were mixed results in relation to discussion/participation. Whilst the majority of tutors and a significant proportion of students noted increased participation/discussion in these tutorials, compared to tutorials in other courses, this was not uniform. Many students commented on increased participation/discussion:

The tutorials run better and there is more class discussion and student input

In some other tutes, I have gone a whole [semester] with some people not even speaking.

It may just be the tutorials I am in, but the students don't want to volunteer answers, they have to be asked specifically. In [this course's] tutorial students seem more willing to participate.

I teach (another course). The majority of students [in that course] don't come prepared and just sit there and stare at you as you present the material (Tutor)

However, others noted that participation by students was not homogenous, and that some groups (in particular international students) regardless of preparation were still reluctant to participate:

I have found that although some students prepare their work they still do not participate in group or class discussions.

Get the international students to actually participate during tutorials, as a majority of them just sit there.

I found that the students who I perceive to be poorer benefit more provided that they are willing to speak up and try to deal with their problems. Students who are determined to be passive learners will unfortunately remain so (Tutor)

It is apparent that factors other than preparation also impact on participation and discussion in tutorials. As one student observed:

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3 *it is very dependent on the tutor and the personalities of the students in the tutorials.*

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6 There was strong support for the preparation requirement in terms of usefulness of
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There was strong support for the preparation requirement in terms of usefulness of
tutorials and enhancing learning outcomes, particularly in Year 2 with over 70% of student
agreement. Positive comments can be classified into 3 main streams. First, the tutorials
assisted students' understandings as focusing on problems identified by students:

*for me I was able to go into the tutorial knowing my strengths and weaknesses on that topic so I could
get the help needed*

you learn so much more which makes it easier to understand in the long run

*The most important benefit of doing this is that students must present a good attempt with their
preparation, and as they don't want to be asked to leave, they inevitably spend more time on their work,
they don't give up because they can't and often they work out the correct answer, whereas if this wasn't
a requirement, they would just give up and say it was too hard. I feel that this has certainly contributed
to their learning, they have often worked their way to the correct answer, because of the requirement,
they have had to persevere (Tutor).*

Second, that tutorial time was not wasted on repeating lecture information or bringing
unprepared students 'up to speed':

*Time is spent on queries students didn't understand an aspect of the homework ..instead of time wasted
on students who go just for the answers.*

*It makes it fairer for the people that do prepare and want to get lots out of lesson. Being able to get
through all the questions because people aren't wasting time copying down answers is important. The
more people that have looked at the work and ask questions the greater the discussions and learning
opportunities*

Third, that the need to prepare to attend tutorials motivated students to do the work and learn
throughout the semester, which assisted their learning and performance. In regards to this a
number of students noted that at the time of the examination they were revising what they had
already learned, rather than learning the material for the first time:

*This is very beneficial to students, as DOING helps to LEARN - no need to cram in the lead up to
exams!*

*This semester for the first time I have to do my homework every single week, in a way its sometimes so
hard .. but now it's close to the exams and I am quite prepared already because I have done most of my
reading requirement already...*

My own experience of tutorials confirmed the improved learning outcomes and
environment. As all students had prepared a variety of answers were offered, highlighting

1
2
3 common problems. Students seemed to quickly realise the value of their own, and other
4 mistakes, in answers to questions in facilitating learning, and hence became more willing to
5 share their problems with other students. This contrasted with tutorials previously where only
6 a handful of students had prepared, usually restricted to 'good' students, and where
7 identification of problems or concerns by students was limited.
8
9

16 **Impact on student evaluations and results**

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19 This university conducts student evaluations on this course at course level and class
20 (both lecture and tutorial) level. A review of the course evaluations over six years (three
21 years before and after implementation of the requirement) revealed no significant differences.
22 These had neither improved nor declined overall. Likewise the evaluations of the lectures (I
23 had conducted these for the entire six year period) revealed no significant differences.
24
25

26 Student evaluations of individual tutors are confidential. However a number of tutors
27 advised that there was no negative impact on their evaluations by students. My own tutorial
28 evaluations by students actually improved slightly (although these were already above
29 average when compared to overall student evaluation data, prior to this requirement being
30 introduced). Student performance in terms of final grades and pass rates were compared for
31 the three years prior to implementation of this preparation requirement and three years
32 following. No differences in the overall pass rate or in grading distribution were found. The
33 pass rate (and associated grade distributions) for off campus students, who would not be
34 impacted by this requirement, also shows no change over this period.
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54 **REFLECTIONS**

