

Teaching & Learning Matters

Fostering Excellence in Teaching and Learning at ACU

In this edition.....

This edition of *Teaching and Learning Matters* features an update on Higher Education sector issues, an explanation of the committees that deal with learning and teaching at ACU, and some of the interesting topics investigated by our ACU staff enrolled in their final GCHE unit. You will also find a list of all LTC staff at the end of this newsletter.

Sector News from LTC Director

Yoni Ryan attended a meeting of the DVCs (Academic) on behalf of Professor McMullen in the two days after the budget for 2010.

There was general concern that while 2009 was 'the year of universities' with the Bradley Review and government fiscal response (with most additional funding pushed out to 2011-2012), 2010 was 'the year for VET', with major announcements regarding apprenticeships and traineeships. Certainly the major HE announcement was the \$6 million per year cut to ALTC, commencing mid-year 2011. This will affect available funding for grants and Fellowships but is not expected to affect the Citations program, which is considered widely popular and successful in focusing attention on L&T in all universities.

Representatives from DEEWR, the federal department, indicated that TEQSA legislation to replace AUQA was unlikely to be fully implemented by 2011, so AUQA would continue until the legislation was gazetted. This has recently been confirmed.

It was reported that the Minister was committed to the idea of a Graduate Skills Assessment Test for all university students – a single metric, 'NAPLAN writ large', as it was described. There was real alarm at this prospect from the DVC group.



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Learning and Teaching Performance Indicators

Many of you will recall that the Government's proposed criteria for additional funding to "reward" universities for their efforts in teaching included the proportion of staff that held a GCHE as a measure of interest in professionalising their teaching.

Predictably, many research-oriented universities attacked this proposal. Six months on, submissions to the Discussion

Paper have not been made public; nor have the indicators been finalised.

ACU stands to do well if such a measure were adopted: we have good numbers for our GCHE.

Do consider enrolment – and see Course Coordinator Dr Annette Schneider's report of the pedagogic research projects completed by ACU staff enrolled in the GCHE in this newsletter. 

'Threshold Learning Outcomes' or Standards

During the course of 2010, as part of its reforms to the higher education sector, the federal Education Department will oversee a number of projects related to standards which universities and other degree providers will be expected to meet to retain their degree-granting status.

One of these projects, the Standards Project (LTAS), relates to the setting of minimum discipline standards or graduate learning outcomes in nine discipline groups. Almost all discipline groups are now in Working Parties under the auspices of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), and in the process of developing these standards. The ALTC describes the process of constructing the standards:


Broadly speaking all discipline groups are following a sequence of eight steps which are:

1. establishing reference/ advisory groups
2. drafting a set of threshold learning outcomes (LOs) based on the Australian Qualifications Framework and existing work (for example, Australian accreditation standards, European Tunings project, UK's Quality Assurance Agency subject benchmarks)

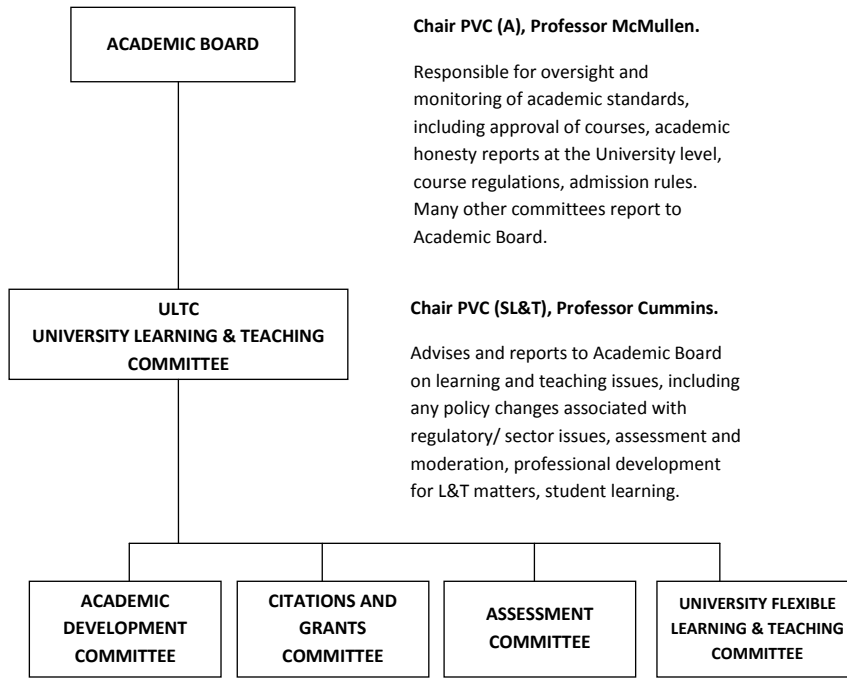
3. seeking feedback from key stakeholder groups on the draft LOs
4. engaging broader discipline communities in relation to the draft LOs, the LTAS project, and the new quality and standards framework
5. revising draft LOs based on stakeholder and broader community feedback
6. gaining endorsement/ratification of final LOs
7. disseminating stakeholder endorsed LOs to their discipline communities and wider community
8. documenting the standards setting process to ensure project sustainability and organisational learning.

