REACTING TO STUDENT FEEDBACK

BEING A RELATIONAL ACADEMIC

POSTGRADUATE LEADERSHIP

E-LEARNING INITIATIVES

2005 VC’S AWARDS
Synergy is a scholarly forum for the discussion and debate of higher education teaching and learning at The University of Sydney. Produced by the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL), Synergy is published twice per year, usually May and October and is circulated to staff through academic and research departments. Synergy is edited by Tai Peseta in consultation with the Director and staff of the ITL.

Contributions to Synergy
The Editor welcomes contributions from the university community all year round. Synergy particularly welcomes contributions written collaboratively by staff and students that:

• report on, or are critical reflections of an aspect of your teaching or your students’ learning
• report on a teaching, learning or curriculum initiative designed to engage students in active learning or inquiry
• use disciplinary research/concepts to develop ideas about teaching and student learning
• report on curriculum initiatives designed to bring teaching and research together to improve student learning

From 2004, scholarly and research-based contributions to Synergy attract points on the University’s Scholarship Index. Unless negotiated with the Editor, contributions must be limited to 2000 words, adhere to the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for referencing, and be accompanied by a 300 word biography outlining significant teaching and learning research interests, publications and projects, and positions of leadership.

Publicising your event in Synergy
Staff and students of the University are welcome to publicise forthcoming higher education teaching and learning events in Synergy. These might be conferences, public lectures or seminars by visiting scholars relevant to higher education teaching and learning. However, the Editor reserves the right to negotiate such publicity.

Subscribing to Synergy
If you are located outside the University of Sydney, a yearlong subscription to costs $10.00 AUS (GST, postage and handling included). Each back copy costs $4.00 AUS. Complementary copies of Synergy are mailed to academic/educational development units in the Asia-Pacific region however, additional copies incur a cost of $4.00 AUS.

Contact the Editor
For further information about Synergy, visit the website – http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy, or contact the Editor, Tai Peseta on (+61 2) 9351 4657 or email synergy@itl.usyd.edu.au.

Design, layout, printing and circulation
Rachel Williams, Web and Publications Manager, ITL. Email: rawillia@itl.usyd.edu.au
Cartoons by Tamara Asmar. Email: tamara77@iinet.net.au
Cover shot: Supplied from the Publications Office
Photos of authors taken by Rachel Williams except on page 12, photo of Dr Jennifer Byrne taken by Paul de Sensi, email: PalmeriD@chw.edu.au

Printing
Thunderpress Pty Ltd
Email: print@thunderpress.edu.au

ISSN: 1325-9881
© 2005 Copyright of the articles rest with the author/s. All else, with the ITL.

Disclaimer
The views expressed in Synergy are not necessarily those of The University of Sydney, the Editor nor the Institute for Teaching and Learning.
contents

regulars

1 Editorial
Tai Peseta

9 T&L snapshots
2005 Vice-Chancellor's University Awards
• Outstanding Teaching
• Excellence in Research Higher Degree Supervision
• Support of the Student Experience

19 ITL focus
• ITL hosts international conference on Higher Education in a Changing World
• Principles & Practice of University Teaching & Learning Program in new contexts
• Recent ITL publications & presentations

22 Book review
Peer observation partnerships in higher education
Maureen Bell
Advising PhD candidates
Peggy Nightingale

27 Profile
Mary Jane Mahony
Director, Education Connections, Faculty of Health Sciences
Chair of e-Learning Working Group, College of Health Sciences

38 Forthcoming conferences

features

3 Graham Hendry with Tai Peseta & Simon Barrie
How do we react to student feedback?

5 Susan Ainsworth
Becoming a relational academic

15 Patty Kamvounias, Frank Stilwell, Rosina Mladenovic & Amani Ahmed
Scholarship Index success in the Faculty of Economics & Business: bringing research & teaching together

23 Cindy McCreery
Less is more: rethinking assessment in a first-year History unit

29 Paul Canfield
Developing leadership skills in the research student experience

34 Mary Peat, Karen Scott, Marianna Koulias, Marina Lobastov, Kate Simpson, Justin Tauber & Mary-Helen Ward
How does the College of Sciences and Technology e-learning support initiative enhance staff & student learning?
With the close of the year fast approaching, it is always timely to reflect on the broader context in which university teaching and learning is located. While there continues to be equal parts lament, debate and controversy surrounding the precise effects of recent and proposed changes to the higher education sector, it might be said that one outcome—the establishment of the national Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education—holds some promise for a renewal of the nature of institutional conversations about teaching and learning. If the work of the Carrick Institute necessarily brings with it an increased focus on the language, representation and performance of quality, then our responsibility must also be that we continue to challenge those discussions in ways that foreground the complexity of teaching and learning practice and scholarship. The work that we produce about our experiences of teaching and students’ experiences of learning cannot simply be reduced to matters of outcomes, performance indicators or quality. Important as these dimensions are, that they should represent the totality of the relation between teaching, learning and pedagogical scholarship would indicate a diminished higher education project.

So, what are the languages that can help us speak this complexity into existence? What are the questions that we need to keep asking about the work of university teaching and learning?

Several of the papers in this issue of *Synergy* take up this work, albeit in different ways. In the first paper, Graham Hendry, a visiting scholar in the Institute for Teaching and Learning from the Faculty of Medicine asks: ‘how do we react to student feedback?’ It is an important question—one we need to ask more often and perhaps, differently too. Given the increasing emphasis upon student feedback and evaluation within promotions criteria and institutional claims to quality, Graham invites us to consider how the processes we put in place to respond to feedback, actually acknowledges the work of emotions and corporeality as part of our interpretations. And then, how do we invite students to collaborate with us to turn these interpretations into meaningful learning conversations? With my ITL colleague Simon Barrie, I benefited greatly from my discussions with Graham about this issue and he has been kind enough to include some of our conversation in his paper.

The second piece by Susan Ainsworth from Work and Organisational Studies delves deeply into the terrain of academic professionalism. As a participant in this year’s ITL Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) course, Susan wrote the piece initially as part of an assessment task. The paper reminds us to attend to the values we hold as academics and how that plays out within our responsibilities as teachers. One interesting point Susan takes up in her piece is how we can supplement academic freedom with academic responsibility in our work as teachers. The next article from colleagues in the Faculty of Economics and Business, shares the journeys of three academics and their interest in developing the scholarship of teaching and learning. Amani Ahmed from the Centre to Advance Learning in Economics and Business (CALEB) is in conversation with Patty Kamvounias, Rosina Mladenovic & Frank Stilwell. Each of these academics, has been active in turning their teaching and learning inquiries into research-based scholarly outcomes, and in so doing, have been beneficiaries of the university’s Scholarship Index. In some ways, the conversation alludes to the choices we make in how we conceptualise...
what is different between teaching and research - and how these two aspects of an academic’s work can work in concert. From the Department of History, Cindy McCreery performs the work of critically evaluating the assessment strategy in a first year unit of study in History. Cindy is another participant in the ITL’s Graduate Certificate course. She draws on John Biggs’ (1999) notion of constructive alignment to better understand what she identifies as a possible misalignment between the nature of the assessment tasks and students’ perceptions of them. Cindy’s paper describes three phases of rethinking which support what Graham Gibbs and Claire Simpson (2005) suggest ought to be a shift in using assessment for learning. The outcome is an interesting one. We then shift to a paper by Paul Canfield from the Faculty of Veterinary Science. Paul’s interest is in the issue of developing leadership and teamwork skills for research higher degree students. In his paper he asks how we might develop a discourse of leadership as a natural part of the research higher degree learning experience. It is a paper that reminds me to think hard about what might constitute the scholarship of leadership as part of cultivating civic responsibility.

The final paper, reports on a collaborative effort to implement e-learning within the College of Sciences and Technology. It describes a number of projects that have at heart, a will towards institutional and cultural change. Mary Peat, Karen Scott and colleagues remind us that the critical and open spirit of this work is to be welcomed as part of a position on the work of organisational learning more generally.

In this issue, we offer two sorts of profiles. First, we showcase the recipients of the 2005 Vice-Chancellor’s awards. Three different awards recognise and reward the work of supporting student learning. The first acknowledges outstanding teaching; the second, excellence in research higher degree supervision; and the third, the provision of support for the student experience. Second, we continue to profile the work of an individual member of the university community who is responsible for leading an aspect of teaching and learning change—Mary Jane Mahony from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Director of Education Connections and Chair of e-Learning Working Group in the College of Health Sciences. If anything, my conversation with Mary Jane allowed me to see again, the variation within which academics come to see the ways in which teaching and learning can contribute to a critical higher education project. We also continue to report on the work of the ITL — the recent HERDSA conference in July; our research and scholarly publications; and two new contexts in which we have extended our Principles and Practices of University Teaching and Learning Program. And of course, we include the usual bits and pieces - a list of higher education teaching and learning conferences for 2006; and a review of two new HERDSA Green Guides.

Publications like Synergy work best when it can represent a diversity of opinions, when it sparks an idea, or when it can articulate a set of challenges that we must wrestle with as a community. I welcome your feedback, comments and ideas for contributions. In particular, I welcome your thoughts about what we can do to improve Synergy so that is better reflects the critical conversations about teaching and learning happening in your context. Please feel free to drop me a line at synergy@itl.usyd.edu.au, or visit our website at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy to offer your reflections in the discussion forum.

And yet again, I am appreciative that so many members of the university community have been generous in putting pen to paper to write about their experiences of teaching and learning, when everywhere, there is such busy-ness. Have a wonderful new year and we look forward to working with you in 2006.

References


Interpreting feedback from our students is an emotional business. Whenever anyone makes a judgement about our behaviour we experience either positive, negative or mixed feelings; for example, we may feel flattered, disappointed or uncertain. Interpreting and evaluating the meaning of students’ feedback ratings or comments can create a variety of emotions that vary in intensity. The main point of this article is that to improve our teaching we need to spend as much time thinking about our emotional reaction to feedback as we do thinking critically about what students mean.

The nature of our emotional reaction to feedback depends on several factors including how we feel at the time (e.g., if we feel unsupported in our departmental role then our reaction may be heightened); the positive or negative connotations and tone of feedback; and the quality of the way(s) in which feedback is collected and presented.

Like most of us students are quick to criticise. The natural way of judging others’ behaviour is to identify only those actions that led to the severest emotional reaction in us. We are usually less likely to be mindful of how another person might feel in interpreting what we have to say. Unless we help students to focus on giving feedback constructively they may not realise that they are being overly negative. There are four generic steps that everyone can follow when giving effective feedback:

- Step 1 - Praise the person for some aspect of their performance;
- Step 2 - Ask the person what they think they did well;
- Step 3 - Ask the person what they think they could improve;
- Step 4 - Suggest a way in which they could improve some aspect of their performance.

When giving feedback to teachers students should be helped to construct their comments by following step 1 first and step 4 second. An example of a well constructed feedback comment (written by a first-year medical student) in response to the question, ‘What suggestions do you have for improving this week’s learning?’ is:

The [theme session] had some great information but most students found the pace too fast to be useful. The questions in the handbook were good and we would have liked to follow that format and [have] actually answered the questions.

Praise motivates people; it confirms for them that they are becoming competent and that others value their effort. Asking learners to identify positive aspects in their performance helps them to develop autonomy and raises their confidence. Asking learners to identify areas of need helps them to set and prioritise learning goals. As thoughtful people with awareness of their learning, students can identify an area where a teacher can improve their competence while also successfully maintaining their teacher’s motivation and/or confidence.

Not all students have thought deeply about how they adapt their learning processes in different instructional situations and learn effectively. So some students’ feedback may be difficult to interpret because it seems irrelevant or too general or overly negative. This can lead to some teachers feeling frustrated. If student evaluation of teaching questions are poorly worded then the problem may be exacerbated. When feedback is poorly collected and constructed then the whole process is a waste of everyone’s time.

The Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL), in addition to supplying and analysing the Unit of Study Evaluation (USE) form for course coordinators, offers teachers several thoroughly researched student evaluation of teaching (SET) forms that are situated in the student learning framework. The ITL ensures that its SET forms are well constructed and validated before they are put to use.

My colleagues Tai Peseta and Simon Barrie believe that collecting and responding to student feedback of dynamic two-way process rather than a one-way reactive modification. Their idea is to collect and redistribute all students’ feedback back to students so that they can construct a new understanding of how their peers experience the same teaching and learning activities, and how their own experience relates to others’ learning.

Acknowledging our feelings about students’ feedback, critically evaluating its meaning and explaining to students how we will improve opens up an evolving dialogue with them about the rationale for why we teach the way we do, and the relation between our teaching and effective learning.

Some of us may find it difficult to admit that some students may know more about the effectiveness of our teaching in relation to their learning than we do. In accepting students’ feedback we are handing some of our power, which we derive from several sources including our reputation as discipline experts, back to our students. This power exchange may lead to feelings of ‘powerlessness’ or anxiety. Those of us who adopt a more democratic (rather than autocratic) and student-centred (focussed...
on students’ concerns) approach to teaching may find accepting and interpreting student feedback easier. Recently colleagues and I explored the relationship between teachers’ approaches to teaching and responses to qualitative student feedback in the University of Sydney graduate-entry, problem-based medical program (Hendry et al., in press). We asked all lecturers and theme session presenters in 2003 who had received student feedback comments in the past 2 years (N=121) to complete anonymously the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (16 items) (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) and an Approach to Feedback Inventory (14 items).

The conceptual change/student-focused (CCSF) approach involves an intention to change students’ conceptions or ways of seeing things through a focus on the student, while the information transmission/teacher-focused approach (ITTF) involves an intention to transmit information using teacher-focused strategies.

Results were that most teachers reported making changes to their teaching in response to students’ suggestions at least sometimes. The types of change(s) teachers made were consistent with their approach. For example, a teacher with a CCSF approach made the following changes: “Re-adjustment of emphasis in a session, modification of background material given to students, extra formative assessment questions, different case scenarios, specific discussion of questions raised by students”. Teachers strong on a CCSF approach were more responsive to feedback and positive about strategies for improving their teaching. A CCSF approach is associated with students’ deep approaches to learning that in turn are associated with higher quality and quantity learning outcomes (Prosser et al., 2003).

