

Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards 2011



Nomination for:

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I recall meeting one of (Ross's) Otago colleagues at a conference. The colleague pointed Ross out and advised me in tones of awe that Ross was quite simply the best teacher he had ever seen... Ross's field of experience is the social responsibility and ethics of business. This is of course not an area where technically-correct expositions of management theory and practice will do. It is an area where moral judgments are made based on personal philosophy and viewpoint, where individuals must find their own principles, where some feel confusion and others feel passion and few feel neutral. Finally, it is an area of the utmost importance in terms of raising students' consciousness prior to their entry into the business world. In this arena Ross is a master facilitator in getting students to understand the issues, think them through and develop and test their own personal positions... His stories are spellbinding and his analysis carefully thought-through. His delivery skills are remarkable: he uses no notes, yet there is never a hesitation and both the words and the meaning behind them are communicated with exceptional structure and clarity.

(Excerpt from a letter of reference for a 1998 teaching award by a colleague)

Introduction

The teaching I do seeks to help young people better place themselves in a rapidly changing world and by doing so, to work consciously towards its improvement. The approach I use is humanistic in form and intends to create supportive but challenging environments in which students can realise their potential. My work teaching in the areas of Business Ethics and Social Responsibility is guided by this vision, and by a deeply-held belief in the power of direct experience in learning and the potential of collaborative learning.

Teaching principles

Although the specifics of a course are never the same, I use a consistent structure that revolves around a core set of teaching principles. In sum, I believe that teaching should be:

Relevant

For education to have an impact it has to be relevant to the life of the learner. Theories and hypothetical case studies have their place in learning about ethics and responsibility but an over-reliance on these can easily fail to engage the whole person. If the effects of good and bad values-in-action can be connected to the life of the learner they become inherently interesting, and learning gains traction as it is anchored in personal experience and validated by it.

Reflective

The courses I run are designed to help young people discover their own grounded perspectives, rather than instill values from the outside. I engage reflective processes which challenge students to ask themselves why they believe what they believe and to test their existing worldviews. Teaching in this modality returns education to its proper meaning as ‘to educate’ rightfully means to ‘bring forth from within’.

Collaborative

Understanding multiplies exponentially as people share perspective with each other; every group of young adults harbours a wealth of wisdom that can be drawn on. As individuals collaborate to share their views, assumptions are challenged, reflection is deepened and understanding is broadened. At the heart of my teaching method are structured discussions that help students to co-operatively develop deeper perspectives.

Respectful

Effective collaboration can only come into being in respectful spaces where people feel comfortable voicing uncertainty. I believe in being honest, considerate and kind to my students and work hard to encourage non-threatening group dynamics where all participants treat each other with genuine sensitivity. This is essential if deep engagement is to be activated and if students are to be open about what are often only vaguely articulated intuitions of right and wrong.

Critical

In facilitating openness it can be tempting to allow poor conclusions to pass unchallenged. My classes are structured to simultaneously bring working understandings out and to subject these to a rigorous logical testing. One important way this balance can be achieved is to allow people to voice group perspectives that can then be critiqued without direct threat to any individual.

Empowering

The ultimate principle of any course I teach is to empower young people to reach their potential as mature and responsible citizens. I work to help students develop resilient ethical capacities of respect, compassion, self restraint and service, in order that they can help create a better future for themselves. My teaching aims to contribute to the development of solidly humane values, and I believe that through the careful co-ordination of the above principles a constructive progress towards this goal can be achieved.

Development as a teacher

Over the years I have taught a variety of courses to a wide range of people: Psychology for prison inmates; Behavioural Science for MBAs; Human Resource Management for Masters students; Development Economics for Māori and Professional Ethics for Polynesian leaders. Throughout these experiences I have been on a constant learning curve. Each semester I fill notebooks with new reflections, exercises and ideas for improvement so that I can have a continuous road-map for better delivery.

In my early years in the classroom I taught in fairly conventional ways but in the search for excellence I have refined my teaching practice. My time at the University of Otago (from 1989 to 1994) was particularly formative as I was allowed to experiment freely and to fine-tune my delivery. This was particularly so in the context of the Business Ethics classes I established there – the first of their kind to be offered in New Zealand. In this early teaching I began to shift the emphasis towards deep learning and away from the assessment of only retained information. I removed final examinations and assessed students on a series of reflective writings that attempted to connect abstract theory to the life of the learner. I also began working with more collaborative processes that allowed students to learn from the collective experience of a class.

