

CETL-MSOR Conference 2015

Eva Szatmari: The challenges and rewards of running a school wide Mathematics and Statistics support solo

In this short 20 minute presentation I would like to share my experience of being the sole learning development tutor responsible for a wide range of support in a school. At Birkbeck, which is largely similar to other institutions, there is relatively well established academic English support, both at individual school level and college wide; however, I'm the only mathematics support lecturer in the whole college with a remit of supporting students in the School of Business, Economics and Informatics. Understandably not all disciplines need mathematics support, but there are disciplines that greatly benefit from mathematics and statistics support. My post is relatively new; it started in the 2013/14 academic year.

Some of the challenges I would like to talk about are:

- Supporting students' needs across very different levels and disciplines: I would like to mention the difficulties encountered in supporting specific subject areas such as computing, the highly technical demands of an economics degree and the general needs of a business student with basic algebra.
- Combining mathematics support with statistics support.
- Diverse statistics support needs from helping with research projects to supporting technical economics subjects, such as econometrics
- Gaining the support of academic staff: the difficulty of getting time of academic staff to talk about their students' needs and the most optimal way of supporting them; then implementing these suggestions.
- Communication: communicating with staff as well as with students, ensuring the service is effectively promoted; so students who need it most access it and staff are clear about what the role is, what I can and cannot cover, help with.

And of course I would like to talk about the rewards that come with the job and keep most of us going despite the daily difficulties. For me the most important reward is students' achievement. Whether it is someone who progresses on to the degree she had a conditional offer from or someone pulling through a difficult exam that s/he previously failed. I would also like to talk about the rewards of being challenged by the diverse needs of disciplines, subject areas; being able to explain to someone the basics of differentiation without having to go into any of the technical terminology or helping someone to fully understand the subtle differences in a mathematical proof.