

Impact case study template (REF3b)

Title of case study:

Learning in Public: Community Engagement in Political Science Education

1. Summary of the impact

This case study demonstrates clear and significant impact on placement learning in a range of universities, according with the following dimension of impact in REF 2014: impacts within the higher education sector, including on teaching or students, are **included** where they extend significantly beyond the submitting HEI (emphasis in the original). The research focuses on Community Engagement in Political Science Education, undertaken from 2007 by Associate Professor Steven Curtis. Curtis researches and publishes new models of placement learning, the learning and teaching uses of Web 2.0, and more effective approaches to feedback. Curtis's work . involving developing new approaches to the pedagogy of community engagement . enjoys both national and international recognition.

2. Underpinning research

Curtis has delivered over 30 conference papers at national and international conferences since 2007, including papers, panels and workshops at the annual American Political Science Association Teaching and Learning Conferences every year since 2010, International Studies Association conferences, and collaborative pedagogical work with colleagues in the US and continental Europe. Curtis's various projects and interventions have focused in particular on:

- devising and evaluating new approaches to placement learning in the discipline of Politics, in which very short placements are fully embedded in the curriculum (by contrast to common practice on sandwich degrees and stand-alone work-placement modules which typically involve long placements, often with little connection to the subject matter of students' studies);
- exploring use of blogs in students' academic writing development and reflective learning;
- developing modes of feedback based on dialogue between tutors and students and among students themselves, especially through audio recordings, Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, and virtual learning environments.

Curtis's research into placement learning, both as part of the HEFCE-funded Scholarship of Engagement for Politics project and subsequently, discovered significant benefits from using very short placements of between five and 18 days and from linking placements to the content of specific modules, by contrast to the then dominant modes of placement learning in Politics which emphasised lengthy placements, usually of ten weeks or more, and which were often free-standing affairs not directly related to any class-based learning. Curtis's research explored research-based approaches to learning on placements and means of assessing such learning.

Curtis also explores the educational use of blogs in politics and international relations, with a particular focus not only on how they enable both tutors and students to provide feedback and other comments on students' first drafts of written work as well as improving their academic writing, but also as a form of learning diary for students on placements. Curtis has also discovered that outside experts and practitioners, such as diplomats and journalists, often leave supportive comments on the students' work.

Curtis identifies similarities between blogging on publicly accessible platforms and undertaking placements, especially the dimension which he describes as **Learning in Public**. This incorporates some of the other innovations he has been responsible for, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) providing training and role-play activities for students and the use of educational visits and guest lecturers.

3. References to the research

Key publications

- Curtis, S. (2012a) How Relevant Are Other Ways to Learn? in C. Gormley-Heenan and S. Lightfoot (eds.), *Teaching Politics and International Relations*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Curtis, S. (2012b) Politics Placements and Employability: A New Approach *European Political Science* 11 (2).
- Curtis, S. and A Blair (2010a) Experiencing Politics in Action: Widening Participation in Placement Learning and Politics as a Vocation *Journal of Political Science Education* 6 (4).
- Curtis, S. and A. Blair (eds.) (2010b) *The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics: Placement Learning, Citizenship and Employability*, Birmingham: C-SAP/Higher Education Academy.
- Curtis, S., B. Axford, A. Blair, R. Huggins, C. Gibson and P. Sherrington (2009a) Placement Blogging: The Benefits and Limitations of Online Journaling *ELiSS: Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences* 1 (3).
- Curtis, S., B. Axford, A. Blair, R. Huggins, C. Gibson and P. Sherrington (2009b) Making Short Politics Placements Work, *Politics* 29 (1).

