To say that Australian Universities are faced with a difficult operating environment is an understatement. Declining Government funding, demanding reporting requirements, the increasing need to compete globally and uncertainty about research funding characterise the situation. At the same time there is an increased emphasis, for a variety of reasons, on the quality of student experience; an important component of that experience relates to the quality of teaching and learning outcomes.

The quite understandable and appropriate increase in emphasis on teaching and learning often promotes discussion about the relationship between teaching and research and about the relative importance of each in terms of staff development, student experience and University reputation. Although such debates are not new, they have taken on a heightened urgency as Universities strive to do more with less. Some notable commentators such as Noel Laurence Peter Doherty have argued that Australian Universities must choose between excellence in teaching and a focus on research rather than trying to do both. Doherty has pointed to examples from the United States where smaller colleges have produced outstanding research records. Whether his model can function successfully in Australia with the current mix of funding for teaching and research is a moot point.

Survey research reveals that a majority of academics believe that research and teaching are positively related. Although correlation does not imply causation, it is clear that many do hold a causal view in which active research is believed to be essential for good teaching. Certainly, anecdotal evidence is consistent with such a view. I was involved recently in a Quality Audit of a New Zealand University in which the research-teaching relationship was explored with a group of undergraduate students. They were quite clear in their view that staff who were active in research were better able to stimulate and maintain interest in their classes. More formal evidence is less clear. A major meta-analysis by Hattie and Marsh (1996) of the relationship between research productivity (measured in a variety of ways) and student-assessed teaching effectiveness produced a relationship very close to zero. The authors concluded that although it is inconceivable that an effective teacher in a University could be unaware of recent research, it is not clear that an effective teacher has to participate in the generation of this research.

A somewhat different picture emerges, however, when one examines the issue at an institutional level. I recently examined the data on teaching and research quality in UK Universities in which each institution is assigned an average teaching, assessment score and an average research score. The correlation between the two is 0.73 indicating that at an institutional level, there is considerable community between the quality of teaching and the quality of research. Again, there is no way of attributing a causal relationship and it may well be that those staff who, for any of a number of reasons, excel in both research and teaching, tend to congregate in particular institutions.

An interesting question for this University concerns the inter-individual correlation between teaching and research and whether or not there is a relationship between quality of research and quality of teaching when examined on an inter-departmental basis. The University already has a high proportion of Awards for Excellence in Teaching going to staff who are widely recognized as active in research. Data on the teaching-research relationship within the University could provide important clues as to how we might enhance learning outcomes by embedding teaching within a milieu of research excellence.
The University of Sydney has the largest intake of first year students in the country. Many of these students come to University straight from high school and are thrust into a learning culture that may significantly differ from their preconceived expectations. As the quality of students’ initial experience of university has a powerful effect on their later academic success, it is vital that we develop a better understanding of the whole first year experience and use this understanding to improve students’ learning environment.

For a number of years, the Faculty of Science has been working to improve the first year experience and has several specially developed teaching programs. The purpose of the study was to add to our knowledge base in order to help improve the student experience.

As part of a larger study, towards the end of their first semester, three hundred first year Faculty of Science students were asked, by a questionnaire, to write about their actual experience. The questionnaire was open-ended so that students were free to write about any issue they chose.

The responses were thematically analysed and categorised accordingly, revealing three main concerns. The largest category of responses was concern about the magnitude of the workload. One hundred and sixteen of the respondents (38.8%) reported that the workload was unexpectedly demanding.

For example, one respondent wrote that:

There are quite a few differences between the image of university that I had and the reality. I thought university would be great fun; heaps of spare time to go out or work and not a lot of study to complete. University life is quite the opposite for me. I don’t have a great deal of spare time (compared to what I expected) and there is much more study required to complete assignments and to understand the material which is so quickly covered in lectures/laboratory sessions/tutorials.

Graduate students do research, and do it well, but they also do many other things. They teach undergraduates (a role for which they often need support), manage careers, care for their families, and fulfil obligations to their communities both in Australia and abroad. Their aims in completing higher degrees vary widely. Witness the increase in professional doctorates.

What does all this mean for departments and supervisors? As in encounters with the increasing diversity of the undergraduate student body, the answer lies in enhancing flexibility, choice and negotiation, by way of:

- Re-defining traditional ideas of what a thesis should be;
- Supporting students in activities such as teaching;
- Encouraging discussion of the student’s life goals and career needs;
- Reaching clear agreement on mutual expectations early in the candidature;
- Being willing to re-negotiate research pathways when necessary.