As a result, students in these classes actively sought out materials to share and brought their keenest understandings to bear in ways that elevated learning to levels I had never experienced before. Through this I learned a very formative lesson in students' capacities to engage for the right reasons and to help each other advance as a group. Furthermore, I discovered how critical thinking blossoms when formal authority is relaxed and replaced with the authority of insight. These lessons in the power of open collaboration have remained central to my practice ever since.

Working with MBA students at both Otago and Auckland was equally helpful for developing good practice. MBAs are renowned for being self-assured and in my experience teaching in ethics and responsibility can create defensiveness. Learning to respectfully challenge deeply-held assumptions taught me the value of good targeted questions and spontaneous agility in the classroom. Both these groups and the Ethics classes taught me a good deal about how to write good reflective assignments that deepen thinking.

- 'More, more, more.'
- 'Don't be tempted to change this course or its delivery. It has a valuable place, both by its nature and delivery, amongst the other more structured and mathematical courses.'
- 'Well presented, well planned and enjoyable.'
- 'One of the most interesting and personally satisfying courses.'
- 'Ross has an excellent technique for MBA students.'
- 'Casual and comfortable - felt at ease interrupting Ross to have a say but he always returned to his point and continued after a discussion. His ability to accommodate input and get through the work is admirable.'

(Sample comments from Otago MBA students – formal feedback, 1991)

My experiences working with Pacific Island leaders and Māori communities in the Far North (as part of the team that established marae-based courses in Māori Development) taught me a huge amount about the need for deep personal integrity as a teacher. Working with these groups also taught me the value of teaching by story-telling and indirect journeys of discovery. This has been particularly valuable in the context of my second-year class in Business and Society where I deliberately take students on journeys, where many of the key learning points come as unexpected revelations, heightening both enjoyment and retention.

- 3) Teaching style.
- 4) Empathy.
- 5) Passionate about his subject. Appear to walk his talk.
- 6) The genuine and sympathetic views to our issues.
- 7) He related easily to our people. Pacific people and their challenges.
- 8) Relaxed manner and the sincerity of his understanding of PI way of life. Invite him again.
- 9) Relaxed, Mana, sincerity and honesty.
- 10) Everything.
- 11) Personal approach.
- 12) His uniqueness.
- 13) Relaxed and understanding of the PI culture.
- 14) Interactive.
- 15) O for Oawesome.

(Sample responses to “What did you like about this Module?” Pacific Island leadership course– formal feedback, 2003)

In 1998 I was invited to India to co-ordinate national workshops on “Introducing Business Ethics into Top Indian Schools of Management” and to teach and research as a Tata Visiting Scholar. This experience taught me the profound value of turning questions back on the questioner. In my time at the Management Centre for Human Values in Kolkata I worked with Indian teachers whose natural tendency was to respond to questions with a quick “what do you think?” a technique constructive to deepening enquiry and one central to my continuing work.

Other influences come from constantly surveying the literature and working with globally renowned educators like David Orr, Bunker Roy, Sulak Siveraksa and Manish Jain on curriculum development in the Kingdom of Bhutan. We were among a group of thirty teachers brought together in late 2009 by the Bhutanese Ministry of Education to help develop new educational approaches for the country.

However, it is above all the students I work with who most guide my improvement. Each semester I seek constant feedback, and regularly make changes as a result. This is particularly the case with assessments where the details of essay questions are always refined in collaboration with a class before being set in stone. This not only improves performance but greatly assists mutual respect. I seek to work *with* my students and as such I open channels of communication to allow for an on-going responsiveness in designing the learning process.

“The impact that Ross’s teaching continues to have is evident on campus and in interactions with any of his past students. Ross is thought of very fondly by people he has taught, many of whom admit to the eye-opening nature of his classes and his unconventional approach to ‘lecturing’ as genuinely changing the courses of their desired career choices. It is not uncommon to come across ex-pupils of his who literally say that he is an “excellent teacher”, “a legend” and most notably that if it were possible “he should become world president”. Indeed a group of students in my cohort in 2005 created a Facebook group called “Ross McDonald for World President”. As gimmicky as it may seem, I think that this is testament to the fact that Ross is certainly an excellent, insightful, and hugely influential teacher with a vast amount of respect from anyone who has been fortunate enough to be a student of his.”