Key grants

- 2009 - 2012 *It's Good to Talk: Feedback, Dialogue and Learning* De Montfort University, London Metropolitan and Warwick University, Higher Education Academy National Teaching Fellowship Scheme project: £200,000.
- 2009 - 2010 *Writing in Public: Exploring the Use of Web 2.0 in Developing Students' Academic Writing* *Learn Higher*-funded project: £2000.
- 2009 Funding from *Write Now* CETL to develop students' academic writing through blogging and other techniques on an International Relations theory module: £1000.
- 2005 - 2008 *The Scholarship of Engagement for Politics* University of Warwick, Coventry University, Oxford Brookes University, and London Metropolitan University, HEFCE Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning, phase 5 project: £275,000.

4. Details of the impact

Curtis's research into developing new approaches to placement learning has had significant impact on placement practices in at least eight other universities in the UK, benefiting both undergraduate students and academic staff (Huddersfield, Keele, Leeds, Nottingham Trent, Royal Holloway, Salford, Sheffield Hallam and the University of East Anglia). Curtis's research exemplifies public impact via (1) engagement with colleagues at other HE institutions (see the five testimonials in section 5 below) and (2) relevant publications and conference papers. His article *Learning in Public: Connecting Politics Students with Practitioners in the Edgeless University* in the Political Studies Association's magazine *Political Insight* (2010), was particularly important in this respect because of its wide circulation among both HE colleagues and students.

Curtis's work with colleagues at the universities of Keele, Huddersfield and Leeds in 2007-08 and Sheffield Hallam University in 2010, helped their Politics departments develop new or revise existing placement learning schemes better to suit their students' needs and curricular requirements. The impact was highly noticeable at Huddersfield, where the relevant placement tutor significantly revised the existing approach to placement learning by reducing the length of placements from ten to three weeks and by encouraging his students to blog about their experiences on the HE's virtual learning environment. This made the placement experience much more popular with students and improved significantly their engagement with the process. Lecturers at Leeds, Keele and Sheffield Hallam also altered their placements, or their plans to introduce placement learning, as a result of the application of the results of Curtis's research. Lecturers at Leeds were primarily concerned about matters of social inclusion, as they saw the value of short placements in terms of providing experiential learning opportunities for students with part-time jobs and family commitments, as had been

demonstrated by Curtis's research and publications.

Curtis's publications and conference papers have also had an impact at other HEIs, such as Salford and UEA. One of these publications (Curtis et al. 2009b), published in a PSA journal with wide readership, influenced how placement learning was introduced at Nottingham Trent University in particular (see the reference section 5 below). In addition, as a result of Curtis's published work and presentations, UEA adopted short internships in Brussels in relation to an EU-focused undergraduate module.

Curtis organised a two-day conference in June 2008 on placement learning and other innovative approaches to learning and teaching in politics, attracting delegates from NGOs, local government and lecturers in the Politics discipline. The experiences of a local government officer and an NGO organiser can be found in the collection of papers which grew out of the conference (Curtis and Blair 2010).

In recognition of the impact of his research and teaching in this area, Curtis was appointed national Discipline Associate for Politics and International Relations at the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) former Subject Network for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP) (2010-11) and he is currently (late-2013) Discipline Lead for Politics at the HEA. In these roles he has organised workshops (e.g., on issues in teaching European Studies), facilitated sessions in early career events for colleagues new to teaching, and has visited departments to help them develop their teaching practice.

Curtis is co-founder and co-chair of the British International Studies Association's (BISA) Learning and Teaching Working Group (BLT), which aims to promote the scholarship of learning and teaching in IR. In this capacity he has convened panels at annual BISA conferences and organised one-day workshops on IT-assisted learning and teaching, assessment and feedback practices in Politics and International Relations, and teaching research methods. He has been co-opted onto the Executive Committee and the Learning and Teaching and Outreach Subcommittees of BISA and appointed chair of BISA's Teaching and Learning Committee, helping to shape its initiatives regarding the promotion and professionalization of teaching in the discipline and promoting the study of the Global Politics units of the A level in Government and Politics, including liaising with the chief examiner of these units over plans to produce a textbook on the subject for sixth form students.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Curtis was awarded the PSA's Bernard Crick Prize (New Entrant) for Outstanding Teaching in 2010. The judging panel noted that Curtis's wide range of outstanding teaching activities, from placements to blogging to research activities, is very impressive and make him a worthy winner of the award. His wide array of publications and dissemination activities show that Steven's work has an impact beyond his own department and has helped shaped good practice within the discipline. In 2011, Curtis was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship (www.heacademy.ac.uk/contacts/detail/ntfs/2011/Curtis_Sтивен_profile_NTFS_2011). These awards demonstrate impact of Curtis's research beyond his home HEI.

