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## MООСs in the community

The University of Edinburgh



AMOSSHE

The Student Services Organisation



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# MOOCs in the community

## A blended learning approach to FE to HE transitions

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[www.ed.ac.uk/student-community-engagement](http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-community-engagement)

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*“Vicki and myself found that the MOOC gave us an opportunity to explore our confidence in structuring arguments, improving presentation style and how to take notes (which we will hopefully take onto university next year). It reinforced our learning in our college classes, which we are grateful for and will take onto our assessment preparation. The MOOC has taught us a great deal about referencing and how arguments are structured, which will prepare us better for higher education and we thank everyone for giving us this brilliant opportunity” (Karen, Further Education student, 2015)*

*“This opportunity gives me the chance to be involved in something productive, a break in my degree programme” (University of Edinburgh student tutor, 2015)*

*“I want to experience how a MOOC is developed, so that I have the knowledge to do this myself in the future” (University of Edinburgh student tutor, 2015)*

*“Critical thinking is for life. Not just for university.” (University of Edinburgh student tutor, 2015)*

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## Introduction

The 'MOOCs in the Community' project was set up to investigate the potential that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) hold for i) enhancing the transition of Further Education (FE) students to Higher Education (HE) and ii) creating new opportunities for building student community engagement. The project was a result of two separate areas of research and practice coming together: enhancing the academic induction of undergraduate students and the use of MOOCs in the wider community. It was envisaged that this project would provide the opportunity to explore the synergy between these two different objectives.

This report begins with the rationale of the project by referring to longitudinal research that Abby Shovlin and Chris Doye carried out in 2013/14, which suggested that the two FE students in the research had found the transition to HE very challenging. The project aims were drawn up in response to these findings and this report details these before providing information on the blended learning programme and the role of the Student Tutor that the Community Engagement Developer created. Student feedback was sought through pre- and post-course surveys and a focus group. This feedback is explored and discussed before the report concludes with recommendations for future MOOC projects.

## FE to HE transitions: background and rationale for the project

'First Semester Through Your Eyes' was a qualitative research study into first year student transitions into the University of Edinburgh that was designed and carried out by Abby Shovlin and Chris Doye in 2013/14. This research was published as an internal report entitled

'Is Getting Used to it Good Enough?' which was presented at the university's 'Gearing Up for Transitions' Conference in 2015. Students in this research study participated in two semi-structured interviews; one at the beginning of semester one and the second at the beginning of semester two, looking back at their journey so far. Participants also shared their thoughts and reflections with the researchers between these two interviews through a secure data cloud. Findings from this small scale study suggested that the students moving from FE to HE may have had an especially challenging transition. 'Through Your Eyes' had four participants who were Widening Participation (WP) students in its sample of 14 first year undergraduate (UG) students. Two of these four WP students had attended FE colleges and both of these participants, Sarah and Beth, talked about their transition from college into university as being 'overwhelming', 'scary' and 'a bit of a struggle'. Sarah<sup>1</sup> told the researchers that better pre-arrival preparation for university would have helped her in this process as:

When people tell you it's going to be a lot harder, you think 'yeah I know that because it's uni, but it's different from actually seeing it and being in it. You get culture shock' (Sarah/2<sup>2</sup>)

She suggested that it would have been helpful to have a current university student come out to her college and talk through their timetable:

Someone showing you... saying 'Right, this is my week, these are my subjects. This is the reading I have to do. I then have an essay due here and an essay due there. And I have to do key readings and further readings... then I also have my outside subjects I have to do readings for each week here.' 'Cause that's how your mind works in uni. (Sarah/2)

She also told the researchers that it would be helpful for students to be given a clearer idea of the differences they might encounter:

Now if you were at university and you were asked to do that, this is how you would do it. And this is how it's done in college. Do you see the difference? Here's where you're at and this is where you need to be. And, this could be the journey... this is the start of your journey and this is the personal journey you'll need to take at uni and here's some tips on how you can do that when you get there. (Sarah/2)

Similarly, Beth talked of university as a 'massive step up' in terms of workload and expectations. She commented on the essays that she was now expected to write as being 'a completely different way of writing than most people will have even attempted before' adding that 'you're not going to be able to do that right away'. Perhaps, in response to this, in her second interview looking back at semester one, Beth suggested that:

Having note taking and referencing workshops in induction week (Fresher's Week), I think that would be good for a lot of people... and I think it would stop people worrying about it. 'Cause even in Fresher's Week, people were asking about referencing' (Beth/2)

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been used in this study.

<sup>2</sup> 1 / 2 demotes the first or second interview.

Over the course of semester one both Beth and Sarah actively engaged in trying to develop their own academic skills. Sarah told us that she had got a book on Study Skills out from the library and had consulted a study development advisor, whilst Beth was focussed on her time management skills. However, despite this proactive approach, Sarah still talked of feeling under confident in her second interview and said that she had “actually questioned” her “position in Edinburgh University a few times” (Sarah/2).

The ‘emotional journey’ of students like Sarah and Beth is well documented in the research literature on FE to HE transitions. (Reay *et al.* 2010, Christie, H. 2009, Christie, H. *et al.* 2008). Christie *et al.*’s study shows that many FE students are often poorly prepared for the realities of university level study as these students typically have a “limited understanding of the new system, or of the standards expected of them” and can therefore find transitions to HE “deeply unsettling” (Christie *et al.* 2008 pg. 571).

Therefore the ‘MOOCs in the Community’ project was set up to find new ways of ‘bridging the gap’ from FE to HE and thereby helping to minimise the “roller-coaster of... emotions” that FE students may experience on their transition journeys (Christie *et al.*, 2008).

### MOOCs in the community: building community engagement background

The University of Edinburgh was the first institution in Europe to develop MOOCs, with a total of 22 different courses having been launched since 2013. Since then, a total of 1.3 million learners, from across the globe, have engaged with disciplines as diverse as *Chicken Behaviour and Welfare*, *The Discovery of Higgs Boson*, and *Understanding the Scottish Referendum*. MOOCs are freely accessible, open-licensed short courses (normally lasting no more than six weeks), which are at SCQF level 7 (first year undergraduate level).

In his blogpost in July 2012 the University of Edinburgh’s Vice-Principal for Digital Education, Professor Jeff Heywood, admitted that while he was “cautious as to where the ‘MOOC movement’ will go” he could see “openings where MOOCs might find a useful place in HE” such as offering an opportunity for prospective students without formal HE level qualifications to “demonstrate competencies at advanced levels as part of portfolios for recognition of prior learning” (Heywood, 2012).

The development of MOOCs is part of the university’s Strategic Plan, with current students now being encouraged to take part in online learning. In the autumn of 2014 students from across the Universitas 21 network, of which Edinburgh is a member, were given the opportunity to take part in a Shared Online Course (SOC), bringing together students from across the world to consider global challenges through the Edinburgh designed *Critical Thinking in Global Challenges* MOOC

([www.universitas21.com/article/educational/details/238/critical-thinking-in-global-challenges-u21s-soc](http://www.universitas21.com/article/educational/details/238/critical-thinking-in-global-challenges-u21s-soc)).

The early aspirations that MOOCs would enable a new demographic of student to engage with HE, have not been entirely successful. The report in The New Scientist in March 2014 that MOOCs were “generally reaching educated and employed men” (Christensen and Alcorn, 2013) caused a great deal of debate across the HE sector internationally. Following the launch of the University of Edinburgh’s initial six MOOCs, research was carried out in 2013 that painted a similar picture: over 70% of respondents indicated a completion of

degree-level academic achievement (2013), which is slightly lower than the recorded 80% at the University of Pennsylvania (Christensen et al, 2014). In short, “the individuals the MOOC revolution is supposed to help the most – those without access to higher education... are underrepresented among the early adopters” (Christensen et al, 2014).

Since its inception in February 2014 the Student Community Engagement project has sought to consider opportunities for students to engage in meaningful, mutually beneficial activities in partnership with community partners. Feedback from alumni has demonstrated that engagement in this area has had a positive outcome on students’ career prospects (Smith, 2014). These activities have been many and have taken a number of forms, including the use of technology. The ‘Digital Participation Strategy for Scotland’, produced by the Royal Society of Edinburgh, outlines the opportunities which technology affords the population in terms of education, health, economic and social wellbeing. It warns, however, that “those who remain offline, however, risk being increasingly excluded from society and the economy” (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 6). Research showed that 25% of the Scottish population was not online or had a lack of “basic digital skills needed to participate effectively and safely in the digital arena” (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 9). The report makes a number of recommendations, of most relevance here that “information and digital skills are embedded across the curriculum and from pre-school to tertiary” (Royal Society of Edinburgh, 43).

Although it might be expected that students in FE and HE in Scotland be exempt from the disenfranchised 25%, discussion with practitioners and researchers at the JISC FE Digital student project training seminar (Edinburgh Training Centre, 4 March 2015) showed that there was a consensus that digital facilities in FE were not of the same standard as in higher education institutions and that the level of digital literacy of both FE students and lecturers was not sufficient. The Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (FELTAG) recommended to the UK Minister of State for Skills and Enterprise in October 2013 that learners “be empowered to fully exploit their own understanding of, and familiarity with digital technology for their own learning” (FELTAG, 2013).

An informal discussion with two former Scottish Wider Access Programme students, who will finish their first year as undergraduate students at the University of Edinburgh this summer, echoed the findings of this wider research. The students reported that they had felt that the difference in the use of technology in FE and HE had made their transition from college to university all the more difficult.

## MOOCs in the community project aims

To enhance FE to HE transitions, the project aimed to:

- Open up a dialogue between Edinburgh College lecturing staff and the University of Edinburgh on how we can work together to prepare our students more effectively for their transition into university.
- Encourage FE students to take a proactive approach to their transition from FE to HE.



- Build FE students' skills in critical thinking, which is one of the four key areas that the University of Edinburgh's 'Preparing for Study' pre-arrival website focuses on in addition to 'being proactive', 'managing your time' and 'learning independently'.
- Pilot a model of a new transition resource that has the potential to be up-scaled and integrated into current University of Edinburgh FE to HE transition practice.
- Increase student empowerment and build confidence by allowing FE students to experience university learning before beginning their undergraduate programme.
- Increase digital skills of FE students.

To build Student Community Engagement, the project aimed to:

- Develop new opportunities for students to engage with the local community.
- Increase the digital skills of university students.
- Enable students to develop skills through working with young people, such as communication, leadership, explaining complex ideas.
- Consider how the university might play a part in tackling some of the issues highlighted by the Digital Participation Strategy for Scotland.
- Encourage university academic staff to consider a wider audience when developing MOOCs.
- Consider the technological challenges of developing MOOC material for new audiences, and use this research to inform the creation of new online resources.
- Build the graduate attributes and skills portfolio of higher education students.

## AMOSSHE support

We applied for funding from AMOSSHE as an Insight project in December 2014 and were informed that this had been successful in early January 2015. A total of £1,100 was requested to support the project, which was granted. These funds have been used to make a short film of the project, cover staff and student travel expenses and for the catering of the 'graduation' event in April. Support was provided by John Bloomfield at AMOSSHE, and by Christine Lowther (Glasgow University) who has mentored us during this project.

## Research dissemination

The findings of this project will be disseminated across the sector initially through the AMOSSHE annual conference in July 2015, with this report being uploaded to the AMOSSHE website. We have also appointed a student intern to make a film of the project ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7yZWUhKM4U&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7yZWUhKM4U&feature=youtu.be)), which will be used to promote the use of MOOCs in community and academic transition settings.

## Project methodology and set up

### Methodology

This project's primary research methodology was that of action research, as this approach facilitates "engagement with people in collaborative relationships, opening new 'communicative spaces' in which dialogue and development can flourish" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008 p. 3). The student voice was a key part of this project and one of the main ways in which the student experience was evaluated was a focus group that was held at the end of the course. 'MOOCS in the Community' aimed to research the change that it wished to create, thereby effectively informing future developments in the field of digital practice in community engagement and transitions to HE.

### Project design and logistics

Discussions took place between the two project leaders during the summer of 2014, exploring the options to develop a joint project using the *Critical Thinking* MOOC. In November, it was decided to approach AMOSSHE for funding as an Insight project, bringing together two distinct project areas: enhancing academic transition and student community engagement.

Following the successful application for AMOSSHE funding, discussion began with Edinburgh College in late 2014 and an initial meeting was set up with two members of teaching staff, Pete Smith and Diane Watkins, in early January 2015. Pete Smith is the Course Leader of the SWAP Access Program (Access) and Diane Watkins is the Higher National Certificate in Social Science Course Leader (HNC). These courses were chosen for the initial pilot as the content and learning outcomes of the MOOC complemented the curriculum of both the SWAP Access Course and the HNC in Social Science.

It was agreed that the MOOC be offered to both the Access A (for those wishing to apply for an MA in Primary School teaching) and Access B (for entry into the Humanities and Social Science) and the two HNC Social Science groups. However, it was difficult to find a space in the timetable that would suit all four of these groups as the second semester of both the Access and HNC programmes is extremely busy and there was no available time to hold the MOOC sessions during the hours of the normal college day. Therefore, a twilight slot of Monday evening from 4 to 6pm was decided upon. This timeslot was not suitable for every student as some students had family / work commitments at this time that prevented them from participating in the project.

### FE student recruitment and numbers

College students were recruited to the project through their college lecturers. The Project Leaders briefed the college lecturers and explained the online MOOC structure. The lecturers then passed on this information and a course handout to the students (see appendix one).

Fourteen students (five Access and nine HNC Social Science) registered initial interest in the project. However, three of these students did not attend the first MOOC session. One of these three students wrote to the AIC communicating that she was unfortunately unable to take the MOOC class as she hadn't been able to arrange childcare. The other two students did not respond to the AIC's email communication and their reason for not continuing with the MOOC is therefore unknown.

