

THE STUDENT LEARNING ASSISTANT

WELCOME

- Welcome to the second issue of the Student Learning Assistant Newsletter. The Newsletter is aimed at all Student Learning Assistants (SLAs) and the wider university community of academic and administrative staff who are involved in the SLA scheme. The idea is to create awareness regarding the SLA scheme and to provide a forum for discussions, suggestions and contributions by all currently involved and also those who have been involved in the past such as SLA Alumni and other members of staff.
- Thanks for all your feedback on the first issue. All your comments and feedback are appreciated. Please email s.ajayi@mdx.ac.uk for any contributions and comments. Deadline for contributions for Issue 3 is April 29, 2011.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Training Event</i>	1
<i>SLA Initiatives</i>	1
<i>Conversations</i>	2
<i>Student Survey</i>	3
<i>Testimonies</i>	4
<i>How We Work</i>	4
<i>Brain Teaser</i>	4

Famous Quote

"I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him"

Galileo Galilei

EFFECTIVE WRITING AND COMMUNICATION TRAINING, FEB 2011

Knowing how difficult it is to find the right time for all SLAs to meet up, we were all pleasantly surprised at the huge turnout at the Effective Writing and Communication Training event which was held on the 9th of February 2011.

The training was aimed at improving SLAs' writing and communication skills as well as offering techniques that will enable them improve their students' writing skills.

SLAs showed they were eager for knowledge as the number we were expecting on the day was exceeded. Four months into their roles as SLAs, the training posed as the perfect antidote for all SLAs who wanted to excel in their roles, up-skill and get to share their experiences with other SLAs.

The training was facilitated by Dr Kathy Harrington and Dr Savita Bakhshi of London Metropolitan University. SLAs were treated to an evening of exploratory and interactive activities all tailored round giving the students SLAs work with the best possible learning experiences.

Topics discussed included:

- What makes a successful study session.
- What lecturers look for in written work .
- Communicating effectively in challenging situations.



SLAs in rapt attention on Training Day

The SLAs spent the first few minutes sharing their experiences with each other and identified key issues for discussion. Throughout the evening, SLAs withdrew into smaller groups to discuss, re-enact role plays, and then convened for feedback with the entire group.

SLAs were reminded of mentoring virtues necessary for their roles which include listening, patience, connecting with students, reacting to the present situations, thinking of the students' needs and discipline. The Facilitators also reinforced the importance of plagiarism awareness in writing, confidentiality and collaboration with academics.

It was all agreed that the event was thought provoking and useful.

According to Great Anaeto (Management SLA), "This has been one of the best training sessions I have attended this year."

"The training was very inspirational and informative," affirms Dionne Bennett., LDU SLA.

The trainers were also full of praise for the SLAs whom they describe as "an enthusiastic, inspiring and impressive group."

See Reflections on page 3 for more..

SLA INITIATIVES

Peer Observations

Sam Greenham, Management SLA has been observing fellow SLAs as part of his personal development.

According to Sam, "Peer observation is one of the best ways of improving yourself. In my role as an SLA, it enables me to improve

my mentoring style as I observe other SLAs and replicate techniques that work."

Facebook

Music SLAs Jessica Treadgold and Sian Evans set up Facebook for Music students.

Sian explains, "Facebook is a very good medium to support students. We post events, links and discussions relating to our course. We currently have over 100 students using the facility. The response has been very good."

Keep up the good work SLAs!



Sam Greenham,
Management SLA

I am a final year student. I have been in England all my life but was raised Irish. I first studied a BND in Business and a HND in Business so I have studied my subject for over five years and still love it.

I work at Legoland Windsor as an Attractions Team leader. If you ever have a chance to visit you might see me walking around Knights Kingdom! I love my job as it involves a lot of mentoring, motivating and training people, which was the biggest thing that attracted me to become an SLA.

Apart from my degree and work I love music; going to gigs is my biggest hobby and it is my dream to one day to go to Download, Reading and Glastonbury in one year.



Sheena Shah
LDU SLA

Why I became an SLA

I see the SLA scheme as a good opportunity to help new students who have problems in their modules. We did not have such help two years ago when I came here, and I feel that it would have helped me with any difficulty I have had in the previous years. My lecturer recommended me because she felt I could provide helpful study tips to new students and students with difficulties. I also became an SLA to improve my existing skills such as communication, interpersonal, leadership, time-management and numeracy skills. It will also enable me to be more confident in tackling different projects and this will further help me with my organisational and goal-setting skills.