(Excerpt from a letter of reference by a Masters Student at the University of Auckland, 2010)

Principles in practice – designing and delivering a course

The teaching principles outlined above provide the framework for all the courses I run, and particularly for my second year course in Business in Society and third year course in Ethics.

An illustrative course in Business Ethics

An examination of the design and methods used in my third-year course in Business Ethics illustrates how my principles are put into practice. The Business Ethics course is a discussion class, and is deliberately kept small in order that students can talk openly and come to work as part of a coherent group. This class has varied a good deal over the years as I have experimented my way to a structure that works well.

The course is highly reflective and collaborative. It is designed to further learning in three phases. First we work to bring out students' values by envisioning a better future and what values are necessary to achieving it. In the second phase we introduce academic perspective and empirical evidence to extend the conclusions the class has already reached. This is followed by a series of 'eye-opening' exercises designed to put the values students have identified into reflective practice. In the final phase of the course students work together to develop assessed plans for ethically progressive businesses that build on these values and make a better world more achievable.

Phase one – asking critical questions to develop meaningful frames of reference.

I begin the course by asking a series of relevant grounding questions starting with whether the class believes that New Zealand is on the whole, getting 'better' or 'worse'. This opening engages and involves students and they are asked to develop a personal answer to the question before joining with three others to share their thinking. I ask them to listen carefully to each other without verbalizing supportive or conflicting opinions as it is important at this early stage of interaction to develop powers of genuine listening. The deeper purpose of beginning in this way is to get learners to begin thinking in value terms. Ethics (and social responsibility) revolve around notions of 'better' and 'worse' and 'right' and 'wrong' and what these mean. This opening exercise is a deliberate foray into articulating value judgments and ethical perspectives.

In the following class I ask students to form different groups so that they talk with a variety of people and begin to build a much stronger sense of class cohesion. I ask students to come to a clear consensus on what exactly they mean by 'better' and 'worse'. With this we begin to probe more deeply and to think more critically about values as students begin bringing to the surface the underlying beliefs and assumptions that they have used to make their assessments.

The value of asking for consensus decisions lies in the opportunities it presents for students to find common ground. Such discussions elicit an energetic engagement as students are talking about their own values in their own terms and about a future that they care about. Each group of four develops a list of criteria which are then collectively refined in order that the class as a whole ends up with a clear, detailed vision of the futures they wish to achieve and those they wish to avoid.

As the group's criteria emerge I begin to play the role of questioner – pushing them to defend these values, deliberately doubting their conclusions in order that they develop skills to defend them against rigorous critique. What does a peaceful world mean and is that possible? Whose justice are we talking about here? Such questioning is a strategic part of the empowerment process and students find themselves working as a group to defend each others' conclusions.

At the end of this first section of the course students have typically made remarkably efficient progress towards establishing a rigorous and consensual framework for ethical judgment.

...under Ross I learned more in those two courses (Ethics and Business in Society) than in all my other papers combined. The level of insight and depth Ross possesses is, to the best of my knowledge is unparalleled. I often spend a lot of time speaking to lecturers trying to gain valuable insight into topics surplus to the course. I can say without doubt that Ross is more insightful and more passionate about teaching and academia than any professor I have spoken to. I don't think he realizes that he has a special ability to inspire students and in doing so getting the best out of them. If every teacher were a Ross then this would be a most effective way to teach. Unfortunately it is very hard to make a judgment on what the university system could be like based on Ross McDonald because he is simply head and shoulders above any other teacher.

(Extract from a letter sent to my HoD by a former student, 2010)

Phase two – integrating theory and practicing values in everyday life

I now introduce a broad range of academic materials including philosophical traditions in ethics from both a western and non-western perspective. All of this material is introduced to bolster the understandings that students have already developed for themselves. We find that what they hold to be critical ethical outcomes and values are ones shared by all philosophical theories of any weight. To present great thinkers' voices as a means to validating students' self-created perspectives is wholly different in impact from presenting them as answers that the learner should passively accept as externally-derived 'truths'. This method supports an active process of meaning-making and validates students' judgments. Students' self-respect increases tangibly as they realize that they are collectively capable of clearly discerning what the great minds in ethical philosophy have concluded.