Eleven students (four Access and seven HNC) began the MOOC and six students (four Access and two HNC) completed the MOOC by finishing all of the homework tasks and achieving 60% or above in the final assessment. Two HNC students failed to return for week two of the MOOC. The two students did not respond to the AIC's emails so the reason for them dropping out is unknown. Anecdotally, fellow students (the MOOC completers) told the AIC that these two students couldn't continue with the MOOC as they hadn't been aware of the amount of work involved. In the second week of the MOOC, the class was therefore composed of four Access students and five HNC students. Three further HNC students dropped out of the project over weeks three and four. All three of these students wrote / spoke to the AIC to communicate their reasons for doing so. They all stated that it was with regret that they could no longer continue the MOOC but they only had enough time to concentrate on college course work at that time and couldn't invest the class time that the MOOC required. Therefore, this left six students who went on to complete and pass the MOOC.

### Recruitment of student tutors

Simultaneously, in late 2014 the recruitment of student tutors took place. The targeting of specific student cohorts was carefully considered and it was agreed that the several hundred students who had taken part in the Universitas 21 Shared Online Course (SOC) would be contacted and asked if they were interested in taking part in a community project. Twelve students applied to be tutors and came from a varied background: undergraduate and postgraduate; international and home; a range of academic disciplines; online distance and Edinburgh-based students. This number eventually settled at a total of six students who agreed to take part in the planning and delivery of the project.

It became clear that student tutors would not all be able to visit Edinburgh College on a weekly basis, so the role of online student tutors was established. This role was set up in order to facilitate discussions through the online forums and answer the FE students' queries.

### The blended learning design

The AIC consulted with Undergraduate Study Development at the university's Institute of Academic Development (IAD) to discuss the opportunities that this project offered for enhancing the transition of FE to HE students. The 'Critical Thinking in Global Challenges' University of Edinburgh MOOC is delivered solely online and lasts for five weeks with students working an average of two to three hours per week. It was decided that the best possible model of course design for this student group was one that used the existing five week online MOOC as its core and added classroom sessions focussed on developing students' academic confidence. In the report, we shall refer to this iteration of the MOOC as

a Blended Learning Massive Open Online Course (BLMOOC). Dr. Jenna Mann of the IAD was consulted on how to blend these two elements effectively and the following live classroom sessions were chosen:

- **Peer learning.** Research from 'Through Your Eyes' suggested that the students in the study were not prepared to take full advantage of the benefits of peer learning in their first year at university. The BLMOOC did offer the possibility of virtual peer learning through discussion boards, but in addition to this a significant amount of group and pair work was incorporated into the programme design of the BLMOOC in order to build students' confidence in this area.
- **How to make notes in lectures.** This was a common area of concern for the students in the 'Through Your Eyes' study and a series of activities on this theme were built into the BLMOOC.
- **How to give confident presentations.** Students in 'Through Your Eyes' often talked of the challenge of adjusting to the tutorial learning environment at university. This presentation session was added in response to these findings as it gave students practice in researching a topic and speaking in front of a group. It was decided that the format of the Three Minute Thesis (3MT)<sup>3</sup> would be used for these presentations as this was something new for college students who were already used to being assessed on their presentations skills throughout their HNC and Access courses.

The full BLMOOC programme timetable can be found in appendix two.

The Community Engagement Developer aimed to use this BLMOOC as part of a portfolio of projects to explore new avenues of building Student Community Engagement and enhancing the graduate attributes of University of Edinburgh students. As part of this, she aimed to include an important element of student-led design into the course planning process and held a co-creation themed consultation event that interested University of Edinburgh students were invited to. This element of student involvement and engagement was a central part of the project design.

Although the BLMOOC course had already been planned in outline form by the AIC and Dr. Jenna Mann of the IAD, the university students were not shown this plan and were invited to contribute their ideas, experiences and suggestions. The planning session began with the university students giving the Project Leaders valuable feedback on their MOOC experience. The students were then introduced to the FE sector in Scotland through two college student personas that the AIC had designed (appendix three). This was found to be useful by the student tutors as they were not familiar with the FE sector in Scotland (none of them had studied in Scotland before coming to the university). Using the course design cards toolkit developed by Rachel Forsyth at Manchester Metropolitan University (Forsyth), which we adapted for our purposes, students considered various mentoring, learning and teaching elements that might be incorporated into the course. The university students felt that group work, presentations and academic skills building activities would be beneficial additions to the existing MOOC content for the FE students and these were incorporated into the existing course design where possible.

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<sup>3</sup> The Three Minute Thesis is an international competition in which PhD students are challenged to present their thesis in one minute, using only one PowerPoint slide.

## Online forums

At the initial stages of project planning it was assumed by the project leaders and the student tutors that college students would be keen to participate fully in the BLMOOC online discussion boards. In the induction to the BLMOOC, students were introduced to the online discussion forums and asked to post something about themselves in the first week of the course. Most students responded to this request, but students said very little on the online forum apart from a short 'hello' to the AIC and fellow students. Posting to the course topic discussion forums was not made compulsory and perhaps as a result of this, very few posts were made.

The AIC wrote a blog post every week that summarised the class discussion and linked it to the HNC and Access Course programmes and included links for further study (for example, see appendix four). Group work was also written up and posted to this blog by the AIC. Whilst students did read these blog posts, they did not comment on them or carry forwards any of their points for further discussion. However, the existing MOOC did have a compulsory online forum homework exercises for those students that chose 'infectious diseases' as their global challenge. All four students that chose this challenge did post a text on 'the most important infectious diseases in my lifetime' to the discussion board for that week's homework. The other two students, who chose 'obesity' as their topic, did not have a compulsory online discussion task to complete and their only posts were social in nature and very short.

## Feedback

### Quantitative feedback from FE students

The results from the pre- and post-course surveys completed by the FE students are in the appendices, a summary of which is as follows:

- The increase in being confident about what 'critical thinking' means.
- The increase in confidence in giving presentations.
- All six students that completed the BLMOOC reported that they would be more likely to participate in an online course in the future.
- All six BLMOOC completers responded that each of the aspects of the course (online material, groups discussions, presentation skills, support from HE student tutors, using the online discussion forum and guest tutors) were either very effective or a little effective.
- All students finishing the MOOC would recommend the course to their peers.

### Qualitative feedback from post-course focus group with FE students

All six of the FE students that completed the BLMOOC attended a feedback and graduation ceremony at the university at the end of the course. Their feedback has been categorised into the following themes:

- Usefulness of the course.

- Recruitment / course publicity.
- Length and level of the course.
- Timing of the course.
- Technical issues.
- Student tutors.
- Student recommendations.

### Usefulness of the course

As in the post course survey, all students commented extremely positively on their MOOC experience, describing the course as both “great” and “useful and very helpful”. All students agreed with Janice<sup>4</sup> who told us that:

It was nice to have the online element combined with class time as well

Elaine expanded on her reasons for finding it useful:

I learned a lot from it. I think it was very helpful for preparing to go to university, as rather than just looking at an article and saying oh I’ll just use that, I’ll just reference that, but further looking into it and finding why it’s been written, who’s written it for what reason, so you know, to use proper research.

This quote from Elaine demonstrates that the project achieved one of its main aims; namely to encourage students to critically evaluate and interrogate the sources of information that they use when writing essays.

Janice liked the fact that the course presented a practical ‘how to’ element to critical thinking and analysis:

I found it very useful, I found it a more pragmatic approach to analysing information that we’re given and how we decipher what it is and the meaning behind it... and it gave us a logical way to approach things, I really enjoyed it

Whilst students were aware of critical thinking (CT) in their college courses, they felt that the BLMOOC helped them to gain a more concrete understanding of CT that they could apply to both their college and future university studies, as Karen explains:

Critical Thinking was actually mentioned in our course [HNC], it was mentioned by a couple of lecturers that you’ve got to think critically and I thought maybe this course would be a good thing, maybe like an upper level on what he [college lecturer] was saying, and it was very good and it was a way to give a definition to something that just, sort of, done in passing before

Vicki told us that she had gained in confidence from doing the 3MT style presentation in the BLMOOC and now felt less apprehensive about a talk that she had to deliver for the Communications unit in her HNC:

I really enjoyed the course... the presentation stuff I think really helped, that was really useful. I’ve got a meeting for Communications next week and I’m happy with it, I’m so like easy for it now because I’ve done this and it’s shown me how to

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms have been used.

research a topic and then bring it to the table and talk about it freely, obviously this group [the MOOC group] I didn't really know very well and I was fine with this, so obviously in my own class it's going to be so much easier, so it's given me that confidence. I'm so prepared for my five minutes Comms meeting next week and everyone else is stressing and like I can't do it in five minutes and I'm like well I did a three minute one so if I can do that one I can do any of them.

Grace also commented on the presentation element of the course being particularly useful and helpful to her as she explained:

I really enjoyed the MOOC and especially the presentation, which was bizarre for me. I've done quite a few [presentations] but between that one and one in Comms that was the most confident one I've ever done... I'm usually terrified of failing what I do in class, like really terrified my voice is shaking and everything but in that one [the CT presentation] and one in my Comms class, I felt quite confident. So I found that it helped boost my confidence a little bit and I really enjoyed the Critical Thinking bit of working out what I needed to put into the presentation and what I didn't need to put into the presentation... it was really hard what to put in and what not to put in

Students also commented on the usefulness of the note making session that Dr. Kay Williams of the IAD ran in week two. Kirsty told us that:

I really enjoyed the course and especially the bits where they gave us tips on taking notes... It was just helpful to know like how people from a university background take notes and see what key points to put in

### Recruitment / publicity for the course

Student comments from the focus group show that the recruitment process and publicity for the course both need to be improved in future. The AIC designed a handout (appendix one) that college lecturers gave to students that were interested in the course, but some students did not receive the handout until after they had signed up for the course. This left some students without an accurate idea of what the course entailed, as Vicki explained:

When we were told that the course could be helpful for us, we weren't really told what the course entailed. I didn't know what I was getting myself into to be honest! [laughs]... I mean I'm so glad I did do it now, but I think that was just out of luck sort of thing! I asked a few people in my class why haven't you signed up and they were like well I don't really know what it is

Janice did remind the group about the hand out that the AIC had passed, but explained that before signing up:

All I heard was it's run by Edinburgh Uni and I went right ok I'll do it but other than that I knew nothing

### Length and level of the course

All of the students in the focus group said that they thought the course could have been longer, with Janice suggesting a 12 week course and most others agreeing. The students

suggested starting the course in September and running it up until Christmas. Janice explained that:

We are the four in the group [Janice and her fellow Access students] that will do more and by definition it's an opt in course so we're ok if it's 4 weeks or 24 weeks

Janice also explained that if the course was made longer, then it could be more in-depth:

I actually came to the course thinking that it was going to be more in depth and harder because it was going to be university level and it wasn't really like that

Karen agreed with Janice telling us that:

When I came I thought oh my God it's a university thing and it's going to be quite difficult but it wasn't like that

This is not to say however, that there wasn't an element of challenge to the course. Most of the students in the group, with the exception of Janice, felt that the level of the course was 'just right' for them as Elaine explains:

I definitely thought that it was really comfortable but I definitely felt that it was still at a slightly higher level, it was a little more serious.

This is exactly what the course design team had hoped to achieve; a course that challenged the students without making them feel uncomfortable.

### Timing of the course

As in the post-course survey, all students in the focus group stressed that September would be the ideal time to run the BLMOOC. They thought that if the BLMOOC had been run earlier in semester one then it would have attracted a bigger sign up as people would have had more time to dedicate to it.

Elaine explained that:

I think more people in my course would have done the course if it was at a different time a lot of people were saying oh if I didn't have to go to work or if I didn't have the kids and stuff if it was at another time then you would have had a lot more people. Everybody was really enthusiastic about it in my group [Access Group] they all really wanted to do it they just couldn't fit it in

Janice said that a lot of her friends on the Access course had been very keen to sign up for the MOOC but were unable to do so because of work commitments. The group also told us that the class time of 4 to 6pm prevented some students from participating, for example commuting students and parents without childcare.

### Technical issues

As evidenced in the post-course survey all students reported having technical issues with the platform.

Grace in particular experienced more problems than her fellow students as she explained that:



My main problem was trying to get logged in 'cause the only place I could get proper access was on my phone

Grace often had to complete tasks on her phone in class as her login problems were ongoing. MOOC project support staff at the university were extremely helpful and responsive to any problems that did arise, and some issues related to running a closed instance of this MOOC could not have been anticipated by them in advance.

On the whole however, the group were very understanding about these issues and Janice spoke for the group explaining that:

There were technical issues, you could circumnavigate them though and they didn't really detract from the course, but they were a fact and they were irritating

### Student tutors

All students in the focus group felt that student tutors were an important part of the programme and that they should feature in future BLMOOCs. The college students saw these student tutors as playing an important role in their transition into university students, as Janice explained:

I think it bridges the gap between us as college students and you as an educator in that these are people [student tutors] that have done it and they are actually doing it right now and it's relevant to them and it's a pathway for us that we can then emulate or follow, it's nice. I really liked our student tutor, she was in our group quite a lot and they were really enthusiastic and our tutor in particular was very, very good at critical thinking, but very good at making us think critically without being condescending or overly involved, it was really, really good. I thought it was really valuable to have our student tutor there.

Karen commented on the student tutors as having promoted a sense of togetherness between college and university students:

I think it was a good point of reference as with someone at university you think that it'll be different from someone at college but with our student tutor we didn't feel that we just like felt like one of the university students too

Vicki also commented on the benefits of having student tutors in the classes as she liked:

Hearing from different people about what they're doing at university and what they thought critical thinking was, 'cause we had our student tutor in our group at the start and he was really good and he was like 'well, what do you think?' and I think in that sense it did make it different from college in what we normally do in college.