To date all disciplines have completed or are finalising the first step and most have embarked on the second. Discipline scholars are receiving many invitations to discuss the projects with professional and educational groups. In addition, all discipline groups have planned strategies for broad-based communication and consultation with discipline-related bodies.

All academics are encouraged to give feedback on the draft standards as they are produced, and to check the ALTC website (altc.edu.au/standards) for updates on progress. The April HOS Workshop featured a keynote by Professor Christine Ewan, Head of the Standards project (LTAS) at ALTC. You can access her PowerPoint presentation and FAQs about the Standards project at <http://www.acu.edu.au/240300>. Graduate Attributes related to higher order skills will be an important element of the standards, because they will prescribe a 'coherent body of knowledge, principles, concepts and higher order learning skills' (AQF Council, 2009) at Bachelor's level. This focus on learning skills such as information literacy, critical thinking and communication skills supports the emphasis ACU has placed on embedding our Graduate Attributes over the past eighteen months, and into the future.

We will have to ensure we teach to these standards, so we should help construct them! 

ULTC? LTC? What's the Difference?



With the addition of a new portfolio of Students, Learning and Teaching to ACU's governance structure, some committee responsibilities were transferred from the PVC (A) portfolio to the PVC (SL&T).

With the 'alphabet soup' of acronyms that are part of every university now, it might be useful for staff to have a diagram of central committees around learning and teaching, and the responsibilities and reporting lines of these.

We'll look at the roles and composition of these committees in future issues – but for now, what's the difference between ULTC & LTC?

LTC is the professional development and scholarly centre dedicated to the improvement of learning and teaching at ACU.

The Centre cannot 'make' policy; it must **propose** any **policy** to ULTC (and hence to AB) for discussion. Such policy recommendations arise from knowledge of the sector by the staff of LTC – such as in relation to a recent policy on expenditure of ALTC Citations money – after consultation with the relevant PVCs.

ULTC is the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

Most policy recommendations come to ULTC from its sub-committees, such as the Assessment Committee.



LTC often implements policies promulgated by ULTC and AB. Examples include policies on online learning and templates, the inclusion of ACU Graduate Attributes into the learning outcomes of a Unit Outline (also an AUQA 'standards' requirement) and so on.

So the difference is?

ULTC is part of the governance structure of the University, with the power to make recommendations regarding L&T to AB.

LTC is a central professional development unit dedicated to the improvement of learning and teaching – it parallels Learning and Development in HR, which promotes more general skill sets in leadership, communication skills, team work etc.

Spot the difference?

Workshops

North Sydney staff learn from students




Lynne Hendrick

On Monday 7 June, staff from North Sydney campus attended a First Year Experience Seminar conducted by Lynne Hendrick of the Faculty of Arts & Sciences and FYE Coordinator (pictured) and Ann Applebee.

The focus of the seminar was to raise awareness of the issues that students face in their first year. Four international students volunteered to talk to staff. They spoke about the problems they experienced, not knowing anyone, having to leave family behind to start life in a new country and having to work to support their family. All the students spoke about being shy and afraid to direct attention to themselves.