CONVERSATIONS WITH SLAS.... (ADAPTED FROM SLA PROFILES)



Kelly Cross
Diagnostic Skills SLA

Why I became an SLA

I became an SLA to hone my new found skills in Diagnosis, to keep my mind fresh for my final exam. I also remember just how hard I found this module, and wished that there could have been someone for me to ask when Lily (my lecturer) wasn't available. I wanted to help other students that feel the same as I did.

My Advice to new students

Keep on top of your work, but always remember to enjoy yourself, either the work itself, or life outside of it. Build a good basis for your final year, and you'll fly through it. Oh and take lots of pictures, three years go by so fast that you will barely remember them!



Avneet Kaur
LDU SLA

Hello, I am Avneet Kaur. I am from India, and I have been in UK for around two years now. I study Business Administration, and my aim in life is to be a Teacher. I have been fascinated by teaching since childhood: I believe that this is a noble profession, and that nothing can be better than sharing knowledge. I am aware of the responsibilities of this profession as well. I am a very calm person, and I believe that a pen is mightier than a sword. Even by holding a calm approach we can win a mighty battle. Moreover I work as a Student Learning Assistant at Middlesex. This job is no less than a dream job. I just love it!



Will Kimber
Education SLA

My Most Memorable Moment at Middlesex University

The sense of pride and achievement when assignments are returned for the first time and the tutor's grade is a reflection of your effort.

My Advice to new students

"If only. Those must be the two saddest words in the world."

Regret is a horrible feeling. Make sure you don't live to regret your time at Middlesex by fully dedicating yourself to your studies (but ultimately have fun).



Pavendeep Chaggar
Marketing SLA

Why I became an SLA

Being an SLA is a great opportunity for me, I have never taken part in anything like this before and was worried about this at the start, but once I started I have begun to enjoy the learning process of the students who were in the same position I was in last year. It's great to be helping these students as I know how they feel during the first year.



Wojciech Wojtak,
Programming SLA

Why I became an SLA

I enjoyed my first year studying programming, and I gave a lot of help to my friends last year, This encouraged me to support first year students as an SLA

My Advice to new students

Student life is the most memorable part of your life - make sure you use it to the maximum every day.



Chintan Handa
Computer Networks SLA

I am a final year student studying BSc IT with Networking, as a sandwich degree program. I won a reality show in India in 2007 which helped me fund my studies and living in the U.K.

Studying in UK has turned out to be the most memorable experience of my life. I love teaching, which also runs in my family for years. As a part of my degree I was required to do a placement. I was lucky enough to do my placement in the School of Engineering and Information Sciences at Middlesex University. That turned out to be the most productive year so far of my education as real life situations always give you a better understanding of a problem than text books.

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENT SURVEY



Zainab (Left) , Statistics lecturer with SLAs

“Hi my SLA is Luiza, and I think she is really good. She helped me a lot and when I wrote my exam it was mostly what I covered with her. I really appreciate it because she took her time and supported me well. Well done! X” (Deborah)



Barbara, Marianna & Luiza

“Barbara is one of our favourite SLAs. Since our time in Middlesex she has given us the biggest support we could get and it has helped us with our Statistics lessons and exams overall.” (Sunny & Tania)

Barbara and Dikla share the findings of a short survey they conducted on the students they support on Statistics module.



Jennifer, Dikla & Alina

“The SLA sessions are extremely helpful and beneficial. The sessions take our learning to another level. We are able to relax and focus more as we are in a small group. Dikla is an amazing SLA. Our sessions with her have built up our confidence level and our understanding of Statistics. We definitely recommend SLAs for other modules as well. Thank you Dikla and all the other SLAs.” (Jennifer & Alina)

“My SLA is Dikla,. She helps me until I understand. I found Stats hard but Dikla made it much easier for me. It is my pleasure to have Dikla as an SLA and I hope that she will continue making my studies enjoyable. Thank you so much.” (Wasif)

“I am finding the SLA experience very useful. It helps me understand the subject better and gives me more confidence in the exams. I can highly recommend SLA sessions to every new university student. SLAs are helpful, motivating and put in a lot of effort to help us with the module in the best way possible.” (Marianna)

REFLECTIONS.....

The effective writing and communication training was one of the most useful training events I was ever a part of. The whole session was very engaging. We were required to do a few mini tasks which were in the form of very easy exercises and later discussed the outcome of the exercises with the whole SLA team. The exercises ranged from using reference tools like dictionary, thesaurus and even internet tools like Google translator to critically examine essays and to break them into components for feedback to the students. We also had brief discussions on challenges we faced as SLAs and the best strategies to overcome them. Essential communication skills, being patient, how to be a good listener and being capable of dealing with different kinds of students were also emphasized at the training.