Elaine also picked up on Vicki's point about the student tutors making the BLMOOC sessions different to college classes. She explained that having a student tutor facilitating their group work:

Kept us on our toes a little bit more compared to college, which is relaxed a little bit more, we had to up our game a little bit

## Student recommendations for next BLMOOC

All students said that the blended learning sessions had been extremely helpful to them and should remain a feature of future projects. Janice particularly liked the note-making session and thought that it could be expanded upon in future versions of the course:

I think that would be really helpful if you're running the course in September especially with the people from our background, because the most I'd written in 15 years was a shopping list! [laughs] so I didn't know how to take notes or anything and it is a massive jump, that would be really helpful to have a more in depth session on that, I mean a lot of people don't know whether they work best with mind maps or spider diagrams or just taking notes and re-writing them

Janice also felt that if the course was extended, then students could be given more feedback on the research component of their 3MT:

We did go away and do research and put it into our 3MT but we didn't get feedback on our research

All students in the focus group agreed with Janice and felt that they would benefit from more time being dedicated to a practical 'how to' approach to researching a topic online. In this way, Kirsty explained that

I think more on how to research effectively, it's all very well just saying right just go away and research but... it would be good to know how to get more out of your research

In the initial pilot of the course, feedback on the presentation style and delivery itself was prioritised over feedback on the research that the students conducted. In future version of the course it may be possible to give students more feedback on the content of their presentations and their research process in addition to feedback on presentation delivery.

Janice also felt that it would be very beneficial if students were given an evaluation of their written work in future versions of the course. Written work was not part of the initial six-week pilot, but may be a useful addition to make in the future.

## Qualitative feedback from student tutors

The feedback from the five student tutors was gathered during an informal focus group at the end of the project.

### Usefulness

It had initially been intended that the student tutors be encouraged to use their MOOC experience (from taking part in the Universitas 21 MOOC and as tutors in this project) for the University's Edinburgh Award. The Edinburgh Award is supported by the Employability Consultancy and is a 'wrap around' recognition of an activity that encourages students to focus on the skills and attributes they develop through participating. The project leaders felt that the award would have been an appropriate method of acknowledging the efforts of the students but, unfortunately, the project did not meet the eligibility criteria.

### Role of the student tutor

The student tutors felt that although they had been very supportive of the project, their roles had not been made entirely clear to them or to the students. One of the tutors had been asked to moderate the online forum discussions, but since the students had not been encouraged to use this facility, she had not been able to engage much with the students. The student did comment that being a moderator made her reactive, rather than proactive, which she would have preferred.

The tutors thought that the online blogs, with information about what the course had covered, had been useful and, as a consequence, 'felt in the loop'.

### Timing

The timing for the student tutors was successful, as they had had the opportunity to complete the MOOC as part of the Universitas 21 session in November 2014. Running this project early in the academic year, as the FE students have recommended, would be problematic for the HE cohort. The timing of the sessions at Edinburgh College (on Monday evenings) proved difficult for two of the university students who had classes at this time. This issue was overcome by asking them to take the duties of moderating the online forums, although this role was unfortunately redundant.

### Technical

Like the FE students, the student tutors encountered technical difficulties with accessing the MOOC at the beginning.

### Recommendations from student tutors

The expectations of the Project Leaders for the student tutor roles needed to be articulated more clearly and they need more training and ongoing support.

That FE students be strongly encouraged, if not required, to engage online, giving the student tutors more of an active role.

## Recommendations

It is important to acknowledge that this project has been based on bringing together two distinct remits: enhancing the academic transition of FE students into HE and exploring student community engagement. As a consequence, some of the recommendations will require compromise or agreement of priorities. The future timing of a similar initiative would need further discussion.

1. It is recommended that six weeks (with weekly classes of two hours) be the minimum timeframe for future BLMOOCS. The existing blended course could easily be increased by two weeks to respond to the student demand for an extended course.
2. The current blend of online and offline elements was popular with, and of benefit to, both student cohorts and should be maintained. If the course was extended by two weeks, these extra weeks could focus on the sessions that students in the pilot

group suggested, for example evaluating written work and a practical 'how to' approach to researching information.

3. If the student tutor role is to be kept in future iterations of the BLMOOC then the role should be based on established mentoring and tutoring frameworks and appropriate support structures need to be put in place for these students. An appropriate ratio of student tutors to the size of the FE group should also be established.
4. Future student recruitment material should incorporate some of the good practice gained from this project.
5. Posting to online discussion topic forums should be made compulsory and introduced as an induction activity in order to ensure that both student cohorts benefit from the peer learning opportunities that these facilities offer.
6. Any technical challenges should be dealt with in the induction session to prevent them from continuing into future weeks of the project.
7. In the future, due consideration of timing will be given to enable student tutors to be eligible for the Edinburgh Award.
8. Consider working with different partner FE institutions, in line with institutional strategic priorities.

## Conclusions

The project was successful in exploring the potential and the challenges that existing MOOCs hold for being incorporated into current transition and community practice. It is our opinion that this pilot has proven that by using university-wide resources creatively we can enhance current academic transition practice and build new models of student community engagement.

The 'MOOCs in the Community' project was tailored to meet the needs of FE and HE students but future iterations of this project could be designed to meet the need of other student or community cohorts. The blended learning format worked well for this audience and purpose, with students valuing and commenting extremely positively on the 'added extra' elements. Feedback from both cohorts of students was positive and both groups suggested ways in which future BLMOOCs could be enhanced.

Given the time restraints of this pilot project, we conclude that the delivered resources were pitched at the appropriate level for this FE student group. However, in the future there may be the potential for building in slightly more challenging elements to the course. These elements will be easier to build in if the course is run for longer than six weeks.

FE students valued the student tutors and strongly felt that this is a role that should be continued. The Project Leaders are convinced that there is great potential for HE students to act in this capacity, but their expectations and support need to be carefully managed.

In conclusion, we consider that we have fulfilled the aims of exploring the potential of using existing university resources in an FE setting, whilst working within two specific remits.

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# Appendix one: handout to college students

## **Taking your critical thinking to a higher level with an Edinburgh University MOOC**

### **What is a MOOC?**

MOOC stands for massive, open, online course. Edinburgh University was one of the first UK universities to develop and offer MOOCs to a global audience. A MOOC consists of short video lectures from University Lecturers and Professors, online discussion forums with other MOOC students and a range of multiple choice exercises.

### **What is this MOOC about?**

The title of this MOOC is: Critical Thinking in Global Challenges. The MOOC was devised by Edinburgh University Lecturers from the Schools of Biomedical Science and Health and Society. The first two weeks of the course focus on essential critical thinking skills for university e.g. how to evaluate theories, assess evidence and build arguments. In weeks three and four, students put these skills into practice by examining a global challenge of their choosing from the following list:

1. Obesity and human health
2. Climate Change: facts, fallacies and the future
3. Population: Too many people, not enough Earth?
4. Infectious Diseases: the global challenge of epidemics and pandemics

In the last week of the course, students sit an on-line, multiple choice exam that reviews all of the critical thinking skills learned throughout the MOOC. The pass mark for this test is 60%. Students are allowed to resubmit this final test if a pass is not obtained on the first sitting.

### **Is this MOOC just an online course then?**

No. Online learning is only part of this project as the MOOC will be delivered in a live classroom setting by both Edinburgh University staff and post-graduate students. Edinburgh College students that sign up for the MOOC will be guided through the online exercises by the Edinburgh University Course Facilitators in weekly classroom sessions.

### **What will I get out of doing this MOOC?**

This MOOC is part of a new partnership between Edinburgh University and Edinburgh College that offers HNC Social Science and Access Students the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills and become familiar with the University learning experience before beginning their degree studies. Students that complete the course and pass the final test will be awarded a certificate of accomplishment signed by the University instructors. The project also allows Edinburgh College students to find out what university is like and benefit from the advice and insights that previous undergraduates have to offer.

### I'm an HNC Social Science student, how does this MOOC relate to what I'm studying at college?

The study of how science and social science work is a key part of this MOOC. The 'theories, hypotheses and laws' section of the MOOC focuses on the key content of the HNC Philosophy A and the Research and Methodology units. The MOOC discusses how competing paradigms offer differing explanations for four global challenges. The evaluation skills that students learn through the MOOC are directly transferable to the HNC e.g. evaluating competing social theories/schools of Psychology.

### I'm an Access student, will the MOOC also help me succeed in my college studies?

The MOOC's focus on assessing relevant sources of evidence and constructing arguments will help Access students to develop the essential skills they need to do well in their semester two independent investigations.

The four topic areas that the MOOC offers may also provide Access students with ideas for discursive essay/report topics.

### Does the MOOC have entry requirements?

No. No prior knowledge of these four global challenges is necessary. The course assumes that students are approaching these topics as beginners.

### Do I need to have a computer at home and/or good IT skills to join this MOOC?

No. The computers used in the course will be provided by Edinburgh College / Edinburgh University. The course facilitators will help you sign up for the course and will guide you through all the online exercises on a week by week basis.

### What does the course look like?

Here is a screenshot of the course front page:

The screenshot shows the Coursera interface for the course 'Critical Thinking in Global Challenges'. The header includes the Coursera logo and the course title. The main content area is divided into sections: 'About the course', 'Learning objectives', and 'COURSE CONTENT'. The 'About the course' section describes the course as an introductory course on critical thinking, aimed at developing skills to think critically and assess information. The 'Learning objectives' section lists five key goals: understanding critical thinking, identifying reliable information, evaluating evidence, assessing arguments, and developing one's own arguments. The 'COURSE CONTENT' section lists five weeks of study.

**Course Title:** Critical Thinking in Global Challenges  
by Dr. Celine Caquineau, Professor Mayank Dutia

**About the course**

In this introductory course on critical thinking, we hope you will develop and enhance your abilities to think critically, assess information from a variety of sources, and develop reasoned arguments in the context of the global challenges facing society today.

This course is **not** a course on global challenges; instead, we use topical and thought-provoking examples from these important challenges, to practice critical thinking.

As you go through the course, remember that critical thinking is a skill that you can really learn best **through doing and practice**, rather like learning to ride a bike. We'll show you the basic building blocks of critical thinking and guide you in the right direction, but to develop your own critical thinking abilities we hope you will engage with the homework exercises each week, and get involved in the **Discussion Forums** where you can exchange views, comments, arguments and counter-arguments.

**Learning objectives:**

By the end of the course you will be able to better understand:

- What critical thinking is, and why it is important.
- Where reliable information comes from.
- How to evaluate the credibility and the relevance of the evidence given to support arguments.
- The key steps in assessing arguments.
- The key things to consider when developing your own arguments.

**COURSE CONTENT**

- Week 1
- Week 2
- Week 3
- Week 4
- Week 5

## Draft timetable

Week	Focus	Venue
Week One w/c 23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2015	<b>Induction:</b> meeting your Edinburgh University Facilitators, signing up for MOOC, online safety tips, getting to know you ice-breakers, posting first discussion forum item	Edinburgh College
Week Two w/c 2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2015	<b>Week One of MOOC. Essential Concepts in Critical thinking:</b> <i>the differences between facts, assertions, opinions and arguments.</i>	Edinburgh College
Week Three w/c 9 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	<b>Week Two of MOOC. Assessing Evidence: Credibility and Relevance:</b> <i>where information comes from, how to identify reliable sources of information and how to identify evidence that effectively supports an argument by assessing for relevance and credibility</i>	Edinburgh College
Week Four w/c 16 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	<b>Week Three of MOOC.</b> Assessing Arguments (Part A): <i>reviewing how to assess arguments using the context of current Global Challenges.</i> Students will choose <b>ONE</b> global challenge to work on.	Delivered solely online by UoE Community Tutors
Week Five w/c 23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2015	<b>Week Four of MOOC.</b> Assessing Arguments (Part B) <i>continuing to practice assessing arguments using the context of current Global Challenges.</i> Students are recommend to continue to work on the same theme that they selected last week.	University of Edinburgh
Week Six w/c 30 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	<b>Week Five of MOOC.</b> Developing your own arguments and Final Exam. The exam asks students to critically assess two resources discussing “publication bias” in medical journals and its impact on doctors and patients.	Edinburgh College
After College Easter Holidays	Graduation Event and course evaluation/feedback	University of Edinburgh

This project has been put together by Pete Smith and Diane Watkins of Edinburgh College and Abby Shovlin and Dawn Smith of Edinburgh University. Abby and Dawn look forward to welcoming you onto the course and please do feel free to email either of them if you have any questions.

