

# What makes a Great Unit Leader and how can we best support others

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# Presentation Aims

- ▶ Reflect on the key characteristics of the most highly student rated student modules.
- ▶ Appreciate the key attributes and characteristics of great module leaders.
- ▶ Consider provision for staff development for module leaders at their own universities.

# Context and method

- ▶ Southampton Solent University
- ▶ NSS Organisation and Management
- ▶ Identified the 30 top student rated units (1600)
- ▶ In-depth interviews with the most successful unit leaders

**Applied social science**

**Making Magazines**

**Web Development**

**Mathematics**

**Accountancy**

**Computer Programming**

**Events**

**Psychology of Crime**

**Interior Design**

**Sociology of Sport**

**Education**

**Computing**

**Business**

**PR**

**English**

**Contemporary Fiction**

**Maritime**

**Thermodynamics**

**Marketing**

**Graphic design**

**Physiology of Sport**

# Our top 30 units are:-

- ▶ Mainly 20 CATS .
- ▶ Mainly level 4 and 5
- ▶ Mixed delivery
- ▶ Mainly classroom based
  - One quarter IT, lab or practical
- ▶ Average 50 students
- ▶ Range 26 -120 students

# Its Your Turn

- ▶ What makes a great unit leader?
- ▶ What makes a great unit?
  - Assessment
  - Communication with students
  - Communication with staff
  - IT
  - Unit ethos

# Top 30 Unit Leaders

- ▶ Worked in industry (25)
- ▶ PGCTLHE (18)
- ▶ No teaching qualifications (7)
- ▶ Taught from 2 to 35 years
- ▶ 6 research champions .
- ▶ Unit leaders reflect their subjects and inspire trust in their students because of this.

# Top 30 Unit Leaders:

- ▶ Lone rangers (22)
- ▶ Most have taught the unit for 4 years.
- ▶ Lead up on average 3–4 units
- ▶ Teach on average 4–5 units
- ▶ Most wrote the unit descriptor (22)
- ▶ Most wrote the schedule & assessment (27)



# Personal Characteristics

## ▶ Maritime

- Flexibility
- Vary approaches

## ▶ Technology

- Approachable & friendly
- Enthusiasm
- Communication

## ▶ Art & Design

- Enthusiasm & passion
- Lecturer as performer

## ▶ Business & Sport

- Enthusiasm & motivation
- Approachable & helpful

# Unit Ethos: Main Student Message

- ▶ **Maritime**
- ▶ Career prospects
- ▶ Work ethos and expectations
- ▶ **Technology**
- ▶ Attendance and organisation
- ▶ Theory practice links
- ▶ **Art & Design**
- ▶ Attendance and engagement
- ▶ Relevance to work
- ▶ **Business & Sport**
- ▶ House rules
- ▶ Commitment

# Unit Assessment

- ▶ Most units had two assessments
- ▶ Mostly coursework (6 exams)
- ▶ Many portfolios and ‘staggered’ assessments
- ▶ Many practical assessments
- ▶ Why successful?
  - Many reasons provided
  - Clarity –no surprises
  - **Formative preparation with regular feedback ‘routine of working’.**
  - Contrast between the two assessments

# Staff-to-Student Communication

- ▶ Everything you would expect but what stands out is:–
- ▶ **Assessment feedback**
  - Assessment design (formative)
  - Speed of feedback
  - Detail of feedback (opportunity for verbal)
  - Significance of feedback to the unit leader
- ▶ **Attendance monitoring and chase**
  - Majority very strong advocates

# Key features of Great Unit Leaders

- ▶ Very well organised
- ▶ Enthusiasm and passion for subject
- ▶ Teaching is industry relevant
- ▶ Creative in assessment design
- ▶ Strong on assessment feedback
- ▶ Very proactive about attendance monitoring
- ▶ Clarity in communications (tough love)
- ▶ Approachable/ door policy is clear
- ▶ Respect students
- ▶ Embrace myCourse

# Staff Development

- ▶ Many presentations and workshops
- ▶ University Portal
  - 25 unit leader photos and brief profiles,
  - 20 unit leader audio 'top five' tips
  - 2 video leader top five tips
  - A-Z unit leader induction guidelines
  - Unit leader role descriptor
  - Powerpoint presentation
  - Full research write up

# The Guide

## Who is it for?

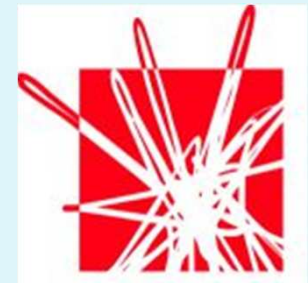
- New unit leaders (starting from scratch or taking over from someone else)
- Existing unit leaders looking to refine skills
- New lecturers looking for teaching tips

## What will it include?

- ▶ Overview of project
- ▶ Definition of Unit Leading
- ▶ Roles & Responsibilities of Unit Leaders
- ▶ A-Z of Great Unit Leading
- ▶ Links to “good practice” by SSU “Great” Unit Leaders

# The A-Z of Great Unit Leading

- ▶ **A** is for Alignment
- ▶ **B** is for Beginnings and Endings
- ▶ **C** is for Communication, Consistency & Clarity
- ▶ **D** is for Devotion
- ▶ **E** is for Enjoyment & Enthusiasm
- ▶ **F** is for Feedback
- ▶ **G** is for Guidance
- ▶ **H** is for Honesty
- ▶ **I** is for Inspire
- ▶ **J** is for Job Market
- ▶ **K** is for Knowledge
- ▶ **L** is for Links
- ▶ **M** is for MyCourse
- ▶ **N** is for Nice
- ▶ **O** is for Organisation
- ▶ **P** is for Positive
- ▶ **Q** is for Quality not Quantity
- ▶ **R** is for Relevance
- ▶ **S** is for Structure
- ▶ **T** is for Teamwork
- ▶ **U** is for Unit Documents
- ▶ **V** is for Variety
- ▶ **W** is for Wisdom
- ▶ **X** is for eXtraordinary
- ▶ **Y** is for You
- ▶ **Z** is for Zeal





# The A-Z of Great Unit Leading

## **F** is for Feedback :

- ▶ Feedback refers to feedback from students (student evaluation) and feedback to students (student feedback). Get regular feedback from students (informal and formal) and incorporate their feedback into improving the unit. Make sure your own feedback to students, for both formative and summative work, is both timely and relevant. The university considers four weeks as the deadline for 'timely' feedback. Many of the Great Unit Leaders interviewed endeavoured to turn **feedback** round even more quickly. Remember that the longer it takes to give students feedback, the less use it will be.

## **M** is for MyCourse :

- ▶ MyCourse is really valid helping tool – use it, but as an extension of you in the classroom, not a replacement. Post lecture slides, links to useful web pages, post questions on the forum that you didn't get a chance to answer in the seminar and encourage the students to start a dialogue with each other, set quizzes, post podcasts. In other words, make your **MyCourse** page as exciting as the unit is!

## **U** is for Unit Documents (or scheme of work) :

- ▶ Never underestimate the importance of the **unit document**. Take the time to create a clear, informative and inspiring scheme of work that includes details of assessments, weekly topic break down, reading list, recommendations and so on. However, remember that too much information is a bad thing; keep the unit document relevant and succinct (see Q is for Quality not Quantity).