The 'eye-opening' exercises also introduced at this point are designed to further this by having students test the values they have identified. Thus if compassion is seen to be of critical importance students might be asked to document their own meat consumption, watch a short film on factory farming and write on how they resolve any psychological contradictions. If helpfulness is mentioned they might be asked to spend one morning seeking out opportunities to practice this value. In developing these exercises I ensure that all involve action and reflection. In the latter example, students are asked to be helpful and to write 2-3 pages on what they did, how they felt before, during and after acting, how the recipients responded and what they think such actions do for relationships.

These reflective exercises build on the specific values raised by the class and they are accordingly instructive for our deliberations. The writings are formally assessed and extensive feedback is given. It is through these exercises that students really begin to make strong connections between their own ethical conduct and our collective wellbeing. Furthermore, they become increasingly aware of the complex psychological dynamics surrounding ethics-in-practice, including the many barriers that stand in our way and the deep satisfaction that can arise when these are overcome.

During these processes students open up as they come to increasingly recognize the validity of their own experience and the depth of their feelings around being good people. They learn to reflect and to observe their worlds more acutely. Ultimately they connect this to theory and evidence, begin to glimpse the potential we all have to exercise good values in everyday life and appreciate more the deeply positive feelings that result. All of these are key outcomes for a successful class in practical ethics.

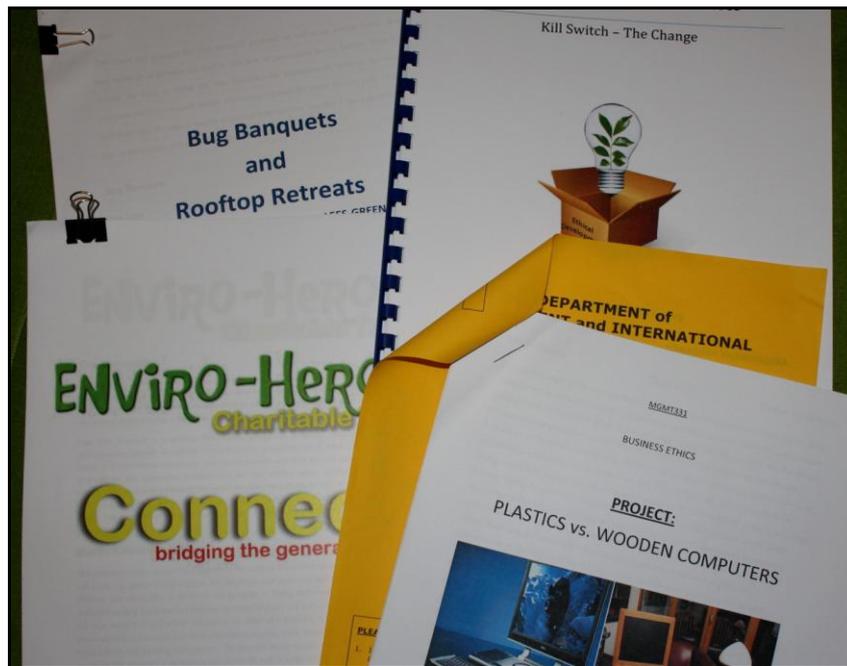
I chaired a panel of young people talking about careers in sustainability last night and one of them referred to your course as the turning point in her life – another one (of the four) also said it was a fantastic course (she may even have said it was the best one she did in her whole degree.) Thought you'd like to know!

(E-mail from a University of Auckland colleague, 2009)

Phase three – integrating ethical potential and professional capacity

The final component of the present course is about empowerment. Students are asked to think of how they might practically combine the values they have developed with the specific technical skills that they are developing in the course of their business training. If humane values can be combined with their entrepreneurial, financial or managerial abilities then not only do we work to facilitate well rounded people, but also to produce well rounded business professionals.

Students work to design 'for-benefit' businesses that have the potential to genuinely facilitate the better world that they have identified throughout the course. At this point a remarkable energy is unleashed as students find a harmonious alignment between 'head and heart'. Working in self-chosen groups of four, students develop some truly inspirational proposals for progressive business practice. As we explore what others are doing in the business world students expand their horizons as to what is possible. As the end of the semester approaches students present their final business plans to the class (and to the colleagues I invite along to give feedback). The completion of these assessed plans is designed to have the class finish the course feeling both hopeful and inspired as to their own potential to make a genuine contribution to our collective betterment.