Despite these problems, their confidence had developed during the semester and they were able to talk comfortably about their situations. These issues are in line with transitional pedagogy issues and highlight the need for continual support for our students. Staff discussed ways to create even more supportive environments.

If you missed the session, you will be able to access a video of the seminar which should be available on the LTC site early in Semester 2. 

LTC Happenings

LTC Workshops for Semester 2

The LTC Workshop Program for Semester 2 is now available on the LTC website at <http://www.acu.edu.au/138961>

There are a range of workshops designed to provide you with opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge.

There are workshops on exam developments, copyright, working with Grade Book, Blackboard tools, sessions for new academic staff and sessional staff, and more.

Why not enrol in a workshop today? To enrol go to: <http://www.acu.edu.au/161068>



Semester 2, 2010 Orientation for Sessional Staff
The Learning and Teaching Centre invites Sessional Staff to an Orientation Workshop on the 29 July 2010. (Burch Preview)

Welcome to ACU! This workshop will provide necessary practical information to support your work. The 3 hour video-conference in the morning focuses on teaching and learning, assessment, scholarship and remuneration matters. This will be followed by a two hour learning session in the afternoon, focusing on how to create units on Blackboard, how to support your students' learning online, ensuring you have an understanding of copyright and where to find local and national help. Staff will be present on each campus to facilitate.

To accommodate Sessional Staff unable to attend the afternoon learning session, we are providing an alternate evening session which will cover the same program as the afternoon session.

This training is a compulsory part of your Orientation program and you will be paid for both the evening and afternoon sessions (please advise that if you have previously attended an Orientation program, either the generic program or the learning orientation program, you may please opt-out).

When: 29 July 2010
Time: 9 am – 1 pm (9 am – 12 noon video-conference; 1 pm – 3 pm video-conference) for *A (9 am – 8 pm)
Where:

Campus	Videoconference Room	*Evening Computer Room	*Alternate Session 6.00 pm – 8.00 pm
Bathurst	205	101/105	Library
Bendigo	AZ-37	PC Lab 1015	Library 101-10.05
Canberra	11	Computer Lab 3	Computer Lab 5
Geelong	104.10	Library	PC Lab C1.5
North Sydney	C1.5	PC Lab C1.4	C1.5
Stratfield	323	Library/Information Commons Area	

Registration for these workshops is online at <http://www.acu.edu.au/138961> or <http://www.acu.edu.au/161068>.
For further details please contact the LTC - ltc@acu.edu.au or CA GIB@acu.edu.au - gib@acu.edu.au

Semester 2, 2010 Orientation for Academic Staff with less than 2 years' teaching experience
The Learning and Teaching Centre invites academic staff to a full day Orientation Workshop on the 30 July 2010. (Burch Preview)

Welcome to ACU! This one day workshop will provide necessary practical information to support your work. It focuses on teaching and learning, position and appointment, assessment and evaluation, scholarship and clearing. It will be delivered by video conference in your campus, with a number of the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC) present in Australia.

If it is a compulsory part of your induction program and your attendance will be recorded on Staff Connect.

When: 30 July 2010
Time: 8.30 am – 5.30 pm
Where:

Campus	Videoconference Room
Bathurst	205
Bendigo	AZ-37
Canberra	11
Geelong	104.10
North Sydney	C1.5
Stratfield	323

Registration for this workshop is online at <http://www.acu.edu.au/138961> or <http://www.acu.edu.au/161068>.
For further details please contact the LTC - ltc@acu.edu.au or CA GIB@acu.edu.au - gib@acu.edu.au

eLearning Professional Development Scheme


In 2010 we have continued the eLearning Professional Development Scheme that was piloted in 2009. This scheme offers staff a trajectory of eLearning professional development that shows the pathway of transformation from eLearning novice to eLearning expert and scholar.

The workshops we have offered in first semester under the eLearning Professional Development Scheme have included:

- Using PowerPoint in T & L (Level 1)
- Staff eLearning Orientation (Level 1)
- Blended learning Bootcamp (Level 1)
- Facilitating Online Discussions (Level 2)
- Online Assessment Strategies (Level 2)
- New Fully Online Template and Quality Assurance (Level 1)
- Online Journal Club Part 1: Key thinkers in teaching online (Level 3)
- Time Saving Marking Tips (Level 2)

For more explanation of the levels visit <http://www.acu.edu.au/138990>.

