

# Building An Academic Community, Cohort Identity and Student Belonging: The MBA Virtual Writing Group Pilot

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**Why ?**



## The context

The BU Masters of Business Administration (MBA) is a one year programme that attracts students worldwide. The programme prides itself with building a strong cohort identity and sense of belonging ('my MBA family'). With most of their classes being done virtually due to the pandemic, the 2020-21 cohort faced the challenge of having very limited peer contact and support in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of their studies, the independent work on final project.

With both the MBA Director and the Project unit leader having previous experience with writing groups (WG), it was a call for action.

**What ?**



## Writing groups

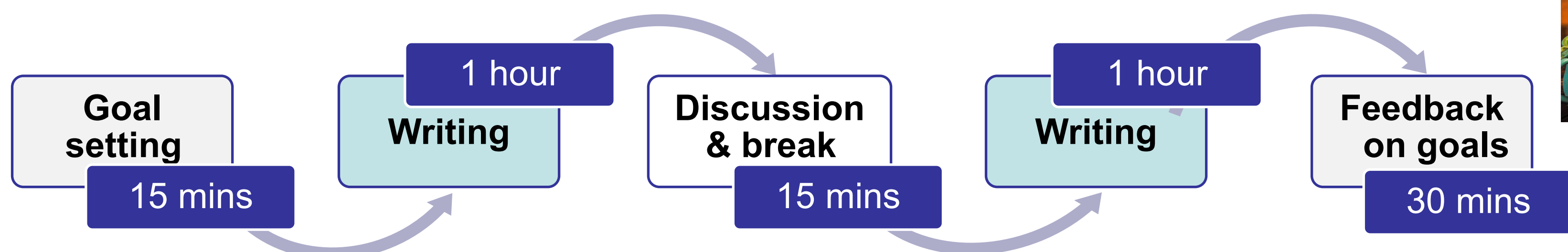
The value of writing groups is often referred to (Murray 2012; Murray & Moore 2006; Rocco & Hatcher 2011), however research regarding their links to academic scholarship is limited (Guerin et al. 2020). They are also most likely to be undertaken by academic staff or doctoral students and there is limited research.

**How ?**



## The MBA Virtual WG pilot initiative

- 4 sessions of 3 hours (9 am -12noon), once a week from 14 May'21 – 4 June'21, delivered via MS Teams;
- Open to students and staff to work on their own research-related tasks, e.g. reading, writing, reviewing feedback;
- Informal evaluation at the end of each session to improve the experience with the next one
- Optional activity; 25% of the cohort joined the pilot; Time and day did not suit some students.



**Which way ahead?**

Reflections Evidence & impact



## Staff views

- All participating students wished to continue.
- It was good to get to work with students informally and make progress on our own work.
- Many alluded to sense of belonging to a wider academic community, and appreciation of cohort, companionship and learning from each other (non-structured group mentoring and reverse mentoring).
- When probed on the running the sessions without academic participation, students noted they appreciated staff offering their time, facilitating the session and leading by example.
- The uptake might have been better if it were possible for the promotion and the first session to be done in-person in class.
- Time management might be a challenge with more people.

## Impact:

- The MBA\_WG'21 continues with a set of 6 more sessions.
- Learning gains (LG): Opportunity to review student perceptions of their LGs, if shared in their reflective essays.
- Unit delivery for 2021-22 to embed WGs as co-curricular activity.



## Student views

*"I have the feeling that I am being a part of something bigger than I am. I love the group and I love the dynamic."*

*"It [the WG] strikes me as an interesting opportunity for lecturers to lead by example. Quite often students might know about what lecturers are doing in terms of research, but they don't actually see the person doing the research. I think there's a value in this for students, particularly undergraduate students, to take part in an activity at the same time as and be able to see their lecturer doing the same thing that they are being asked to do."*

*"When it's an informal thing, the accountability is actually self-generated within the student rather than imposed from outside, which is probably a more valuable thing to develop and learn."*

## References:

- Guerin, C., Aitchison, C. and Carter, S., 2020. Digital and distributed: learning and teaching doctoral writing through social media, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 25(2), 238-254
- Murray, R., 2012. Developing a community of research practice, *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(5), 783-800.
- Murray, R. and Moore, S., 2006. *The handbook of academic writing: A fresh approach*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK)
- Rocco, T.S. and Hatcher, T.G., 2011. *The handbook of scholarly writing and publishing*. Jossey-Bass.