In another recent study of how teachers respond to student feedback Moore and Kuol (2005) examined University of Limerick teachers’ reactions to undergraduate student feedback reports that contained both quantitative and qualitative data. Teachers (N=50) were asked to complete a survey about the feedback that they received. Survey responses were analysed for the extent to which teachers focussed on positive or negative aspects of their reports, and teachers’ reports were evaluated for the overall positive or negative nature of the feedback. Table 1 shows the types of changes teachers planned to their teaching in relation to whether their feedback was positive or negative. Moore and Kuol theorise that when the nature of feedback is positive and we feel positive about it (proud) then our practice is affirmed and reinforced; however there is a risk we can become complacent. When the nature of feedback is positive and we feel positive (guilty) then we are committed to addressing minor problems in our teaching (e.g., changing the font size on a Powerpoint slide). There is a risk that we may focus excessively on minor issues at the expense of reflecting deeply on other areas in our practice. When feedback is negative and we feel negative (guilt or shame) then we generally experience a realistic commitment to improvement; however there is risk that we may become discouraged and possibly even withdraw from the situation. When feedback is negative and we feel positive (superior) this may indicate a strong need to maintain our level of self confidence and sense of self efficacy, leading to a denial of real problems (and anger). In the Moore and Kuol study no teachers fell into this category.

The main purpose of collecting student feedback is to improve teaching. To improve our teaching we need to spend time thinking about our emotional reaction to feedback (whether we feel proud, guilty or superior) and why we feel this way. We also need to evaluate the overall nature of our feedback (is it mostly positive or negative?); often the best way to do this is with a close colleague. By attending to our emotions we can more easily focus on why we do what we do to facilitate students’ learning, and so prioritise our goals to become more effective teachers.

References
The full list of references for this article is available online at:
http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy

Graham Hendry began his career at the University of Sydney in teacher education in the then Faculty of Education. His background is in educational psychology. In 1995 he moved to the Faculty of Medicine to join the fledgling ‘medical education unit’ established to develop and evaluate the pioneering graduate-entry medical program. His research interests include teaching and learning theory, academic staff development and quality improvement. He is involved in tutor training and coordinates units of study in educational development and evaluation at the Masters level in the Faculty of Medicine.

Chat with Graham about student feedback at:
www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy or email at:
grahamh@gmp.usyd.edu.au
In Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, Brookfield (1995) outlines four different lenses for understanding university teaching: the theoretical lens (research and theory on university teaching), the autobiographical lens (our histories as students and teachers), the peer lens (engaging with the views of our colleagues) and the student lens (students’ perspectives and experience of our teaching). These four lenses express and encourage a ‘relational’ notion of the academic (Nixon, Beattie, Challis & Walker, 1998) as someone who actively engages with students, peers and the self and in doing so, enhancing the possibilities for critical reflection on teaching practice. As our final assessment piece for the Graduate Certificate in first semester, we were asked to use these four lenses to reflect on our teaching practice. In the following discussion, I reflect on my experience of teaching management and human resource management in the School of Business, subjects which have a large and diverse student base including relatively high numbers of international and fee-paying students. In particular, I focus on explaining how my understanding of university teaching has changed as a result of engaging with Brookfield’s four lenses.

**Brookfield’s Four Lenses**

**Theoretical Lens**

There are two key ideas that I have drawn from my reading of literature questioning the role of academics and universities (e.g. Nixon et al., 1998; Barnett, 2004), and hence, what it means to be a professional university teacher. The first concerns the role of reflexivity and reflective practice and the second involves reconceptualizing the academic as a ‘relational’ identity. Both ideas are consistent with Brookfield’s framework of seeing university teaching from multiple perspectives.

Reflection has taken on a central role in the professional development of university teachers and is undertaken to enhance teachers’ self-knowledge (Kuit, Reay & Freeman, 2001; Clegg, Tan & Saeidi, 2002). Reflective practice for university teachers may take various forms but essentially it involves thinking about and ‘questioning why we do something rather than how, and most important of all, learning by this process’ (Kuit et al., 2001, pp. 130-131). Such learning should then inform teaching practice (Kuit et al., 2001) though the exact relationship between reflexivity and practice may vary (Clegg et al., 2002).

Theoretical literature contributes to reflective practice by providing alternative viewpoints that can be used to question the assumptions that underpin our teaching or reach a different understanding of what we do. For example, last year I revised the undergraduate subject I was assigned to teach using the new Unit of Study template distributed by the Faculty. While I was able to do this, I did so in a superficial way, without understanding the rationale for its format. It was only by reading material on constructive alignment that I was able to see why the Faculty required explanations of the relationship between learning goals, graduate attributes and assessment. Based on this new understanding, I was able to approach the development of unit of study outlines in a different way, and was able to clearly articulate the rationale for certain assessment tasks and their relationship with learning goals.

My understanding of what it means to be a professional university teacher has also been influenced by theoretical discussion about the need to revise the role of academics. Writers such as Barnett (2004) and Nixon et al. (1998) critically reflect on the meaning of ‘academic freedom’, arguing that it has stood for individual autonomy and freedom of speech for academics. As a counterpoint, Mary Beattie writes about an alternative role: rather than being solitary, autonomous and individualistic, she envisages a ‘relational’ role for academics, one that is underpinned by conversation, collaboration, ‘interdependence, connectedness and responsiveness to others’ (Nixon et al., 1998, p. 284). As someone who became an academic later in life, after working in organizations where collaboration and cooperation were essential, I have struggled with the individualistic ethos of universities. Such theoretical discussion is reassuring and also voices possibilities for changes to university teaching.

**Autobiographical Lens**

Of all the four lenses discussed by Brookfield (1995), the ‘self’ lens is one that had immediate resonance for me, possibly because it was consistent with what I had already suspected: that my own experience as a learner was heavily influenced by my approach to teaching. In teaching postgraduate students, for example, I remember working full-time and studying part-time, struggling to both attend class and complete assessment. My academic peers have long complained about students not being ‘intellectually curious’, not using the library or doing independent research. I became of my own experience as a part-time student (from 1993-1997), I know there are other equally valid explanations: fatigue and time. As a university teacher, I adopt a highly structured approach to course design and provide teaching materials and reading packs to minimize
the amount of time students have to spend searching for material. Become more aware of how my own history as a learner influences my teaching raises the possibility of changing how I practice teaching.

Similarly, I knew that my experience as an undergraduate affected my teaching practice, in particular that my history as a ‘bad student’ actually made me a better teacher, though I would perhaps have struggled to articulate why. I was therefore heartened by Brookfield’s (1995) discussion of the value of teachers experiencing struggle and difficulty in learning. Thus while I had some level of awareness, my understanding of the importance of the autobiographical lens has been deepened. In addition, Brookfield’s illustrations have encouraged me to more critically revisit my own assumptions: for example, why do I design in-class exercises and expect an immediate response from students when I, as a student, need time to think and reflect before responding?

Peer Lens

Based on my experience in the Graduate Certificate, I now have a deeper understanding of why the perspective of peers is central to professional university teaching. To date, I have preferred to work collaboratively with colleagues and find establishing mutually supportive relationships with peers from within my own discipline to be critical to my survival as an academic. While the supportive aspect of collaboration is important (Walker, 2001), I am now more aware of the value of engaging with peers from outside my own discipline because of discussion and exercises that have occurred in the Graduate Certificate seminars.

For example, in one exercise, we were asked to explain and justify the appropriateness of a particular type of assessment (we chose essays), working first in small groups and then presenting our reasoning to the broader class. This exercise prompted me firstly to articulate the assumptions (Brookfield, 1995) underlying my reliance on essays and secondly, to engage in critical reflection with peers from different subject disciplines about the purpose of essays. One initial realization was the extent to which the idea of ‘essay’ was discipline-specific (Walker, 2001): we had difficulty reaching a consensus about the definition of an essay. Not surprisingly then, we struggled to reach agreement on why essays were an appropriate form of assessment. This collaborative experience of confusion and struggle (Walker, 2001) over the definition and purpose of essays led me to then reflect as an individual about why I used essays, within the context of the subjects I teach, specifically, the undergraduate Foundations of Management (WORK 2001) course. I reviewed the range of Unit of Study aims and objectives I had included in the outline distributed to students and wrote an explanation of how the essay and the essay questions I had set related to these broad aims. In the lecture the following week, I then used this as a basis for articulating to students the purpose or rationale for the essay and how it specifically related to the aims of the unit of study.

Prior to this experience, my in-class actions would have been interpreted as assuming students understood the point of assessment tasks.

Student Lens

The student perspective enhances the process of critical reflection that is so central to professional university teaching and Shor argues it is the ‘first responsibility of critical teachers’ (1992, p. 202 quoted in Brookfield, 1995, p. 93). Exploring student perspectives on my own teaching reminded me both of my own experience as a student and the gaps between my intentions as a teacher and student perceptions and experiences of my teaching. For example, whereas I thought that reducing the content in the first two lectures of a large undergraduate class would be interpreted positively by students, one student I interviewed expressed anxiety that we had not yet covered material relating to the assignment (due in week 6). I would not have been aware of this gap between my assumptions and students’ experience of my teaching if I had not been exposed to student perspectives.

This key learning moment is an example of immediate reflection (Clegg et al., 2002) and reflection informing the process and practice of teaching (Kuit et al., 2001). However, it also enabled me to understand and experience, in a small way, what Brookfield (1995) refers to as ‘laying bare our pedagogic reasoning’ (p. 108) so that students might be able to better understand the basis for my actions and the design of the subject. Similarly, I have been able to integrate this principle readily into my teaching practice, in articulating the rationale for in-class exercises and the criteria for evaluating assessment tasks.

Reflection on student perspectives was also triggered by in-class discussion of negotiated curricula: we were asked to consider whether it would ‘work in our context’ which led me to rethink a critical incident from the previous year.

Last year, in my first year of teaching at Sydney University, I took over a large postgraduate class that had been running for some time in the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies. I was advised to deliver the subject in its existing form, as it related to various other subjects that formed a major in a postgraduate degree. The
subject had an enrolment of approximately 140 students from diverse backgrounds: international students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds, local and international students with no work experience, local students with substantial work experience and some with relevant undergraduate degrees. In addition, students were allowed to enroll in the subject at any stage in their degree – this meant there were students at the beginning of their postgraduate study and those for whom this was their last subject. In the first few weeks of teaching I had the following diverse responses from students: some did not understand basic concepts; some had difficulty understanding introductory readings; some argued they had ‘heard it all before’ and that they had covered all the material in other subjects offered by the Discipline. The critical incident concerned the request made by two students to complete alternative assessment tasks. Both students (separately) argued that they had already covered the material in different subjects and they were ‘bored’ and ‘not being stretched’ by the subject. Both also made negative comments about the size of the class and the large proportion of international students. At the time, I spoke to both students and asked them various questions about their previous subjects as well as about the topics we were covering. I also spoke to colleagues in the Discipline who suggested that the students may have been exposed to the terms related to the topics, but that they would not have covered them in depth. On the basis of these conversations with students and colleagues I was not convinced the students had covered the material and compelled them to complete the set assessment task. One of the students received a pass grade, the other a (mid-ranking) distinction for this assessment.

At the time I made sense of it in the following way:

These students both have inflated opinions of their abilities. If they had covered the material before, they would have achieved higher grades. They want to feel ‘special’ and superior to the rest of the class. If I had made a special assessment task for these two students, where would it have ended? The class was already difficult enough to handle and it would have been uncontrollable.

This is the way I make sense of it now:
There are alternative explanations for the outcome. These students may not have done as well because they were bored and felt they were not being stretched by the class. I should have remembered what it felt like being in this situation myself as a student. They may have been genuinely attempting to engage in deep learning and I hampered that endeavour, rather than assisting it. Why do I act on the basis of the assumption that students all need to complete the same assessment task, and that control in the classroom is a desirable outcome? There are some things about the subject I cannot control: the diversity of the student base, the large numbers, and the overlap with other subjects. However what I can do is re-design the assessment so that there is greater choice, including an opportunity for students to work on self-directed projects.

The two different interpretations I have of this critical incident are an example of deferred or ruminative reflection (Clegg et al., 2002): while I reflected on the incident soon after it occurred, it is only with the passing of time and the benefit of alternative perspectives that I was able to critically reflect on my assumptions and re-articulate a different response that will have implications for my teaching practice. More fundamentally this incident and my interpretations of it, illustrate the revisions to the concept of ‘academic freedom’ suggested by Nixon et al. (1998) and Barnett (2004). Rather than academic freedom denoting freedom for the individual academic (to free speech, autonomy and security of tenure), Nixon et al. (1998) argue that it should denote a more outward looking freedom, where academic professionalism includes promoting freedom for others to “speak their own minds, to learn in accordance with their own interests, and to enjoy a secure framework within which to learn” (p. 278). Of particular relevance to my reflection on this incident is allowing students the freedom ‘to learn in accordance with their own interests’ which Ramsden (2003, pp. 65-66) identifies as one factor contributing to deep learning among students.

References

Susan Ainsworth is a Lecturer in Work and Organisational Studies in the School of Business. Before becoming an academic, she worked in public and private sector organisations in industrial relations and human resource management. She has taught at Monash University and the University of Melbourne before joining the University of Sydney in 2004. She teaches in Management, Human Resource Management and Organizational Ethics at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and undertakes research in organization studies, social identity, communication and discourse.

To chat with Susan about her notion of a ‘relational academic’ or her experiences learning in the ITL’s Graduate Certificate course, visit the online discussion forum: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy/forum, or email Susan at: s.ainsworth@econ.usyd.edu.au
Outstanding Teaching Awards  The University of Sydney has long been committed to recognising and *Outstanding Teaching *Excellence in Research Higher Degree Supervision *Support of the Student Experience Each

Dr Chris Chapparo
School of Occupation and Leisure Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences

The best teaching for learning is theoretically and practically grounded in the human capacity to interpret. Learning that prepares therapists for practice is characterised by a high degree of deliberative awareness and thought-to-action congruence. Deliberate learning is a challenge involving time and effort to weigh and digest decisions. I believe that therapists become contemplative, interpretative professionals in the field of disability through opportunities to use multiple types of knowledge and the language associated with them. First, the language of pedagogy provides therapists with a factual knowledge base that is evidence-based, a starting point for interpretation. Second, evidence is enhanced through the use of the practical language of therapy: the stories and shop-talk that emerges through dialogue between teachers and participants. Finally, the language of critical awareness: knowledge of the role of therapy in the social reconstruction of health delivery. Deliberate curriculum design is needed to facilitate learner therapists to move from mastering facts to a constructive self-awareness.

The Committee considered that Dr Chapparo’s application displayed excellence in all areas, and they were particularly impressed by the fact that his work is at the forefront of pedagogy in both the national and international arena.

Email: C.Chapparo@fhs.usyd.edu.au

Dr Michelle Lincoln
School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Faculty of Health Sciences

Outstanding teaching combines the facilitator’s research skills, subject knowledge, learning and teaching skills and passion. An outstanding teacher uses their research skills to critically evaluate and apply the learning and teaching literature and to design valid and reliable student assessments and evaluations of learning outcomes. Outstanding teachers engage their students in learning by sharing their research and inviting them to criticize, wonder, imagine and hypothesise with them. An outstanding teacher also shares knowledge with their peers through mentoring, presentations and publication.