A sample of completed projects

By exploring in relevant, reflective, critical, collaborative and empowering ways we co-create a learning experience that brings out the best in us all. At the conclusion of each course I find myself impressed and humbled by the potential for learning and the goodness that lies within the young people we teach.

- Really opened my eyes to the world around me and my own actions and what matters! Thank you!
- Ross stimulated my thinking, vast amount of knowledge. The web resources which were provided.
- Lecturer was always well prepared and knowledgeable and stimulated my learning and interest greatly. His enthusiasm and insight was well received and clear to see.
- The sources of information eg TED talks, books, which we are directed to. Examples such as Bhutan and other experiences that Ross has had. Discussion and response to questions from students.
- Video resources/ websites. Connection with real world which is mixed nicely with theory. Business ideas assignment made the issues that we face real.
- Video resources. Lectures. Students questions. Group interaction.
- The group assignment was challenging and meaningful and encouraged innovative and ethical thinking. It was a thinking course as opposed to relying on raw learning material.
- The topics that are covered and the breadth and depth they are done in. The relation of the beginning of the course and the strong point that it has together. Working with the 'open floor/class' mentality instead of traditional lecture structure.
- The topics discussed were very interesting and allowed me to really engage and think about what I could do to change things.

(Excerpt from formative feedback question “What was most helpful for your learning?”, Business Ethics class, 2010)

Large class teaching – Business in Society

BUSINESS IN SOCIETY - MGMT 231

ROSS McDONALD

Brilliant Lecturer - Dynamic, inspiring & incredibly knowledgeable!

- lecture content is really relevant & useful & links together so well - a coherent picture of free Market thinking & globalization.
- Course Readings are again amazing. So informative & interesting - excellent selection.

Ross has a friendly, approachable manner & is easy to talk to. His command of the English language & his way of describing & explaining is PHENOMENAL!

This Lecturing is First-Class & I can honestly say This paper has inspired me to become a more aware & socially active member of society.

(Student comment, Business in Society course, 2010)

My second-year course in 'Business in Society', aims to provide students with a coherent picture of what is happening in the interconnected realms of economy, ecology, media, culture and politics. It is a large class with students from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and this demands a style of delivery that is different from that I employ in smaller class teaching.

Whereas the third year class is designed as dialogue, the class in Business in Society relies on more structured delivery as I work to integrate broad themes and help students to see the interconnections that are shaping their world. This requires that I convey information in clear and compelling ways and I work to connect the abstract with the everyday world that students experience. Central to my practice in this class is story-telling. I enliven content with imagery, personal experience and video material all of which is designed to bring alive the theories that we discuss. In this class we aim to build a holistic understanding and cover a vast amount of material from resource depletion, to climate change, to the history of free market expansion and the psychology of materialism.



Your world in a coffee cup – How everyday things connect us to the world. Business in Society lecture.

Throughout the course, exercises and reflective writings are employed to deepen reflection and to make learning personally relevant. Over the years students have been asked to participate in a range of carefully targeted exercises, including:

- calculating their own ecological footprints,
- turning their televisions off for a week
- creating advertising copy
- making formal submissions to government
- raising money for worthy causes
- accounting for the contents of their shopping trolleys

The exercises are designed to have them engage critically and creatively with the themes we are discussing and with the world around them. In each instance the aim is identical to the ethics course – to integrate academic theory with action, current events and personal reflection.

We also connect our learning to the contents of the newspaper to show how applicable what we discuss is to the unfolding nature of contemporary affairs. Articles from both local and global media are posted on a regular basis as are web-sites, blogs and wikis relating to our discussions. This allows us to maximize the relevance of academic learning and the formal essays that students complete are always designed to deepen understanding of theory and current events (see assessment section for more details).

Although size can impede the flow of conversation in large groups I take every opportunity to seek questions by creating an open environment and employing facilitating techniques like circulating envelopes for questions which are fully answered in class. I also teach without notes in order to be maximally aware of the dynamics of the class, be alert to confusion or distraction, and change pace accordingly. I attempt to answer all questions fully and ensure

the whole class understands the explanation. Despite its large size sessions are typically full of interjection and debate.