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## Appendix two: blended MOOC timetable / plan

Week	In class	At home
23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2015	<b>INDUCTION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction from team (Abby and student tutors)</li> <li>• HNC and Access students meet each other (ice breaker challenges)</li> <li>• Introduction to course and MOOC / blended learning format</li> <li>• 'Are you thinking?' puzzles and tasks</li> <li>• What is critical thinking?</li> <li>• Welcome to the course video (online)</li> <li>• Critical thinking: our own definitions</li> <li>• Sign up for Coursera accounts and send our first post</li> </ul>	Watch video: Essential Concepts in Critical Thinking (week one)
2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2015	<b>APPLIED CRITICAL THINKING, ARGUMENTS, HEDGING AND NOTE-MAKING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and discuss homework video: 'Essential Concepts in Critical Thinking'</li> <li>• Dr. Kay Williams (IAD) on Critical Thinking / having an argument and links to essay writing / hedging</li> <li>• Review Quiz 1</li> <li>• Watch video 'Assessing Evidence: Credibility and 24relevance' and do note taking/making exercises with Dr. Kay Williams</li> </ul>	Homework multiple choice exercises: 1A, 1B,1C and 1D

Week	In class	At home
9 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	<b>ASSESSING ARGUMENTS AND CHOOSING A GLOBAL CHALLENGE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch 'Assessing arguments' (part A) video and <i>make</i> notes (as we did in class last week)</li> <li>• Write compression questions and swap and answer questions with other groups</li> <li>• Intro to the challenges: watch all 4 videos, make notes, discuss and choose a global challenge-hosted by Dr. Jenna Mann (IAD)</li> <li>• MOOC exercises for each challenge (listed as week 3 homework), but we will do this in class in pairs</li> <li>• Feedback from individual exercises to group</li> </ul>	Homework multiple choice exercises: 2A,2B,2C and 2D  Review Quiz 2
16 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	<b>ASSESSING ARGUMENTS PART B AND SECOND PART OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch 'Assessing arguments' (part B) and <i>make</i> notes</li> <li>• Review Quiz 3</li> <li>• Individual work in class: watch second part of your own challenge (bring headphones)</li> <li>• Find a friend! This will be your presentation pair for next week</li> </ul>	Homework (listed as week 4) for your own challenge  Prepare 1 slide: 3 Minute Thesis style  Watch video: 'Developing your own arguments'
23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2015	<b>3MT PRESENTATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confident presentations with Chris Doye of IAD</li> <li>• Global Challenge presentations (pairs)</li> <li>• Feedback from Chris Doye and Abby</li> <li>• Watch end of course video</li> <li>• Revision</li> </ul>	Revision
30 <sup>th</sup> March 2015	<b>FINAL ASSESSMENT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment-2 hours, multiple choice-one piece to read and one to watch (transcript available). Assessment can be resubmitted.</li> </ul>	NONE!! Course completed😊

Week	In class	At home
tbc	Graduation and course evaluation at University of Edinburgh	

## Appendix three: college student personas, used for student tutor planning sessions

### Gale, 33 Access course student

Gale was very nervous about the Access course interviews. The interview bit itself was OK for her, she likes talking to people, it was the English, and worse still, the Maths test that got her. It was a test to her, even although the interviewers (the college lecturers) said that it wasn't. They said they just wanted to see the rough level that the applicants were at, but the whole experience brought Gale out in a cold sweat – just like when she had last done exams (Standard Grades) at school, and that was nearly 20 years ago. Gale left her local secondary school at 16 and has been working in sales ever since. She had been thinking about going to college for a few years before she put in an application for the Access course, as she had never really found any of her jobs fulfilling.

She was really pleased to be offered a place on the course! She's doing the Access course because she wants to be a primary school teacher, but she doesn't have the qualifications that she needs to get into university. Her lecturers tell her that she is doing well and she is passing everything so far. However, she never feels confident in what she does. Even although she is passing her assignments, she still worries that she's not understanding things and that her level of work isn't good enough.

She's now going into the second semester of the Access course and is concerned about the 'step up' as her lecturers have told her that she'll soon be having to write 4,000 word investigations. The lecturers also said that students will have to come up with their own topics to investigate and then carry out their own research. Gale hasn't done any research before and wonders how she is going to cope with this new way of learning. The Access course work level has been OK for Gale so far as she has been managing to balance studying with her part-time job and being a mum to her two kids. However, time is always tight and Gale never feels that she has the amount of time that she would want for studying.

She is determined to get at least an 'ABB' Access Grade profile so that she has a good chance of getting into Moray House to do primary school teaching. She feels that this year is 'make or break' for her – her last chance to get to where she wants to be in life.

Gale has signed up for the Edinburgh University MOOC as she thinks that it will boost her chances of getting accepted at Moray House. She also wants to be better prepared for university as she is terrified about not being able to cope with the work level there. Her lecturers at college told her that the MOOC was about critical thinking and assessing arguments. They haven't really done any classes on critical thinking at college yet but Gale's Communication Lecturer often asks the class to 'critically evaluate' a text. Gale has heard that it is important to think critically at university so has signed up in order to get more practice in this. She has to stay a bit later at college on the Monday night to do the MOOC.

This is OK though as her mum can pick up the kids from school that night. The MOOC is only running for six weeks so she thinks the extra work will be OK over this short period of time.

She is really looking forward to the MOOC starting, but is anxious about it being an online course. She's never done one of these before and hopes that she'll be able to cope with the IT side of things.

## David, 18, HNC Social Science student

David attended his local secondary school in East Lothian and really enjoyed it. He left at the end of fifth year with two Highers (BC) in English and Psychology. He'd like to study Psychology / Social Science at university but doesn't at present meet the entrance requirements. He could have stayed on in sixth year at school and sit more Highers but he liked the idea of coming to college instead. He'd heard from a few friends of his in first year at Heriot Watt that the HNC in Social Science at Edinburgh College is a really good course, especially if you'd like to go on and study Psychology at university. So far, he's enjoying most of the HNC but has already done most of the Psychology before at Higher level. He has been missing some of the Psychology classes because it's been going over material that he's done before. He didn't see the point in attending these classes but is attending now as his Learning Development Tutor issued him with an attendance warning.

Although he likes being at college he wishes that he'd sat more Highers at school so that he could have applied directly to university. He took four Highers at school, but only passed two. David himself would say that he didn't put enough effort in to pass all four of his subjects. He also realised that he only studied for the subjects that he liked and found interesting.

David has applied to all of the four Edinburgh universities. His preference would be Queen Margaret as it is nearer to where he lives and they have only asked for a 'C' in the HNC Graded Unit. The other universities have stipulated at least a 'B', with Edinburgh asking for an 'A' plus a language at Standard Grade. David does have French at Standard Grade but has heard that Edinburgh are more keen to take students with five Highers than they are to offer places to HNC students. He doesn't expect Edinburgh to make him an offer.

He has enrolled in the Critical Thinking MOOC as he is a little bit bored with some of the HNC course material and wants to try something new. He read that the MOOC contains an optional unit on 'obesity' and he is very interested in the 'food addiction' debate. He chose to write an essay on obesity in the Communications class and he passed with good feedback. His tutor said that his essay would have been strengthened if he had used more academic sources. He thought that he had done what was asked of him as he used a variety of references, for example books, websites, news articles and statistics, and he thought that some of these sources were academic. When his tutor suggested that that he look in academic journals next time, he wasn't sure what these were or how to find them.

The feedback that David receives from his tutors, in all of the different subjects of the HNC, all points to the same thing: that he should be less descriptive and more analytical. He does pass all of his course assignments and his tutors tell him that he has a very strong grasp of

key concepts. In assessments he scores highly in the Knowledge and Understanding sections but less well in the evaluation sections. He would like to be able to take his work to a higher level and he thinks that the Critical Thinking MOOC will help him to do this.

# Appendix four: Academic Induction Coordinator's course blog

## Potatoes, sheep, hedging and note taking-a review of our first two weeks

Hi MOOCers!

Well, just reflecting back on what we've covered in the past two weeks before we head into our four global challenges on Monday 9th March. We started off with Charles and Efrain telling us that Critical Thinking (CT) is a **skill for life**, not just university. Efrain was talking about the brain being like a muscle and Charles was telling us that CT is essential if we are not to be duped by false claims. Efrain's idea about the 'growing brain' reminded me of Norman Doidge's book on '**neuroplasticity**'. Have you come across this concept in your Psychology classes?:

[http://www.normandoidge.com/?page\\_id=1042](http://www.normandoidge.com/?page_id=1042)

We then moved on to talking about the idea of '**extraneous variables**' and came up with some very imaginative reasons as to why the field treated with 'Miracle Grow' may have produced a higher yield that year. If you think about, a lab experiment (in e.g. Psychology) is set up the way it is precisely to produce a controlled environment but may lack what we call '**ecological validity**' as we all know that lab set ups are far removed from 'real life' and that we also have to take the **Hawthorne Effect** (people altering their behavior because they are being observed) into account. The example of 'Miracle Grow' was adapted from this excellent book on the **Philosophy of Science**:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Thing-Called-Science-Third-Edition/dp/0335201091>

We also had a go at defining what this thing called CT was and came up with our own definitions that echoed Dr. Caqineau's:

**'Critical Thinking is the ability to gather and assess information in a logical, balanced and reflective way to reach conclusions that are justified by reasoned arguments'**

My own personal image of CT is captured in this old advert for 'The Guardian' newspaper:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3bfO1rE7Yg>

This ad reminds me of a few things: not to jump to conclusions, how stereotypes play such a large role in culture and that CT asks us to try and move beyond our own subjective understandings of an event/theory/idea. It also I think, relates very well to the point that was made in class this week-remember to take everything into consideration (even criticisms of your own argument) so that your work considers all view points and no one can say 'but... have you considered x?'

Those old smoking adverts I mentioned? Here's one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCMzjJjuxQI>

Dr. Williams' session in Week 2 used a visual image to illustrate how we should analyse things when we are reading critically. She also made a very important point about university essays: a common mistake is making the essay **too descriptive and not analytical/critical enough**. Here is a simple seven step guide that I wrote, you can use it when writing essays (a **Critical Thinking Checker**):

[http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.120278!/fileManager/critical\\_thinking\\_checker.pdf](http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.120278!/fileManager/critical_thinking_checker.pdf)

Dr. Williams also raised an important point: **what can we know for certain?!** Turns out-not much! Thus, the language that we use to describe the fact that we have seen one half of one sheep in Scotland that is black must be '**hedged**' i.e. **tentative**. Dr. Williams mentioned the **Manchester Phrase Bank** as a good resource for academic writing support. Here it is:

<http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>

It has sections on '**being cautious**' and '**being critical**'-both what we need to do when writing academically-a fine balancing act if I ever saw one.

Then, I finished off by talking about the picture of the fishing net in the handout. The reason I mentioned this is that it answers the questions of 'how do we know things?' in the social sciences: **we go and do some research**. Our research methodologies (**quantitative or qualitative**) both result in us producing different nets (methods, e.g. a survey or an interview) and these nets 'catch' different types of data-they produce and generate knowledge in their own unique individual ways. Each method (as I'm sure you're learning at the moment) has its own advantages and disadvantages e.g. a quantitative survey can generate a large sample size (1000s of people can easily do an online questionnaire) but it is often criticised for generating data that is more superficial (not as rich) as a qualitative interview. However, with qualitative interview you can't easily interview 1000s of people at an average of an hour per interview-so you get a reduced sample size. Then of the course the question is, is this small sample size in any way representative of the general population. This is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to quantitative vs. qualitative debates!

We finished off week 2 by **making notes**. Writing comprehension questions is a very good way to check your understanding of a lecture. You should also maybe consider printing off the PowerPoint slides for this lecture that we took notes from as it has an excellent slide on what you should consider when **evaluating evidence: authorship, provenance, nature, context, accuracy and authority**.

If you'd like more practice of taking notes from lectures you may want to consider the University of Edinburgh's series of global challenge lectures called '**Our Changing World**'.

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/about/video/lecture-series/changing-world>

Next week folks we're going to look at four university experts presenting key issues from their own areas: obesity, climate change, infectious diseases and population. We'll be watching their mini lectures in class-but here's a taste of what they'll be talking about:

- **Obesity: prevalence of obesity in developed countries, what factors affect obesity and can you be overweight and fit?**
- **Infectious diseases: animal and human diseases, are infectious diseases a thing of the past now?**



- **Population: dramatic increase in population that has taken place over the past 150-250 years, effects of population growth on our global environment, Classic Demographic Transition and predictions for population growth**
- **Climate change: basic climate change science-4 proven facts and the vital distinctions, climate change deniers, science vs. politics**

That's enough for now as you'll be taking notes on these mini lectures in class next week:). You'll also be working in class on some articles that will take your understanding of your global challenge further. These tasks, and the homework you all do individually each week give you the opportunity to put what we discuss/learn in class into practice.

Exercises 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D revise the idea of what constitutes an argument and the differences between assertions, opinions and facts.

Exercises 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D use various websites and articles to help you assess the credibility of evidence (essential skills to practice for the final assessment!)

That's all for now folks:)

Chat to you soon

Abby

## Appendix five: pre-course survey

**11**

**Total Responses**

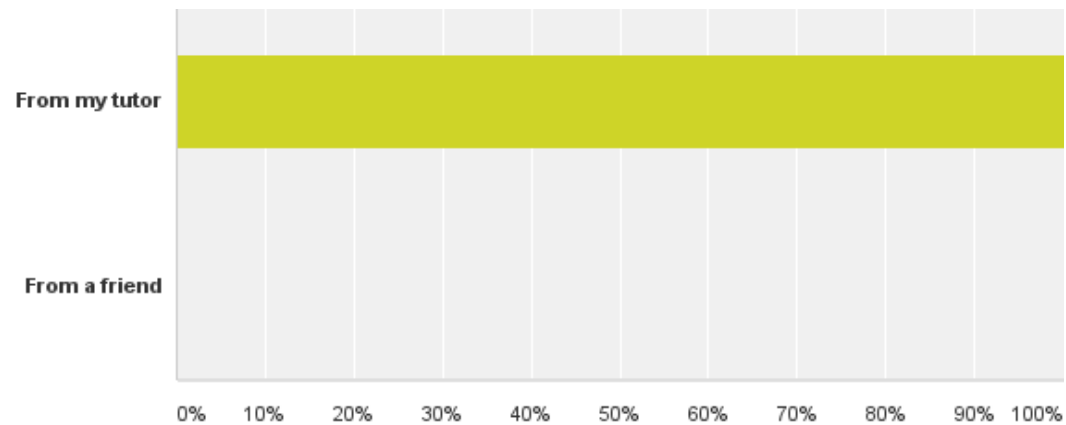
Date Created: Tuesday, February 17, 2015