The following testimonials demonstrate impact on placement practices in five other HEIs: **University of Huddersfield** (Reader in Politics): "Research undertaken by Steven Curtis has proven instrumental in enhancing the quality of work placement programmes for Politics courses in higher education institutions in the UK. Through his leadership in a number of ground-breaking programmes, Curtis's research has provided evidentially informed templates for the reform of the work placement programme at the University of Huddersfield in terms of pedagogy and structure. In particular, Curtis's research aided the reform of the length of the programme at Huddersfield, and also provided clear examples which aided development of greater emphasis on the development of employability and personal development within our Politics work placements."

University of Leeds (Senior Lecturer in European Politics): %Steven's work on placements has had an impact on our practice here at Leeds. We have a long history of providing year-long placements, but we have been able to use the information and discussions with Steve to shape our practice in relation to the successful delivery of short placements with, in particular, Leeds City Council. His publications & work on blogging have also been influential in shaping our practice in this area, both within the field of placements but also in the wider context of student engagement i.e., using a blog to record student reviews of research seminars is a key example.+

Sheffield Hallam University (Principal Lecturer in Politics): %Steven came up to Sheffield Hallam at the beginning of our revalidation process. We did not have any experience of placements at this stage. The meeting we had with Steven was extremely useful. He continued his support via email during our revalidation process and offered concrete suggestions as to how we could develop the structure and assessment of the politics placement. Our placement module was commended in the validation meeting. The placement module is now up and running and has been a success; much of the success is down to the good design of the module, which can in large part be attributed to Steven's input and continued support.+

Keele University (Senior Lecturer in Philosophy): %In 2012/13, we introduced a Work Experience module for second year undergraduate students in the School of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy. Steven Curtis helped at many stages of the initial planning for this module, providing information and advice from his wide experience with similar modules at other universities, which had a major influence on many aspects of our own module design. Then once the module had begun, he led one of the core module workshops, which students found very useful. Some of his writings are required reading on the module.+

Royal Holloway (Senior Lecturer in Politics): %Steven's research has had a major impact upon teaching and learning in political science/international relations in the UK and more widely. He has provided important evidence-based research (from peer-reviewed academic articles to practical user-guides) that has influenced the delivery of teaching and learning in his discipline. Steven has also provided important leadership for the growth of teaching and learning specialist groups in our professional associations (BISA/PSA). In more concrete terms, Steven's work has heavily influenced my own professional practice with regard to political science placements/internships. His research into student placements has had a direct impact on our own teaching provision at Royal Holloway, University of London. In 2013-14, we will be starting up a placement programme in politics along the lines recommended by Steven.+

Further evidence of the impact of Curtis's publications on other HEIs (in this case, Nottingham Trent) can be found in: Virginie Grzelczyk and Roy Smith, *International Studies Placements at Home: Evaluating Innovative Work-based Learning Opportunities* paper presented at the 2nd British International Studies Association-International Studies Association Joint International Conference, Edinburgh, 20-22 June 2012, available at http://convention2.allacademic.com/one/bisaisa/conference2012/index.php?cmd=Download+Document&key=unpublished_manuscript&file_index=3&pop_up=true&no_click_key=true&attachment_style=attachment&PHPSESSID=kn80qdlmm75i05tnr05bbpkt04