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56 I admit that I was initially extremely anxious about students' possible response to this
57 requirement. Would there be a revolt? Would formal complaints be laid? Would student
58 evaluations plummet and I be asked to explain? What would I do if students simply ignored
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3 this requirement and continuously turned up at tutorials unprepared and refused tutors
4 requests to leave? These concerns did not evaluate. However in Year 1 the requirement was
5
6 a surprise to students and there was a certain amount of 'noise' and scepticism about whether it
7
8 would be enforced. I recall at the end of the first lecture a student saying:
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12
13 *I can't believe that you are **really** going to kick us out if we don't do the work*
14

15 My response:

16
17 *I can't believe that you **really** think it's OK to come to tutorials if you haven't done the work*
18

19
20 seemed to make students reflect. Given the information provided about the rationale for the
21
22 requirement in the context of a set of dual and reciprocal rights and responsibilities, of
23
24 academics and students, students accepted that the requirement was a reasonable one, even if
25
26 they did not like it. In subsequent years students were well aware of and seemingly resigned
27
28 to the fact that tutorial preparation was a requirement for this course, due to prior knowledge
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30 via academics in preceding courses and the student grapevine.
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32

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34 Nor did the concerns about student evaluations eventuate as these were not adversely
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36 affected by this requirement. Indeed, student's review of this requirement indicated overall
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38 support and a desire by many that it be required in other courses. It should be noted that this
39
40 support comes with a proviso. I am certain that if I had asked students their views on this
41
42 requirement early in the semester there would not have been such support. My discussions
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44 with students indicated that many initially hated this requirement (in the words of one student
45
46 'I thought it sucked at first'). It was only after being 'forced' to prepare and recognising both
47
48 the positive impact of preparation itself and on the nature of tutorials that students endorsed
49
50 the preparation requirement. This delayed endorsement is consistent with the motivational
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52 literature's claim that it is a fallacy that motivation necessarily precedes action; in fact, it is
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54 argued that 'in most cases action precedes motivation: that is, once action has been initiated
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56 motivation tends to gather momentum and it becomes increasingly easy to continue what has
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3 been started' (Lazarus, 2010). It was apparent here that once students started preparing this
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5 increased their motivation to prepare.
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9 Another concern was whether tutors would be willing and able to support this
10 requirement on a sustained basis throughout the semester? I appreciated that it was one thing
11 to agree with the requirement in principle, but another to actually put into practice at the
12 coalface. My attendance at initial tutorials eased the transition and implementation. Further,
13 as noted previously, after initial tutorials students largely self-regulated and simply did not
14 attend if not prepared. Hence many of the anticipated problems did not eventuate. In
15 subsequent years tutors recognising the benefits of this requirement not only willingly
16 enforced this but also promoted the requirement.
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29 Given that the preparation requirement would result in some students being excluded
30 from tutorials I had anticipated that the pass rate would decline slightly. I accepted that those
31 students who did not do sufficient work would still fail but I assumed that simply attending
32 tutorials would be of some benefit to students, even if unprepared. In hindsight this
33 assumption was incorrect. As the literature suggests mere attendance per se does not
34 necessarily facilitate improved performance. This is also reinforced by off campus students
35 in the course who pass without even having the opportunity to attend class. Thus excluding
36 unprepared students who were unable to authentically engage in tutorials did not impact on
37 overall course results. This also needs to be considered in the context of student attendance
38 patterns. There is no doubt that attendance was lower than it would be without this
39 requirement. However the majority of students indicated that the preparation requirement
40 itself did not have a significant impact on their attendance. This is also supported by student
41 and tutors comparisons of attendance in tutorials in other courses. As one student noted:
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In other tutorials, I have found lately only about 30% of students prepare for the tutorial. Attendance is at about the same level - 30%. This is very disappointing.

