



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project

In your own words: Experiences of first-time distance learners.

An Invitation

My name is Mark Brown. I am Director of Teaching, Learning and Distance Education at Massey University. I am inviting you to participate in a research project that I am leading entitled, *'In your own words: Experiences of first-time distance learners'*. The project is funded by the Distance Education Hub (DEHub), which is an Australasian consortium of major distance education providers. Your agreement to take part in this study would be greatly appreciated.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to learn from the experiences of first-time distance learners to inform improvements in distance education. We want to learn from students, in their words, about the experience of being a first-time distance learner. The focus of this research has come about due to concerns about retention and completion rates for distance education and because of Massey University's commitment to providing an exceptional and distinctive learning experience for all students. We intend using the findings to improve current services and to produce a Student Guide for first-time distance learners. The findings will also be shared in a report for DeHub and during a Student Success colloquium for distance education providers. The study may also lead to conference presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles.

How were you chosen for this invitation?

We would like to invite you to participate because you are a first-time distance learner. This is based on your enrolment data, which was obtained with the University's permission. The same invitation has been extended to all first-time distance learners who have enrolled at Massey University for Semester 2, 2011.

If you would like to participate, how do you volunteer?

If you would like to volunteer, please email: inyourownwords@massey.ac.nz. Given that data collection needs to commence before the start of Semester 2, please express your interest as soon as possible.

We hope that you will volunteer to be one of a small group of 15 participants with whom we can work closely to gather deep and valuable information. However, if the number of volunteers exceeds our target number of participants, we will need to select a range of volunteers who represent the diversity of distance learners at Massey University. In other words, we are hoping to recruit participants who range in: age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, subject of study, type of study, entry qualification, along with prior or current experience of tertiary study on-campus. Whatever your unique demographic combination, we would like to hear from you.

We aim to notify all volunteers with the outcome of the sampling process by Friday 08 July, 2011. If you are selected, the *Participation Consent Form* will be either posted or emailed to you at that time. You will be asked to read and sign the Consent Form and then return it to the Research Team by New Zealand post.

If you participate, what will you need to do?

We would like you to participate in the project for no more than 15 weeks. Taking everything in to account (as outlined below), we estimate that participation will amount to 1 hour each week:

- **Orientation Week:**

You will need to read an orientation module (either hardcopy, softcopy or online) and receive an initial communication (either telephone or Skype) from the Project Manager. We will then ask you to complete a short survey (either hardcopy or online).

- **Twelve Weeks (maximum):**

We will send you reflective prompts by email or text message. Thinking about these prompts, we would like you to record a diary for 5 minutes each week. We will provide either a Sony Bloggie camcorder to record a video diary or a digital audio recorder to record a voice diary, depending on your preference. You can record your diary in short episodes or collate your thoughts in to a single episode each week. You will be asked to submit your diary at the end of each week (either softcopy in the post or electronically).

- **Final Week:**

Upon completion of your diary, there will be another short survey (either hardcopy or online).

- **Review Week:**

The final task will be to review the transcript of your entire diary. We will ask you to notify the Research Team with any amendments within 7 days.

If you participate, what are the benefits?

We will offer you a token of our appreciation (*koha*) upon receipt of your final diary episode. However, the greatest benefit of participation is likely to be the activity of self-reflection, which plays an important role in supporting better learning outcomes. In addition, Massey University is likely to gather valuable feedback from first-time distance learners that will be shared among the wider distance education community to help improve the learning experience for future students.

If you participate, what are the risks of being involved?

You may feel concerned about being identified via your diary recordings. For example, you might be concerned that participation will influence your relationship with academic staff and/or grades in the papers that you are studying. You may also be concerned about exposing your identity via video and/or voice recordings to the international community during the dissemination phase of this project.

There is no risk that your participation in this study will affect your relationship with academic staff or grades in the papers that you studying. We would like to reassure you that your diary recordings will remain confidential and only be viewed by members of the Research Team. You will be given the opportunity to review and edit the transcript of your diary data. No dissemination of your diary data will happen without your explicit permission. Your diary data will be reported using an alias unless you give explicit permission for your real name to be used. If you give permission for your name to be associated with your diary data, you will be given the opportunity to release selected extracts of your diary recordings for dissemination to the international community, during conferences, for example. However, although it is not the Research Team's intention to upload diary recordings to the internet, we are unable to provide a guarantee of absolute anonymity.

Your survey will be anonymous. No attempt will be made to match survey data with your diary recordings.

If you participate, what are your rights?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point; ask any questions about the study at any time during participation; decline to answer any particular question (or reflect on any particular issue); provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the research team. When the project is concluded, you will receive an Executive Summary of our final report and will be given access to the full report upon request. In addition, you will receive a Student Guide to Successful Distance Learning.

If you participate, how will your data be managed and stored?

Raw data will be stored securely in password protected electronic files or locked filing cabinets for five years after completion of the project, when it will be destroyed.

Who else is involved in this research?

From Massey University, my research team includes Helen Hughes (Research Assistant, Office of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor Academic & International) and Dr Sandi Shillington (Manawatu Campus Registrar). Our partners at Charles Sturt University include: Professor Mike Keppell (Director, Flexible Learning Institute), Natasha Hard (Research Officer, Flexible Learning Institute) and Liz Smith (Director of Transition Project).

If you participate, what do you do if you have concerns about the research?

If you have any concerns please contact Project Leader, Associate Professor Mark Brown, Director of Teaching, Learning and Distance Education, Office of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic & International) on m.e.brown@massey.ac.nz or +64 (0) 350 5600 x 5423.

Who should you contact about further information about the research?

Should you have any questions, please consult our website (<http://inyourownwords.massey.ac.nz/>) or contact Project Manager, Helen Hughes on inyourownwords@massey.ac.nz or +64 (0) 21 318 982.

Yours sincerely,



Associate Professor Mark Brown

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 11/34. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Nathan Matthews, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 8729, email humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz