Helen Hynes – School of Marketing and International Business – Tutor Coordinator

Helen Hynes recruits and manages more than 100 tutor positions across 3 trimesters for the School of Marketing and International Business. Her processes have been endorsed not only by course coordinators but also by consistently high tutorial evaluations. Helen’s strategy is based on a form of career progression where tutors (ideally) begin tutoring in their third year of university and continue on to honours, commencing their development as tutors at MARK 101 or IBUS 201 before going on to specialised papers.

Tutor recruitment begins with suitable applicants being interviewed individually for about half an hour. “Since our tutorials are discussion rather than demonstration-based, I need to determine how well tutors can converse. For example, can they initiate new topics, what are their views, can they laugh? We talk about a whole range of things and I get to know them better.”

Up until the MARK 101 ExcelL workshop with Karen Commons and Xiordan Gao in trimester 1 of 2012, Helen had never really recruited for an international perspective, although she did encourage students from different cultural backgrounds to apply.

“I’m into diversity – creating a tutorial programme with a spectrum full of skills, experiences, personalities. I encourage tutors to bring what makes them unique - cultural diversity is part of that”. She started to notice, however, that applicants with ex-pat experience, multi-cultural parents and those that had spent time away on exchange, often appeared to possess an awareness and appreciation of events and people that was at times broader and more insightful than their less experienced peers. “It got me thinking that these were valuable attributes and skills that we wanted. And because of a workshop I once attended regarding international student engagement I knew they could be taught.”

So when it was suggested that MARK 101 trial the ExcelL programme she was keen. “It took a lot of organising, especially as it involved around 14 people. Plus I needed a course co-ordinator that was able to commit to it. You can train tutors as much as you like but for full effect, support and direction
needs to come from the top and ideally be built into the tutorial programme. Otherwise interest dissipates.”

The introductory MARK 101 ExcelL workshop taken by Karen and Xiordan was viewed as worthwhile by the tutors and also served as a great team-building exercise. However, because the majority of tutors were tutoring for the first time it served more to build awareness rather than providing the tutors with enough confidence to try out suggestions with their own students. The plan was to build on this momentum in trimester 2. Unfortunately though this didn’t end up being possible.

“However, now when we advertise for tutors, we say they need to be open to these Teaching and Learning initiatives because they are the sort of thing trialled in MARK101. So then when we recruit we can detect whether these qualities exist. These capabilities then need to be developed.”

“Tutors are crucial to the student experience and course delivery. I select tutors who want to inspire and help students reach their potential. I then select for a course a team of tutors with a broad spectrum of views. They need an academic capability of at least an A- average and specific subject knowledge, but I am also looking for what is special about them that they can bring to the mix. What can they contribute to the teaching of the course? Are they effective communicators? What kind of leader will they be?” she said.

A key part of this, is a global and multicultural perspective. “For International Business, in particular, we want tutors who have had contact with other cultures. We have tutors whose families work for multi-nationals and who have lived around the world.”

Inherent in the process are the efforts of course coordinators to build close connections with the tutors and help with their training and growth. There also needs to be an openness to initiatives and material outside the immediate course – such as ExcelL.

Helen found ExcelL to have been of considerable benefit to tutors. “The ExcelL training with Karen and Xiaodan was awareness-raising for MARK101 tutors. If we want to be known for the student experience, we will need tutors who can bring these kinds of things to the students. If we want to introduce internationalisation, we have to plan for it and keep it going. It’s not just for 100-level, but that’s where it ideally starts.”

What is clear, is that efforts for internationalisation and engagement of students, both domestic and international, go hand in hand with other initiatives to improve student outcomes, and other equity and culturally-focused engagement initiatives. MARK101 engages Maori tutors for MPI tutorials provided for Maori and Pacific Island students. “They have to be good tutors. They have to meet all
our other requirements. I put this to them as a challenge, something we could put together. It is their thing too. But then, I encourage this in all our tutors, that this is their opportunity to shine. It’s part of their development too.”

The benefits are hard to assemble, but there is a growing body of anecdotal evidence involving individual students.

“There’s a closeness that develops between the tutor and the students. The key time is when the tutor says ‘don’t give up’. This is crucial for any student but particularly for MPI. The MPI tutors keep them in the game.

“One of our success stories was a student who had been in the ‘who cares, nobody cares’ space. She missed deadline for the assignment. The tutor encouraged her to not give up. Finally she brought her assignment into my office and slammed it down on the desk. She said ‘I did it!’ and walked off. Not that she received many marks due to lateness, but despite everything she ended up with a ‘B’ overall for the course. I was delighted”.

The other side is when Maori or Pasifika students aspire to become tutors themselves. “I’m always on the lookout for potential tutors to have this background. I mean, what an excellent resource for the students! Enquiries can be tentative because there can be a tendency not to put themselves forward because they don’t feel ‘good enough’ or meet the marks criterion or think they have to be asked. Even if the marks aren’t as good as I would like, I am encouraging. I like to give students something to aspire to. Work hard next trimester and yes let’s talk! I am in the fortunate position of engaging with applicants as both students and tutors so I get to see both sides. Recruiting is a continual process.”