Winning with ExcelL – Course Coordinator perspectives

**Yang Yu – IBUS201 – Course Coordinator/Lecturer**

Every business discipline now needs cross-cultural understanding, says International Business 201 course coordinator Yang Yu.

“It might seem obvious that we would use ExcelL in an international business paper. But all of business is being internationalised, globalised, and understanding cultural differences is fundamental to success. Business has a cross-cultural element that no-one can avoid. Business is about dealing with people.”

IBUS201 is the foundation paper for International Business, providing the big picture of the managerial implications for organisations if they operate internationally, and presenting various theories and perspectives of the international commercial environment. About 20 percent of the cohort are international students, and everyone in the class has aspirations for a career in the international scene.

But every lecturer knows how hard it is to make theories relevant for students, and every student knows how uninspiring the process can be. Yang found ExcelL could bring some of the theories to life. And in this lies a crucial element to making the process successful – the ties to the curriculum must be explicit so students understand why the activities are taking place, and what they can expect to get out of the exercise.

Yang worked with Karen Commons to develop scenarios and in week 4, where the course discusses socio-cultural environments, the class of 115 students was divided into 15 groups with three or four instructors moving between them to ensure progress and encourage engagement. Each group had questions on roles or interactions. Each scenario prompted a little conflict – such as how to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ between buyers and sellers. Students took turns as role players or observers.

“We’d move from group to group. Sometimes all you needed to do to really get things started was to ask ‘what do you think?’,” Yang said.

In a few cases, engagement was not always immediate or the process was not successful. But mostly the students really wanted to play a leading role and be more active.

“Success depends on the attitudes of the students,” Yang said.
“Students tended to relate their observations to cultural dimensions and try to match these against the theories. This is good.

“Even though some students were not active, others see that as a cultural matter. Kiwis are different to Europeans and Americans.”

The immediate benefits from the exercise were a definite improvement of student understanding of cultural differences in a business environment and the ability to connect the theories with what they had observed.

“Students start to realise how different their behaviour is compared with students of other cultures. It’s very useful for New Zealand students who have never been overseas.

“It was very good for dynamics in the classroom. We can make use of students from different cultural backgrounds. It gives real experience – an experience you can’t get out of the textbook.”

Yang will definitely use the exercises again, possibly in tutorials where the more sociable and inclusive environment might promote deeper insights, and with scenarios even more focussed on the curriculum issues.