



# HOW DO WE OVERCOME NON-ATTENDANCE AND LACK OF ENGAGEMENT OF STUDENTS IN INTERVENTIONS DESIGNED TO INCREASE STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT?

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## ABSTRACT

In 2014 we successfully piloted an intervention to encourage a 'growth mindset' in DBS students, as part of a wider research initiative called the **'Heroic Imagination Project (HIP)**. Our aim was to test ways to change student attitudes, with the ultimate goal of increasing attendance, engagement and performance in our students. In 2015 we launched a randomised, placebo-controlled experiment, designed to compare the effect of the growth mindset versus a 'placebo' intervention on motivation and mindset in first year undergraduate students across several programmes in the college. The interventions were delivered during class time, but we encountered practical difficulties in reaching a sufficient and representative sample of students to participate in the experiment, largely due to low attendance.

## INTRODUCTION

The 'Heroic Imagination Project' (HIP) is a non-profit organization founded by psychologist Philip Zimbardo. The goal of the project is to increase individuals' ability to react positively to challenging situations, through research on "understanding the nature of everyday heroism and the psychology of personal and social growth" (Heroic Imagination Project, n.d., para 1). Research suggests that an important influence on our ability to learn and grow is a **'Growth Mindset'** (Dweck, 2008).

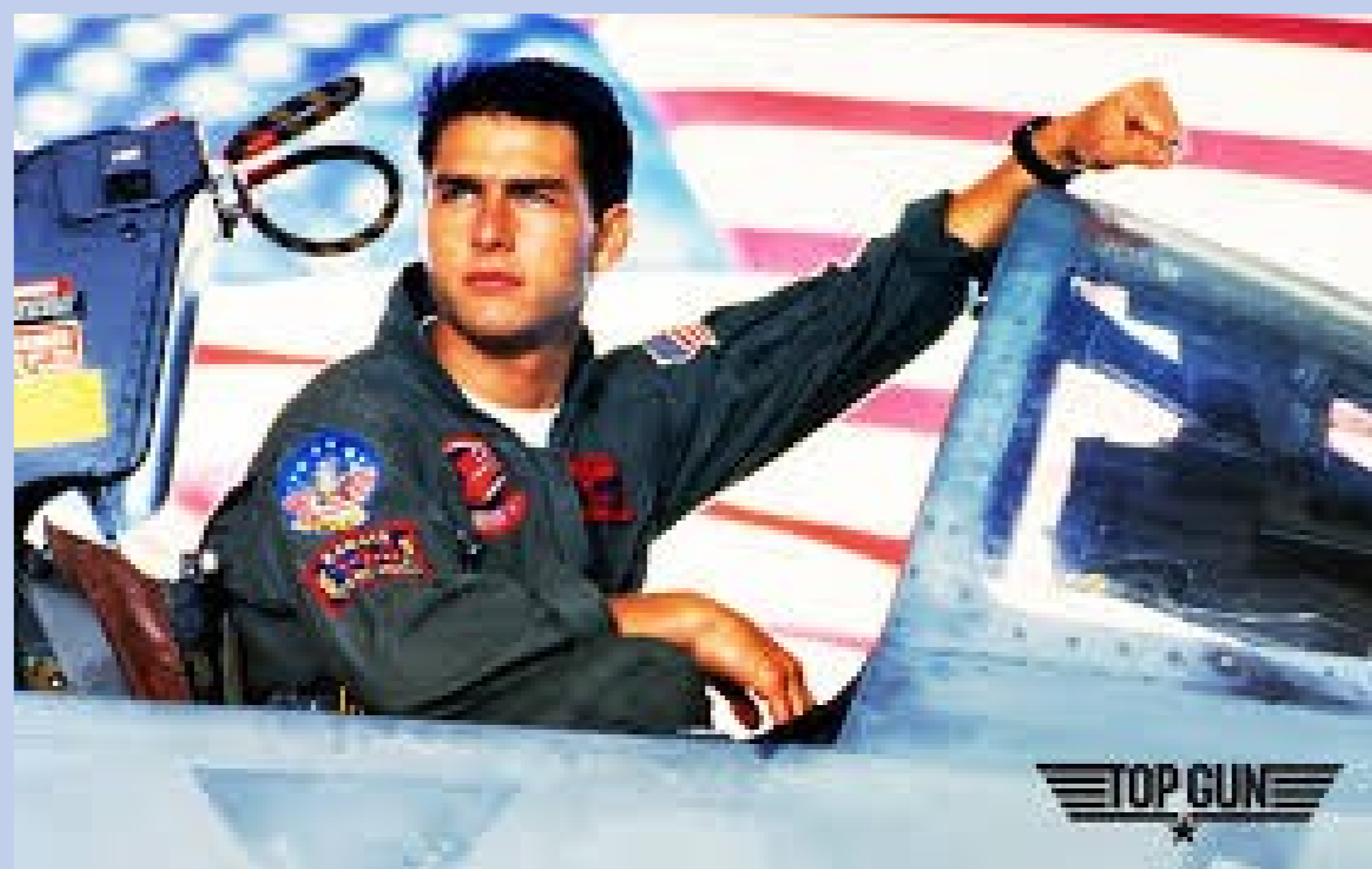
As part of the HIP, a 'Dickerson-Zimbardo Intervention Framework' has been developed for the delivery of interventions to increase 'everyday heroism', including an intervention to encourage a growth mindset in students (Dickerson, Wilkins, Gunderson & Zimbardo, 2013). These interventions are being tested at multiple sites to determine their efficacy in helping students towards greater academic achievements. Dublin Business School is now one of those sites, currently engaged in an ongoing test of the growth mindset intervention in our classrooms.