We offer the workshops through a variety of modes - video conference, online, webinar, face-to-face and (depending on resources) tailored to your particular school. You can build these workshops into your professional development program for this year and have them recorded on *Staff Connect*.

We are interested in hearing what you would like to see offered in Semester 2. 

Graduate Attributes Resources

The Learning and Teaching Centre has developed a website that provides teaching staff with examples of how to align graduate attributes, learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment tasks for the different graduate attributes at ACU. The resource will continue to be developed during 2010 and the short link to the website is:

<http://www.acu.edu.au/233067>

For the graduate attributes, the resources provide examples of:

- Terminology or elements that make up the graduate attribute
- learning outcomes which relate to the graduate attribute
- related learning activities and assessment tasks
- further resources and publications.

Kym Fraser would like to thank the many colleagues who provided her with examples from their disciplines and in particular colleagues in the library who developed the information literacy resource (GA8). Kym welcomes both comment on the resource and further examples which might be added.

LTC hopes that you find the resource useful in your work. 



Please let us know about your eLearning training needs by emailing either LTC@acu.edu.au or Di Griffiths Dianne.Griffiths@acu.edu.au





The focus areas for the UNHE 503 projects undertaken by the 2009 GCHE cohort

The participants, some academic, some professional staff, in UNHE 503: Research-based Teaching and Learning, conducted a wide range of projects associated with teaching and learning in their areas of professional practice. The issues they addressed are briefly outlined here. You are encouraged to contact your ACU colleagues for further information about a particular project.



Exploring professional practice – the research component of the GCHE

The final unit in the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education, **UNHE 503: Research-based Teaching and Learning**, requires participants to plan and conduct a small research project related to their professional practice. As part of the assessment, the researchers present their draft findings in an interim report to colleagues at a series of video conferences and engage in professional conversations about their project. The final research report can become the basis for a conference paper and a subsequent journal article.

Participants have indicated that presenting an interim report via video conference and then preparing the final report after discussion with colleagues assists in confidence-building and skill development in terms of reporting on pedagogic research activity. We at the LTC hope that you will be inspired to write about your teaching and professional practice after reading the following snapshots from the range of scholarship of teaching and professional practice being undertaken at ACU.

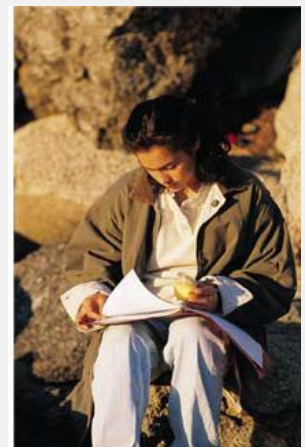
Barbara Adamson (Liaison Librarian, Brisbane): This project explored the experiences of undergraduate business students searching for information for assignments. As a reference librarian for 17 years, Barbara's experience suggests that students often rush into the search for information without adequate preparation and critical thinking and then frequently experience frustration and confusion. Barbara concluded that librarians and academics can help students with the broader picture of cognitive decision-making by encouraging preparation before searching. Staff can also model and teach higher order thinking skills involving brainstorming concepts, locating topics in a hierarchy, and critical thinking about how and what is being retrieved at each stage. Students who learn about and understand the Information Processing Model will also know that feeling overwhelmed and frustrated are normal stages in the search process, but that those feelings should be transitory, as a focus and a structure gradually evolve in the search for meaning.

Dr. Janet Chew (School of Business, North Sydney): This was an exploratory study, applying a qualitative methodology to investigate teaching practices in business education in relation to problem-based (PBL) and self-directed learning (SDL). The study put issues of learners' experience centre stage and involved interviewing ten third year Business students. The findings provided relatively strong support for the existence of a positive relationship between effective PBL teaching practices and its influence on the students' perceptions of their learning. The results identified that PBL does foster SDL but there is also evidence that some respondents were self-motivated prior to entry to university and this personal experience is a factor to be considered in the development of SDL. Janet found that the lifelong learning skills ascertained were collaborative problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, decision making capability, research skills, time management, presentation and communication skills.

