Martyn Gosling set himself clear targets when he took on MARK101 and developed a strategy for achieving them. “I wanted to see our school’s rolls increase. I wanted greater retention and completion. And I wanted to turn out alert, hireable, professional, competitive, business people who will contribute something to our world. That means taking an international perspective and engaging at an individual level with international and domestic students. That’s the backdrop for everything we do in MARK101.

The results are there for everyone to see. It works.”

MARK101 is a typical core commerce paper. There are around 700 students catered for by two streams each trimester, and initially many have no real interest in the subject other than something to get through on their way to a BCom. A large proportion of students are international and at this stage many have poor conversational English. And most of the class has little understanding of what makes a successful student.

“They are straight from high school. They don’t know the business world. Most have never even shopped for toothpaste. We have kids from high schools with smaller rolls than these lectures. We have many from towns of fewer people than Vic has students. Regardless of national origin, they are all overwhelmed.

“I figured that we needed to teach them not only the curriculum, but how to be students, and start them on their journey of becoming professional business people in a globalised world. In many ways they think internationally – they all use the web. What they can’t often do is make the connections at a personal level,” Martyn said.

“Lecturers don’t need to be entertainers, but we do need to engage them. This begins with the way a paper is designed and delivered, and it involves explicit expectations of the lecturer, the tutors and the students. Think of it as a leadership issue.”

In lectures students are encouraged to comment – generally by direct invitation – and these views are written on the whiteboard to build a picture of the discussion theme. “Students are often so shy, or so frightened of being thought a nerd, that while they know the answer, they will just sit there. By directly inviting a student to speak, we get around those two barriers. Further, by putting their comments on the whiteboard there is a direct implication that what they said was important. This encourages further contribution. This has to be done carefully, because we don’t want to embarrass

We recognise and respect differences. We can play to the strengths of those differences and get a better outcome for all parties.
anyone, but the effects on the class are overwhelmingly positive. The fact is, these students often
have real insights.

“The other aspect, is that international students are getting a picture of New Zealand culture – we
are an egalitarian society, we expect engagement. I call them ‘sir” or ‘ma’am” and they call me ‘sir’
or ‘Martyn’. I encourage laughing and we do a lot of that. These are huge leaps for anyone who is
used to a more formal and hierarchical approach, but they are making those leaps in a very
supportive place.”

Martyn also ensured his availability through Blackboard’s discussion board. “International students,
in particular, may be nervous about approaching me, or being thought stupid for asking a question,
or will have a conversational language issue. On discussion board any student can raise questions
anonymously and have them answered. It is common for a posting to be read by 300 or more
students. In the course of a trimester, I’d expect our discussion board to have about 900 postings on
perhaps 200 to 300 subjects. Of those 900, about half will be

Think of it as a leadership issue.

The next element comes in the selection and training of
tutors and in tutorial design.

“We have a very rigorous process of tutor selection and training. It sets our school apart. Much of
this rests with our Tutor Coordinator Helen Hynes, but again the course coordinator has a powerful
role to play in setting expectations on how the tutorials will be delivered. For example, I ensure the
tutorials are explicitly related to the assignment – that really encourages engagement.”

The tutors have all gone through the standard training, but Martyn and Helen hold further frequent
briefing and training sessions. “They need to know how I go about things, and what my expectations
are. I don’t expect tutorials to be mini-lectures. I expect them to be an exploration, a stimulus for
thought, a process of bringing alive course content, a means of extracting from students what they
are thinking, what they are working on, the issues they are facing. I always take tutorials, early in the
week, so that when issues emerge I can relay these and my solutions to my tutors.”

The ExcelL process was used not with students, but with the tutors. “Karen Commons and Xiaidan
Gao ran through an ExcelL scenario with the tutors,” Martyn said.

“ExcelL was brilliant for the tutors. It really raised their awareness. I’d have no hesitation in running
this process again.”
Engagement in tutorials between students is essential. “The first thing we do, besides any icebreakers the tutor may wish to run, is origami - we make paper name plates for the desks. These are used at every tutorial. This means all students are no longer a face. They have a name. They are immediately getting to know each other. These connections will remain throughout their time at Victoria. Lifelong bonds and international relationships begin with folding a piece of paper.

“We see tutors as the leader of a team and we shuffle the furniture to turn classrooms into meeting rooms. The tutorial is then a process of engagement through discussion and sharing of ideas. This may mean going around the table and asking for a contribution from every student, and these ideas go on the whiteboard. If someone stumbles, move on and come back to them. This way everyone knows they are expected to contribute and the contribution is valued. It also means the tutor can readily reinforce points or pick up mistakes.

“We often break the team up into smaller groups of three or four. The next time we ensure the groups are different. This means students don’t get isolated as Indian or Chinese or New Zealanders, but have to talk and engage with students of other nationalities and get different perspectives. The tutor needs to ensure the students understand that these different perspectives are important. The tutor may need to promote discussion among these very young people who may not know how to engage or who feel uncomfortable discussing issues. We have to stimulate with questions. We ensure every group has a designated scribe, and the scribe then reports back to the tutorial. This means everyone gains from everyone else’s perspective and all the views are seen as worthwhile. Sitting there and saying nothing is no longer an option. Obligate the students to get involved and have a go. They never regret it.”

MARK101 also runs MPI tutorials specifically aimed at Maori and Pacific Island students. The tutors are themselves Maori.

“The content is the same. What we are saying is that we recognise and respect differences. We can play to the strengths of those differences and get a better outcome for all parties,” Martyn said.

The results are evident in the evaluations of the course, the lecturer’s teaching, and of the tutors. The School, however, is also seeing an increasing roll for 200 and 300 level courses, and a trend towards students of ostensibly other disciplines incorporating marketing into their degrees though double-majors and minors. “It’s too early to be certain, but you’d have to expect this is making a positive difference to retention and completion.”

ExcelL was brilliant for the tutors. It really raised their awareness.
I’d have no hesitation in running this process again.