I've learnt more during the semester of this paper than any of my other ones - v. well ~~to~~ taught, lecturer clearly is passionate about the subjects, which makes what he says very easy to ^{understand &} remember. Excellent teaching method, reflected in the high level of attention held by the class ~~to~~ during every lecture.

2008

Brilliant course - one of the most relevant & interesting I have taken to date, went well beyond my expectations! Lecturing was incredibly articulate, questions answered effectively, course objectives clearly defined, we knew what was expected of us re assessments. Also made me aware of my ignorance in many regards. Motivated me to learn more on an individual level. Can't really suggest any improvements.

★★★★★

2009

This was definitely the best business school paper I have ever taken. It further opened up my eyes to the world & even helped to shape my personal views. I found it extremely interesting & it was an absolute pleasure being taught by someone so knowledgeable. I would recommend this paper to everyone.

2009

Management 231

Best course I've ever done, structure and content were great. Totally eye opening. See you in 331.

(I feel more engaged with the world, and able to have intelligent debate as a result of this course).

2010

(Sample student comments, Business in Society course)

Student feedback

At the end of every course I ask students to write about how they have found the experience. This provides me with a wealth of qualitative feedback to supplement the formal University course and lecturer evaluations. Given that the open feedback is completed anonymously, students are free to be honest and all comments are useful. Suggestions for improvement are taken on board and shape future delivery. These have been particularly valuable in refining the balance of class discussion and lecturing over the years. Feedback also alerts me to areas that might need ‘mini-lectures’ to clarify, and to new resources that might be useful for future students.

Feedback is not however limited to the conclusion of a course and one of the great advantages of creating open learning spaces is that these allow students to give constant feedback throughout the semester. The groups I work with know that any constructive suggestions are always welcomed.

Course evaluations

In summative University course evaluations students are asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on course content, design and delivery.

Course Name	Course Code	Year	Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this course	I learnt a lot in this course	This course helped deepen my understanding (of the subject)
			Mean value		
Business Ethics	MGMT 331	2009	4.63/5	Not asked	4.79/5
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2007	8.86/10	9.15/10	9.31/10
Issues in Society, Culture and Business	MGMT 733	2007	9.46/10	9.82/10	9.64/10
Issues in Society, Culture and Business	MGMT 733	2006	10/10	9.55/10	Not asked
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2006	8.91/10	9.02/10	Not asked
Business Ethics	MGMT 331	2006	9.38/10	9.38/10	Not asked
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2005	9.21/10	9.50/10	9.50/10
Business Ethics	MGMT 331	2005	9.0/10	8.68/10	9.03/10

Lecturer evaluations

In summative University lecturer evaluations students are asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on teaching practice.

Course Name	Course Code	Year	Overall, the lecturer was an effective teacher	The lecturer stimulated my interest in the subject	The lecturer responded to students' questions in a constructive way
			Mean value		
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2009	4.76/5	4.71/5	4.83/5
Business Ethics	MGMT 331	2009	4.85/5	4.75/5	4.85/5
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2008	9.42/10	9.46/10	9.6/10
Business Ethics	MGMT 331	2008	8.42/10	9.02/10	9.28/10
Issues in Society, Culture and Business	MGMT 733	2006	Not asked	Not asked	9.77/10
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2006	Not asked	Not asked	9.57/10
Business Ethics	MGMT 331	2006	Not asked	Not asked	9.77/10
Business in Society	MGMT 231	2005	Not asked	9.84/10	9.68/10
Current Issues in Business, Society and Culture	MGMT 337	2002	9.56/10	9.46/10	9.57/10

"What did you like best about Ross McDonald's lecturing?"	
Knowledge in the subject	
Well structured	
Clear explanations	
Easily understood / used plain language	
Overall clarity	
Good mix of practical and theoretical	
Examples / anecdotes used	
Relates content to "real world" / UP-TO-DATE	
Interesting presentation	
Use of audio-visual aids	
Varied activities	
Participative approach	Q+A
Class discussion	
Quantity / quality of handouts	
Quantity / quality of overheads	0002
Provides handouts of overheads	
Good pace of presentation / speech	
Good use of voice / ACCENT	
Well organised	
Sense of humour	
Friendly / approachable manner	
Attitude towards students	
Enthusiasm	
Helpfulness	
INSPIRING / MOTIVATING / CHARISMA	
GOOD LECTURING / PERFECT	
FAIRNESS / ACCEPTS THERE ARE OTHER VIEWS / EXPLORING POINTS OF VIEW	
GOOD ASSESSMENT SYSTEM	

(Summary of open feedback, Business in Society course, 2006)

Assessment

My assessment generally falls into three categories: formal essays, final examinations and reflective writings.