In my area of clinical education, students’ personal and professional growth is facilitated, assessed and celebrated. Students learn to apply academic knowledge to the management of individuals, their families and carers as well as develop empathy and strong interpersonal skills. They are supported to challenge their attitudes and values and to bring a heightened sense of self-awareness to their clinical work. In order for this to occur an outstanding teacher creates a learning environment of trust, safety and challenge. This environment allows students to explore and extend academic and personal knowledge as well as develop the required clinical competencies.

The Committee considered that Dr Lincoln’s application exhibited an understanding of students’ needs, strong evidence of a scholarly approach to learning and teaching, and connections between research and teaching. They were particularly impressed with the fact that this was being achieved as a practitioner in a professional faculty.

Email: M.Lincoln@fhs.usyd.edu.au

Sue Page & Sally Farrington
Yooroang Garang, School of Indigenous Health Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences

‘Making a difference’ to Indigenous student learning and community health is the inspiration for our work. Successful education outcomes for Indigenous health science students have a powerful potential to improve health status within Indigenous communities. We see our work as contributing to both these outcomes.

Outstanding teaching for us requires a scholarly approach and for the last 8 years we have been conducting a qualitative research project called the Student Experiences Study. This research comprehensively examines the experiences of Indigenous students at the Faculty of Health Sciences to identify factors which affect their success. The research has led to a number of innovations in teaching practice and program change within the School. Student learning is enhanced by responsiveness which is considered and evidence based. We also share our expertise with academic staff across the Faculty so others can incorporate recent developments in Indigenous education into teaching practice, thus enhancing outcomes for Indigenous students in all health science programs.

The Committee considered that Ms Page and Ms Farrington’s application exhibited evidence of strong leadership in the area of indigenous education. They were particularly impressed by the fact that their teaching is student-centred and having impacts outside their own faculty.

Email: S.Page@fhs.usyd.edu.au or S.Farrington@fhs.usyd.edu.au
rewarding excellence in learning and teaching. In 2005, the university offered three sets of Vice-Chancellor’s awards: of the recipients was invited to reflect on the link between their practice and student learning.

**Professor Frank Stilwell**

*Discipline of Political Economy, Faculty of Economics and Business*

I’ve taught at the University for 35 years, and I really enjoy it, perhaps more now than ever. I think it’s important that Professors are actively working ‘at the coal-face’ with undergraduates. Teaching introductory first year units is important because that is where the good foundations are laid for students’ learning.

I don’t think there’s any ‘silver bullet’ that produces good learning outcomes. Teaching is essentially a social process. You have to put your whole body and personality into it, hoping that the enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. I’m lucky because my subject is inherently challenging. It draws on competing currents of theory and has direct relevance to understanding a rapidly changing world, and maybe contributing to making it better. I always begin lectures by posing the questions that will be explored during the hour, discussing why they are interesting or important. Around the mid-point, when students’ attention tends to flag, is a good moment to invite some two-way interaction—just for a few minutes because lingering longer can cause a loss of focus too.

Tutorials also require striking a balance between systematic structure and accommodation to students’ personal concerns. Quiet students often welcome being ‘put on the spot’ by being asked direct questions. It gives them their ‘own space’ to speak and it sends a message that no-one can hide or switch off during tutorials. A tutorial must be an active and collective learning process. Creating a serious but friendly context is the key.

The Committee were particularly impressed by Professor Stilwell’s sustained passion for teaching, and the positive influence he has had on past and present students.

Email: franks@econ.usyd.edu.au

**Dr Penelope Van Toorn**

*Department of English, Faculty of Arts*

I try to cultivate in students a healthy sense of their own agency as knowers and makers of meaning, by building on what they already know both from their previous studies and their own life-experiences. As students recognise the real-world relevance of the texts they are studying, they discover their own personal investments in the issues they are learning about. Without losing sight of how important it is to be able to make impartial, detached observations and judgements, it’s crucial that students see themselves as being inside the picture they are learning about. I therefore approach literature and film not as forms of high art, but rather as politically significant instruments that explore, reflect, and exercise particular kinds of power in real-world contexts. This double inside/outside positioning helps stimulate in students a kind of passionate curiosity about the texts and issues explored on the course, while also developing their skills in rigorous critical thinking.

The Committee considered that Dr Van Toorn’s application exhibited strong evidence of a focussed, coherent approach to teaching. They were particularly impressed with the structure of Dr Van Toorn’s course materials and assessment tasks, and the high quality of her application.

Email: penny.van.toorn@arts.usyd.edu.au

**Dr Roger Pamphlett**

*Department of Pathology, Faculty of Medicine*

What I have learnt from 18 years teaching medical students:

1. A good lecture is like an enjoyable evening at the theatre. There should be drama, humour, visual engagement, a polished performance by the protagonist and a surprise ending.
2. Most students will only remember the humour.
3. Try to think of your students as future colleagues. It’s not difficult—they will be in 4 years time.
4. Also try to imagine each of your students as your own physician in the future. What attitudes and knowledge would you like them to have as they go about treating you? Or undertaking a sigmoidoscopy on you?
5. Don’t try to be your students’ friend. You’re their teacher, not their friend.
6. If, at the end of the day, you can instil some humility and uncertainty into your students then it’s been a good day.
7. Few things are more pleasant than a lecture or a practical class finishing 10 minutes early. Perhaps only one that finishes 15 minutes early.
8. Always getting favourable student feedback isn’t necessarily a good thing. You may be being too easy on them.
9. You’re privileged to have contact with students during a few, precious formative years of their lives. Don’t waste their time.
10. Encourage students both to work hard and to enjoy themselves. Especially the latter.

The Committee considered that Dr Pamphlett’s application exhibited strong evidence of research-led teaching and a scholarly approach to teaching.

Email: rogerp@pathology.usyd.edu.au
Institute for Teaching and Learning

Professor Terry Carney
Faculty of Law

Professor Merlin Crossley
School of Molecular and Microbial Sciences
Faculty of Sciences
Email: m.crossley@mmb.usyd.edu.au

Unfortunately, Professor Crossley was unable to share his reflections on the award.

Almost all scientists begin their research training as PhD students. The days of the gifted technician (or bookbinder like Michael Faraday) becoming a professor have probably gone. The prosperity of our nation in the knowledge based industries, therefore, depends on the foundation of that training – the PhD (and BSc(Hon)) degree. But not all students will, or even want to, enter a research career (certainly very few will enter academia). So not only must the PhD training provide research skills, it must provide transferable skills, which must be appreciated as such by students. At the same time, a PhD in e.g., chemistry, should not be seen as “an expensive way of training a business analyst”. Therefore, the training must be inherently productive, as well as providing those essential transferable skills.

Meeting these various imperatives requires the highest quality research supervision. In addition to the provision of unique skills, the quality of the research experience of most students profoundly influences not only their consideration of research as a long term career option, but, whatever their career, their attitude to research and its value. Since we would hope that these students, the most intellectually able of their generation, become the decision makers of tomorrow in their respective careers, our graduates must have a critical, well informed awareness of the nature, context and (realistic) potential of research. Ideally this awareness is informed and updated by the maintenance of links with research.

University-wide awards

Professor Terry Carney
Faculty of Law

A/Professor Tony Masters
School of Chemistry
Faculty of Science

Tony masters cont...

These are all important, but the truth is that to share the joy and wonder of true discovery with some of the brightest young minds in the country and to have a small part in the making of those minds is, to misquote the 17th century alchemist, John Joachim Becher, “to live so sweetly … may I die if I would change places with the Persian King”.

The five principles which underpin my supervision are:

- Firstly – Isn’t this fun?
- Secondly, I want each of my students at the completion of their degree (MSc or PhD) to know more about something than I do.
- Thirdly, I tell my students that they know what they’ve done – they don’t yet know what they can do.
- Fourthly, students should move from one steep learning curve (the PhD) to another (e.g., postdoc, industry) and not be doing more of something at which they’ve shown they’re eminently capable.
- Fifthly - Isn’t this fun?

On top of all of this, it’s important to remember that it’s the student’s candidature, not ours, not the University’s.

Email: a.masters@chem.usyd.edu.au
There are a number of books which discuss effective practices for research student supervision. These practices include the correct matching of student and supervisor, the importance of assessing the student’s needs, establishing reasonable and agreed upon expectations and encouraging students to write early and often. Other important practices are having regular contact with students, providing them with regular feedback on their work, involving students in the life of the department, and taking an interest in students’ future careers. While all of these are important, one further thing I think is important for successful supervision is taking an interest in, and account of, the students’ lives beyond the thesis itself; that is, why they are doing the degree, what it means for them, and what is at stake for them in their doing this. Sometimes students are working in much more difficult and demanding circumstances than their supervisor may be aware of. For instance, they may have tenure track requirements they need to meet, they may be trying to hold down a full time job while doing their studies, and they may be trying to establish a new life for themselves and for their family in a new and unfamiliar country. While a supervisor cannot necessarily solve these issues, being aware of what some of these issues are, I believe, can help supervisors work with students to achieve their academic (and other) goals.

Email: b.paltridge@edfac.usyd.edu.au

College of Health Sciences

Dr Jennifer Byrne
Discipline of Paediatrics and Child Health, Faculty of Medicine

I view the relationship between a postgraduate student and their supervisor as a dynamic, evolving partnership formed to achieve essentially common goals. The cornerstones of this partnership are hard work and mutual respect, and if these are lacking on either side, both parties are probably in for a fairly miserable few years. The foundations for excellent research supervision are set when supervisors are willing to tailor their supervisory approaches to individual students. I try to marry as much as possible what students want in terms of supervision, with what I believe that they need at the time, bearing in mind that the latter can change substantially during their candidature. Ultimately, my personal maxim is “what is good for the student is good for the supervisor”. Once supervisors recognise this principle, and use this to guide their actions, the process of supervision seems relatively straightforward.

Email: JennifeB@chw.edu.au

College of Sciences and Technology

Dr David Easdown
School of Mathematics and Statistics, Faculty of Science

Mark Twain penned the maxim ‘truth is stranger than fiction’. Mathematical truths which underlie phenomena are almost always more wonderful and surprising than one could have imagined.

A postgraduate in mathematics undertakes a journey of discovery, with whom the supervisor is a travelling companion: sometimes a mentor or guide, but, most importantly, always there to reflect upon the experience, to share the frustrations as well as the exhilaration of success. The other side of the discovery coin is communication: sharing ideas and knowledge with the mathematical and wider community. Here also the supervisor’s role is pivotal: setting examples of good writing and self-discipline; providing constructive (not destructive) criticism; encouraging the student to engage with others through seminars, conference participation and publications. Contributions to scholarship should start early, preferably long before the thesis is due. The thesis then becomes a window for others to view the postgraduate’s vibrant, burgeoning academic life.

Email: de@maths.usyd.edu.au

College-based awards
Scaffolding Literacy Program
Faculty of Education & The Koori Centre

The Scaffolding Academic Literacy Program (developed with colleagues and students in the Koori Centre) integrates the development of academic literacy with undergraduate study. To overcome the negative educational experiences of many Koori students, and make academic learning both enjoyable and successful, it reverses the traditional academic curriculum cycle which demands an extremely high level of independent reading and writing skills. Instead lectures and tutorials are directly linked to the reading and writing tasks that are the basis of university study. Classes prepare students to read set academic articles with the aim of critical understanding, and to use this information to write successful assignments. A proportion of class time is devoted to joint reading of texts, note taking of key information, and joint writing using the notes. A carefully planned pattern of teacher-student interaction is used to scaffold students into reading texts with understanding and writing successfully. Aside from the enjoyment of participating actively in the scaffolding classes, students consistently say that their greatest rewards are being able to understand texts that were previously closed to them, and the pleasure of high grades which they have achieved for themselves. These techniques are also being applied in mainstream academic programs and schools, in a program known as Learning to Read: Reading to Learn.

Mindful of the problems that Clinical Schools have in providing a quality student experience to students removed from the Camperdown/Darlington Campus, the Panel were very impressed with the variety and scope of the PReSS program. Not only did it support the curriculum and provide opportunities for personal growth, it also developed a student community both socially and virtually. The Panel were also impressed with the inclusive nature of PReSS activities and felt that PReSS and its programs was an excellent model for other University clinical schools and remote campuses.

Email: Dr David Rose (d.rose@edfac.usyd.edu.au).

Postgraduate Research Students Society (PReSS)

Northern Clinical School, Royal North Shore Hospital, Faculty of Medicine PReSS was established in 1996 to meet the needs of University of Sydney postgraduate research students undertaking their studies at the Royal North Shore Hospital (RNSH) Campus. The aims of PReSS are to improve academic support as well as to increase social interaction between students. Student research is promoted in almost every clinical and surgical department, as well as in dedicated research institutes on campus.

RNSH is a unique research environment, exemplifying the goal of improving the health of Australians by translating scientific research to the bedside. PReSS aims to foster the relationship between different research units, initiating communication between students, as well as paving the way for future collaborations.

As PReSS is based at the RNSH campus, postgraduate students cannot indulge in the myriad of activities and opportunities that are made available to students studying at the Camperdown campus. Therefore, PReSS aims to enrich the student experience at RNSH by facilitating a number of academic and social activities. For more information, go to http://www.ncs.usyd.edu.au/press.

Mindful of the problems that Clinical Schools have in providing a quality student experience to students removed from the Camperdown/Darlington Campus, the Panel were very impressed with the variety and scope of the PReSS program. Not only did it support the curriculum and provide opportunities for personal growth, it also developed a student community both socially and virtually. The Panel were also impressed with the inclusive nature of PReSS activities and felt that PReSS and its programs was an excellent model for other University clinical schools and remote campuses.

Email: Chris Scarlett (scarlett@med.usyd.edu.au); Michelle O’Han (mohan@med.usyd.edu.au); Hamish Ross (hamishr@med.usyd.edu.au)

Support of the Student Experience Awards
This award recognises outstanding achievement in the support of the student experience. It reflects the University’s

Postgraduate Research Students Society (PReSS)
The Faculty of Medicine Summer Research Scholarships offer an opportunity for undergraduate students studying a science-based degree to obtain experience in biomedical research prior to their decision to enrol in a graduate degree. The aim is to expose students to the research process and give them the opportunity to test whether they wish to pursue a research career. The student chooses from a list of projects devised to produce a research outcome in the 8 week scholarship period. They are trained in the techniques required for the project and supervised throughout by well-established researchers, in high quality medical research facilities. They have the opportunity to work independently and in a one-to-one relationship with a senior researcher. This helps to develop their self-confidence and their problem-solving skills. The program gives them an insight to undertaking research which is not available elsewhere.