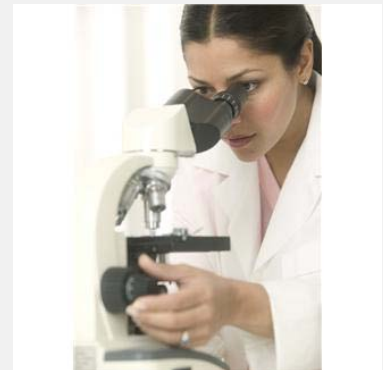
Dr. Vanessa Hughes (School of Arts and Sciences, North Sydney): This study examined the use of a frequently asked question Discussion Board (FAQ DB) for the enhancement of teaching students in large cohorts. It aimed to establish if the FAQ DB contributed to student learning and if so how, while also determining the types of information most requested by students. In addition to this, Vanessa sought to find out if other aspects of teaching may be improved by the use of the informal feedback received via the FAQ DB. The results obtained indicated that the FAQ DB was a useful tool for supporting learning in large student cohorts and the informal feedback gathered by the FAQ DB allowed for continuous improvements to be made to teaching and learning during the semester as well as proving beneficial to future cohorts.



Dr. Madeleine Laming (School of Education, Melbourne): This study focused on women students and their delayed entry to university. Madeleine adopted a qualitative approach, through phenomenography, in order to explore the complex stories of seven women, ranging in age from 24 to 49, all students at the Fitzroy campus of ACU. The categories of experience which emerged from the interviews overlapped, and at times contested with each other, reflecting the complexity of the women's lives. Madeleine found that the major influences on the women, causing them to delay entrance to university, were fractured relationships with parents, unsupportive school environments and self-doubt. An implication for policymakers charged with crafting various institutional responses to the Bradley Report (DEEWR, 2009) is that they must begin by acknowledging that, although many young women are able to take advantage of existing opportunities in education, there will continue to be girls and young women who need additional encouragement, support and protection if they are to undertake university study.



Michael Larkin (School of Arts and Sciences, Canberra): This study used statistical methods to analyse the results of student nursing cohorts at the Canberra campus over the past two years to determine any relationships between academic performance in a variety of assessment tasks and the age of the student. Generally there were no significant differences between the academic performance of mature-aged students and the performance of younger students, though Michael found that each cohort had particular challenges – younger students with motivation for self-directed learning and mature-aged students with ICT and online learning. The information gathered from this study will be used to identify possible strategies for improving the performance of students and enhance their learning in the Bachelor of Nursing course.



Dr. John Quilter (School of Philosophy, Strathfield): The project sought to find out the contribution participation in professional research seminars by research students in the School of Philosophy made to their development as independent researchers. The project generally confirmed that this participation is beneficial to students, especially those moving from undergraduate to Honours studies at the first step of transition into research work. Supervisors agreed that the research seminars contributed in beneficial ways to the development of research students as independent researchers. John's findings suggested that students see considerable value in giving a presentation of their own research work to the School, even though it is a challenging experience.



Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (continued)




Annette Schneider

Betty McGuinness (School of Nursing and Midwifery, Ballarat): This research project explored the views of experienced practising, or recently-retired, midwives about their own midwifery teachers. Being part of a unit of study in higher education, this project focused generally upon education and specifically upon midwifery education. Participants' voices highlighted the diversity of experience and of approaches to teaching midwives two decades ago. Betty believes that the lessons to be learned from this project relate to 'keeping the soul and love in education'. Implementing such perspectives within teacher education is imperative. As with education in any discipline, reciprocal respect allows engagement and effective relationships to be established. If respect is afforded the learner, the learner will be able to concentrate on acquiring knowledge and skill and will be empowered in all manner of being.


Dr. Abdur Rouf (School of Business, North Sydney): In this project a group of Biological Science students were asked to provide feedback, via a questionnaire, on their perceptions relating to their Self-Directed Learning (SDL) experience and the influence of the comprehensive online SDL assessment on their further engagement and learning. Abdur found that the SDL component of the unit contributed to the development of students as self-directed learners and that a well-designed, content-aligned comprehensive SDL online quiz can be an effective method of assessment as well as a means of learning.