Formal Essays

Each class I teach has at least one formal essay designed to build academic research and writing competencies. Essays focus on contemporary issues to maximize engagement and I provide detailed instructions often extending to two or more pages. Each requires extensive

reading, deep reflection and personal judgment and these are graded with detailed comments on strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve performance.

In recent years students have been asked to write about the dynamics of the oil industry, food security, carbon trading, child labour, the Millennium Development Goals, the virtual water trade and mining in New Zealand. I expect a very high standard of critical writing. It is rare that grades are questioned and a typical semester sees no more than a couple of requests for re-consideration. This I take to be a sign of the high level of mutual respect that we manage to create as a class.

Ross,

This course has been by far the most challenging paper I have taken in terms of pushing myself to think.

Essays have always been my strongest point when it comes to assessment. After having received a rather poor grade for my 231 essay, I was a bit bummed. But I took a while to ponder over your reasons for giving me that grade and I completely agree with you. Out of the many teachers I have had through the years, a handful of them have ~~been~~ ~~are~~ motivated me. But you are the 1st to have really opened my eyes and encouraged me to think about the wider world.

(Student comment, Business in Society course, 2010)

Final Examinations

Given the greater emphasis on factual learning at the second year level a final examination is always given. For the third year class it is not a particularly constructive mode of assessment, although I have occasionally given factual tests to ensure that students are keeping up with readings and lectures. In the second year class the final examination question is highly integrative. Students have to show that they have engaged in thoughtful reflection to achieve a good grade and to help in this they are given some detail on what the final examination will contain beforehand. Over the years I have found this to be valuable (not to mention respectful) as it allows students to prepare considered answers free of the panic often induced by a surprise final exam. This raises the expected standards for writing and I firmly believe it aids long-term perspective building and cements learning in place.

Reflective writings

Reflective writings are used extensively at both the second and third year levels for reasons outlined above and all are assessed. Given the nature of reflection these require particular care and I have built a very rigorous process of evaluation. Students are asked to complete their reflective writings prior to meeting in class to discuss the topic and the quality of exchange is greatly enhanced as students have thought about the issues in some depth and have well-considered views to share.

The writing produced by students is useful in a number of ways, including allowing me to understand how a class is thinking and where barriers to understanding lie. As such they aid considerably in fine tuning delivery. In the smaller third year class in Ethics my feedback on writings allows me to develop an on-going and very tailored dialogue with individual students. This allows me to cater to unique learning needs.

The core grading criteria of genuine engagement and deep thoughtfulness may sound somewhat vague, but they are far from that. As students develop their own unique voice and learn to question their assumptions, beliefs and personal barriers they discernibly mature and by the end of semester most students are writing strikingly insightful reflections. At the beginning though, such modes of learning are often quite unfamiliar and as such I spend a good deal of time talking with classes about concerns and criteria and I implement processes whereby model student answers are made available to the struggling (with permission) and any unsatisfactory writings can be re-submitted until the appropriately high standard is attained. This latter practice, while unusual in a university, is important as it maximizes the potential for successful learning. At the end of these courses students regularly comment on how important and useful this mode of assessment has been for them and how much they have learned as a result.

Wow, what an experience. I did not expect the assignment to be so emotionally taxing. It was a great experience Ross and I hope you ask this assignment for future classes because the insight and self-analysis is so detoxifying.

(E-mail from Business Ethics student, 2010)

Leadership in teaching

“...When I was a student I found your lectures nothing short of inspirational and the very essence of what I consider university to be about –challenging, thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating. When I started teaching, I always had your lectures at the back of my mind as a blueprint for what good teaching should be all about. When I won an Early Career Teaching Award three years ago I wrote that I had a great role model during my own university years while studying management and that I wanted my students to walk out of my classes in the same ‘enlightened’ way that I walked out of yours.

