



## **Promoting conference presentation skills for diverse student groups.**

### **Key Words**

conference presentation, networking, communication, diversity, peer learning, self assessment

### **Abstract**

Training research students with transferrable skills applicable beyond academia is in line with the goals of the recent ACOLA review, which has been adopted as the latest blueprint for improving postgraduate training pathways in Australia (McGagh et al., 2016). One major challenge in training postgraduate research students is their diverse background. These students present with a broad range of skills (including linguistic), various confidence levels in presenting themselves and their work, and individual personalities that impact how they network and collaborate. Nonetheless, this diversity presents a unique opportunity to promote effective communication skills in the presentation of complex concepts to diverse audience backgrounds. Here, the incorporation of student-directed and peer learning (Boud et al., 1999) is explored in promoting enhanced conference presentation and networking skills, in groups of STEM postgraduate research students from a wide range of disciplines at Macquarie University. These workshops are delivered over six weeks, in a three-hour class per week, in small groups of sixteen students. Each week, engagement is promoted between students through ongoing peer learning and review (De Grez et al., 2012), with encouragement to informally assess presentation style, and promote improvement in communication style. Students actively participate each week under general guidance to develop their active skills in several key foci, including: networking, chairing symposia, fielding questions, delivering and optimising oral and poster presentations, and critically reviewing effective presentation approaches by others. In addition to receiving peer assessment, students are required to self-assess video recordings of their presentation to be able to complete the course (De Grez et al., 2012). Students may also choose to develop and hone a three-minute thesis presentation, which is a key component of the annual postgraduate calendar. This student-directed and peer learning promotes effective conference presentation and networking skills for postgraduate researchers with diverse linguistic backgrounds. The value-added from this type of training is discussed here, in developing not only transferrable skills, but also collegiality and confidence in the students that participate in this workshop.

### **References**

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