Reflections on working as a research mentor and supervisor with my colleagues

The snapshots above reveal an exciting range of projects undertaken as part of the GCHE. My involvement contributed to a growth in my knowledge of the issues that my colleagues are addressing in their everyday professional practice. Collegial feedback helped shape and focus the projects from the start, so they became 'doable' within a semester's work (almost!). It was exciting to receive the final reports and see how far participants had come on their pedagogic research journey, especially those who had never completed an ethics application before and who had consequently found the start of the research process quite daunting! I hope you will consider reflecting on your own professional practice with a "researcher's hat on" and grasp the opportunities that come your way to share those reflections with others at staff gatherings, conferences or in journal publications.

(Dr. Annette Schneider rsm, GCHE Course Co-ordinator, with the permission of my colleagues completing UNHE 503 in 2009). 

New Resources in Teaching and Learning

Sociology teachers might be interested in a new database of teaching resources: [TRAILS -- the Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology](#) 

ALTC News

A useful resource for staff interested in considering an application for a national teaching award is a podcast of a presentation by A/P Aziz, who won the Prime Minister's award in 2009. This is an extract from 'HERDSA News' 21/4/2010 on the availability of the podcast, and its value to academic staff:

Podcast of HERDSA SA Event available -

The presentation by Associate Professor Aziz on the topic 'From classroom to Prime Minister's Award' was really well received last week. I managed to have it videotaped and a podcast of the event can be found at our HERDSA SA blog: <http://herdsasa.blogspot.com/>

Colleagues from the three South Australian universities who attended the presentation made the following comments:

- *A very interesting and helpful session. Hearing the benefits of going through the award process, (promotion/ critical reflection) beyond just the award was great.*
- *The presentation was very focused and extremely well delivered. THANK YOU!*
- *This lecture cemented ideas but also introduced new ones.*
- *A very worthwhile session*
- *As being new in the Learning and Teaching area - I found this very useful.*
- *Gave us insight about how and what he has done in achieving these awards.*

If there are any problems accessing the site - please let me know.

From Dale Wache HERDSA SA Branch Convenor Dale.Wache@unisa.edu.au



ALTC Project News

ACU is a partner in the ALTC CLASS (Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff) Project, which aims to further develop the skills of Unit Coordinators/Lecturers-In-Charge who work with sessional and contracted staff, mainly those teaching in large units.

Nine ACU Sydney-based staff participated in a 4-university workshop at UTS Broadway on June 18. The aim of the workshop was to share best practice in management of the teaching team, better understand the skills LICs bring to their work as leaders of teaching teams, and develop a plan to assist their sessional staff to themselves improve their teaching practices.

The first Newsletter of the CLASS project and further information can be found by linking to the LTC website at:

http://www.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/248409/CLASS_Project_May2010_Newsletter_2.pdf



LTC Staff Changes

Dr Jo Caffery resigned from LTC in April, to further pursue her interest in indigenous education.

Ms Dianne Griffiths has joined LTC as Office Manager, and is based in North Sydney.

Ms Hannah Forsyth has resigned to take up a position in her PhD area of expertise in the History Faculty at Sydney University.

The merger of ACUonline and LTC is proceeding through the various HR processes.



Yoni Ryan

ALTC Project News (continued)

LESSONS LEARNT: IDENTIFYING SYNERGIES in DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP PROJECT




Anne Applebee

In the last LTC Newsletter I reported on the start of this project that is designed to clarify elements of distributed leadership in universities.

Although there is growing debate about the real agency of distributed leaders for universities due to the dispersed disciplinary nature of the academy, there is no agreed definition, structure or process to describe and support the development of Distributed Leadership. Four universities make up the project team: the University of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the Australian Catholic University, Macquarie University and University of Wollongong.

The project team is currently working in Phase Three: Developing a Distributed Leadership Matrix (DLM). Each university is establishing their Community of Practice and in June will start to develop the DLM comprising contextual conditions and leadership skills needed to achieve an effective distributed leadership process. The team is also presenting a paper at HERDSA on July 9th.

Ann Applebee 

Comment?