The Panel felt that the Summer Research Scholarship program not only supported and affirmed the University’s professed goal of Research-led Teaching but also provided undergraduate students with the valuable experience of undertaking real research in a working laboratory with staff as colleagues. The program also provides benefits to the University through encouraging the enrolment of quality graduate students who have already been inducted into the research experience.

Email: Simon Myers (smyers@anzac.edu.au); David Handelsman (djh@anzac.edu.au); Yamini Sandiran (ysandiran@med.usyd.edu.au); Joanne Elliot (jelliot@med.usyd.edu.au)

Due to the quality of the applications, the Panel also awarded a runner-up:

Postgraduate Peer Mentoring Program
Faculty of Economics and Business

The objective of the Postgraduate Peer Mentoring Program ([http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/mentoring/](http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/mentoring/)) is to enhance the postgraduate students’ sense of belonging to a learning community. Each semester, mentors trained in leadership, communication and teamwork skills guide groups of new students through academic and social activities which aim to provide rapid orientation to the Faculty and University. Features which make this program noteworthy are: student involvement in the shaping of the program, a commitment to continuous improvement based on evaluation and a research-led approach. Forty two percent of the Faculty’s large and diverse cohort of new Postgraduate students took part in the most recent program with 96% of respondents to the end of program survey recommending the program to new students. The coordinators have actively fostered relationships with mentors through an open-door policy resulting in a culture of inclusion, belonging and support passed from mentors to mentees.

The Panel felt that the Postgraduate Peer Mentoring Program was research-led and integrated, which not only provided benefits to those that were mentored but also to the mentees. The Panel thought the Program had the quality to become a model for other faculties and student groups, in that it filled a need by providing a transition to the academic and social life of the University for both International students and students that had little recent experience of structured learning.

Email: Jill Kelton (J.Kelton@econ.usyd.edu.au) or Nadia Bradley (n.bradley@econ.usyd.edu.au).
This conversation emerged from the Faculty’s renewed emphasis on developing, supporting and enhancing university teaching and learning. Facilitated by Amani Ahmed, Projects Coordinator in the CALEB, the conversation illustrates the ways in which three academics – Patty Kamvounias, Rosina Mladenovic and Frank Stilwell have successfully turned their interest and passion for teaching and learning, into research and scholarly outcomes.

Amani: You all did really well in the Scholarship Index, particularly for 2002. This was based on your qualifications in higher education, teaching awards, and your publications and seminars about university teaching. I thought we could chat about your seminars about university teaching.

The other thing I found really helpful with the course was that it wasn’t about techniques - it’s actually about a theoretical understanding of teaching and learning, so that in the end, I had a framework of thought within which to figure out what to do to support my students.

Rosina: The most helpful aspect of completing the MHEd was that the instructor’s modelled and practised what they taught. I actually saw my teachers model ‘good practice’ by the way they conducted the sessions and I experienced what it was that I could bring to a classroom. The teachers emphasised that my learning would be driven by what it was I was looking for, so I needed to clarify my learning goals, the outcomes I wanted to achieve and how can we could work together and learn from each other. The course was very much based on theories and principles that I could put in place in my classroom and that was what was expected in the assignments. In fact, one of my first publications in accounting education arose from one of my assignments.

Patty: I did a Graduate Diploma in Higher Education (at the University of NSW). Teaching is one of the things that we’re here to do and I try to take a professional approach to my teaching, just as with everything else. I needed to know something more than just what you pick up by being thrown into a classroom. I also found it interesting from the point of view of being a student in a new discipline and that made me more aware of perhaps how our own students feel when they’re first being exposed to our disciplines. It’s not easy.

Frank: I did the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education here at the University of Sydney. This was a bit unusual as I was in my mid fifties and most were in earlier stages of their academic careers. I was motivated by the wish to combine reflection on my own experience with more formal study of the teaching and learning process. I found it very interesting, and so after I finished I decided to do a further year of study with the Faculty of Education and Social Work. It was a diploma course that included studying the psychology of learning, including learning styles and evidence of what makes for effective learning. The classes were full of high school teachers so I was an odd one out – however Christine Crowe from the Faculty of Arts was doing the course too and she was a kindred spirit, which helped my motivation. I did consider going on to a Masters but felt I’d done enough – I was never planning to become a specialist in educational theory. For me it has to be linked to the ‘buzz’ of the classroom and the lecture theatre.

The impact of this study on my teaching was that it caused me to engage in a bit more experimentation. One of the projects I did for the Grad Cert was about how to focus students on evaluating their own progress. I experimented with getting 3rd year undergraduate students to rank their progress early in semester on a 1-10 scale and identify what it would take to improve that ranking – what would help them improve their learning. It was a small shift away from teacher centred to student centred learning. Instead of me telling them, the students came up the...
issues for themselves - although they mostly said ‘do more reading’. We then did the same exercise later on in semester. The experiment reflected my interest in solution focussed brief therapy, a practice used in one-to-one counselling to get the person seeking help to focus on immediate goals. The scaling process is a technique used to help a client take action to improve their situation by identifying the steps for themselves. I like to borrow ideas from other fields to create a more active student-centred learning environment.

Research – ‘students are really interested in my research on teaching and learning’

Rosina: Over the years I’ve found that students are really interested in my research on teaching and learning, so I guess I’ve been using research-led teaching for a long time. I really like the idea of students having access to the research I do and exploring the reasons I do it. Students seem to enjoy that I do research that supports their learning and they find it helpful that I am able to incorporate what I do as a researcher into my teaching. For example, I always thought that students’ negative perceptions of accounting really hinders their learning. As students come in with certain perceptions of what accounting is, they ‘learn’ in certain ways. If you think accounting is all about ‘number crunching’ then you don’t spend time on the theories, frameworks and the underlying concepts, because that’s not part of what you think accounting is. You don’t critically evaluate it. So, over the years in week one of semester I have introduced some of my research on perceptions of accounting. I would start by asking the current students to tell me about their perceptions of accounting. Students often say things like ‘boring, numbers, tax’ and so on and I’d say ‘OK that’s interesting, as it is similar to what students said one year ago’ and I would show my research. By then students are usually all laughing at the negative perceptions and I then say ‘but 12 weeks later look at the perceptions students have at the end of the unit’. The current students see that ‘maybe it’s not just about numbers’. I feel it helps when students see alternative perceptions and they’re mindful of this in week one that concepts and theories are in fact important as this is what students from the last course said were important.

Frank: Not many of my own publications are about teaching, but I just got a paper accepted into the Australasian Journal of Economics Education. It’s about how the teaching of political economy contrasts with teaching economics, in terms of pedagogy and content. My argument is that the changing curriculum (from orthodox economics to political economy) goes hand in hand with change in pedagogy. Political economy is more student-centred, particularly in the way it allows students to link their studies with their personal observations of the outside world. It’s a pedagogy that’s less textbook driven and more linked to practical experience and observation. The problem with orthodox economics is that it has a core of established theory that is quite impervious to the diversity of people’s actual experience. It also conveys a certain politics that emphasises individual choice rather than collective concerns. My teaching aims to open student thinking to a broader view that takes in human needs and social progress – to provide an arena for competing viewpoints to all get a hearing.

Over the years I’ve also written articles for high school teachers of economics, for example in Economics, the journal of Economics and Business Educators NSW. I got invited to give talks at in-service training courses for economics teachers. I also got involved in redesigning the HSC economics syllabus, though I’m not sure my ideas had much impact! It’s important to link into these pre-university studies and well worth doing as it’s the foundation of young people’s understanding of economic issues, so that they have a good foundation for university study.

Patty: I’ve done some of my research with Diane Dancer from the School of Economics and Political Science. Diane’s been able to provide some really useful analysis of the data obtained from my students. One of the projects we’ve worked on is on identifying students at risk. We looked at students as they come in to university – at the information that we had in terms of their background, the level of admission, whether they had coaching at school, whether their parents had a university degree, whether they were working, how many hours a week they were doing and so on… factors that we could identify literally on day 1 of the semester. And the predictors of success were very different for the females and males in my first year unit and I imagine that if we did that in other first year units the results may be similar. And that all arose simply after having a discussion with Diane one day about how our students were doing.

Rosina: The other thing that I really like about education research is a point that Patty’s just made - that it is cross disciplinary and it’s also international as the issues are the same. I have a co-author in England who I’ve been collaborating and writing successfully with for several years.

Assessment Practices – ‘I got my first year students involved in identifying assessment criteria’

Patty: Assessment of class participation has always been an issue in our discipline, and I imagine in other disciplines as well. So I got my first year students involved in identifying assessment criteria and we used self and peer assessment to come up with a way of assessing class participation that I think is fairer and that students accept because they can see that it’s fairer.

Finding the balance – ‘I don’t regard research and teaching as separate activities’

Amani: How do you balance everything? You’ve all achieved a lot in one year.
Frank: I don’t regard research and teaching as separate activities. My teaching wherever possible draws on examples from recent research, including my own. And my research and writing I regard as a process of teaching – trying to inform and educate my audience. I spend an enormous amount of time on expression – in the classroom and when writing, which I regard as a highly skilled process of communication of ideas. The nice thing about research publications is the allure of possibly communicating ideas more broadly within society. That’s exciting but difficult to achieve.

Patty: Well I guess the reality is that focussing on teaching leaves you less time for other research but what I’ve tried to do is make my teaching part of my research as well. I’ve had some success but I’m still a novice in the discipline of higher education. What I need to do is to team up with somebody who is an expert in the field.

Rosina: I’d say I’m not balancing it very well as I have very little leisure time. I’ve worked really long hours to achieve these outcomes. But I think I am learning how to manage it better. I have a wonderful co-author (Ursula Lucas from the UK) to share the work and we’re being much more strategic with each project and each data set - trying to ‘get the most’ of it out. For example recently we’ve published a literature review in the area we’re currently researching and with the data we’ve collected, we’re planning to achieve a number of publications eg a paper focussed on gender, ESL, comparative Australia and UK data and we’re also collecting longitudinal data. Finally, we know other people collecting similar data in this area, so we’ll do another larger comparative study. We’re trying to be more strategic in the planning stage.

Patty: In terms of collaboration, I’m also reminded of the work that I did with Christine Crowe from the Arts faculty. When researching your teaching, you can collaborate with colleagues from other disciplines – whether from social work or vet science – because the principles of teaching and learning are the same across all disciplines. And it makes the work so much more interesting and enjoyable.

Rosina: Conferences provide a wonderful opportunity to meet research collaborators. I was at a conference when Ursula came up to me and said ‘I like your work’, and I said ‘well, I really like your work’ and we started working together. After years of turning up to international conferences, I was invited to speak at other conferences, invited onto editorial boards for international education journals. Being on editorial boards is really good because you’re reviewing new papers all the time. I think that’s the way to go, attend conferences, meet people, and tee up papers and joint research projects with them. And pounds translate better into Australian dollars!

The Scholarship Index – ‘very positive for the University of Sydney’
Amane: Any comments about the Scholarship Index itself? Is there a feeling of being pleased with the results, a feeling of being rewarded?

Patty: I didn’t do what I did with a view to getting a reward for it. It was just something that I was doing anyway because I thought it was important. The monetary reward is an added bonus. What is more important is knowing that teaching and learning is valued.

Frank: I think it’s good that Schools are rewarded according to demonstrable efforts and achievements in teaching and not just research. That’s very important. I’m not sure that the Scholarship Index is the best way of doing that. My own view is that there are dangers in extending economic incentives into higher education (as I argued in an article in the Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, May 2003). The culture of the institution is ultimately what matters most. Putting more prominence on teaching quality in hiring and promotions process, in reality as well as in rhetoric, is important. If, over and above that, money is to be allocated between Faculties and Schools according to teaching indicators, we need to recognise that different arrangements can generate quite different responses, not all of which will actually produce more effective teaching and learning outcomes. So we need to look carefully at questions such as whether funding should be based on teaching performance (as revealed, for example, by ITL unit of study evaluations) or measured output of academics’ scholarly work (and what exactly are we measuring there?). And should it go to the School as a whole or to the individuals concerned (as is the case in the Faculty of Economics and Business)? The more you look at these issues the more you realise that there is no necessary connection between the measures, the money, the motives and the institutional outcomes.

Rosina: I think it is a terrific initiative – it is wonderful to be acknowledged and rewarded. Teaching and research are our primary activities so I think that rewarding scholarship in teaching adds to the credibility of this kind of research. More importantly, as we receive the funds we can do more work. You can’t do research without funds, so it’s one way of getting the funding just to continue the research.
Amani: That's just a choice of our two schools, by the way. Some faculties do not provide the money right to the individual level.

Rosina: I believe it provides an incentive for others to do research on teaching if they know that they will receive further research funds. I think that it's really good that our Schools want to acknowledge this, as it signals that this research matters and the scholarship of teaching and learning matters. I'm very grateful for the support of both Schools for teaching related research.

Patty: I was able to use my funds to go to an international conference on the scholarship of teaching and learning. When other participants at the conference saw 'University of Sydney' on my name tag they were very interested to find out about what was happening at our university and what it was like to be part of a university that recognized and rewarded the scholarship of teaching. Until then, I had thought that because it happens at our university it happens everywhere—but clearly it doesn't. It is something very positive for the University of Sydney.

Recent teaching and learning publications

Patty Kamvounias

Rosina Mladenovic

Frank Stilwell

Patty Kamvounias is a Lecturer in Business Law. Her major research areas and interests are in competition law, consumer law and legal education. She is an outstanding teacher dedicated to encouraging high quality student learning. She has a particular interest in the first year educational experience and is involved in a number of projects to support teaching and learning in first year commercial law. In 2000, Patty was awarded the VC's Award for Outstanding Teaching: First-Year Teaching.

Rosina Mladenovic is a Senior Lecturer in Accounting. She has been recognised as a highly accomplished teacher in her field both by her students and by external sources. Rosina is an Associate editor for Accounting Education: an International Journal and serves on a number of editorial boards for international accounting education journals. Her research interests focus on exploring student perceptions, assessment methods and students' approaches to learning as a way to improve accounting education practice and research.

Frank Stilwell is a Professor in Political Economy. He is a well known critic of conventional economics and an advocate of alternative economic strategies which prioritise social justice and economic sustainability. He has taught for 35 years at the University and received the Faculty's Wayne Lonergan Award for Outstanding Teaching in 2004 and a Vice-Chancellor’s Outstanding Teaching Award in 2005.