Complete Responses: 11

Powered by  SurveyMonkey

## Q1: How did you hear about this course?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

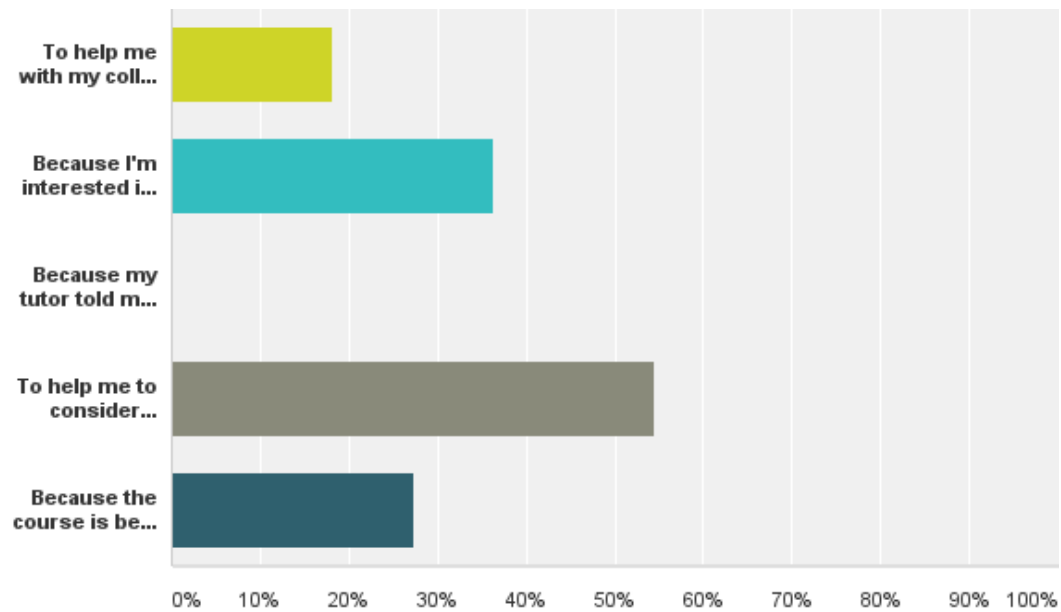
## Q1: How did you hear about this course?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
From my tutor	100.00%	11
From a friend	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 11		

## Q2: Why did you decide to do this course?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

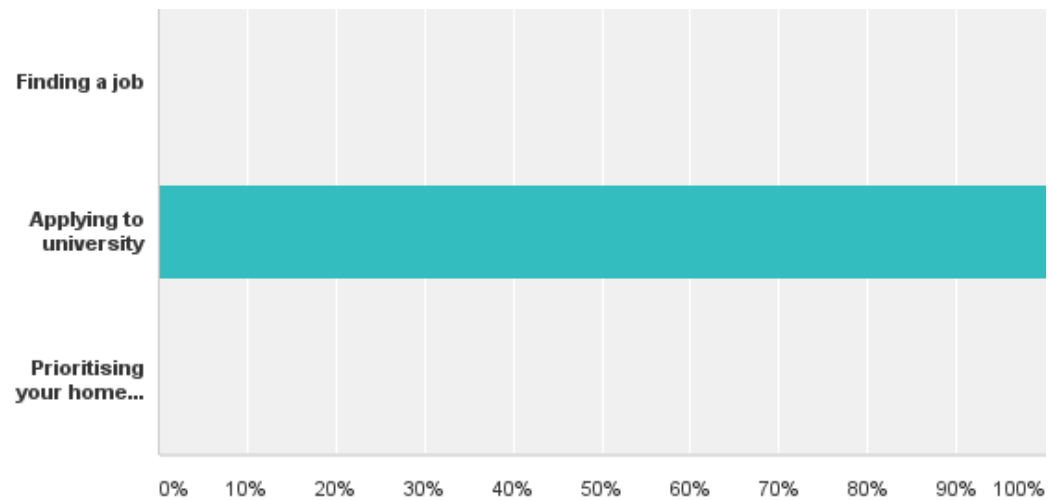
## Q2: Why did you decide to do this course?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
To help me with my college course	18.18%	2
Because I'm interested in critical thinking and global challenges	36.36%	4
Because my tutor told me to	0.00%	0
To help me to consider progression to university	54.55%	6
Because the course is being run by the University of Edinburgh	27.27%	3
Total Respondents: 11		

### Q3: What do you envisage yourself doing once you have completed your qualification at Edinburgh College?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

### Q3: What do you envisage yourself doing once you have completed your qualification at Edinburgh College?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

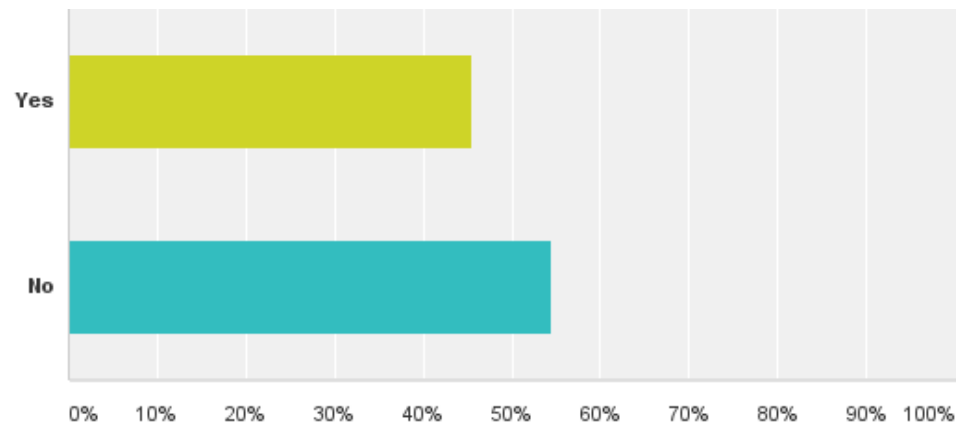
Answer Choices	Responses	
Finding a job	0.00%	0
Applying to university	100.00%	11
Prioritising your home commitments	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 11		

Powered by  SurveyMonkey



## Q4: Have you ever done an online course in the past?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



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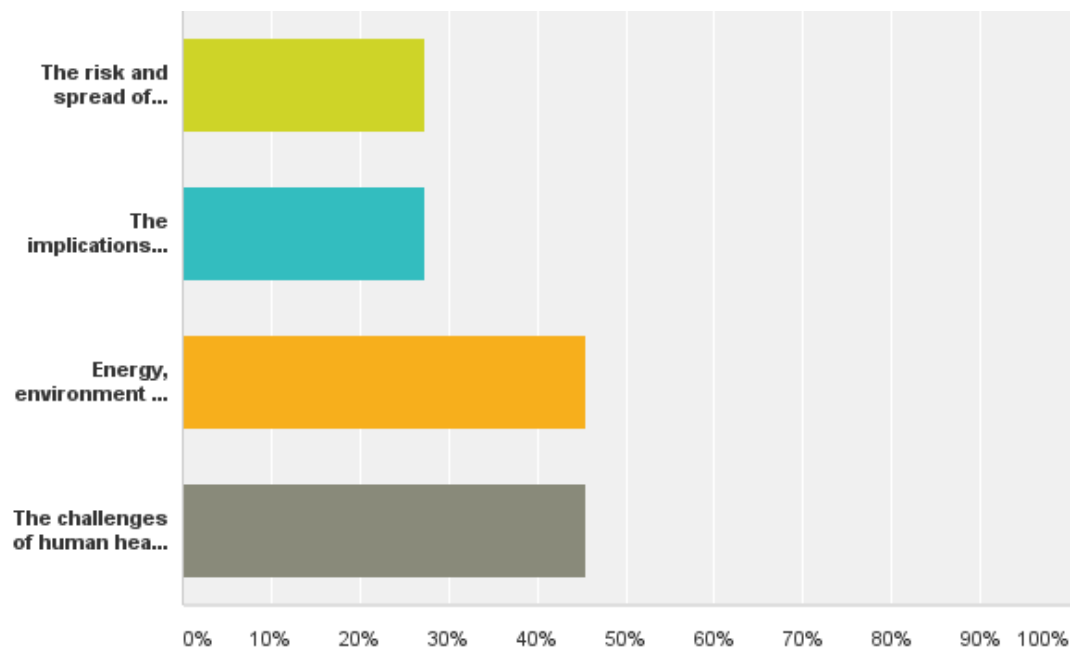
## Q4: Have you ever done an online course in the past?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	45.45%	5
No	54.55%	6
Total Respondents: 11		

## Q5: Which of the following topics interests you the most?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



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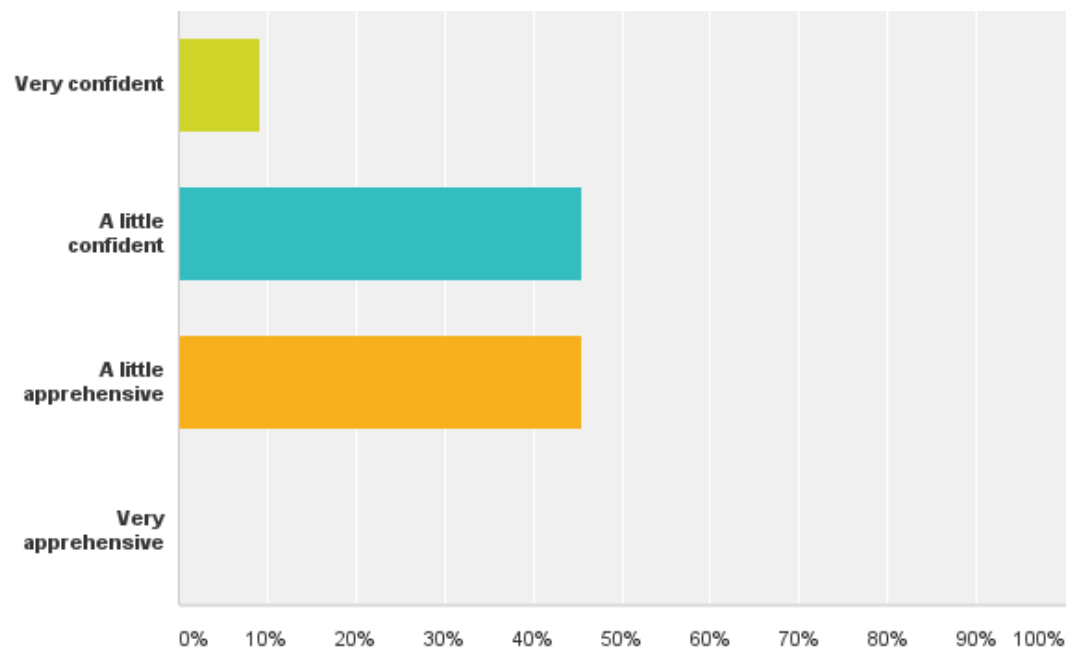
## Q5: Which of the following topics interests you the most?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
The risk and spread of serious infectious diseases in epidemics in modern societies	27.27%	3
The implications of increasing human population on global resources	27.27%	3
Energy, environment and climate	45.45%	5
The challenges of human health and wellbeing in the modern world	45.45%	5
Total Respondents: 11		

## Q6: How confident are you that you know what 'critical thinking' means?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

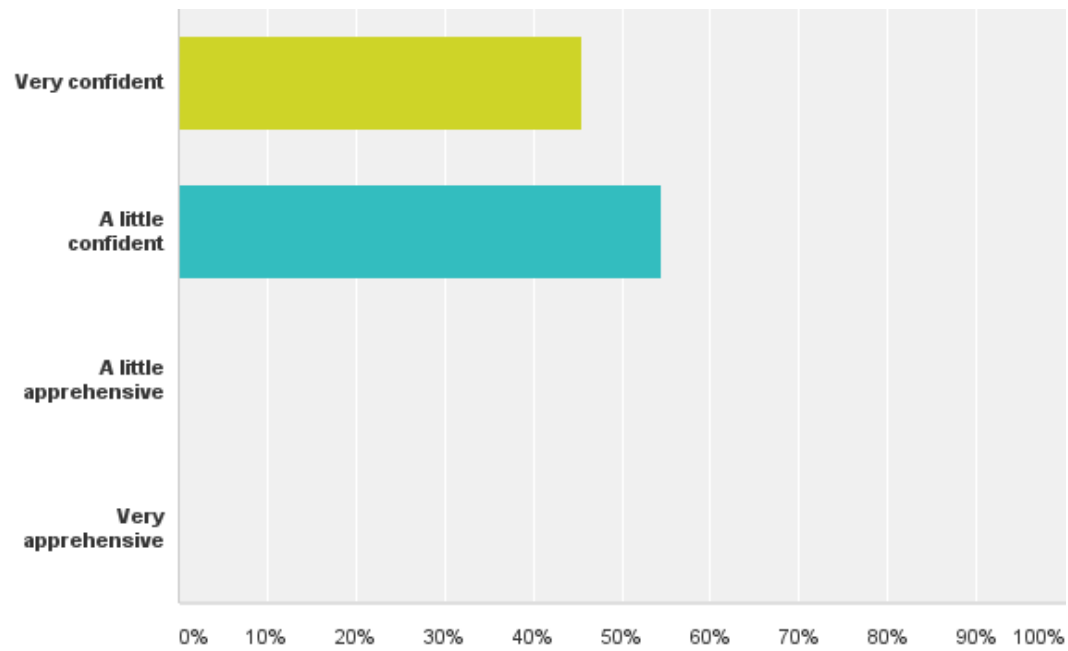
## Q6: How confident are you that you know what 'critical thinking' means?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very confident	9.09%	1
A little confident	45.45%	5
A little apprehensive	45.45%	5
Very apprehensive	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 11		

