



TIES: Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme

Large Grant Application Form: Teaching Improvement Progress Report¹

Project Title

Arts Network Program 2008

\$ Amount Awarded

\$49,494

\$ Amount Expended

\$33,304 expended in 2008; remainder committed for January/February 2009

Brief Project Description

In 2007, we had improved the Arts Network Mentoring Program in two important ways. Firstly, we refined our qualitative research processes in consultation with mentors in the program, and with colleagues in the Faculties of Economics & Business and Pharmacy. Secondly, we developed and piloted new systems for e-communication with participants in Arts Network, and with all first year students in the Faculty.

In 2008, building on the work done in the previous year, we undertook two further initiatives:

1. to complement our qualitative research activities with quantitative research designed to give insight into the value of the program in terms of its relevance to participants' retention and success at university.
2. to utilise our new systems for e-communication in order to begin to extend the 'Arts Network' identity beyond the first year Mentoring Program, to incorporate elements relevant to senior undergraduates in the Faculty. This initially involved developing an e-newsletter for senior undergraduate students, based on the successful model of our e-communications with commencing first years.

Progress to date

In addition to regular program activities, we have made major progress in our new, 2008 initiatives:

1. The quantitative research we conducted has revealed evidence of the value of the Arts Network Program in terms of both academic outcomes and student retention. Our research shows that commencing Bachelor of Arts students who participate in Arts Network tend to have higher average marks at the end of their first year than those who do not, and are more likely to stay on at the University in the following year. Furthermore, even though the Faculty now offers more places to students with a lower University Admission Index than when the Program began, overall retention rates have improved in the Bachelor of Arts and across the entire Faculty.
2. The e-communication systems developed in previous program cycles for communicating with commencing first year students have been extended to include targeted communications to all senior students in the Faculty. Four e-Newsletters were designed and sent to senior students in each semester of 2008, giving advice about key academic and administrative issues, as well as encouragement to participate in Faculty activities designed to support students and to build a strong and active learning community.

¹ This form is to be sent to the Executive Officer (Learning and Teaching) by the 30 January 2009.

If Project completed, list project outcomes

The key aim of the Arts Network Program is to build an encouraging and supportive learning community for Arts students and to foster a sense of engagement with the Faculty and the University, thereby positively impacting student retention, progression, and the overall student experience.

The results of our quantitative research project have provided evidence that the Program is, indeed, impacting positively on student retention and progression. This has given the Faculty further confidence in the value of the Program and determination to continue and expand its activities.

The results of our improved e-communications with senior students have led to a number of new Program initiatives for 2009. These are outlined below.

List any publications or seminar/conferences reporting on this project

The results of the quantitative research on the Arts Network Program (#1 above) were reported in an application (unfortunately not a successful one!) for an ALTC Award for Programs that Enhance Learning (First Year category), submitted in July 2008.

Nerida Jarkey, the Program Coordinator, will submit an abstract on this research to the 16th National Conference on Students in Transition, to be held in November 2009 in Columbia, South Carolina.

What is the next step? How may project be replicated and best practice spread across the University?

1. Lessons learnt through conducting quantitative research on the Program in 2008 will lead to improved capacity for Program evaluation in the 2009 and subsequent Program cycles.
2. The e-newsletters developed for senior students in the Faculty will be used as models for continuing regular e-communications in 2009 and beyond.
3. Our efforts to improve communications with senior students in 2008 have led to new Program initiatives in 2009, designed to ensure that our communication with students really is 'communication' and not just 'broadcasting'. These initiatives involve working with
 - a) the student representatives on the Faculty Board and other Faculty committees, to induct them into their role, and support and empower them to ensure they have real voice in Faculty planning and policy;
 - b) the Education Collective of SASS (the Sydney Arts Student Society) to plan two, themed forums (one in each semester) in which students have opportunities to interact with academics and raise questions about issues relevant to their concerns, interests and needs.
4. We will continue our collaboration with other faculties in the University, especially the Faculty of Economics & Business and the Faculty of Science and, from 2009, the Faculty of Law, to share ideas and expertise developed through all our first year transition and mentoring programs.

Project Representative

Name	Nerida Jarkey
Signature	