Why Unis Shouldn't Play the Economics Card

Hannah Forsyth

Teaser: Australian universities need to explain their value on their own terms, rather than using economic arguments, or they will continue to deteriorate, writes Hannah Forsyth, ACU Learning and Teaching Centre. This piece was originally published in newmatilda.com on 18 May 2010.

Around budget time, every sector wheels out whatever weapons they think will bludgeon the Treasury into sending the odd scrap of cash their way. Higher education put a lot of resources into that effort this year, once again it was too little or no avail [<http://newmatilda.com/2010/05/13/universities-need-cash-now-kevin>].

For a while now, university leaders have tried to speak the Treasury's lingo, attempting to show that funding universities is in the Treasury's self-interest. Giving the universities money will actually increase your own reserves, they argue. One day this approach might yield more than the scraps it has produced for the last 20-odd years. But even if it does, it won't help higher education as much as leaders of the sector hope it will.

Not surprisingly, Universities Australia published a [report](http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=/news/media_releases/2010/uniaus_media_07_10.htm) [http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=/news/media_releases/2010/uniaus_media_07_10.htm] that was able to show that investment in higher education would have substantial economic benefits.



Hannah Forsyth

Hannah is a PhD student researching the topic "the ownership of knowledge in Higher Education in Australia". As "Learning Matters" has gone to print, Hannah has resigned as the part-time Learning and Teaching Centre Educational Designer. Among a wide range of other things, she maintained the LTC Blog <http://blogs.acu.edu.au/ltc/>

Hannah has a BA(Hons) in Archaeology, MA in history and a Graduate Certificate in Learning Science and Technology.

Comment? (continued)

Why Unis Shouldn't Play the Economics Card

Their media release even argued that higher education would reduce health costs since obesity and smoking are rarer amongst educated people. All in the hope that government will say, "Well, we do want to grow the economy, and we want to fight obesity too. Okay, let's invest in higher education". But it clearly doesn't work that way.

One problem is that this information is not exactly new. While they might not have had exact figures before, the Government knows about the link between higher education investment and economic growth. A few years ago the Prime Minister's Science, Engineering and Innovation Council warned the (Howard) government that, based on its research, failure to invest in higher education would mean Australia would be rapidly overtaken economically by the countries that do [http://www.innovation.gov.au/Section/pmseic/documents/PMSEIC%20Working%20Group%20on%20Asia%20-%20final%20report.pdf]. The smallest of the consequences of current levels of international investment, especially throughout Asia, would obviously be the loss in Australia of the international student market, as their own local universities gain strength.

It is an argument used repeatedly, as if saying it again will produce another dribble of cash. One of Australia's most eminent higher education researchers, Simon Marginson, told a [recent conference](#) [http://newmatilda.com/2009/11/24/academia-no-longer-smart-choice] that he had redirected his research efforts to showing the link between knowledge and the economy.

Since the only way to improve the situation in higher education was more money, and the only thing Treasury understands is economics this appears to be the only argument worth making. Even Rashmi Kumar and Nick Irving – who don't believe economics should drive higher education policy - gave the Universities Australia economic argument in their [recent article](#). [http://newmatilda.com/2010/05/13/universities-need-cash-now-kevin]

The idea of using economic arguments to justify adequate university funding emerged in the 1980s when universities failed to convince government that the value of tertiary education should not be measured by its short-term economic output. That failure led to increasingly drastic cuts. Universities decided that if they hoped to persuade government of their worth they needed an economic argument government could understand.

The problem is, that argument also succeeds in persuading government, the public, and even sometimes universities themselves, that economics is what universities are about. And that has very unfortunate consequences. If universities are focused on producing wealth for the economy, they will be expected to measure university performance on the basis of those economic values. Which, to a large extent, has already happened.

We get the higher education system that we pay for. If we pay for a system that is for the economy, we get an education system that focuses on utilitarian economic outcomes.



Why Unis Shouldn't Play the Economics Card (continued)

It would be far better if advocates of higher education explained to government what universities are really about, giving government reasons to fund the system properly.

Universities actually have quite a lot of functions. One of them is the education of society – something the current government cares about. The Government knows that if we expand the proportion of the population with tertiary education we will also help address a range of social issues (health and obesity might be one). But addressing the social issues is the 'benefit', not the 'substance that universities really work with'.