This kind of approach takes account of contemporary realities in the graduate scene whilst promoting a greater awareness of individual student learning needs.

Reference

Dr Christine Asmar is a lecturer in the Institute for Teaching and Learning. With Dr Kate Stevens of the University of Western Sydney she is co-author of ‘Doing Postgraduate Research in Australia’ Published by: Melbourne University Press.

At universities with a long tradition of research, there can be a tendency to regard research students solely as if they were professors in the making. The raison d’être of such students is seen as the production of their thesis, and any other activities they engage in – such as teaching large classes of first year students – is somewhat peripheral. Moreover, the students’ own goals in pursuing the degree, and their commitments external to that degree – jobs, families, communities, home country governments – are sometimes seen as either irrelevant or else as an impediment to their higher calling. This particular paradigm also tends to locate the supervisor at the centre of things, so that the individual’s candidature can end up being supervisor-centred rather than student-centred. The current shift to a student-centred approach in undergraduate teaching is not always mirrored at graduate level. Nor is the multi-faceted, holistic nature of graduate student life always matched by an equally holistic approach to supervising them.

A recent study into the actual nature of doctoral candidatures in Australia (Pearson, 1999) has revealed some interesting findings. By 1995, only 44% of research graduates seeking employment were employed as academic or full-time researchers. In 1996, sixty-five per cent of doctoral students were over 30; 41% were female; 36% were doing their degrees part-time; and 13% were international students. The profile of the ‘typical’ student has changed rapidly and remarkably in the context of the ‘massification’ of doctoral education.

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A key difference between high school and university study is that at university students are expected to be capable of self-management, e.g. time-planning, being aware of due dates for assignments, finding their own resources etc. Such skills are central to successful university study. Forty respondents (13.3%) found the degree of expected self-management unexpectedly high. This group of respondents found the transition to self-directed study difficult to cope with:

I thought I would find it much easier to be self-motivated towards study than I do … the fact is that we are responsible for what we learn. I was expecting to be spoon fed more instead of having to do everything myself … There are no big detailed explanations on each subject compared to school … we have to do much of the study ourselves.
The University of Sydney

Dental educators stress the importance of formulating holistic rehabilitation plans for patients before treatment commences. The formulation of an oral rehabilitation plan from a wealth of examination data is second nature to the dental expert who teaches in the clinical setting. It is usually the culmination of years of clinical experience with little or no conscious thought as to the mental steps taken to arrive at the plan. Students, however, do not have a lengthy clinical background to help them make their decisions. Added to this, there is usually no one ‘right’ rehabilitation plan, and several experts can, and routinely do, arrive at different plans for any particular patient. To compound the difficulty, dental educational material, while abounding in details of how to amass examination data and how to perform actual treatment procedures, has produced little to help guide the novice through the tangled web in between. It is no wonder that students, who have a limited clinical background, find this part of their education frustrating and difficult.

The challenge we face in Prosthodontics is to address this longstanding problem, and for several years I had been thinking about developing a learning module which could do this, while at the same time promoting dental knowledge, creativity, problem solving skills and logic. The module has now matured. It involves students from different universities worldwide, collaborating in a problem-based learning format, to develop an oral rehabilitation plan for a simulated patient. Twelve students, working in groups of 3, communicate on the World-wide Web under the guidance of a tutor. Each member of a group is in a different location and is supplied with trigger material in the form of information about the clinical and radiographic background of the ‘patient’. Individual students are appointed to a role within the group.

These roles are:
- Patient/lawyer (P) who will supply the history and flesh out the ‘person’ to whom the trigger examination material belongs. He/she will be responsible for the personal/legal ethical implications of treatment.
- Academic (A) who will identify state of the art treatment options available for the various dental treatment needs identified by the group. He/she will be responsible for the dental validity of treatment in terms of current knowledge.
- General practitioner (D) who will identify treatment options within the limitations of skill, knowledge, finances and patient commitment. He/she will be responsible for tailoring treatment options to P’s personal requirements without jeopardising oral health.

Sybille Lechner, Faculty of Dentistry
1. Help students organise their knowledge.

Students are given a set of basic, generic rules to begin any rehabilitation planning process, with the understanding that these rules must then always be modified to accommodate variations in given data. They will also role play as "patient", "academic" and "general practitioner" to help them define the issues involved.