Amani Ahmed is Projects Coordinator in the CALEB. She has a PhD from the University of Technology Sydney. While studying for her PhD, she taught biology and horticulture at the University of Sydney, UTS and TAFE and also completed a Graduate Certificate of Higher Education Teaching and Learning.

For further conversation with Patty, Rosina, Frank and Amani about the scholarly outcomes of their research into teaching and learning, visit the online discussion forum at: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy/forum or email Amani at: A.Ahmed@econ.usyd.edu.au
ITL hosts International Conference on ‘Higher Education in a Changing World’

In July, the ITL and the University hosted the prestigious Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), international conference on teaching and learning. The conference was considered to be the Society’s most successful conference ever, with 466 delegates attending from 21 countries. Particularly impressive was the contribution of the many University of Sydney staff who offered high quality papers on their research and development work on university teaching.

Feedback from conference delegates included the following reflections:

This is my first HERDSA conference. I come not from an educational background rather science. I have found the ideas discussed wonderfully interesting and thought provoking.

I’ve met interesting people and even the things that challenged and/or frustrated me have been productive in terms of forcing me to examine the issues from other perspectives in order to modify/reinforce my own approaches to and beliefs about academic development, teaching and learning.

Got me engaged with current thinking on higher education. Enabled me to deepen my understandings of some of the challenges and opportunities of the faculty I work for.

Conference delegates participated in a range of activities including pre-conference workshops on teaching and learning offered by renowned local and international colleagues, approximately 300 informative paper and seminar sessions and a range of workshops on issues such as national agendas for teaching and learning from government policy makers; strategies for and support for student learning presented by learning centre staff and getting teaching and learning research published offered by editors of several leading educational journals. ITL staff made a significant contribution to leading many of the workshops.

As part of the conference, the University generously hosted a Welcome reception at which Professor John Hay, Chair of the AUTC presented this year’s HERDSA Fellowships. The HERDSA Fellowship is a professional recognition scheme based on a peer assessed portfolio. The scheme provides an internationally recognized qualification in university teaching or academic development. Information on the scheme and how to become a member of HERDSA is available at: www.herdsa.org.au

The conference also included keynote presentations from Professor Graham Gibbs, Professor Dai Hounsell and Professor Jan Currie. These keynotes and copies of all the refereed papers are available in the conference proceedings which can be obtained by contacting the HERDSA office at [office@herdsa.org.au].

At the conference this year the ITL offered a new award, The Institute for Teaching and Learning Creative Presentation Award. This award was designed to foster engaging and creative presentation of scholarly work on teaching and learning at the conference. Judging by the feedback provided by delegates it achieved this aim with some sessions involving participants as partners in autobiographies and even as competitors in a game of twister! The ITL is proud to announce it will also be offering this award at next year’s conference as a means of fostering the engaging communication of scholarly work in teaching and learning.

The 2006 conference is being held in Perth from July 10-13 and the advance call for papers will be announced shortly. Information on the conference is available at www.herdas.org.au and it is hoped that once again staff of the University of Sydney will take the opportunity to present their outstanding research and development work on university teaching.

Hosting such a successful conference is a major undertaking and involves the contribution of many people. In particular I would like to thank all the staff of the ITL...
who contributed so generously of their time and expertise and the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Sachs who ensured the institutional support for the event. In particular I would also like to thank Jennifer Ungaro, Manager Administration and Finance in the ITL whose superb conference management ensured the event ran smoothly and was an enjoyable and productive experience for all involved.

Simon Barrie
2005 HERDSA Conference Chair

Principles & Practice (P&P) of University Teaching and Learning Program in New Contexts

P&P at Moore Theological College
One of the flagship ITL staff development programs is the 3-day Principles and Practice for University Teaching and Learning (offered annually on multiple campuses for University of Sydney staff). An awareness of the successful nature of this program in meeting the needs of academics to develop their understanding of effective learning and teaching in higher education has expanded outside the University of Sydney environment and as a consequence, a modified 2-day program is now on offer, both locally and internationally.

One of the first external organisations to take up this offer was Moore Theological College (MTC) in Newtown, who as part of their quality assurance initiative recently approached the ITL for 2-day program for their faculty. Drawing on learning and teaching research, the ITL team designed suitable content and developed specific presentations and handouts for MTC. Evaluations from the participants indicated a high satisfaction rating with the only suggestion for improvement being a longer time frame!

Ann Applebee
Coordinator of ITL Graduate Programs

Teaching & Learning from Sydney to Saudi Arabia
In August, the P&P program ran at the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. KFUPM is the Kingdom’s premier research university and in recognition of its status has recently been given the responsibility for developing the strategic plan for Higher Education in Saudi Arabia for the next 25 years. The university has special expertise in the area of Engineering. I travelled to Saudi Arabia to facilitate the program as well as a number of seminars on Evaluation and Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning and Generic Graduate Attributes. The seminar on Teaching Quality assurance was attended by approximately 95 faculty members and was an occasion for lively debate and discussion of the challenges involved in developing institutional quality assurance strategies which were seen as useful by both academics and university management. The importance of basing such strategies in well researched understandings of the relationship between teaching and quality learning was particularly interesting to the participants. The seminar on generic attributes – ‘Graduates for tomorrow’s world’ was also well received. Following the seminar, I met with the Rector of the university and the committee responsible for developing a strategy to integrate generic attributes in KFUPM’s curriculum. As a result of the discussions, KFUPM is exploring the possibility of using the same research based framework that Sydney has used in its new policy on Generic Graduate Attributes [http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/graduate-attributes]. The Rector and the Deanship of Academic Development have invited ongoing consultancy and input to KFUPM’s work in this area.

This is the first time the ITL has taught the University’s Principles and Practice Program for new academic staff in an overseas university and judging by their feedback, participants found the program very useful:

It is a high quality program…..I benefited a lot from this program and I will be applying it in my classes… it will significantly improve my performance.
The 30 participants engaged wholeheartedly in the program and generously shared their experience and ideas. Amidst much laughter, the participants’ genuine commitment to improving student learning in their classes was obvious.

The interaction was great…… the lecturer encouraged all to participate and express their experience…the instructor provided very effective methods to improve teaching and learning…I intend to use the techniques practiced here in my courses.

Simon Barrie, ITL

Recent ITL publications and presentation


Brew, A. (2005). Integrating Teaching and Research: What do we know? Keynote address to the Canadian Summit on the integration of teaching and research., University of Alberta, Canada, 3-5 August.


Jackson, M. & Sachs, J. (2005). Integrating the scholarship of teaching into a research university. Paper presented at the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 14-16 October, Vancouver, Canada


Randy Bass (1999) once observed that having a ‘problem’ in one’s teaching is not something that academics want to share openly. A ‘problem’ is something to be got rid of, to be kept quiet. In a peer observation partnership, the status of a problem transforms into an invitation for collaborative inquiry. This new HERDSA guide written by Maureen Bell is representative of a larger conceptual shift in thinking about the productive capacities of the peer collaboration as a form of professional academic development, and a signal of academic professionalism. The first noticeable shift is in the use of the word ‘partnership’. This is not a matter of fussing over nomenclature. The tenor is different. The purpose is different. Bell writes very early on, that it is a focus which is intended to “provide a structured process for mutual support in which colleagues can share their knowledge and experience and develop their skills and approaches within the immediacy of their own teaching environment” (p.1). It is characterised by support, reciprocity and challenge. Bell draws on the educational image of a critical friendship to describe its spirit. And in an era where teaching and learning is becoming more accountable, often in ways we have yet to fully grasp, and sometimes in ways that we might to resist, the peer observation partnership process provides an opportunity to reclaim, replenish and nourish the work of teaching.

The Guide itself is thorough, scholarly, informative, and provides practical advice for academics willing to engage in an open process of learning about teaching. It provides a background to a number of theoretical frameworks for collaborative and peer learning; guidance with a process for developing a focus to the partnership; an introduction to the nature of critical reflection; and suggestions for evaluating the success included in the appendices. These should be used as a basis for conversation and be adapted so that the partnership has relevance within the context of those who engage with it. Bell makes a convincing case for the collegial nature of the process.

References


Nightingale’s Advising PhD Candidates is in some ways an extension of Ingrid Moses’ 1985 HERDSA Guide Supervising postgraduates. It argues that there is something fundamentally different about advising PhD candidates; that they are in fact closer to being colleagues than students suggests a different and perhaps more detailed attention to its pedagogy. While the precise nature of this difference is not really fleshed out at length in the guide, Nightingale takes advisors (her preferred term for supervisors) through a journey which engages them in considering their own readiness for the work entailed. For instance, there are suggestions for how to assess a student’s readiness to undertake the task of a PhD; questions to be asked the integration of a new candidature within an academic’s research program; a consideration of topics for the first meeting; the importance of knowing and understanding the institutional terrain; and an emphasis on negotiating a set of expectations early on so that there is a common understanding. In Chapter 3 ‘First Meeting and Early Stages’, Nightingale reminds of the factors which can complicate the advisory relationship - and here her focus rests on gender, culture and co-supervision. The messages err on the gentle side: develop self-awareness and establish open lines of communication. The most interesting chapter for me is Chapter Five ‘What does it mean to do a PhD’ since it raises a more vexed set of issues of how to advise in a time where the nature of the doctorate is changing.

Those starting out with their first experience of advising will find this Guide a useful beginning. Supplemented by ongoing conversation with more experienced colleagues, together with systematic scholarly attention to the pedagogy of advising, the Guide provides an insight into unpacking the work of research higher degree supervision.
I recently joined the Department of History as a lecturer, and, amongst other duties, have been involved in teaching first-year students. The Department of History, part of the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry (SOPHI), offers a rich selection of units of study that reflects the staff’s expertise in American, Australian and European history (www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/history/docs/history/index.shtml). In first year, students can choose from a range of options, including HSTY 1045, ‘Modern European History 1750-1914’. This unit of study introduces students to the major themes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European history, including the Industrial Revolution, French Revolution, the rise of liberalism, capitalism and socialism, changes to family life, and the origins of World War One. This is a fascinating and influential period, when many of the major political institutions and social and cultural movements that we are familiar with today (for example the system of parliamentary democracy) were first developed. By addressing such topics, HSTY 1045 aims to provide students with an understanding of the key issues in European history that have shaped the modern world.

This is an important and challenging task. More and more, our students focus on twentieth-century history in high school. There is relatively little attention to history pre-1900 (let alone pre-1800), with the notable exception of Ancient History. Moreover, many students enter university with little background in history at all. This means that in HSTY 1045 we must assist students to come to grips with a period about which they often know little and a society which may seem completely alien. How do you make sense of the French Revolution if you don’t know what pre-revolutionary France was like? At the same time, we introduce students to perhaps the most important, yet complex and challenging, aspect of the practice of history, namely research and writing a long essay.

The Department of History is committed to providing students with an excellent learning experience. Its staff members are interested not just in ‘product (the production and delivery of new information)’ but ‘process (how students learn in their subject and how learning develops through the interaction between student and subject matter)’ (Booth, 2004:251). With the introduction of the University’s new policy on assessment, my colleagues and I have been considering ways to improve the assessment in History units of study, as well as to ensure that our teaching helps students develop the university’s graduate attributes.

In order to achieve these goals, I decided to enrol in the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) this year. This decision was warmly supported by the Head of SOPHI as well as my colleagues in the Department of History. The following is based on a Graduate Certificate project on assessing student learning that I completed in first semester. The task was to provide a critical review of an existing assessment from the perspective of the extent to which assessment supports quality student learning, together with a proposal for improved assessment which is consistent with the University’s new standards-based approach to assessment. I chose to focus on the assessment in HSTY 1045.

**Teaching Context**

HSTY 1045, Modern European History 1750-1914, is a very large (350+ students) first-year unit of study, which is taught by various lecturers in first semester each year. Students enrol in HSTY 1045 from a wide variety of degrees and programs, and are taught via two one-hour lectures and a one hour tutorial per week. The current assessment strategy comprises:

- 250-word analysis of a journal article (10% final mark)
- ten-minute tutorial presentation (10%)
- 2,000-word long essay (35%)
- formal two-hour exam (35%)
- tutorial participation (10%)

I have been increasingly concerned about the gap between the large number of things we try to teach students in this unit of study, and what they actually learn. In particular, I have doubts about the effectiveness of some of the assessment tasks we assign. My reading in the Graduate Certificate has enabled me to conceptualize what is actually happening with current assessment practice and why that may be undesirable. In turn, this has helped me to think about ways to improve the assessment strategy in HSTY 1045.

For the purpose of the project I focused on the journal article analysis and the long essay, and with what I perceive as their relative misalignment with the unit of study’s learning outcomes. I should make clear that there are many excellent aspects of HSTY 1045, not least the commitment and passion of my fellow lecturers. The problem, I think, is with aligning our good intentions as teachers with student perceptions of their learning, and this is where I think revision of the current assessment strategy is desirable. I must emphasize that I view the following project as an experiment, a first step towards improving the quality of student learning in HSTY 1045.
It certainly does not purport to be ‘the last word’ in improving this unit of study, and other changes to the assessment strategy may well be advisable in the future.

**Current Assessment Practice – Critical Review**

My own experience teaching HSTY 1045, discussion with colleagues who have also taught the unit, reflection on the Graduate Certificate sessions on assessment, as well as my reading of the research literature on how students perceive assessment, all indicate that the unit’s current assessment strategy does not always fulfil its stated student learning outcomes. (O’Donovan, Price & Rust, 2004; Leach, Neutze & Zepke, 2001 and Ramsden, 2003). In particular, HSTY 1045 does not always achieve what I regard as its three most important learning outcomes, namely that this unit of study will enable students to:

- analyse historical writing in a critical fashion
- develop skills at presenting your analyses in oral and written form
- learn how to carry out independent research through the writing of an essay

Student surveys also suggest some misalignment between assessment and student learning outcomes. Some students complain that they are overwhelmed with material, provided with little guidance on preparing their essay (‘I didn’t know what standard was expected’), and given insufficient feedback on their performance. A few also complain about variations in marking standards between tutors and lecturers (marking is divided between 4-5 postgraduate tutors and 2 lecturers). Finally, some students lament the absence of opportunities for group work involved in the unit. Such responses suggest an overall feeling of powerlessness and lack of autonomy among students. As the experience of Leach, Neutze & Zepke (2001) demonstrates, encouraging autonomy among students can lead to higher-quality student learning. Students’ perceived confusion about essay writing is borne out by their performance. Many students who perform well in both the article analysis and the long essay entered the unit of study with excellent essay writing skills, while others don’t seem to improve much over the course of the semester. In other words, we seem to assess students more on what they learn from others (e.g. high school teachers) rather than what they learn from us. This conflicts with the university policy that assessment should be effective, and in particular ‘a representative test of the knowledge, understanding and skills to be achieved by successful completion of the curriculum’ (The University of Sydney, 2000, amended 2004, section 2.1.1.2).