The substance of the university is knowledge. Universities need to start to talk about knowledge and the ways that it underpins a safe, civil, ethical, healthy and prosperous democracy. Knowledge of the highest quality can only be produced in a free, collegial environment - and that is the type of university that should be funded. Looking for the benefits knowledge creates without fostering the environment in which it is created is an obvious – and expensive – way to fail.

Universities do also have an economic function. They influence the economy through providing skilled graduates, innovations and research, and through their very existence: they are large consumers of stuff people make, are major employers and of course are classified as a significant 'exporter' by educating students from other nations. But we should not confuse their economic function with their purpose.

If they are funded for their economic function alone, they will fail to do the things for which they are actually needed.


It was difficult, in the 1980s, to really communicate these needs. Academics' reputations had declined. The public tended to see them as cosseted public servants – lazy, elitist and arrogant. They were accused in the media as wasting public funding – precious after the 1970s oil shocks – in irrelevant, useless "hobby" research. Their critics hoped that the harsh realities of internal competition for scarcer resources would lead to greater efficiencies. In a phrase that could only belong to the 1980s, the goal was "more scholar for the dollar".

Advocates of this approach were warned that this would commodify knowledge – substitute its inherent value for a financial one that is useless in the long run. To critical ears it sounded like pathetic bleating by a selfish intelligentsia.

The result is that now we gather together some of the most qualified people in the country and waste their time competing for scraps of funding. Most grant applications are the size of a novella and take nearly as long to write – time that could be spent finding how to stop bushfires, cure diseases, new ways to think about classic works, make society fairer, the planet cooler.

Universities need to show that academics love their work, are inspired to do it and want more time to get on with it. They have already learned the importance of communicating what they do; now they just need to learn how to explain the kind of environment that makes good knowledge possible.

Really good knowledge can't be made in a place where highly trained people need to count every minute and measure every ounce of their ideas. Doing so inhibits knowledge and makes higher education seem like a fight rather than a delight. Since research deals with the unknown we can't know what we've missed out on. But we do know it that it has been made too hard for its own good, or the good of the country.

The current focus on economic outcomes might seem like a smart way to persuade the Government to part with some cash, but it prevents Australia's universities from being everything they so easily could be. 

Hannah Forsyth is at the University of Sydney, working towards a PhD in the history of higher education in Australia.

New Journal available from Curtin University of Technology -Graduate Employability

We are pleased to announce the inaugural edition of the Journal for Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability published by Curtin University. The Journal aims to provide a forum for the dissemination of research and evidence-based practice in higher education teaching and learning for graduate employability. Graduate employability is an issue of concern to academics, career advisors, students and employers regardless of discipline or profession. We see the Journal as a forum that will foster interdisciplinary dialogue among researchers, teacher scholars, careers staff and industry and professional practitioners. We are looking for quality, scholarly articles so please invite your colleagues to visit http://otl.curtin.edu.au/scholarship_teaching_learning/jtlge.cfm for information on the foci of the journal and instructions for authors.

Our first paper in the Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability is now live on line. We decided on continuous publication to ensure that papers have currency and authors are not faced with the long lead time between acceptance and publication that characterises print-based journals. As an e-journal it is available to anyone with access to the internet at no cost. As papers successfully complete the peer review process we will publish. As readers need to register with the site we will gradually build a readership database and email the members each time a paper is published. Please register yourself and urge your colleagues to do likewise at <http://jtlge.curtin.edu.au/index.php/jtlge/user/registerUser>


We are privileged to launch the journal with an article by Mantz Yorke. Professor Yorke is a leading figure in the domain of graduate employability and co-author with Peter Knight of *Learning, Curriculum and Employability in Higher Education (2003)* and *Assessment, Learning and Employability (2003)*. Professor Yorke's work is responsible for a revolution in thinking about graduate employability that sees it not simply as a set of skills but as a fundamental aspect of good curriculum design: Employability: aligning the message, the medium and academic values

<<http://jtlge.curtin.edu.au/index.php/jtlge/article/view/7>> PDF

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Mantz Yorke 2-12.

Professor Robyn Quin

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Curtin University of Technology 

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