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3 This suggests that for many students failure to attend particular tutorials was more likely for
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5 other reasons and supports the literature which suggests that reasons for non-attendance are
6
7 largely outside of the control of academics and primarily not course related (Self, 2012;
8
9 Longhurst, 1999).
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13 The benefits of this requirement could be questioned given the negative (albeit
14
15 relatively small) impact on attendance and the lack of any positive effect on overall course
16
17 results. However this is to ignore the remarkable transformation in tutorials. These changes
18
19 were qualitative, and almost cathartic. The very nature of tutorials changed being
20
21 increasingly student centred and driven. Students had put the effort in to do the preparation,
22
23 and so wanted and were able to contribute (even if some still needed more coaxing than
24
25 others), identify problems and share these with their peers. Given the technical nature of the
26
27 course tutors could ask various students for their answers and often this would result in a
28
29 range of divergent answers being presented. It was not simply the few 'good' students
30
31 offering correct answers. This allowed students to learn from others mistakes and to value,
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33 and not be embarrassed, to share their own mistakes and problems. The act of checking
34
35 students' preparation, albeit somewhat cursory and quick, also provided tutors with an insight
36
37 into problems that students experienced, thus allowing tutors to target these. The in class
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39 activities met their objectives as students had the necessary knowledge to attempt these.
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41 Tutorials were more a dialogue, a conversation, between tutorial members rather than a 'mini-
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43 lecture' by the tutor. As one student commented:
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53 *everyone has input and the group discussions provide for arguing of points where listening to a tutor*
54 *may not get the same result; it may highlight an issue that you would never have thought of just*
55 *listening to the tutor; also the tutor is not spending all of their time explaining simple ideas to students*
56 *that have not prepared.*

57
58 Tutorials were less a chore, and were enjoyable, more energetic. In previous years I
59
60 often acted as a sounding board for tutors complaining about students' lack of engagement
and how boring tutorials were. Instead now, tutors talked excitedly about the tutorials and

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3 students. Tutors displayed a renewed enthusiasm and seemed less stressed. Indeed the
4
5 suggestion that we review the preparation requirement (as part of a regular review of the
6
7 course I questioned if it should be continued) was overwhelmingly condemned. Tutors also
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9 observed that in the course in the semester following that a number (albeit a minority) of
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11 students maintained the study habits promoted by this requirement, despite preparation not
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13 being explicitly enforced in this subsequent course. I cannot over emphasise the difference
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15 between the dynamics of tutorials in previous years and in tutorials following the introduction
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17 of this requirement. Tutors also noted this difference between tutorials in this course
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19 compared to other courses and indeed indicated that the requirement should be extended to all
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21 courses.
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28 Overall if success is measured in terms of improvement in course results or student
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30 evaluations then it could be concluded that the preparation requirement was not successful;
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32 although neither was it detrimental. However if success is assessed on the quality of the
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34 experiences of students and teaching staff then the requirement was a remarkable success.
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38 CONCLUSION