While the lecturers all lead tutorials and mark written assignments, the large number of students means that we also employ postgraduate tutors. This means that we have non-specialists (the vast majority of these tutors are NOT studying European history topics for their PhDs) marking a great deal of written work in a short amount of time. Not only does this mean that tutors may vary in the quality as well as quantity of formative feedback they provide students on their written work, there may also be some problems of inconsistency in the summative feedback, e.g. one tutor might give an essay a ‘55’ that another would give a ‘65’. This means that the assessment may be both ‘inefficient’ (because it doesn’t help students to learn) and ‘unacceptable’ (because the distribution of marks isn’t necessarily fair and transparent). (University of Sydney, 2000, amended 2004, sections 2.1.3.1.6). While there will always be strict time and resource constraints on our marking of written work, I believe that my proposed new assessment strategy will improve the quality of both the students’ written work and the formative and summative feedback that they are given on this assessment.

With improvements to the current assessment strategy I believe that all of these learning outcomes will be more readily achieved, and that there will be constructive alignment of the assessment strategy with the learning outcomes. Constructive alignment, a term taken from Biggs (1999) in this context, means that the assessment strategy actually facilitates the student learning outcomes. By focusing in a more structured way on preparing the long essay, students will learn to ‘analyse historical writing’, ‘develop skills at presenting analyses in oral and written form’ and ‘learn how to carry out independent research’. As research studies such as Ramsden’s report on Hyde and Taylor’s Animal Science course point out, constructive alignment of the assessment strategy with the learning outcomes provides greater opportunities for achieving high-quality student learning. (Ramsden, 2003:193-94). Alignment of assessment and learning is important for its own sake, but it also enables HSTY 1045 to better meet the guidelines set out in the university’s policy on standards-based assessment, and thus to enhance the consistency of students’ learning experiences. (The University of Sydney, 2000, amended 2004, sections 2.1.1.2, 2.2.2, 3.2.7).
Proposed new assessment strategy

My proposal is to replace the current journal article analysis and separate long essay (together worth 45% of the students’ final mark) with a three-stage essay process (also worth 45%). At the moment the journal analysis is not linked with the long essay and is often misunderstood by students. I think that students’ and teachers’ time would be better spent focusing on the essay, which is the hallmark of almost every university History unit of study, and indeed most closely resembles what professional historians ‘do’. The new assessment strategy comprises:

- ten-minute tutorial presentation (10%)
- 2,000-word long essay (45%), consisting of:
  - draft essay plan and bibliography (10%)
  - final version of essay (35%)
  - formal two-hour exam (35%)
  - tutorial participation (10%)

Revised Essay Assessment

In the first stage of the long essay preparation, students meet in Week 4, not with their usual tutorial group, but with the other students who are researching the same essay question (these are divided up equally, so that each question is answered by the same number of students) and the lecturer or tutor who will mark this assignment. This represents a U-turn in current practice, as currently we go to great lengths to obscure who will mark particular essay questions in order to prevent students parroting back the marker’s perceived views on a particular topic in their essays. Nor do we encourage students to work together on essay preparation, for fear of plagiarism. I now think that it would be most beneficial for students to work with the person who will mark their essay, and to discuss their ideas openly with other students. This openness should engender a greater sense of trust between staff and students. It should also help staff identify problems with a student’s approach to an essay (and potential plagiarism) before the final version is handed in. As students will have more time to work on the essay, this approach should lessen the last-minute panic that sometimes leads to plagiarism. Students spend this tutorial session drafting a ‘directed paraphrase’ of the essay question, swapping it with another student to read and respond to, then reporting back to the whole group on their various responses. As Biggs notes, research conducted by Angelo and Cross (1993) indicates that direct paraphrasing can be a useful tool for assessing students’ understanding of subject matter. (Biggs, 1999:131-132).

By encouraging students to work in pairs and to then present their ideas to the whole class, this exercise should build students group work skills, ‘confront individuals with alternative views and different standards of work’, and provide experience in reaching the second learning outcome, namely ‘develop skills at presenting your analyses in oral and written form’ (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-05, pp. 15-16). By giving students the experience of analysing other students’ work, this task helps them to see the assignment from the marker’s perspective. As O’Donovan et al (2004:330-332) point out, sharing the marking experience with students ‘should also enable more effective knowledge transfer of assessment criteria and standards’ as well as encouraging ‘assessment for learning’. This exercise counts towards students’ tutorial participation mark but otherwise is not graded, which should alleviate...
any anxiety that students have about ‘performing’ in front of the class.

The tutor then leads general discussion on how to ‘unpack’ the essay question, emphasizing that the department values individual interpretations, and provides guidance on finding relevant sources and preparing the draft essay plan and bibliography. Si/he also draws students’ attention to the departmental essay writing guide and the department’s set of grade descriptors, which are the subject of one of the lectures that week. In 2004 a postgraduate student and I prepared a HSTY 1045 Essay Writing Guide, which is currently being revised for adoption by the entire History department (www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/history/docs/history_referenceguide.pdf). We also have an excellent departmental set of grade descriptors. (www.arts.usyd.edu.au/departs/history/undergrad/need_to_know/interpreter_grades.shtml) While these are useful tools, I think that they will have even greater impact if they are well integrated into teaching. Through discussion of the Essay Writing Guide and grade descriptors in lectures and tutorials, students will have the opportunity to think about them BEFORE they use them, as well as to ask questions and make comments on them. In this way students’ attention is drawn to the way in which HSTY 1045 assessment is standards-based, and in turn consistent with the policy endorsed by the university.

In the second stage, students meet with their essay tutorial group in Week 6 after reading relevant sources and preparing a draft essay plan and bibliography (250 words, together worth 10% of final mark). They discuss both with another student, and then report back on the partner’s essay plan (via another directed paraphrase, as recommended by Angelo and Cross) to the group (Angelo and Cross, 1993, in Biggs, 1999:132). The partner then comments on how well the student has understood his/her essay plan. This session is designed to give students more opportunities to reflect on the essay writing process, work towards the learning outcomes and to report problems and seek shared solutions (e.g. if one student has had trouble finding a relevant book, the tutor and other students may be able to suggest alternative locations for the book or alternative readings). The students submit their draft essay plans and bibliographies to the tutor, who marks them according to the existing departmental grade descriptors for Fail, Pass, Credit, Distinction and High Distinction work. The work is then quickly returned to the student with a copy of these grade descriptors, and with brief written comments which focus on how the work fits the particular grade assigned. This process will be repeated in the feedback given on the final version of the essay.

In the third phase of essay preparation, students are encouraged to contact the marker with any questions about this feedback before handing in the final version of the essay (worth 35%) in Week 9. The marker keeps a copy of the draft essay plan and bibliography, and compares them with the final version of the essay, which is returned before Week 13 so that students can seek feedback on their performance before the final exam. Students should thus see a link between their preliminary work and the finished long essay.

Through encouragement to start their assignment early, to discuss their preparation with other students and the tutor who will mark the essay, and by verbal and written feedback on their ideas, students should approach the task with more confidence and better planning and produce a more coherent essay (Carless, 2002, in Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-05:20). Also, by eliminating the journal analysis assessment, students (and the teachers/markers, both postgraduate tutors and lecturers) will have more time to focus on the long essay, which should reduce stress levels and in turn the panic that can lead some students to plagiarism. This new strategy in turn fulfils the university’s policy that assessment be efficient (by maximising the benefit for both students and staff), and acceptable to students (by not generating undue stress). By breaking down the long essay into discrete, manageable stages, and providing numerous opportunities for feedback (student-to-student and student-to-teacher as well as teacher-to-student) on students’ performance of these stages, this revised assessment strategy should more readily achieve the stated learning outcomes (analyse historical writing, develop oral and written analytical skills and learn to carry out independent research), as well as encourage students to enjoy further the study and practice of history.

References
The full list of references for this article is available online at: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy.

Cindy McCreery obtained her Master’s and PhD degrees in history in the UK. She spent two years as a Senior Research Fellow at the National Maritime Museum in London and worked as a lecturer at the University of Oxford. In 1998 she returned to Australia for a postdoctoral fellowship at UNSW, and later taught history at the University of Newcastle. In 2002, she joined USyd as a Lecturer. Recently, Cindy has become interested in researching how students learn in large first-year units of study, as well as how they develop essay writing skills. She is currently enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education), and hopes to apply what she is learning to both her teaching practice, and to future research projects on learning and teaching. Cindy would like to thank Tai Peseta of the ITL as well as Robert Aldrich and Dirk Moses in History for their helpful comments on this article. To chat further with Cindy about assessment in History, visit the online discussion forum at: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy/forum or email Cindy at: cindy.mccreery@arts.usyd.edu.au
Mary Jane Mahony thought her postgraduate qualifications in Botany specialising in cell biology would lead naturally into a career as a bench scientist. It didn’t. The change in direction was confirmed when she was offered a post in Malaysia at the University of Agriculture, teaching science. Reflecting back on the time, she says “I was an untrained teacher and I am embarrassed to say that I taught in the way I was taught. My interest in the use of audiovisual materials started there though”. Her now career-long interest in the education of adults was struck with a position at the then Tasmanian College of Advanced Education working as an editor in a Distance Education Unit. “At the time, distance education was driven largely by access issues and supporting those returning to study. After teaching high school students for two years following completion of a UNE Diploma in Education, I realised that my skills were more suited to supporting mature learners rather than young people”. From Tasmania, Mary Jane moved to what was then called the Orange Agriculture College, and more recently the Faculty of Rural Management – her primary role was in distance education and instructional design but situated within a framework of discipline expertise. She later took on several roles, one of which was the Head of Postgraduate and Professional Studies which developed her profile across the university more broadly and enabled her to better understand the complex nature of change in universities and how best to work within it. With a PhD from the University of Wollongong in a policy systems study of distance education in Australia, a central theme in Mary Jane’s work is in working out how change happens to support student learning. She says, “I realised that change in education often has little to do with teaching and learning theory and more to do with two things: institutional and national policy; and individuals themselves and where they want to go. So my work has been to contribute significantly into policy and procedure development with a knowledge of individuals at the grassroots, and the complexity of systems. I suppose you could say that my work is trying to work out where to tap on the system”.

Now working in a number of different roles across the university, one as the Director of Education Connections in the Faculty of Health Sciences, and another as Chair of the College of Health Science’s e-Learning Working Group, Mary Jane has been in thick of working towards developing systems, mechanisms and policies that enhance university learning and teaching primarily through flexible approaches. These are often, though not always, underpinned by information and communication technologies, but always underpinned by a philosophy of learner-centredness. She brings to each role, a long institutional history and commitment to building collaborative networks. In fact, this is the pleasurable part of Mary Jane’s work. “One of the benefits of my work is being able to create opportunities where colleagues discover that they have something to give each other and get excited about it. Fostering collaborative learning always gives me a buzz because I don’t feel like I have to deliver knowledge. Instead, I facilitate people to share their work so that they learn from each other. I see this happening more and more in my College role with knowledge sharing of e-Learning across the five faculties. This is an enormous challenge since there are staff (and students!) on four campuses as well..."
Mary Jane identifies too, much of this coordination is supported by developing a strategic approach to working towards change, managing it, and then translating it for application in different contexts. “My work can range from discussions at the chalkface to senior management. I like to think of it as producing an understandable and informed way of moving forward. Learning is the core – e-learning strategies are a current focus.” This work also manifests broadly within her Faculty responsibility. One role in that context, for example, is to encourage more research into learning and teaching. It is about raising the status of pedagogical research and “turning what academics have to do anyway into scholarly outcomes. This could be about encouraging them to collect evidence and to develop a process of rigour about it but also communicating that work to others as a form of scholarship”.

Mary Jane thinks of e-Learning as a driver that encourages people to think about their teaching - “an excuse”, as she puts it. The challenge as she sees it, is how to “recognise and reward” academics’ efforts at change. “There is increasing pressure to do more with less, and perceived conflicts between teaching and research responsibilities, both leading to considerable stress on our excellent teacher. We need somehow to get beyond that dichotomy, and to nurture and reward colleagues who meet that challenge.”

The landscape for talking about technology, particularly e-Learning, is changing. Mary Jane argues that while there will always those “early adopters” and “innovators” of e-Learning, the focus must be on enabling the majority of university teachers to make informed decisions about taking-up established technologies to support student learning. “Change is always evolutionary and incremental. We need to have a twin focus: getting more colleagues to use technologies to facilitate active learning by students in integrated ways while supporting early adopters to use it with increasing pedagogical sophistication.” The issue as she rightly notes is in finding ways of rewarding the take-up of other peoples’ ideas.

As a long time user of these technologies, Mary Jane describes herself as having “played with these toys” for a very long time”. In fact, she has had an email address since 1986. But aside from the onslaught of potentially exciting new technologies and how they might support university learning and teaching in ways that foreground flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency, one debate that Mary Jane feels is lacking: the purpose of the university itself. While she is clearly excited by new discourses around graduate attributes as providing an avenue for that discussion, she worries that “there appears to be an absence of debate” on that broader question. “Being clearer about the purpose of the university in our 21st century society”, she says, “could help us all be clearer about our roles within the university.”

For further conversation with Mary Jane about her e-Learning work in the College of Health Sciences, or in the Faculty of Health Sciences, or about learning and teaching more generally, visit the online discussion forum at: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy/forum or contact her via email at: MJ.Mahony@fhs.usyd.edu.au
If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to go to the forest to gather wood, saw it, and nail the plank together. Instead, teach them the desire for the sea -- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

This is the challenge for the postgraduate supervisor: to assist the student to develop desire for, and understanding of, research. A determination to acquire and utilize research tools will then naturally follow, as this process will be driven by the student. Leadership is about students having the confidence to seize control of their research and career to ensure that it delivers what they desire personally and professionally.

Leadership and how it relates to the ‘educational product’

‘Leadership’ is perhaps one of the most commonly used terms in today’s society. However, it is rarely clearly defined and, consequently, is often abused and misrepresented by business, government and institutions. Hence nowadays the term is often regarded cynically as a euphemism for coercive management or mere rhetoric. Leadership is perhaps best defined in business where it developed to explain a style of management that encouraged maximum product and profit. Both management and leadership have people as their main focus. Management is about effective organization and methods of implementing change. Leadership is about empowering people, irrespective of their defined roles in an institution, to contribute to direction and change in an organization. In effect, it is allowing people to engage in the decision-making process. How then does leadership apply to a university, where there are historical, hierarchical power structures?