## Q7: How confident do you feel working in a group?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

## Q7: How confident do you feel working in a group?

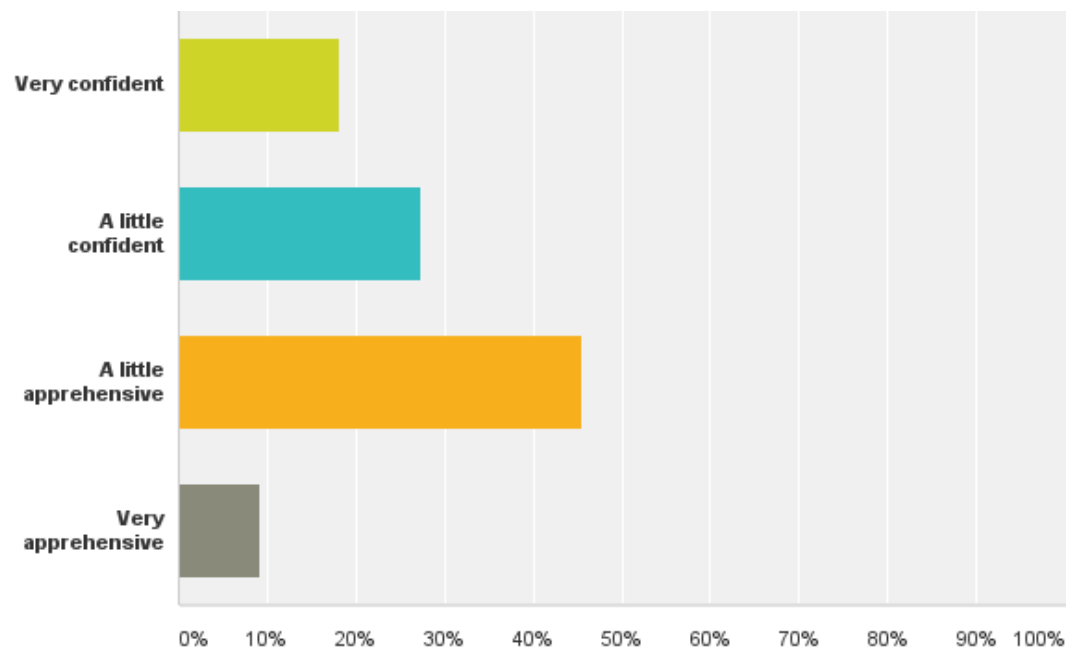
Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very confident	45.45%	5
A little confident	54.55%	6
A little apprehensive	0.00%	0
Very apprehensive	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 11		



## Q8: How confident do you feel giving a presentation?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

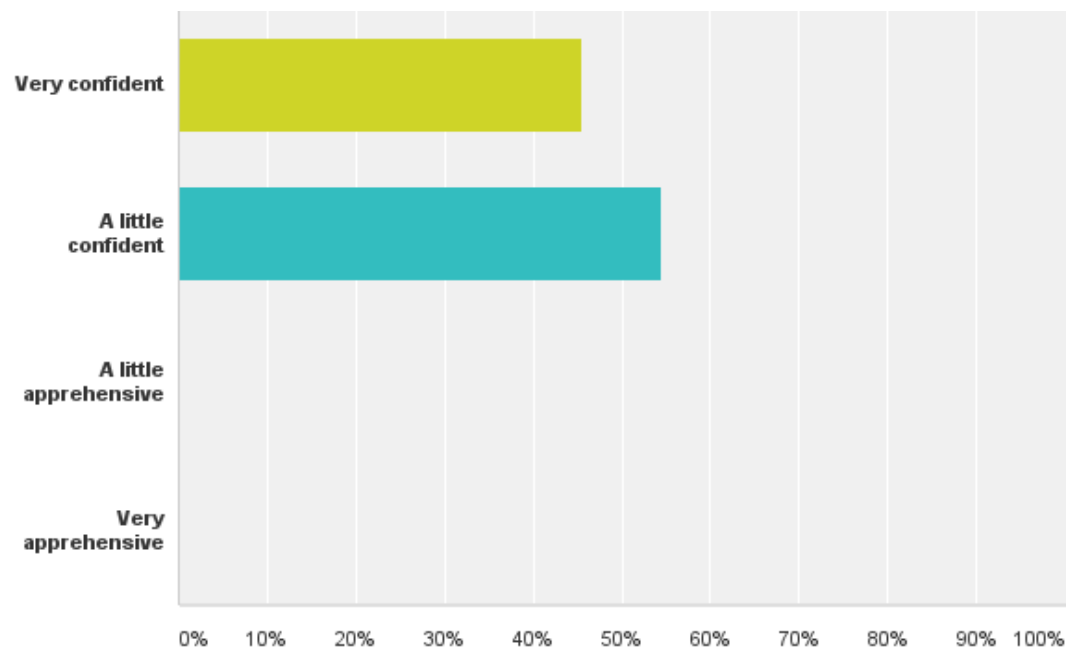
## Q8: How confident do you feel giving a presentation?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very confident	18.18%	2
A little confident	27.27%	3
A little apprehensive	45.45%	5
Very apprehensive	9.09%	1
<b>Total Respondents: 11</b>		

## Q9: How confident do you feel using online tools (software, online forums, social media)?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

## Q9: How confident do you feel using online tools (software, online forums, social media)?

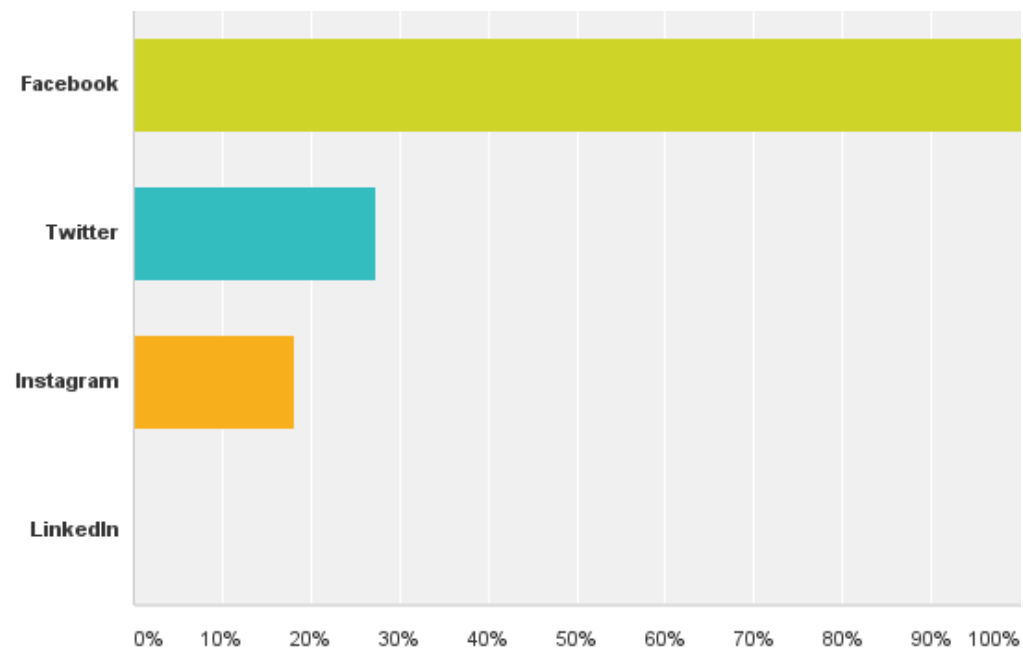
Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
Very confident	45.45% 5
A little confident	54.55% 6
A little apprehensive	0.00% 0
Very apprehensive	0.00% 0
<b>Total Respondents: 11</b>	

Powered by  SurveyMonkey

## Q10: What types of social media do you use (this may be for academic or personal reasons)?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

## Q10: What types of social media do you use (this may be for academic or personal reasons)?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Facebook	100.00%	11
Twitter	27.27%	3
Instagram	18.18%	2
LinkedIn	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 11		

## Appendix six: post-course survey

**6**

**Total Responses**

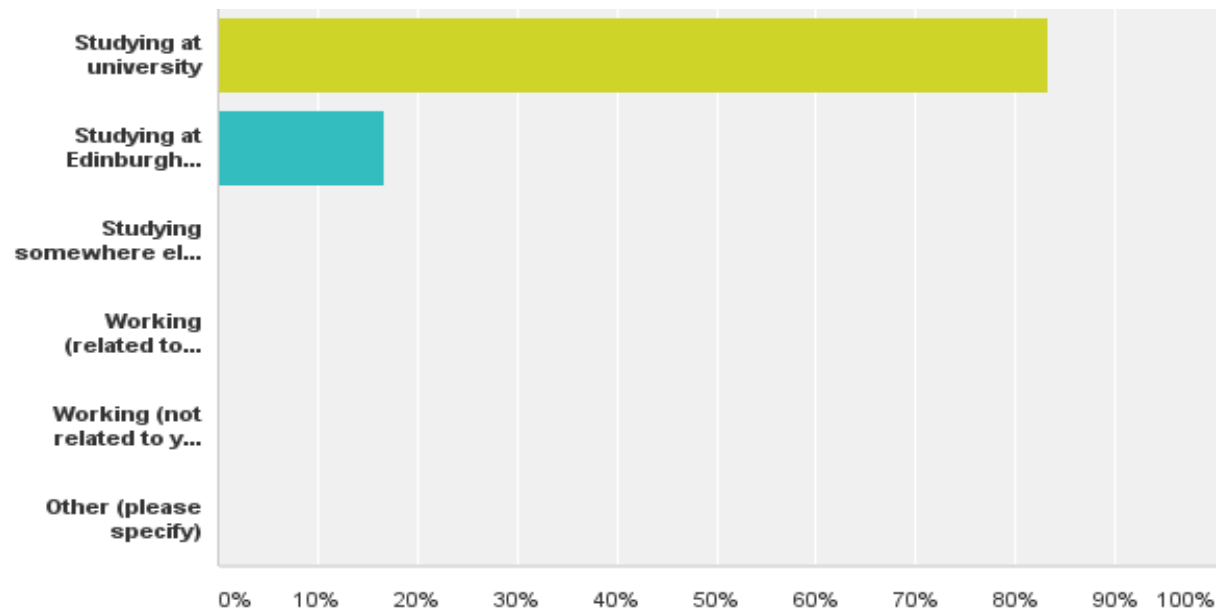
Date Created: Monday, March 30, 2015

Complete Responses: 6

Powered by  SurveyMonkey

## Q1: What do you expect to be doing in twelve months' time?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey



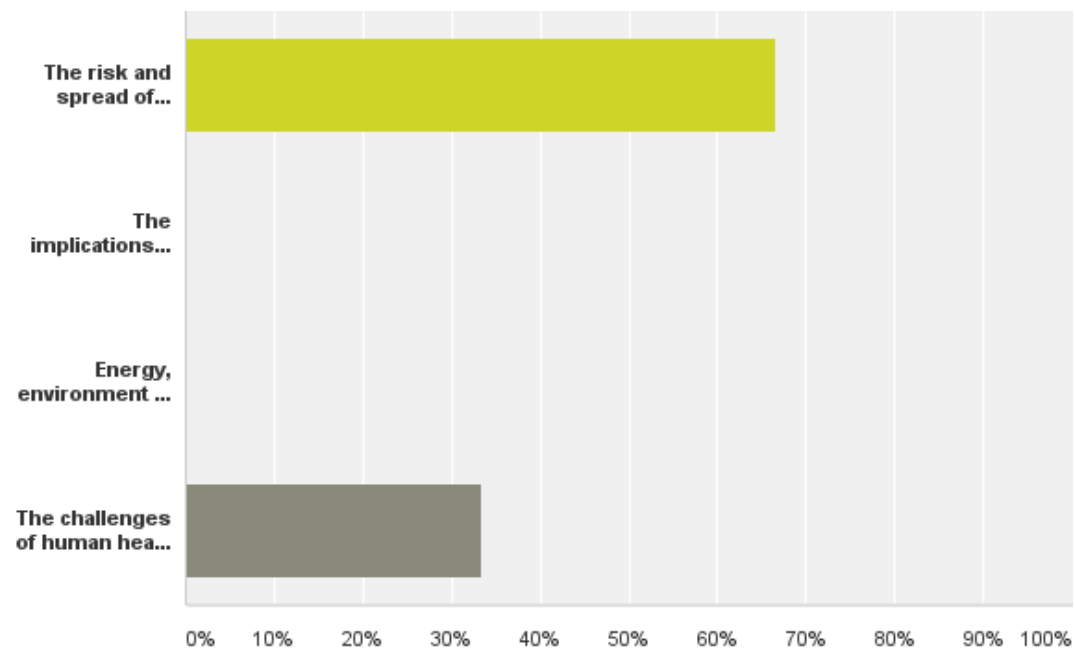
## Q1: What do you expect to be doing in twelve months' time?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Studying at university	83.33%	5
Studying at Edinburgh College	16.67%	1
Studying somewhere else (please tell us where below)	0.00%	0
Working (related to your course)	0.00%	0
Working (not related to your course)	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 6		