2. Build on what students already know.

The course begins with students analysing the decision making process of an everyday activity. The body of the course also builds on assumed knowledge. It is geared for senior dental students who have had at least some experience in treating patients and a working knowledge of treatment options in the various discrete dental disciplines. They are expected to use this knowledge and enlarge on it to formulate a holistic rehabilitation plan.

3. Facilitate information processing.

Students are supplied with a case-based learning resource which includes a structured framework within which to plan oral rehabilitation. It also shows how modifications to the plan can be tailored to individual requirements. They are then given trigger information for a different case for which they can adapt the planning process.

4. Facilitate deep thinking through elaboration.

The course includes group problem solving scenarios. Members of a group must work in collaboration to form an oral rehabilitation plan for a particular patient. It also includes peer critique of other groups’ decisions.

5. Make thinking processes explicit.

Students must establish a step-by-step reasoning process in their decisions in the everyday activity. They must also defend the planning decisions made by the group. To do this they must first recognise the factors that have influenced their decisions.

The Discipline of Removable Prosthodontics has already been heavily involved in preparing the trigger material, writing the course information and canvassing help and advice from our final year students. The module will make use of 2 existing interactive CD-ROMs dealing with various aspects of dental decision making, developed with the help of G. A. Thomas. The first CD-ROM is being used in Dental Schools throughout Australia as well as in the USA and Europe. The second CD-ROM was completed in April 1999 and is currently being trialled by final year students in the Faculty of Dentistry.

Students taking this module will adapt the generic framework they have worked through when using the CD-ROMs to formulate a custom oral rehabilitation plan for their simulated patient. While all students within a group are expected to collaborate in helping with all aspects of the tasks, the appointed student is the leader of his/her designated role and is ultimately responsible for that part. Groups will develop an oral rehabilitation plan for their "patient". They will then first critique each other’s work and subsequently defend or change their decisions in the light of this critique. The unit of study will thus give them practice, on a simulated patient, for the real decision making processes they will need to formulate rehabilitation plans for their own patients.

Reference


Associate Professor Sybille Lechner is the Head of Discipline, of Removable Prosthodontics. Her work on dental decision making has been funded through grants from the Australian Prosthodontic Society, the Apple University Development Fund, the Pierre Fauchard Academy, the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development and the Information Technology Committee.

The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to learn, the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realised that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. (Rogers, 1983: 120)

Students in professional disciplines appear to have a tendency to "box" their learning and once a subject has been completed and assessed then many seem to "suppress" the knowledge contained within this "box", almost in a whimsical “been there, passed that, now to the next thing” attitude. The paediatric team in the School of Physiotherapy feels its challenge is to develop the skills of our students as future practitioners and to achieve this we need to facilitate our students to integrate their knowledge and learning rather than isolate it – to “unlock the boxes” so to speak.

A graphic example of students’ difficulty in transferring the clinical sciences outlined in lectures and tutorials into effective clinical reasoning within paediatric healthcare settings was shared by one of the School’s clinical educators. She mused over an incident in which a high achieving 4th year student baulked when asked to treat a 12 year old child who has sustained an uncomplicated sprained ankle. The educator was perplexed by the student’s anxiety and asked if the student had had any experience in dealing with people with such an injury. To this the student responded, “Oh yes I’ve seen lots of adults who sprained their ankles and they are no problem, but I could not possibly manage a child as they didn’t show us how to treat a 12 year old at Uni.” At no time did the student try and relate her prior knowledge to the novel situation. Unfortunately this was not an isolated incident.

Problem-based learning (PBL) has been embraced widely as an educational philosophy (and method) to help students integrate their learning. In PBL the process of learning is highlighted as much as content knowledge. Further the learning is focused around clinical (or work-related) scenarios. The theoretical basis of PBL is that learning is enhanced by stimulation of prior knowledge, using contextual situations and group discussion to elaborate on this knowledge and promote knowledge retention. Students are encouraged to develop skills in divergent (creative or innovative) and convergent reasoning (critical analysis). Emphasising meta-cognitive skills about learning, where the students articulate how their learning needs are identified and addressed, prepares the students to adapt to change and to develop the necessary skills for coping with the situational, task and human complexities of professional practice.