## PILOT

In 2013-14 we piloted the intervention with an opportunity sample of **61 part-time psychology students**. The intervention took place during normal class time. Taking approximately 90 minutes, it takes the form of an interactive class where students consider how they would act in hypothetical situations, and discuss these ideas with each other and the deliverer.

## PILOT METHOD:

We **randomly allocated** students to either the growth mindset intervention, or a placebo intervention, and afterward compared the students on questionnaire measures of their mindset, test anxiety, and their strategies for learning. **We found a significant increase in the students growth mindset, and a decrease in test anxiety** (Murphy, Hyland, Hyland, Frazer, Reid, Walsh & Dickerson, 2014)



**Figure 1: Flying high, like Maverick from Top Gun. A visual metaphor for our enthusiasm for the main study after such a successful pilot. What could go wrong?**

## MAIN STUDY

A research scholarship was awarded to facilitate the rolling out of the intervention on a wider scale, with a broader range of students.

AIMS:

- Use the **employability pillar** modules to access a representative sample of first year students.
- Using attendance lists, divide each class into two, randomly assigning each student to **either an mindset or placebo intervention** to be delivered at the same time on the same day.
- Take **baseline measures** of student mindset as early as possible
- Eventually use attendance and real performance as indicators of long term effectiveness of the interventions



**Figure 2: Like Reverend Billy (New York's Church of Stop Shopping) here, we want to do more than just 'Preach to the Choir'. How do we reach non-attenders?**

## DIFFICULTIES

Several methodological difficulties were encountered in trying to achieve our aims (see Table), and we will need to increase sample size before a reliable and meaningful analysis of results will be possible. Out of a possible pool of 197 students, 43 took part, and anecdotally, those who did take part were less engaged and interested in taking part than the part time students who had taken part in the pilot.

**Table showing the main difficulties encountered in trying to collect sufficient data and reach those who could most benefit.**

Problem	Details
Attendance	<p>Low attendance at class leads to low numbers for intervention (as low as 25%)</p> <p>Dividing small classes in two for experimental control led to classes that were too small to encourage real participation</p> <p>Are people who are in class more likely to have a growth mindset already?</p>
Timetabling	<p>Limited number of facilitators to deliver the interventions</p> <p>Timetable clash with facilitators own classes</p> <p>Only FT first year students of 'Learning to Learn' were therefore sampled</p>
Timeline	<p>When/where how do we get the best baseline?</p> <p>Fitting around assessment schedule</p>

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## REFERENCES:

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*To conclude :*

*How can we avoid these problems next time?*