(Excerpt from an e-mail from a colleague, University of Auckland, 2011)

My collaborative learning techniques have been adopted by peers in each department that I have taught in. As co-ordinator of the Business, Society and Culture programme in the Management Department at the University of Auckland (2000-2006) I was involved in embedding some of the first truly collaborative courses involving up to four teachers in the classroom at any one time. The courses we designed as a team of five introduced both collaborative teaching and reflective assessments. In the years that have followed both of these approaches have been widely adopted in considerable part due to the positive reception by students in our B,S & C courses.

In the area of teaching ethics my approaches have also been adopted by a number of teachers both in New Zealand and abroad. After being mentored as tutors in my courses, at least three of my former students moved into teaching the subject and are now teaching ethics in creative, collaborative ways at New Zealand universities.

My publications on teaching philosophy and practice have led to invitations to train tertiary teachers in Bhutan, to coordinate a national workshop on introducing Business Ethics into top Indian business schools, to write for the Humanistic Network of Management educators based at Harvard University and to demonstrate my techniques at universities in Thailand, Samoa and the United Kingdom. All of these constituencies are particularly intrigued by the humanistic approaches I use as these are seen as breaking new ground in a complex and subtle area of education.

Over the years I have also written a number of articles on teaching including the following:

What are the Principles of Humanistic Education? (Book chapter in *Humanistic Management Education*, Cambridge University Press. *In Press*)

Educating for Happiness: Some Practical Questions and Possible Answers. *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 2010

Reframing Management Education: A Humanistic Approach. *Interchange*, 2000

Seven Exercise to Get Students Thinking. *Teaching Business Ethics Journal*, 1999

Information and Transformation in Teaching Business Ethics. *Teaching Business Ethics Journal*, 1997

More recently I was appointed to both the Business Schools Curriculum Review Committee and chaired the Management Department's own curriculum review process, both of which have developed plans that are being implemented currently to build more collaborative and reflective pedagogies.

Over the past 18 months both the University of Auckland Business School and the Department of Management and International Business (MIB) have undertaken major reviews of our undergraduate offerings. Ross has played a very significant role in shaping the outcomes of both reviews as we move towards delivering increasingly integrative programmes. Ross's critical input to these processes extends his influence as a creative educator of the highest regard. His insightful approach to teaching inspires both his students and his close colleagues to strive for excellence by challenging the relative safety of conventional teaching. He was chosen to chair the Management major review by his peers, many of whom are excellent teachers in their own right. We were concerned to address not just content, but also pedagogy and delivery. Together this team has developed a forward-thinking programme that we believe will serve us well in the coming years and equip our students to play an increasingly constructive role in shaping an uncertain future.

(Letter from a colleague, 2011)

My current international work is designing a foundational course in humanistic values for the Royal University of Bhutan where my work is seen as central to fulfilling the government's 'Educating for Happiness' initiative (Bhutan's national goal being to maximize Gross National Happiness and not GNP). I am currently developing curricula and training teachers in collaborative processes and will be running more intensive capacity-building workshops in July and December of this year.

"In our latest work together Dr Ross ran a three day workshop for lecturers, Deans and Directors. These were excellent for us and all participants reported feeling genuinely inspired by the positive energy and practical experience that Dr Ross shared with us. We now plan to implement the programme he has developed nationally across 10 colleges. In the workshops the breadth of knowledge and his commitment to finding creative solutions in the classroom were very impressive. We now plan to bring Dr Ross back for continuing consultations so that we can help build teacher capacity in the Royal University system over the coming months/years. The educational approach that he has developed in humanistic teaching is of great interest to us as we work to improve educational delivery."

(Extract from a letter of reference, 2011)

Towards the future

I would like to offer my sincere thanks for this nomination and the opportunity to reflect on my practice. As I look forward, my primary interest lies in building cross-institutional collaborations among students in a range of countries and the technology we now have available to us holds remarkable promise in this regard. Ultimately the greatest reward for me is to see the young people I work with grow in their considerable capacities through our work together. Their feedback provides me with all the motivation and fulfillment I require.

...I wanted to thank you for all those lectures I've listened to over the past two semesters. Apart from them being so interesting due to the eloquence of delivery, I always felt that they were like coming home. It was as though you picked up the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that I had in my head, and a fair few more that I hadn't known about, and fitted the pieces together for me so that I could see the picture. Thank you for that Ross, they were the most valuable papers I've ever done for myself as a person and for my understanding and view of the world. Thanks again for shaping my life and best wishes for your future

(Business in Society student, 2000)

Dr Ross McDonald
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