All the various approaches to PBL involve the use of ill-structured problems as the stimulus point for the students’ learning. The design of the problem cases is seen as one of the crucial tasks in developing a sound PBL curriculum. The paediatric team accepted a mindset change to let go of the notion of attempting to teach, or rather cram, “all the essentials of paediatric physiotherapy”. Early in our subject planning we gathered our clinical educators together and asked them to nominate what each felt should be “the essentials” of the
The Key Centre of Microscopy and Microanalysis has a number of post-graduate programs in Microscopy and Microanalysis divided into 11 core modules (short courses) and 15 optional modules. Most modules have a strong practical component and have developed from workshops run by the Electron Microscope Unit for researchers at the University of Sydney since the 1970’s. Each module has an academic convenor who teaches the theoretical component of the course, and/or will organise specialist(s) to give the lectures. The convenor is also responsible for organizing and teaching the practical component, drawing upon the technical expertise of staff in the Electron Microscope Unit.

The results of an investigation into the quality of our units of study has raised the concern that many of our assessment procedures were not clearly defined, or even sometimes unclear. Students, especially when participation was included. Our students are generally part-time, either coming for a full week to undertake a module or else they take evening courses when available. Most would have to do their assignments off-campus (largely at their place of work) or out of hours. It is critical that assessment tasks are clearly understood by the students. This is not always the case.

1. Assessment involved written assignments in all but one case.
2. Modules involving practical skills did not provide guidelines for students on how there will be assessed.
3. A few modules included a mark for participation.
4. Of those which included participation, none had guidelines on how it is assessed.

I inherited the EM Specimen Preparation Course as a ready made package, which had been running as a workshop for researchers for over 20 years. It had been extended to satisfy the time requirements of the Graduate Diploma, as dictated by the credit point rating. The assignment had been tackled on to the module. The obvious place to start with the review of assessment procedures was with my own two modules. Since assessment must reflect the objectives and expected outcomes of the course, I found that I had to review these as well. It became immediately obvious that some of the assessment tasks had requirements which were not made explicit in either the objectives or the outcomes. Furthermore, while I had attempted to include assessment of critical thinking and skills, it was not really clearly stated. This meant that my first task was to clarify the objectives and outcomes for each module, then redesign the assessments according to these.

Subsequently all but one of the modules have been reviewed. I found that the problems I had identified in my own modules were present in others to varying degrees.

continued on page 12...
Generic needs were determined from direct/indirect experience (observation and evaluation of previous courses, and participants’ evaluations written at the end of each course) as well as through discussions with groups of community language teachers and members of the Ethnic Schools Board and the Department of School Education (DSE).

Specific needs were determined partly through a participants’ survey (for the particular group in question) prior to the start of the program, and partly through routine information collected from community language teachers by the Ethnic Schools Board. The information collected included: knowledge of teaching language; knowledge of English language; teaching experience; availability, access, familiarity and use of computers and related technology.

Benefits to the Students

Although it is premature to do a full evaluation of the program, a number of things have already been achieved as a result of creating a collaborative learning environment.

- students have benefited by the on-line inclusion of course information and supplementary materials (readings, links to interesting sites etc.) which has allowed increased contact and interaction.
- students are using new technology, although it has not been an easy task for all participants (some had never used a computer before, and most lacked computer experience, are now using the web as a means to communicate with relatives overseas and research “authentic” lesson materials. The confidence of all participants as to their ability to approach this medium has increased, and all have expressed an interest in continuing further, to discover how the computer can be included as a teaching tool.

- The on-line communication network is beginning to be put to work as participants are asked to discuss readings and complete tasks. Independently of this, some teachers are communicating with each other, offering support, ideas and suggestions for issues raised during the face-to-face sessions. This is particularly promising as isolation is a major negative aspect of language teaching, aggravated for community language teachers who often work without the benefit of a supportive infrastructure.

The course aims to increase the level of competency and confidence of participants in their ability as effective language teachers. This requires the development of those skills and attitudes related to second language teaching, as well as the more general requirements of a modern professional, including familiarity with technology in general and computers in particular. This project has already been used as a pilot study for programming and delivering a Certificate course in intensive mode during the July school holidays. Feedback received from both courses as well as insights gained, will further assist with similar developments for the Graduate Diploma in Modern Language Teaching, which is in the process of being re-structured.

Renata Natoli, is a lecturer at the Language Centre which has offered the Certificate in Community Language Teaching since 1997. The website for the CertCLT is constantly expanding as new materials are introduced. It can be accessed at:

Student perceptions of the first year experience: work overload continued from page 4...

During this year we will be asking teachers in the Faculty of Science about their expectations and perceptions of first year students to determine the extent to which teaching staff's expectations of the students are at odds with the students' expectations of university. We consider these to be important issues. A key factor contributing to a university’s reputation is the quality of the educational service offered to its students, and an important predictor of student satisfaction is the quality of their first year at university. Examining students’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences can help develop educational programmes suited to the contemporary student population, whilst maintaining the high educational standards.