Leadership as a term is commonly used in universities to describe the ‘products’ of academic pursuits, namely education, research and service. It is also used at a personal level where it describes the roles and responsibilities of senior and junior ‘line managers’ (from the Vice Chancellor downwards). However, the term leadership is often confusingly intermingled with those of ‘leader’ and ‘manager’. This may send the wrong message to staff and students who lack a position of designated authority, and may feel that they lack the power or encouragement to contribute (provide leadership) to the university’s direction and growth.

In circumstances where there is an autocratic style of management, this may be a reality; but commonly it is a false perception based partly on a personal lack of understanding and confidence. Interestingly, the term ‘leadership’ is in not included in the university’s list of generic attributes for graduates, and yet it could be argued that the key attributes relating to scholarship, global citizenship and lifelong learning have leadership as their foundation. If this is the case, why is there not encouragement of formal development of leadership in the undergraduate curricula? Similarly, the generic attributes for postgraduates avoid the underlying foundation for research skills development. Even the criteria for good supervision practice avoid the term leadership, despite, the fact that the development of ‘competent autonomy’ (Gurr, 2001) in a postgraduate student primarily depends on developing leadership skills and the confidence that follows.

For the purposes of this article, I use the word leadership to mean the ability and capacity to manage one’s personal and professional destiny through influencing change and direction (Drucker, 1999). This requires the development of self-confidence and competence in understanding others and oneself. It is about empowering individuals to view their environment/context from an empowered perspective. An individual does not have to undergo an epiphany to change or understand. Some may call the change a form of enlightenment; others may refer to it as simply obtaining additional self-knowledge. It is my belief that this change can be assisted by elaborating skills and understanding for an individual through a program of personal and professional development.

Postgraduate supervisors have the opportunity to assist their students to develop leadership, but it first requires the supervisors themselves to develop the courage to reflect on and face their capacity to lead. Perhaps many undertaking the Development Program for Research Higher Degree Supervision realize they are taking a form of leadership course; perhaps others just simply want to be able to formally supervise postgraduate students without having a life-changing experiencing. I would advise the latter group, if they exist, that every postgraduate student in their care will have a life-changing experience of varying proportions; and the supervisor has a real opportunity to influence whether it is positive or negative experience.

There are many available tools to help individuals understand themselves better, particularly how they interact with others. Many of these began life as psychological/business tools and, hence, are viewed with suspicion and cynicism by many academics. And it is probably true that the tools can have harmful effects if explained poorly or utilized inap-
appropriately. For example, personality profiling, such as the DiSC method (@Inscape Publishing, Inc), Myers-Briggs Type Indicator © 1998 Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc) or the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (©1999 Victor Dulewicz and Malcolm Higgs), may have the negative effect of ‘pigeon holing’ individuals to the extent that there is an expectation that individuals will always behave true to type. This may be akin to a postgraduate supervisor who believes there is only one way to supervise to achieve success, which is usually the way with which they feel most comfortable. However, by understanding that personality profiling is very much about identifying behavioural patterns of thinking, feeling and acting in others and self, there is an opportunity to vary one’s responses depending upon different sets of circumstances. By ‘viewing oneself from the balcony’, there is an opportunity to be analytical and truly understand the needs of a particular interaction. This has direct implications for postgraduate supervision where I believe there is a requirement to be flexible in responding to varying student needs during the course of postgraduate supervision. Styles of supervision very much depend on the interaction of behavioural patterns of supervisor and student (and perhaps associate supervisors?).

Another tool commonly utilized in business is the analysis of team working styles, such as the Knowledge Team Effectif Questionnaire (© Robert Marshall, 2002 Knowledge Teams International) and Working Styles Exercise (© 2004 KPMG), which can be less threatening as they explore the ways teams work and the ways one feels most comfortable working a team. They identify what factors make a team successful, such as leadership, resources, dynamics and processes, and how individuals like to contribute to the factors (Marshall and Lowther, 1997). Teamwork is vital for success in every walk of life and requires individuals to develop interpersonal skills that allow them to become an effective team member. Teamwork is now a core educational process for learning and assessment, and interpersonal skills are now an integral part of the University’s preferred graduate attributes. So, how does this apply to the postgraduate supervisory process and the development of leadership skills in the postgraduate?

It is my view that for the postgraduate supervisory process to lead to success for the student it is imperative that both the supervisor and the associate supervisor(s) have real team skills. In many cases, the supervisors are research collaborators who have had experience of working closely together to deliver key outcomes, and the supervisory process is merely an extension of that team approach. However, other supervisors may have limited experience of working together and have been brought together because of the disciplinary skills they possess. In either situation, for the team to be successful, there is a need for common goals, concern for one another’s views, respect for one another’s disciplinary and interpersonal attributes, and attention to planning for timely outcomes. The broad foundation basis for these is trust and respect, which require time to develop and very much depend on building a capacity for active listening (i.e. displaying understanding of the speaker’s issues through direct feedback).

Team members have to develop the capacity to vary their roles; and while leadership capacity is displayed at all times, there may be opportunities for alternating leaders. For example, a senior, experienced academic may vary from acting as a ‘tribal elder’, as a ‘foreman’, as an ‘apprentice’, and even as a ‘foot soldier’. For their training in leadership concepts and team skills. Additionally, it requires an acceptance that there should be an almost seamless transition in life skills from undergraduate, to postgraduate, to junior academic/scientist and, finally, to senior academic/scientist.

For the past six years, the Faculty of Veterinary Science has engaged in remodeling to an inclusive culture and developing leadership skills for all staff. This required a significant commitment of resources and the engagement of professional individuals and teams used to working

Interestingly, the term ‘leadership’ is not included in the University’s list of generic attributes for graduates, and yet it could be argued that the key attributes relating to scholarship, global citizenship and lifelong learning have leadership as their foundation.
with organizational leadership. The Faculty has now reached a stage where it believes that undergraduates can benefit greatly from the leadership programme, and it is important that this is extended to engage postgraduates.

**Engagement of postgraduate students in training of undergraduates in leadership and team skills**

The Faculty of Veterinary Science treats incoming undergraduates as junior colleagues and impresses upon them the responsibilities of leadership expected of them by the general community. Throughout the early years there are units of study that focus on ‘Professional Practice’ attributes. There is now a push to include the formal development of generic attributes for leadership and teamwork in these units of study. One such model is to set tasks that require undergraduates to work effectively in teams to achieve success, to provide formal training in generic team skills, and to provide opportunities to reflect on the reasons for the level of success. For this activity to be successful, it will need to be carefully managed.

It is proposed that the Faculty will consult about the activity with those professional individuals currently providing leadership training for staff within the Faculty, and will utilize presently trained staff in leadership to facilitate the activity.

There is a real opportunity to include postgraduate students as facilitators in this activity. By doing so, postgraduate students, through necessity, will be exposed to leadership concepts, profiling and teamwork skills in a non-threatening manner and with a clear objective in assisting
undergraduates. Postgraduates will be required to train with staff operating as facilitators for the activity, some of which will most likely have concurrent postgraduate supervisor roles. Consequently, there will be an opportunity for postgraduates to develop some knowledge and understanding of working in a team with supervisors, which should benefit their operating capacity in the research supervisory relationship.

**Utilization of the Annual Postgraduate Conference to develop awareness in staff and students about leadership**

In 2004, the Annual Postgraduate Conference in the Faculty of Veterinary Science broke from tradition and provided sessions, in consultation with Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL), which allowed supervisors and students to jointly explore concepts of the postgraduate supervisory process. One session, based on role play, focused on understanding of expectations in the supervisory interaction, and was very much about self-awareness and consideration of one another. From my observations, I believe the resulting discussion proved to be successful in providing a higher level of awareness amongst supervisors and students about roles and expectations.

In hindsight, the session has established an important precedent. Whilst the conference will always focus on developing students’ skills in presentation, there is now an opportunity to devote a significant period of time to developing understanding about the supervisory process. The Faculty of Veterinary Science requires mandatory participation of both supervisors and students at the annual conference, and it would be relatively easy to arrange several joint sessions covering aspects of the supervisory relationship, especially with the involvement of the ITL. In effect, aspects of leadership and teamwork could be explored with a slant to preparing students for ‘competent autonomy’.

**Formal leadership courses for postgraduate students**

Whilst this perhaps provides the best possible exposure for students to leadership concepts, it can be costly and may be resisted by the more skeptical of students. The course could be personally threatening to some students and they may not see the relevance for their research discipline. However, handled by professionally trained facilitators, the courses could provide invaluable self-awareness and useful teamwork skills. It is feasible to set aside some Faculty postgraduate funding for such an activity, and it may be the case that such activities work best at an institutional level, possibly through the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Presently, The Faculty of Veterinary Science operates a leadership program for staff that includes a one-week residential workshop, one half-day and two full-day sessions and an ongoing group project. The program focuses on developing confidence and understanding of others and self. I believe components of this could easily be adapted for postgraduate students, with group projects directed at providing ideas and plans on how to improve the postgraduate experience, the supervisory relationship and research and career opportunities. Ideally, postgraduates would be involved in their first year of candidature; but some, depending on enrolment date, would attend in their second year. The inclusion of some supervisors in the program would provide additional two-way benefits for the supervisory relationship.

**How to judge if the proposed model is effective?**

It is always difficult to measure the success of a change, especially if that change is primarily about influencing attitudes and perceptions. In this model, it is about measuring whether the change, better allows students to take responsibility for their own learning and to work effectively with others. The outcome should be a better understanding of their career goals, more effective interpersonal skills and, hopefully, timely completion.

Despite the difficulty of measurement, there are mechanisms presently in place that could assess success, albeit subjectively. The present yearly review of postgraduates could be utilized to appraise postgraduates of their capacity to undertake greater responsibility for their project and their understanding of the team approach to research. At that time, supervisors and associate supervisors could be specifically questioned on the development of these skills in the postgraduate. Moreover, it could be suggested that supervisors monitor the development of the postgraduate in these areas through their weekly meetings.

Ultimately, the success of the change will be measured through the career paths of individuals. However, many individuals prove successful despite having great limitations in self-awareness, reflective capacity and interpersonal skills. So, perhaps the best measure of success is how the individual feels about themselves? Has the change given them self-esteem; has it given them confidence to set and achieve goals; has it helped them in their personal life; has it given them better understanding of the expectations of their colleagues? All these are perceptions, but very important perceptions. Surveys of completed postgraduates (eg Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire) could allow the collation of such information. However, whether this would be acceptable or useful to the Government or universities is debatable. Unfortunately, institutional success is measured by tangible outcomes, such as completions, publications, career progression and Nobel prizes, and not by whether individuals feel good about themselves and are trusted and respected by others.
Why is it important to facilitate leadership and empowerment in postgraduate students?

I started my career with a focus on advancing education and research in veterinary science. I accepted that part of this involved training postgraduates. I was realistic in that a benefit of this was an opportunity for personal advancement. Today, as a long-term academic, the hunger to advance veterinary science still exists, but the need for personal advancement has diminished. And yet my commitment to postgraduate training has continued to grow. I cannot fully understand all the reasons for this growth in commitment, but I do know that it cannot be separated from my personal development and core values.

If one cares about people and the ideals of a university, then the primary role of an academic has to be facilitating the enlightenment of students; empowering them to understand and influence for the benefit of society and their own well-being. It would be very easy for me to be cynical about the process of postgraduate supervision and to suggest that it is a production line that primarily benefits the supervisor and the institution. However, it cannot be denied by most experienced supervisors that there can be great joy and satisfaction through helping young colleagues to fulfill their potential and to become researchers in their own right. I continue to feel that satisfaction and revel in the joy of watching previous students advance and then begin to influence and lead further generations of researchers. My wish is that younger supervisors find and acknowledge the importance of this enjoyment and somehow balance it with institutional demands and the necessity of personal advancement.

Concluding remarks

Universities have developed into complex organizational structures. One consequence of this has been the compartmentalization of functions into the broad categories of learning and teaching, research and innovation, and service. These are often managed separately and at times may seem at odds. And yet, are they not all directed at enriching Society? Are they not about empowering undergraduates, graduates, postgraduates and all university staff to enrich their own lives as well as that of Society? Enrichment comes with understanding: understanding of personal and professional desires and needs, and those of others. Tertiary institutions have an obligation to facilitate understanding, and thereby provide a foundation for societal leadership and direction. Perhaps a way of achieving that obligation is to view the diverse university community as one; to view undergraduates, postgraduates and staff not as a Venn diagram but as a virtuous circle in which cause and effect merges. By doing so, there is an opportunity to develop a culture and scholarship of leadership in learning that is both inclusive and naturally progressive.

References


* This article is based on a case study to fulfill a major requirement for the Development Program for Research Higher Degree Supervision, ITL, University of Sydney. The author is grateful for the support and advice provided by Tai Peseta, Sue Piper and Angela Brew in the writing of this article.

Paul Canfield (DVSc, PhD, GradCertEdStud, FACVSc, FRCPath, MRCVS) graduated in 1973 and spent two years in both small animal and farm animal veterinary practices. He then returned to the University of Sydney and completed a PhD on studies of Bovine Neurofibroma in 1978. In 1979, Paul travelled to the UK and spent some months working in mixed animal practice near Coventry before taking up a year’s appointment as a Lecturer in Veterinary Pathology at the Royal Veterinary College. In 1980, Paul returned to the University of Sydney to take up an appointment as Lecturer in Veterinary Clinical Pathology. He is currently Professor in Veterinary Pathology and Clinical Pathology and Director of Diagnostic Services. He was Acting Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science in 2003-2004, Pro-Dean of the Faculty from 2002-2004 and Head of Department of the now defunct Veterinary Anatomy and Pathology Department from 1999-2000.

In 2001, Paul received a Faculty Pfizer Teaching Award for excellence and innovation. He is active in continuing education in association with the Post-Graduate Foundation of Veterinary Science (PGFVSc), presenting workshops and lectures on laboratory diagnosis of disease. Paul’s research interests are varied and include host-pathogen-environment interactions in wildlife and domestic animal disease, and haematological and biochemical disturbances in companion animals. He has been author or co-author of over 160 publications and has successfully supervised over 15 postgraduate students. He was awarded a Doctor of Veterinary Science for his thesis of published works entitled ‘Investigations into the health and disease of Australian wildlife, with particular reference to the koala’ in 2003.