## Q2: Which of the following topics did you choose to focus on?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

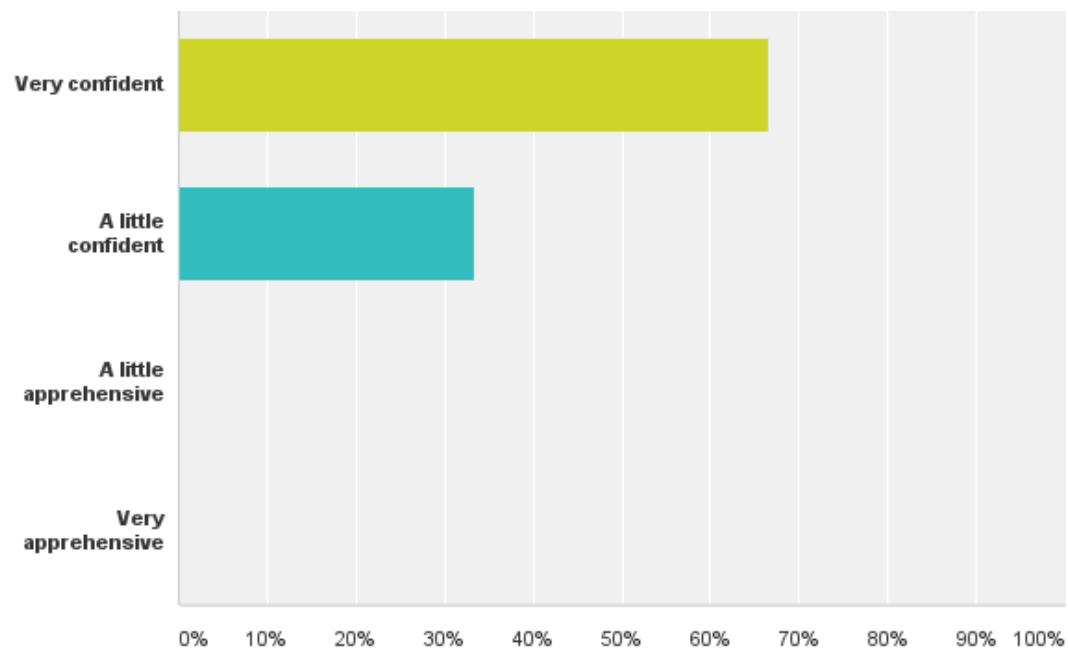
## Q2: Which of the following topics did you choose to focus on?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
The risk and spread of serious infectious diseases in epidemics in modern societies	66.67%	4
The implications of increasing human population on global resources	0.00%	0
Energy, environment and climate	0.00%	0
The challenges of human health and wellbeing in the modern world	33.33%	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

### Q3: How confident are you that you know what 'critical thinking' means?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

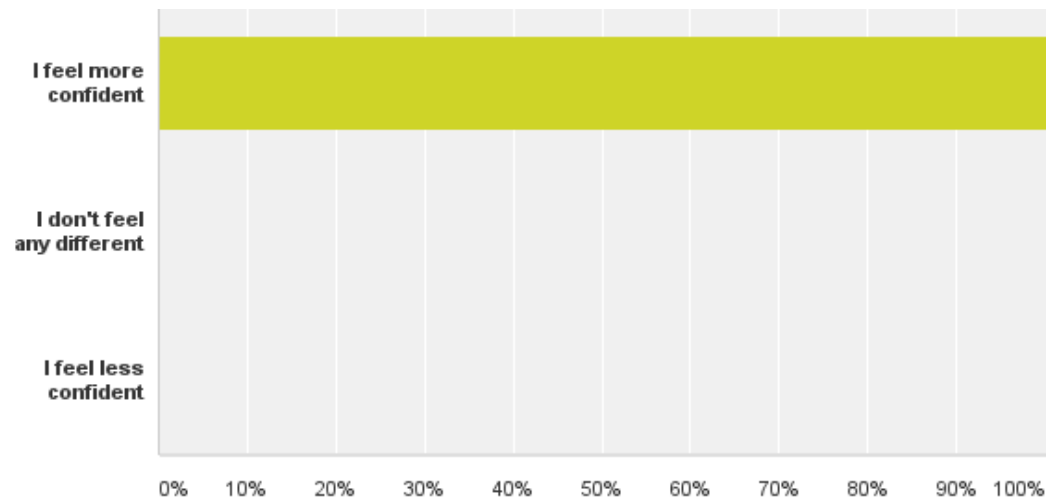
### Q3: How confident are you that you know what 'critical thinking' means?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
Very confident	66.67% 4
A little confident	33.33% 2
A little apprehensive	0.00% 0
Very apprehensive	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

#### Q4: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more or less confident that you know what 'critical thinking' means?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

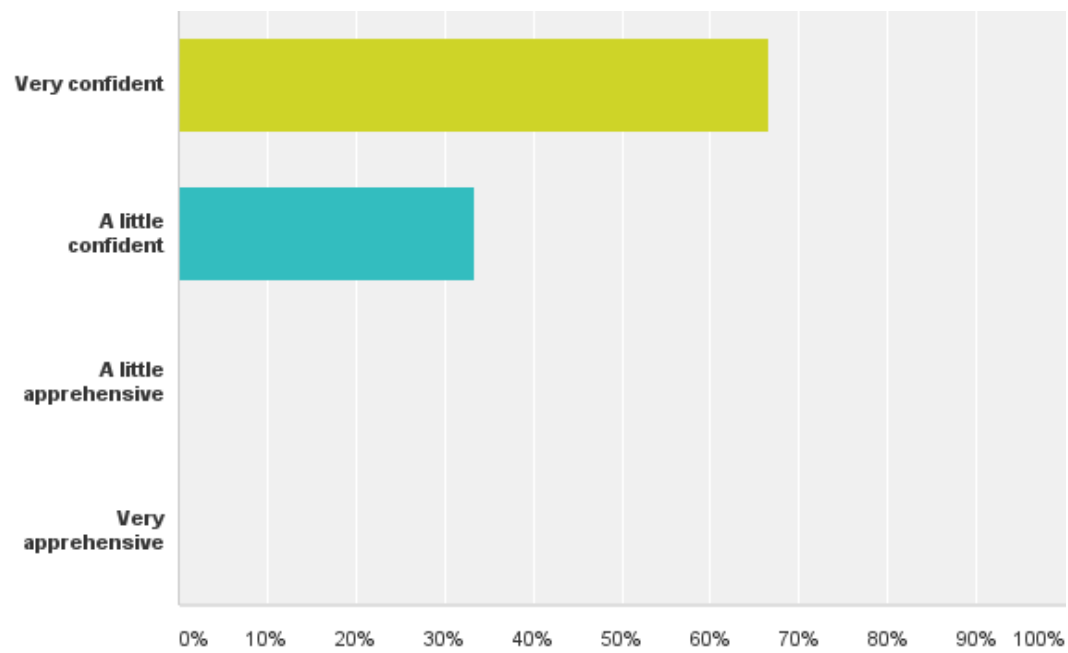
#### Q4: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more or less confident that you know what 'critical thinking' means?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
I feel more confident	100.00% 6
I don't feel any different	0.00% 0
I feel less confident	0.00% 0
Total	6

## Q5: How confident do you feel working in a group?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey



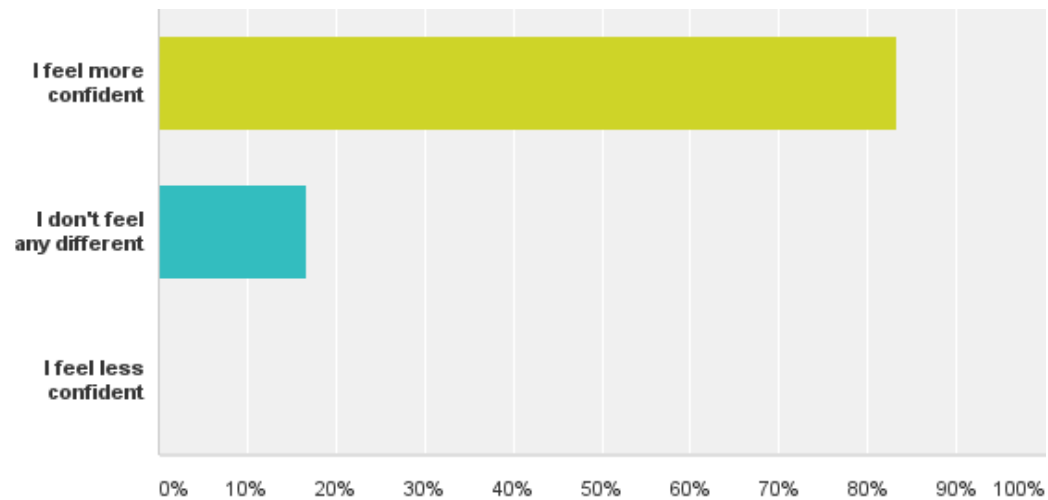
## Q5: How confident do you feel working in a group?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very confident	66.67%	4
A little confident	33.33%	2
A little apprehensive	0.00%	0
Very apprehensive	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

## Q6: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more of less confident working in a group?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

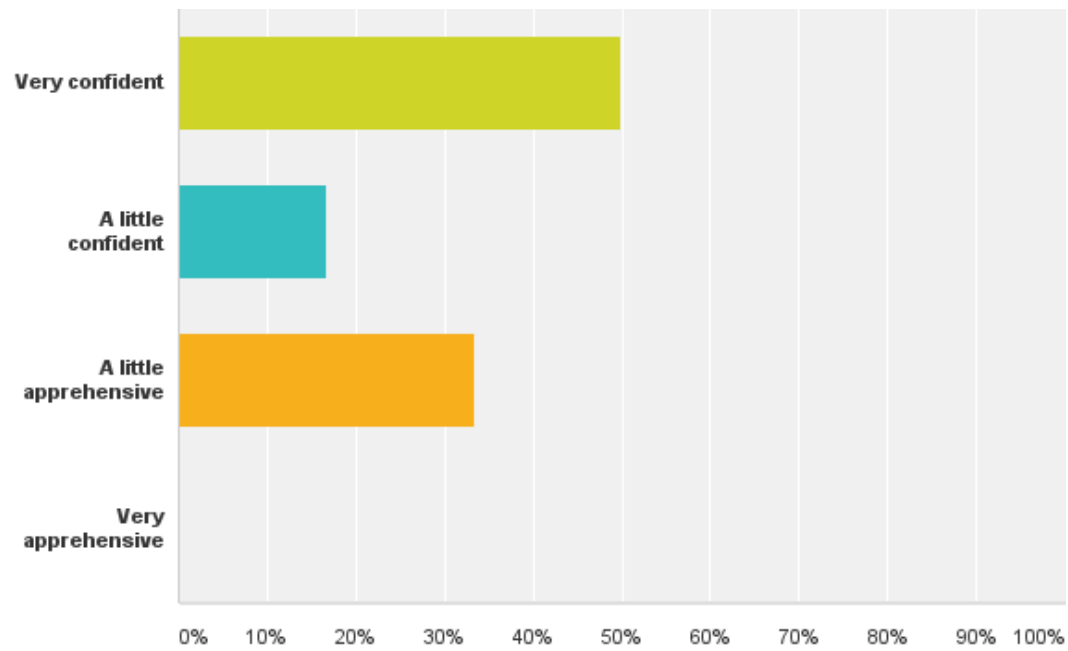
## Q6: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more of less confident working in a group?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
I feel more confident	83.33%	5
I don't feel any different	16.67%	1
I feel less confident	0.00%	0
Total		6

## Q7: How confident do you feel giving a presentation?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

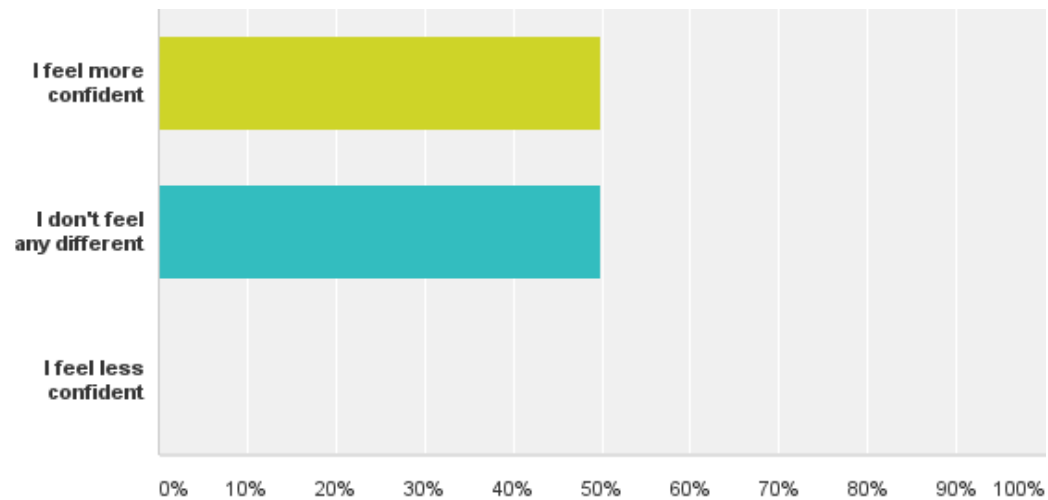
## Q7: How confident do you feel giving a presentation?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very confident	50.00%	3
A little confident	16.67%	1
A little apprehensive	33.33%	2
Very apprehensive	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

## Q8: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more of less confident giving a presentation?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

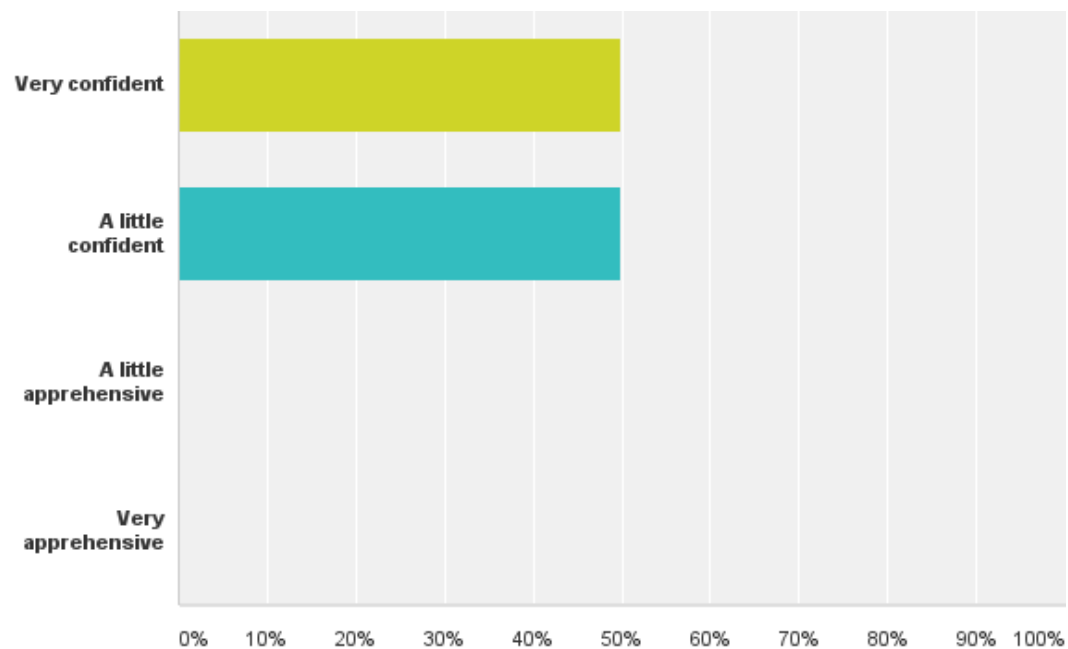
## Q8: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more of less confident giving a presentation?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
I feel more confident	50.00% 3
I don't feel any different	50.00% 3
I feel less confident	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