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40 Almost all universities have student charters or similar documents that espouse a
41
42 universal expectation that students have a responsibility to adequately prepare for class.
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44 Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that lack of preparation by students is widespread and
45
46 systemic. We recognise (and the literature confirms) that preparation is required for effective
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48 class engagement yet this lack of preparation seems to be viewed as a *fait accompli*;
49
50 something that must be tolerated and simply lived with. Surely the question to ask is,
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52 knowing the impact this has not only on students but on staff, why do we accept this? Our
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54 passive, if reluctant, resignation implicitly condones such behaviour and in turn may foster
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56 the normalisation of non-preparation for class. From a student perspective how can the
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3 requirement to prepare for classes be seen as important, or even legitimate, if few academics
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5 in reality require or enforce it?
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9 There are numerous ways to encourage student preparation (for example, explicit
10 learning contracts, penalties or marks for preparation, ensuring tutorials are well constructed).
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12 The value of such motivating strategies and their place as legitimate initiatives to enhance
13 and encourage student engagement should not be discounted or ignored. None of the
14 literature reviewed considered enforcing preparation requirements or excluding students from
15 class. There is no doubt that there are some academics who do this but it is apparent from the
16 review of the literature this is not widespread.
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26 I can understand the reluctance of many academics to exclude students from classes
27 for non-preparation whether from genuine concern for students or fear of consequences.
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29 Should we not care about students who do not prepare? Of course we should! The question
30 however is should we allow these students to compromise the learning experience of those
31 students who are willing and able to engage? Do we not have a duty of care to all students?
32
33 Isn't it likely (as the literature suggests) that widespread lack of preparation undermines the
34 value of tutorials and so contributes to non-attendance even by diligent students? The
35 increasingly managerial focus of universities, with the associated emphasis on student
36 evaluations, may promote a 'customer is always right' ethos but we need to consider the
37 nature of students as customers; as co-producers. As students' comments attest unprepared
38 students who behave as mere bystanders have an adverse impact on the efficacy of tutorials
39 as a forum for learning and the learning experiences of all students.
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55 Learning (and teaching) entails both rights and responsibilities on students, academics
56 and institutions. Setting and enforcing class preparation expectations results in increased
57 preparation and resulting participation, thus allowing the purpose of tutorials to be realised as
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3 well as assisting students to develop consistent and appropriate study habits. Students are not
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5 lazy. But like everyone else, they need to balance and prioritise the myriad of demands on
6
7 their time. Insisting on adequate class preparation can ‘kick start’ motivation as well as
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9 causing a reprioritisation and a shift from a culture where class preparation is viewed as an
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11 optional activity. There has been a shift in the paradigm of teaching: from delivery of content
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13 to facilitating the production of learning (Braun and Seller, 2012). This recognises students as
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15 co-producers of their own learning and such co-production requires active participation, of
16
17 which preparation is an integral part (Stone et al, 2013). Indeed, as the opening quote states
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19 ‘education is not a spectator sport’ and we should not allow it to become one; we need to
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21 assist students to move from the sidelines if classes are to provide the opportunity for
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23 meaningfully student engagement. Yet, as Stone et al (2013) state:
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30 The accounting education literature tends to concentrate on the role of educators rather than proposing
31 contributions that students may make to their learning.... A reassertion of students’ responsibility to
32 prepare for classes is arguably overdue (p. 181).
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35 As this is a case study the findings and results are situated in a specific context and
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37 hence cannot be generalized to other settings; to other cohorts of students or even other
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39 courses. Further, this paper illustrates just one strategy to improve the effectiveness of
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41 tutorials, and a rather blunt one at that. However this study illustrates one means of increasing
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43 active learning even where restricted to the traditional lecture/tutorial format. I am currently
44
45 moving towards a ‘flipped’ approach to this course, abolishing lectures and incorporating
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47 further team based learning activities. Although this will incorporate activities such as tests to
48
49 encourage preparation (see for example, Braun and Sellers, 2012) in this context adequate
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51 preparation by students is even more critical. Future research could consider other strategies
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53 and also target those students who fail to prepare.
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Table 1		
Impact of requirement on attendance at tutorials		
Number of tutorials missed due to this requirement	Year 1 (%)	Year 2 (%)
0	46	40
1 or 2	35	32
3 or 4	15	11
5	3	5
> 6	3	12

For Review Only

Table 2: Student and Tutor Evaluations of Tutorial Participation and Effectiveness				
		<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
		%	%	%
1	I have found that there is more discussion than in my tutorials for other courses			
	Students Year 1	43	31	26
	Students Year 2	58	28	14
	Tutors Year 1	83	17	0
	Tutors Year 2	75	25	0
2	More students seem to participate in FA2 tutorials than in my tutorials for other courses			
	Students Year 1	35	35	30
	Students Year 2	51	21	28
	Tutors Year 1	83	17	0
	Tutors Year 2	63	25	12
3	The tutorials in FA2 are more useful because students are required to prepare before attending			
	Students Year 1	59	28	13
	Students Year 2	71	19	10
	Tutors Year 1	83	17	0
	Tutors Year 2	100	0	0
4	The requirement to prepare and the resulting tutorial discussion has enhanced my learning			
	Students Year 1	60	25	15
	Students Year 2	76	12	12
5	The activities in tutorials are more effective because students are required to prepare			
	Tutors Year 1	80	20	0
	Tutors Year 2	100	0	0
6	Did you find any differences between attending these tutorials and tutorials that you have attended in other courses/study periods	YES %		NO%
	Students Year 1	54		46
	Students Year 2	62		38
	Tutors Year 1	83		17
	Tutors Year 2	75		25
7	Do you think this requirement should be introduced in other courses			
	Students Year 1	55		45
	Students Year 2	61		39
	Tutors Year 1	83		17
	Tutors Year 2	100		0