For further conversation with Paul about supporting the development of leadership and teamwork skills as part of the research student experience, visit the online discussion forum at: www.ilt.usyd.edu.au/synergy/forum or email Paul at: p.canfield@vetp.usyd.edu.au.
The University’s e-Learning Support initiative supports the University community to enhance the student learning experiences and the campus with sustainable learning technologies that promote research-led, active and innovative approaches to learning and teaching. One of its key aspects is the strategic support for College Information and Communication Technology (ICT) projects. Each PVC College has appointed a representative (Director of e-Learning) to oversee the academic administration of strategic e-Learning projects. Faculties have also each appointed a representative to better understand how e-learning is being used to support learning and assessment in their faculties. In addition, the central initiative has provided an annual allocation of 4000 hours of support for strategic projects which are prioritized by the director and operationalised by staff from the central Flexible Online Learning Team (FOLT), (Sachs, 2004). Since 2001 there has been a 60% increase per year in the use of WebCT as a learning management system with about 30% of learning at the undergraduate level classified as blended learning, (Applebee et al., 2004).

This short paper addresses how the central initiative has been operationallyised within the College of Sciences and Technology (CST) over the last two years and whether we can already point to significant output that is enhancing the learning experience of students. We will also try to look into the future and suggest where this is all heading.

The team and how it functions

The College “team” consists of the Director of e-Learning, representatives from each of the faculties (appointed on a yearly basis by the Director in conjunction with the Dean of each faculty), a Project Manager assigned to the College from FOLT, and members of FOLT. The latter are assigned to the College each semester depending on the development needs of each College. The College FOLT group has office accommodation in the Carslaw Building.

The Project Manager meets with the FOLT group on a weekly – if not daily basis to discuss the development of the multiple projects on which the team is working. The Director and Project Manager meet with the faculty representatives every month to discuss issues that have come up; to report progress on the projects; to select projects for the FOLT group to develop and to allow for a flow of communication from the initiative through the faculty reps to the faculties. This did not always work as effectively as was hoped in 2004 during the setting up phase. In 2005 we set up more structured meetings that have provided for good two-way communication. Each faculty representative is a member of his or her faculty teaching committee and this provides an avenue for communication.

In 2005, we have sought to answer three strategic questions:

• What is the size and shape of e-learning in each faculty?

• How is e-learning influencing the learning activities/opportunities in each faculty?

• How is this influencing assessment?

The 2004 projects

As the University initiative was being set up in 2004, each College was given 2000 hours strategic development time for the development of projects for the remainder of the year. The projects chosen had to meet several criteria (to be seen as strategic for either the School, Faculty or College; to provide either a model or a set of ideas for use elsewhere in the same School or Faculty or within the College; or to be collaborative across Colleges with a whole-institution output), and they had to be appropriate for the time available (November 2004 – end of January 2005). The College team undertook six projects, one of which was a large joint project with the College of Health Sciences (CHS). Four of the six projects are outlined below.

1. Using still images in online teaching and learning project

This joint project with CHS began largely as a fact-finding mission to determine the level of proficiency amongst staff in using images in online teaching and learning. It resulted in remarkably tangible outcomes. A large and informative WebCT site was developed for staff, offering extensive instruction in using images online. The site:

• introduces the essential principles and practices of preparing and using images online, with step-by-step guidelines and templates;
• focuses on the educational use of images by providing authentic examples of image use in CST and CHS;
• explains the use of images with specific WebCT tools;

Copyright – It was time-consuming for the project team and Library staff to interpret available documentation on where, how and how often to place the required copyright warning image on online resources, and to investigate how the copyright legislation applied to the images of academics taken before or outside of university employment.

4. Audit of online teaching and learning in the College
Initially developed by CHS, the online inventory has provided valuable data, although we did experience difficulty getting information from sufficient staff to ensure the results are valid.

2005 projects
In first semester, we are worked on five projects. Some of the projects are aimed at providing resource delivery modes that can be used to develop specific teaching materials for individual units of study, and any templates produced will be available for use elsewhere in the College (and the University); some of the projects are aiming to provide working models within a specific unit of study that could be transferred across other units of study within the same discipline.

With all of these developments the questions being asked are: are they sustainable; how can we best use legacy materials; are we using better educational design.

Two small research projects have been identified from the current projects. These will be ongoing in semester 2 by the academics in charge of the projects and members of FOLT.

Outputs of 2004 and 2005 projects
• Expected research project dissemination outside of the institution
• Templates for models of educational design
• Professional development resources and training
• Resource delivery models

Outcomes for the College of Sciences and Technology
• Better understanding by staff of the pedagogical use of e-Learning
• Student acknowledgement of a superior online teaching and learning environment
• Technologically literate graduates
Has this work contributed to a “cultural shift”?  
Stephen Cattle in the Faculty of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources (FAFNR) reports that prior to 2005, e-learning strategies were largely restricted to sporadic use of internet sites during lectures, loading lecture notes and slides onto the faculty’s intranet or local servers, and occasional loading of assessment tasks onto the intranet. In January 2005, a joint Teaching Improvement Fund (TIF)/e-learning project was initiated to establish WebCT sites for the Animal and Veterinary Biosciences Degree (taught by Vets and FAFNR). Six semester one units now have live WebCT sites, and up to six more will be established for semester 2 units. Through demonstrations of these sites to faculty staff, and positive responses from staff and students who have used the sites, a cultural shift towards the incorporation of e-learning into all units has commenced. In particular, there appears to be a growing appreciation of the flexibility of an e-learning platform like WebCT to enhance unit delivery and management, and an appreciation that students now expect an on-line presence for most units. In the coming months, it From the perspective of the College Director of e-Learning, the biggest challenge has been communication with the faculty reps. A WebCT site was tried as a means to inform, update, share information, but also to allow for electronic communication that was open to all. The reps did not all use it; they preferred just email. The solution has been to turn the WebCT site into an archival site for all the College team to access and to introduce a formal monthly face-to-face meeting with a set agenda. The Director of the Sciences and Technology Libraries also attends. Another issue is how to encourage academics involved in projects to provide the content to FOLT according to the previously agreed schedule. One suggestion for a solution to this is to align the expressions of interest with the TIF rounds each year (this occurred for CST in 2004 and was successful in getting funding for two of the 2005 projects) and to persuade the College PVC and PVC Learning and Teaching to allow small grants to be available for selected projects. In 2004, some academic staff involved in the initiative had work load issues, which may be less severe this year as the initiative matures and TIF grants help to prevent such problems.

Another issue affecting staff stems from the innovative nature of some e-learning projects, such as the ‘Using still images’ project. The broad aim of the web site and workshops was to transform the way in which staff work with images in online teaching and learning. Kenny (2004) has found that projects which introduce change to University staff also ‘introduce high levels of uncertainty’ (p. 402). In a previous study Kenny (2002) recommended an investigative focus for this type of project, in which ‘the outcomes … are usually unclear or ill-defined at the outset, often becoming clearer through iterative development’ (p. 374). Integral to the iterative process are action learning and action research, together with a flexible approach to project timelines. As a first step in project development, Goodyear (2001) recom-

is likely that FAFNR will adopt a policy to create a web-presence for all individual undergraduate units over the next few years.

Issues
What were/are the issues associated with an initiative that involves so many players who report to so many supervisors? What were/are the biggest challenges?

The workload issue also relates to the degree of staff readiness – or willingness – to participate in e-Learning projects. Academics responsible for units of study in a given course may be keen to develop online materials, but may find that academics on other units in the same course may not wish to participate. Not only does this have implications for consistency across the units of study in a course, it also challenges the independence which academics have traditionally had for the development and teaching of units for which they are responsible (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998). Either way, it is difficult when staff who are less committed to a project (for valid reasons) need to find time from within heavy schedules to develop content. Another issue affecting staff stems from the innovative nature of some e-learning projects, such as the ‘Using still images’ project. The broad aim of the web site and workshops was to transform the way in which staff work with images in online teaching and learning. Kenny (2004) has found that projects which introduce change to University staff also ‘introduce high levels of uncertainty’ (p. 402). In a previous study Kenny (2002) recommended an investigative focus for this type of project, in which ‘the outcomes … are usually unclear or ill-defined at the outset, often becoming clearer through iterative development’ (p. 374). Integral to the iterative process are action learning and action research, together with a flexible approach to project timelines. As a first step in project development, Goodyear (2001) recom-

mends beginning with a detailed requirements analysis to ‘generate as rich and accurate a picture of the requirements of the various parts as time and other resources allow’ (p. 25). After carrying out a requirements analysis for the ‘Using still images’ project, we recognised that the original project outcomes were not relevant to the majority of staff for whom the resource was designed. Through a flexible approach to proj-
ect development, we altered the project outcomes - and consequently the development timeline - to meet staff needs. In current projects, we have made provision for a requirements analysis, coupled with action learning and action research, as well as a flexibility in the development timeline.

On a less positive note, in the ‘Using still images’ project, an opportunity was missed to develop a space in which staff can help each other develop the skills they need to work with images, and where they can share their insights and suggestions about what works and what doesn’t when teaching with images online. Lateral community-building – based around techniques rather than disciplines to develop cross-disciplinary communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) – could provide an important source of teaching innovation through cross-pollination between disciplines of teaching know-how and conceptions of the appropriate student experience.

A continuing issue with the ‘Using still images’ project centres around the dissemination of its outputs to all CST and CHS staff. The three workshops were popular and the web site has been well visited since its launch, however, anecdotally we know that some students are still unable to access some online course materials because they contain non-web-ready images. Perhaps we need to look to Rogers (2003) for an explanation:

Getting a new idea adopted, even when it has obvious advantages, is difficult. Many innovations required a lengthy period of many years from the time when they become available to the time when they are widely adopted (p.1).

We will continue to explore ways in which we can promote the ‘Using still images in online teaching and learning’ web site to facilitate a greater uptake of this valuable resource.

Summary

The beginning was hectic with a feeling that we must achieve something very quickly. In fact this happened and we can look back on the apparent chaos with pride and look forward to the implementation of a series of projects that will have huge ramifications across the College.

What have we got going for us?

- Better understanding of issues to do with e-Learning
- Collaborative actions
- Collegial discussions
- Beginnings of a noticeable cultural shift
- Input into development of University policies with respect to e-Learning Support issues.

References


Higher Education Teaching and Learning

AUSTRALIA, NZ AND ASIAN PACIFIC REGION

Teaching and Learning Forum 2006
Theme: Experience of Learning 1-2 February, 2006
University of Western Australia, Perth, AUSTRALIA
www.catl.uwa.edu.au/tlf06

International Education, A Matter of Heart
14-16 February, 2006
Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

7th Quality Conference in Postgraduate Research
Theme: Knowledge Creation in Testing Times
20-21 April, 2006
Adelaide, South Australia, AUSTRALIA
www.qpr.edu.au/2006/

31st Improving University Teaching Conference
Theme: Extending our Boundaries: New solutions for complex problems in higher education
3-6 July, 2006
Dunedin, NZ
www.iutconference.org/

Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF)
Theme: Quality Outcomes and Diversity
5-7 July, 2006
Perth, Western Australia, AUSTRALIA

Higher Education Research and Development Society Australia Conference (HERDSA)
Theme: Critical visions: thinking, learning and researching in higher education
10-13 July, 2006
Perth, Western Australia, AUSTRALIA

9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference
Theme: Engaging Students
12-14 July, 2006
Gold Coast, QLD, AUSTRALIA
http://www.fyhe.qut.edu.au

South-East Asian Association for Institutional Research
Theme: Transforming Higher Education for the Knowledge Society 5-7 September, 2006
Langkawi, MALAYSIA
http://www.seaair.info

UK, EUROPE & THE MEDITERRANEAN

IADIS International Conference on Web-based Communities
26-28 February, 2006
San Sebastian, SPAIN
http://www.iadis.org/wbc2006/

1st Pedagogical Research in Higher Education Conference
Theme: Pedagogical Research: Enhancing Student Success
2-3 May, 2006
Mariott Hotel, Liverpool, UK
http://hopelive.hope.ac.uk/PRHE/index.htm

Writing Development in Higher Education
Themes: Challenging Institutional Priorities
11-12 May, 2006
Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) Conference
Theme: Enhancing Academic Development Practice: International Perspectives
11-14 June, 2006
Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK
http://iced2006.shu.ac.uk/index.html

The Higher Education Academy Conference
Theme: Enhancing the student learning experience
3-5 July, 2006
Nottingham, UK
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/conference.htm

The 6th DIVERSE International Conference on Video and Videoconferencing in Education
5-7 July, 2006
Glasgow Caledonian University, SCOTLAND
http://elisu.gcal.ac.uk/diverse2006
Higher Education Close Up 3 Conference
Theme: Qualitative Research in Higher Education
24-26 July, 2006
Lancaster University, UK
http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/events/hecu3/

Third Biennial Northumbria/EARLI SIG Assessment Conference
Theme: Assessment for Excellence
30 Aug – 1 Sept, 2006
Northumbria University, Durham, UK
http://northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/assessment2006/

Association for Learning Technology (ALT) Conference
Themes: Next Generation (Learning, Learners, Technology, Providers)
5-7 September, 2006
Edinburgh, SCOTLAND
http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2006/

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):
International Management in Higher Education Program
Theme: Values and Ethics: Managing Challenges and Realities in Higher Education
11-13 September
Paris, FRANCE
http://www.oecd.org/site/0,2865,en_21571361_34712006_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

CANADA & THE AMERICAS
Association of American Colleges and Universities
Theme: Demanding Excellence:
Liberal Education in an Era of Global Competition, Anti-intellectualism and Disinvestment
25-28 January, 2006
Washington DC, USA
http://www.aacu.edu.org/meetings/annualmeeting/

The International SUN Conference on Teaching and Learning
Theme: Creating Inquiring Minds: How to get students to discover (in) the disciplines
3-4 March, 2006
University of Texas at El Paso, USA
http://sunconference.utep.edu/2006/index.html

Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Theme: Evidence, Impact, Momentum
1-2 April, 2006
Madison, Wisconsin, USA
http://www.carnegiefoundation.org

Society for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (STHLE) Conference
Theme: Knowledge and its Communities
14-17 June, 2006
Victoria College, Toronto, CANADA
http://www.utoronto.ca/ota/stlhe_sapes06/welcome.html

International Conference on Problem-based Learning
Theme: Connecting Learning to the Real World
17-24 July, 2006
Pontificia Catholic University of Peru, LIMA
http://www.pucp.edu.pe/eventos/congresos/pbl2006abp/

Distance Learning Conference 2006
Theme: Present at a Distance
2-4 August, 2006
Madison, Wisconsin, USA
http://www.uwex.edu/disted/conference/

EDUCAUSE
Theme: Spurring Innovation and Marshalling Resources
9-12 October, 2006
Dallas, Texas, USA http://www.educause.edu/conference/annual/2006

Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education
26-29 October, 2006
Portland, Oregon, USA
http://www.podnetwork.org/conferences/2006/index.htm

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL)
9-12 November, 2006
Washington, USA
http://www.issotl.org