The interesting highlight was the role play session in which we participated in turns first as a student and then as an SLA, re-enacting difficult scenarios. We were required to minimize awkwardness and student defensiveness by presenting feedback in a supportive manner. We learnt how to respond effectively to students' reactions while maintaining control of the direction of the discussions and outcome.

Chintan Handa—Computer Networks SLA

“The interesting highlight was the role play session in which we participated in turns first as a student and then as an SLA, re-enacting difficult scenarios. We were required to minimize awkwardness and student defensiveness”

Student Learning Assistants (SLAs) are Middlesex University students who have been identified by their academic tutors as being highly motivated and capable individuals.

SLAs work collaboratively with academics in lectures, labs, seminars, workshops and small group sessions to support other students in their learning.

To find out more about SLAs, visit <http://www.24-7.mdx.ac.uk/ldu/SLA>

Contributors:

- ◆ Simbo Ajayi
- ◆ Aleksandra Podsiadlik
- ◆ Barbara Heribanova
- ◆ Dikla Azoulay
- ◆ Phoolparee Shah
- ◆ Chintan Handa

Lest we forget...

- *SLAs facilitate and do not teach*
- *SLAs are not counsellors—when in doubt refer to Academics, PAL Manager, or to the counselling service on <http://www.24-7.mdx.ac.uk/counsel/index.htm>*
- *SLAs are students and should keep on top of own workload*
- *SLAs work collaboratively with Academics*
- *SLAs are the best. Let this reflect in all aspects of our education.*

TESTIMONIES

"My SLA has been very helpful since I got to know him. He works very well in busy conditions, and all his sessions have helped me progress further." Blerina, Management student.

"I have found the help of the SLAs very beneficial as they are so patient and approachable and eager to help in any way. They bring a great deal of fun to the sessions too! Everyone appreciates their time and I am so very thankful." Ruth, Acupuncture student.

"My experience with my SLA is really helpful for me. I can stay in touch with the subject, and do all the seminar exercises before the seminar." Arnaud, Statistics student.

"I thought I could not continue with my course, but with the helping hand of my SLA, I was able to complete the work as well as have someone to encourage me through their experiences as an ex-foundation year student." Eunice, Foundation EIS student.

"It has been very useful getting support from someone who has endured the same course. Thanks for taking the time in being a n SLA; might consider it myself next year." Ken, Traditional Chinese Medicine student.

"My SLA has been really helpful. He makes it simple as English is not my first language." Marius, Sports student.

HOW WE WORK – EIS FOUNDATION SLAS

Gustavo, Ansar, Philip and Bola are SLAs who support the Foundation EIS programme.

Foundation SLAs work with students doing Maths, Multimedia, Networking and Business Information Systems.

At the beginning of the year, they were all given the Module Handbooks and access to OASIS plus. SLAs join the Foundation Year online discussions and are able to share valuable experiences in this way.

SLAs work collaboratively with the academics in seminars and Labs. They also support students via emails and hold 1-2-1 sessions occasionally.

They are called upon to deliver reflective speeches and share the experiences they had on the Foundation programme last year. They are seen as a source of encouragement to students.

Foundation Computing SLAs have been instrumental to boosting student morale

particularly those who are struggling to settle down into university life.

Elizabeth Stokes, Programme Leader and Senior Lecturer for EIS Foundation programme who initiated the first SLA pilot in EIS in 2008/9 commends the SLAs for the work they have been doing:

"The SLAs are eager to help. They were chosen because they had successfully passed the modules and they also benefited from SLA support last year."

Brainteaser

(See if you can solve this in 5 minutes)

The Planet of the Apes



On the Planet of the Apes the government has been toppled and the ZOO Director on Earth has a problem. The ZOO is expecting a delivery of 12 apes: 3 gorillas, 3 chimpanzees, 3 baboons and 3 orangutans. There are 12 cages in the monkey-house prepared for the 12 apes, as they are very quarrelsome and there can only be one ape in one cage.

There are a few problems, however. The director was informed that there are strong conflicts between some of the species and their cages cannot stand side by side: a gorilla cannot be put by a chimpanzee, no chimpanzee can next to a baboon, and no baboon can be next to an orangutan. Moreover, the cages of the apes of the same species cannot stand next to each other.

How should the ZOO director deploy the apes in the cages?



Solution to be posted on Face Book on Wednesday 6 April.

(Adapted from Omnibus, summer 2010, Poland).