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Mixing cohorts and reflective practice: the joys and challenges of enforced group work

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Mathemateg | Mathematics

I run sessions involving third year maths students (Topics in Biological Statistics), MSc students (including Data Science and Statistics for Computational Biology) and PhD students (Statistics in Context: Collecting, Handling and Presenting Data). The PhD students give individual presentations about their research towards the beginning of the semester, followed by group presentations involving a mixture of third year and MSc students. These presentations are not assessed. The assessment consists of two reflective pieces of work, a reflective presentation and a reflective essay.

Meeting the needs of three such disparate cohorts is challenging for me as the module coordinator. Trying to encourage the third years and MSc students to work together for the group presentations can be difficult at times. However, when it works and I see how the students who do engage grow through the experience, it is incredibly rewarding.

After a short presentation about the structure of the module, including some details about how I present the reflective tasks, there will be a roundtable discussion where I will show some anonymised examples of reflective writing.

I have had feedback from a number of students saying that the module gave them something useful to talk about in interviews, in terms of group work, problem solving and self-awareness. Despite the complex logistics of coordinating these modules, I believe that I am offering the students a good opportunity to interact with people they wouldn't otherwise, and some of the reflective essays are very well-written, demonstrating good insight about the students' learning journeys.