In many cases, there were no clear indications of what was actually required as part of the assessment tasks, and the criteria for assessment was more often than not missing. This had led to confusion and some dispute over the last two years.

In order to bring about effective changes, I decided to start with reviewing and rewriting the objectives and outcomes for 25 modules. This was achieved with a great deal of help from Dr. Christine Asman in the Institute for Teaching and Learning. I am most grateful for her input into what has turned out to be a rather heavy task! Once the revised objectives and outcomes had been drafted, I gave a copy to each convenor and discussed the modifications. Changes were made following the discussions and a final draft was drawn up. Following this, I suggested changes to assessment tasks to reflect the objectives and outcomes. Most convenors have been very happy to be involved in this process, especially as much of the work has been essentially carried out for them!

To date, new objectives and outcomes and assessment procedures have been drafted for 23 modules. A review of the literature on assessment procedures used by science-related fields of study revealed the variety of formative and summative assessment procedures available. I am sure that further improvements will take place in the next 12 months, but this project has been extremely useful in getting convenors to become aware of the need for clear and transparent assessment procedures as an integral part of teaching a course.

Dr. Annick D. Amselin is a Senior Microscopist with the Electron Microscope Unit. She was a Teaching Development Grant holder in the Institute for Teaching and Learning in 1999.

References

Mary Peat is the Director, First Year Biology in the School of Biological Sciences and Associate Dean, Teaching, Faculty of Science. Anthony Grant is Coordinator and Associate Lecturer in the Coaching Psychology Unit of the Department of Psychology.

Assessment
Student Assessment in Higher Education: A Handbook for Assessing Performance
London: Kogan Page.
A comprehensive handbook for those unfamiliar with the recent literature on assessment procedures. This book discusses assessment in terms of the measuring and recording of student progress and achievement communicated to the students and relevant university authorities. It provides a comprehensive survey of the research related to assessment to provide university teachers with an overview of the approaches to formal assessment in higher education. This includes setting, marking and reviewing coursework, assignments, tests and examinations. The authors begin by describing the purposes of higher education, and the functions of assessment. They then discuss assessment methods and finish with current and future developments, encouraging all of those concerned with assessment to examine how it is used in practice.

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2000

AAHE ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE 2000
14-18 June 2000 Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
Details: Linda Suskie, email: lsuskie@aahe.org
URL: http://www.aahe.org

4TH INTERNATIONAL COMPUTER ASSISTED ASSESSMENT (CAA) CONGRESS
21-22 Jun-2000 Loughborough University, UK
Details: Susan Clowes, email: S.E.C.Clowes@lboro.ac.uk or URL: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/fli/flicaa/conf2000/index.html

AQUHE 2000
Twelfth International Conference on Assessment of Quality in Higher Education
28-30 Jun-2000 RMIT University, Melbourne
Details: G. Srikanthan, email: sri@rmit.edu.au or URL: http://www.cmqr.rmit.edu.au

FLEXIBLE LEARNING FOR A FLEXIBLE SOCIETY HERDSA & ASET
2-5 Jul-2000 Toowoomba, QLD
Details: email:kessels@usq.edu.au or URL: http://www.herdsa.org.au/conf.htm

CREATING FUTURES FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM
4TH Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference
5-7 Jul-2000 Brisbane, QLD
Details: Brett Coates, (07) 3864 5160 or email: b.coates@qut.edu.au

LIFELONG LEARNING: DEVELOPMENT OF GENERIC SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
17-19 Jul-2000 Rockhampton, QLD
Details: email: life-long-learning-conference@cqu.edu.au or URL: http://www.library.cq.edu.au/conf

INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2000
30 Aug-2 Sep-2000, University of Helsinki, Finland
Details: email: inno2000@helsinki.fi

Second International Interfaculty Conference on Problem-Based Learning in Higher Education
17-20 Sep-2000 Linköping, Sweden
Details: URL: http://www.ida.liu.se/conferences/PBL2000/

CSUE 2000
Third Biennial Communication Skills in University Education Conference
28-29 Sep-2000. Fremantle, WA.
Details: URL: http://www.hs.ac.cowan.edu.au/csu e2000/

NEW MILLENNIUM: QUALITY AND INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
10th Anniversary International HKCAA Conference
4-5 Dec-2000 Hong Kong
Details: email: hkcaa@cityu.edu.hk or URL: http://www.hkcaa.edu.hk

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