## Q9: How confident do you feel using online tools for academic purposes?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey



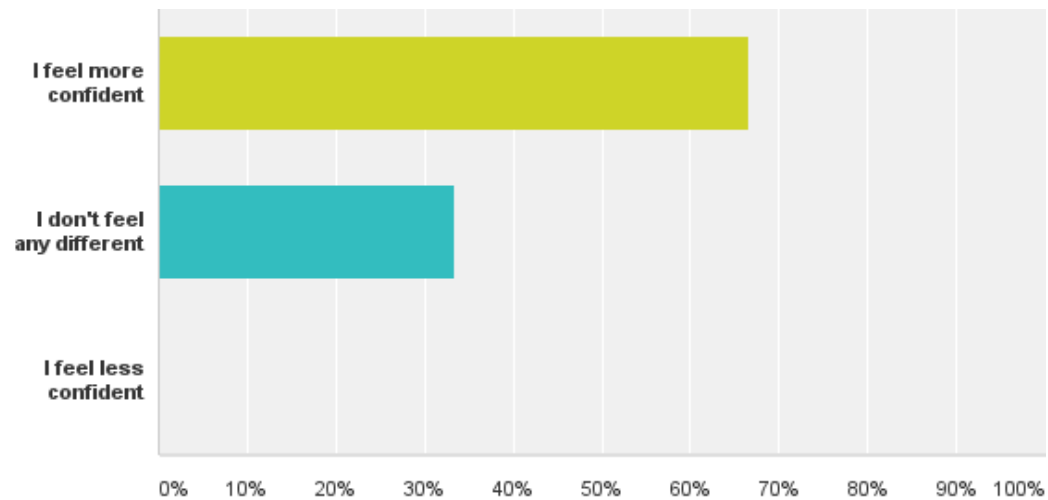
## Q9: How confident do you feel using online tools for academic purposes?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
Very confident	50.00% 3
A little confident	50.00% 3
A little apprehensive	0.00% 0
Very apprehensive	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

## Q10: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more or less confident using online tools?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

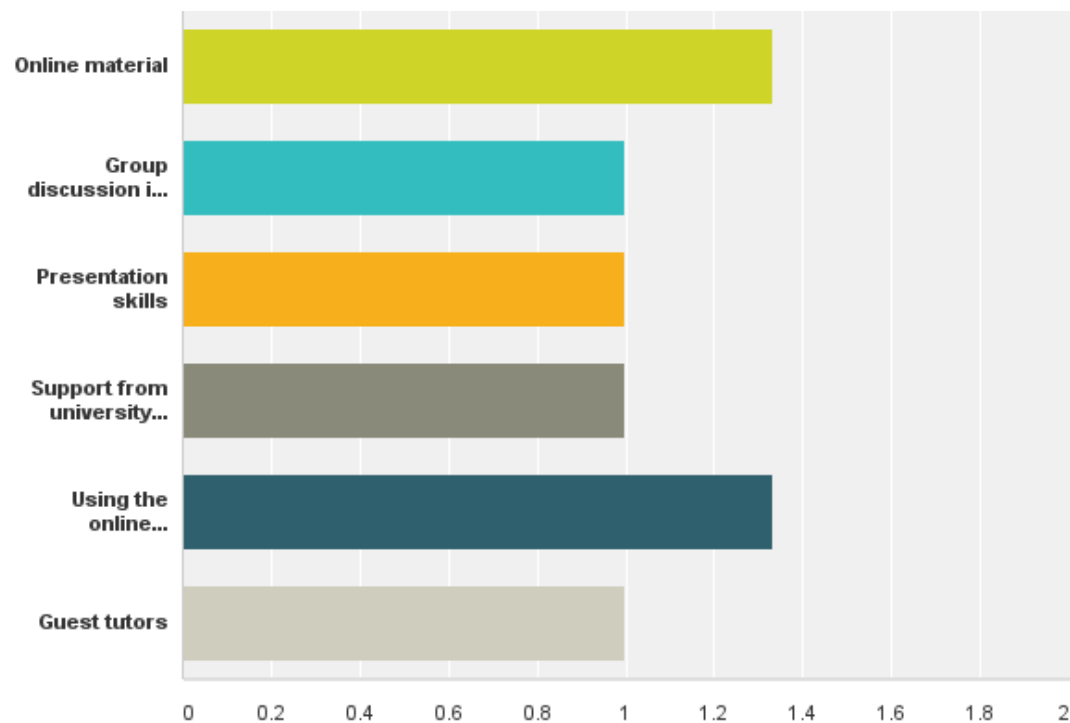
## Q10: Thinking back to the beginning of the course, do you feel more or less confident using online tools?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
I feel more confident	66.67% 4
I don't feel any different	33.33% 2
I feel less confident	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

## Q11: How effective were the different aspects of the course?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



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## Q11: How effective were the different aspects of the course?

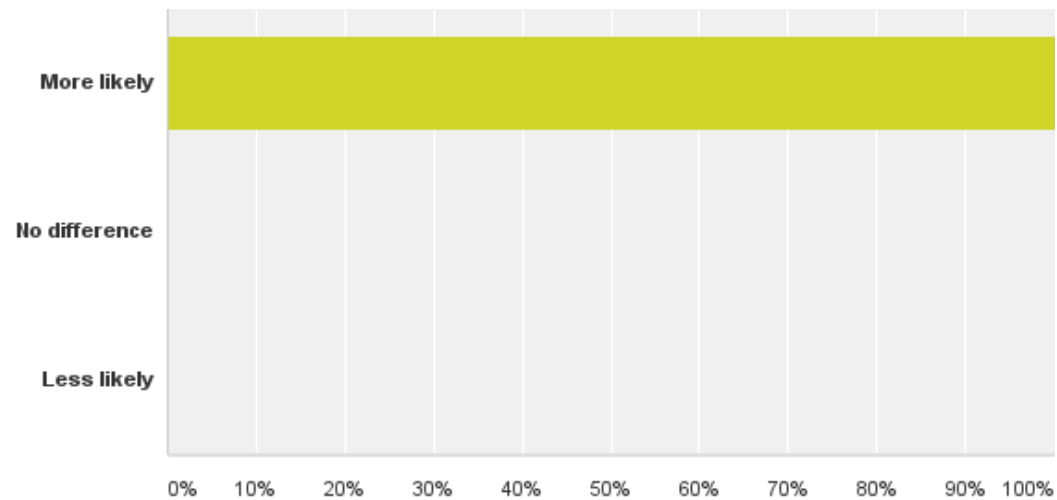
Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

	Very effective	A little effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	A little ineffective	Very ineffective	Total	Weighted Average
Online material	66.67% 4	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	1.33
Group discussion in the classroom	100.00% 6	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	1.00
Presentation skills	100.00% 6	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	1.00
Support from university students	100.00% 6	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	1.00
Using the online discussion forum	66.67% 4	33.33% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	1.33
Guest tutors	100.00% 6	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6	1.00

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## Q12: Would you be more of less likely to do an online course in the future?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey

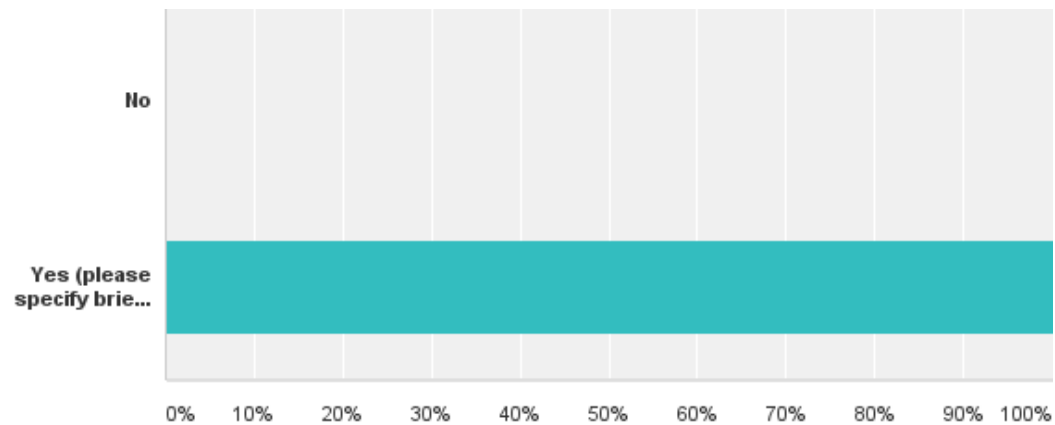
## Q12: Would you be more of less likely to do an online course in the future?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
More likely	100.00% 6
No difference	0.00% 0
Less likely	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

## Q13: Did you experience any technical issues with logging into the Coursera website?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



Powered by  SurveyMonkey



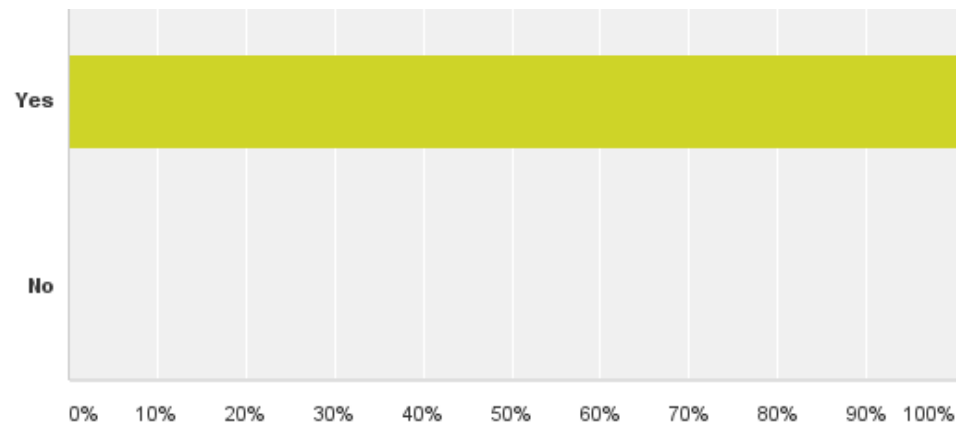
## Q13: Did you experience any technical issues with logging into the Coursera website?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
No	0.00%	0
Yes (please specify briefly what these were)	100.00%	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

## Q14: Would you recommend the course to your peers?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



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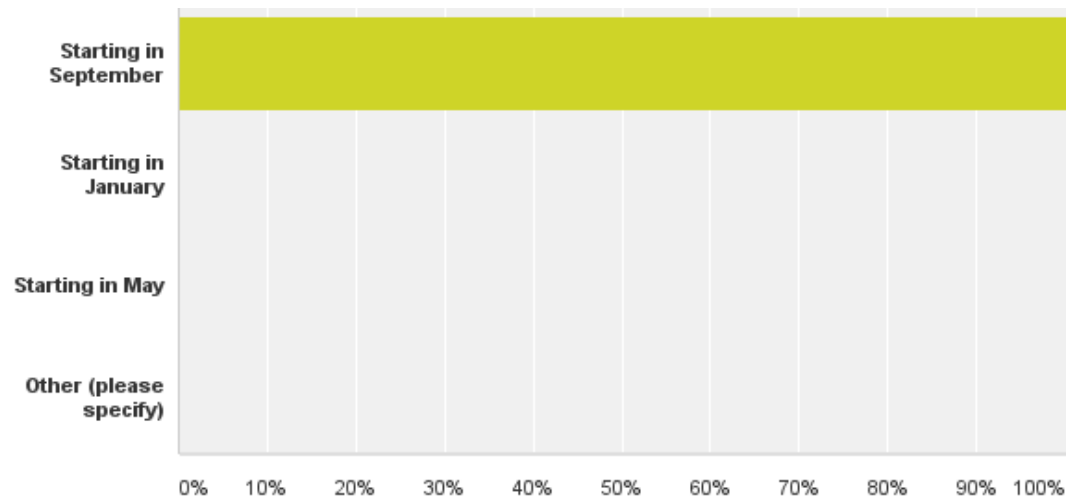
## Q14: Would you recommend the course to your peers?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	100.00% 6
No	0.00% 0
Total	6

## Q15: Would you prefer to have done the course at a different time of the academic year?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0



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## Q15: Would you prefer to have done the course at a different time of the academic year?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Starting in September	100.00%	6
Starting in January	0.00%	0
Starting in May	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>

## Q16 Do you have any comments about the course?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 1

#	Responses	Date
1	Abby was amazing.loved her energy. All the guest were awesome.really enjoyed it.	3/30/2015 5:49 PM
2	A very helpful course.	3/30/2015 5:18 PM
3	Really good course, Abby is the best!!	3/30/2015 5:12 PM
4	I would recommend the course as it was a good way of building social aspects as well as academic attainment	3/30/2015 5:09 PM
5	I have really enjoyed the course and feel that it was a positive learning experience. Accessing the online content was problematic at times.	3/30/2015 4:54 PM



AMOSSHE

The Student Services Organisation