Name(s) and department(s) of applicant(s)
Dr Amal El-Sawad
Department of Human Resource Management and Organisation Studies

Title of innovation:
Management and Music: harnessing the creative arts and student-led research to create an inclusive co-curated online course

If your application is successful, would you like us to add your case study to the Teaching and Learning space?
Yes

Please describe how your teaching innovation is distinctive in one sentence:
My teaching innovation harnesses the creative arts - in particular music and creative writing - to help students critically evaluate core management concepts and theories and share findings from their own original research in engaging ways.

Please describe how your teaching innovation has a specific focus on inclusivity in one sentence:
To ensure all students feel included and can see themselves and their cultural contexts represented in their course materials, they are encouraged to view themselves as co-creators of knowledge and co-curators of aspects of their course, conducting original research, contributing to a unique collection of student-authored examples and case-studies from around the world, representing a valuable shared and inclusive learning resource of benefit to all students (and tutors) and offering an innovative, student-led approach to de-colonising the curriculum.

Please describe and evaluate your teaching innovation (for example creative, novel, original) in any aspect of course design (teaching, learning, assessment) and include reference to inclusion and engagement.
Please write this in a form that can be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

I have recently developed a MOOC and two modules for our new Coursera online degree. The Coursera programme demands a completely new approach to course design. Learning is asynchronous and entirely online. We are designing modules for large numbers of independent and solitary learners all over the world. There are no teaching centres and no physical campus for our Coursera students to attend. Aside from two live webinars of 1 hour duration at the start and end of each 10-week module, there is no direct synchronous contact between students and tutors. This presents considerable design challenges. First, there is a real risk of students feeling isolated, disconnected from each other and from us and, in turn, becoming increasingly passive and disengaged from their learning. Second, it is important that all students feel included and can see themselves and their cultural contexts represented in the course and in the case-studies and examples presented. However, in the existing academic and research literature, as we know, some cultural contexts are over-represented, others under-represented, and some are almost entirely absent. Relying on this literature as the sole teaching resource risks re-creating the status quo.

My approach to course design is underpinned by a teaching philosophy which views students and, crucially, encourages them to view themselves, as active and engaged researchers, co-creators of knowledge and co-curators of aspects of their course. I also draw on the creative arts - in particular music and creative writing - to help students: connect with each other; listen to and capture diverse voices; develop a deep and empathic understanding of the lived experiences of managers and employees; present and share their research findings and ideas in novel creative ways; and critically engage with, debate and discuss core concepts and theories. I have experimented with and refined this approach in my face-to-face teaching over a number of years and have witnessed time and again the transformative impact it can have. So, I set about adapting this approach for the online environment.

In both my ’Interpreting Management’ module and also my MOOC (’Explore management concepts through metaphor and music’), I draw on the universal shared language of music to introduce key concepts to students in ways which they can immediately relate to. For example, students begin exploring organisational and work design and management styles through the musical metaphors of jazz bands and orchestras. They investigate employees’ lived experience of work by listening to and analysing the lyrics of work-related folk songs from around the world, researching, sharing, and discussing examples from their own cultural contexts with their fellow students. They are
introduced to organisational culture by analysing company songs and they compose their own corporate anthems. They create and share their own music ‘productivity playlists’ to help them think more deeply about the concept of work motivation. There is no loss of intellectual rigour here – the musical dimension is simply a pedagogical aid to promote critical engagement with management theory and to deepen understanding of core concepts.

Students learn about management and the lived experience of work by undertaking research in their own organisations and communities. For example, they: conduct interviews with managers; visit a fast-food restaurant to observe how it functions and how employees, customers and managers behave; and, survey people employed in the gig economy and McJob style roles. They present and share their research findings with their fellow students in creative ways, for example through a creative writing exercise called ‘managerial pen portraits’ and an audio drama assignment called ‘the McJob Monologues’. By conducting their own research and creating their own creative case-studies, all students are able to see themselves and their particular cultural contexts represented. By sharing their examples with each other, students co-create a rich and diverse learning resource. Involving all students in co-creating and co-curating aspects of their course in this way offers a valuable and innovative approach to de-colonising the curriculum.

Please describe the actual or potentially beneficial effect on student learning and include discussion of some source of external evaluation and/or (ideally), student feedback.

Please write this so that can be published unaltered on the Teaching and Learning space.

The beneficial effect on student learning can be summarised as follows:

- Harnessing the creative arts - in particular music and creative writing - helps students to: engage with each other, alleviating feelings of isolation; critically evaluate core concepts and theories in fun innovative ways; develop an empathic understanding of the lived experience of work; express their thoughts and ideas creatively.
- Students become active and engaged learners, co-creating knowledge by conducting their own original research and sharing their findings with their fellow students. This ensures that all students’ voices are included and heard, and all students are able to see their own working lives and their own cultural contexts represented in the course.
- Collectively, students’ contributions represent an impressive collection of examples, case-studies and research summaries from around the world. This is a unique and valuable learning resource benefitting all students (and tutors).
- Involving all students in co-creating and co-curating aspects of their course in this way offers a valuable and innovative approach to de-colonising the curriculum.

Since the subject of Management and Organisation Studies is interdisciplinary, this approach is transferable and could be adapted for use by College colleagues in other departments and disciplines. This approach can also be used in developing innovative and impactful training courses for College staff and managers.

It is early days in our Coursera journey, but feedback to date has been very promising. Students who tested the course before official launch gave it a rating of 4.75/5 and offered the following feedback:

- This is a super cool course. Very innovative.
- Exciting course.
- This is something really great, innovative and interesting. Loved it.
- Grateful thanks to Dr Amal El-Sawad for a melodious offering.

Our Coursera and DL Programme Director received feedback from the University of London that this course design was:

- the best seen to date across all the member institutions

The course was also commended by a University of London review panel and described as:

- Sophisticated and well designed
- Lively, imaginative and interesting
- Encourages diverse creative thinking practices useful in management contexts
- The comparison of management and music is rich and speaks to different parts of learners’ lives

Our partners at Coursera in the USA also favourably reviewed the course and commented:
The diversity of assignments is wonderful. Learners will likely find many that align with their preferred way to express themselves.

Please describe any help which you have received from professional support staff (e.g. Careers, CeDAS, Educational Development) in developing, implementing or evaluating your initiative.

We have worked in partnership with the University of London Worldwide team to develop the Coursera programme. I would like to mention in particular Vicky Devaney who is a Learning Designer at UoL. Vicky has offered a tremendous amount of support, encouragement and positive feedback throughout the process, particularly in relation to creative teaching innovation. She has reviewed all of my design work and offered valuable suggestions, drawing on her extensive experience of designing for the online environment. This has been especially helpful to me since this is the first time I have developed courses for an entirely online asynchronous programme.