

POLICY ON QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction

Australian Catholic University shares with universities worldwide a commitment to high-quality teaching and learning, research and community engagement. It is aware that a key factor in its reputation as a higher education institution is its ability to excel in teaching and learning and to produce quality graduates. As part of its Mission the University declares its commitment to the centrality of teaching and learning. This Policy document articulates the broad principles underlying teaching and learning in the Catholic tradition at Australian Catholic University. These are that:

- teaching and learning attends to spiritual, moral, values and ethical perspectives – a key dimension within the University’s curriculum. This includes attention to equity, developing awareness of multicultural and Indigenous issues, and sensitivity to social justice;
- academic staff and students are empowered to engage in teaching and learning which:
 - . meets professional accreditation needs;
 - . is critical, well informed, up-to-date with knowledge and research in the substantive disciplines, and innovative; and
 - . makes appropriate use of information and communications technologies;
- course and unit documentation, learning experiences and resources are systematically developed and used to support quality teaching and learning practice; and
- teaching and learning processes and outcomes are monitored and evaluated to maintain the focus on excellence, relevance and quality.

These principles provide the foundation for the University’s Teaching and Learning Plan. The Plan formally commits the University to the maintenance and ongoing development of quality teaching and learning.

Staff are expected to abide by the University’s Code of Ethics in Teaching, which articulates the principles of scholarly competence and engagement. It also provides the framework for scholarly respect for students, colleagues and the University, to shape relationships and interactions in which academic staff and students engage in teaching and learning.

Responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning resides in the Faculties. Within the framework of the University’s Teaching and Learning Plan, each Faculty has a derivative Teaching and Learning Plan, which is updated annually and in which the procedures for ensuring quality in teaching and learning are described in detail, with the enhancement of learning the primary outcome of quality teaching.

Understanding Quality Teaching

In one sense, effective teaching is very easy to identify: it is what leads to effective student-centred learning. It is not as easy, however, to specify what particular approaches and techniques will produce this desired result. The literature on effective teaching in higher education stresses that there is no straightforward formula, no single way of helping people to learn. Students testify that they have learned well in a variety of contexts, from a variety of teaching styles, ranging from the charismatic brilliant lecturer to the non-interventionist, supportive facilitator.

It is possible, however, to articulate broad, general principles as a guide to staff and students. In recent years, a great deal of work has gone into the formulation of such principles at a national level and very useful sets of guidelines have been published, after consultation with interested groups in higher education. These include the Universities Australia’s *Universities and their Students: Principles for the Provision of Education by Australian Universities (2005)*, the DETYA document *Benchmarking: A manual for Australian universities* (McKinnon, Walker and Davis, 2000, Chapter 6) and Chalmers and Thomson’s project on quality indicators¹.

In order to maximise the potential of the learning experience for all students at Australian Catholic University, members of the Faculties responsible for course delivery are encouraged to achieve the following characteristics of effective teaching.

¹ Chalmers, D. and Thomson, K. (2008) *Snapshot of teaching and learning practice in Australian Higher Education Institutions*. Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education project report. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Effective Teaching

- is conducted in the context of, and with reference to, the goals and objectives of the University, and its Faculties and Schools;
- is focused on learning outcomes for students, in the form of knowledge, understanding and skills and aims to develop the attitudes and values of mature adult learners;
- proceeds from an understanding of students' knowledge, capabilities and backgrounds;
- is coherent in the integration of objectives with teaching procedures and assessment;
- ensures the clear communication to students of expectations, requirements and ways in which they can achieve their potential;
- engages students as active participants in the learning process, while acknowledging that all learning must involve a complex interplay of active and receptive processes, the constructing of meaning for oneself, and learning with and from others;
- encourages questioning and criticism of accepted views and theories;
- is based on an awareness of the limited and provisional nature of knowledge in all fields;
- is linked with the latest research and scholarship in ways that allow students to see how understanding evolves, and is subject to challenge and revision;
- attempts to excite students about innovative developments in their discipline areas;
- promotes the development of co-operative learning among students and lecturers;
- provides opportunity for improved information literacy;
- makes use of a wide range of teaching strategies, including the use of various information and communication technologies;
- encourages students to develop independent learning skills by providing appropriate tasks to develop analytical and critical thinking skills;
- respects students' views and responses;
- is grounded in a concern for the welfare and progress of individual students;
- assists students to form broad conceptual understandings of areas of knowledge;
- encompasses an inclusive curriculum, being open to a range of perspectives from groups of different cultural backgrounds, and is committed to facilitating learning climates which are supportive of all students;
- is sensitive to the particular needs of students with disabilities;
- encourages awareness of Mission focus including ethical dimensions of issues and problems;
- takes into account feedback from students about their learning and the perceived effectiveness of teaching strategies, obtained regularly through a range of formal and informal evaluations;
- draws on and contributes to engagement with the community.

The University's Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning focuses on supporting lecturers in many of the areas listed above. It also responds to expressions of need identified by academic staff either formally through the Academic Staff Performance and Review Planning Program or informally as a result of individual staff requests.

Understanding Quality Learning

While the learning promoted by all universities is focused primarily in the areas of knowledge and understanding, and cognitive skills, Australian Catholic University focuses particularly on learning leading to the holistic development of its students and staff. Effective teaching can enhance many aspects of learning, including physical, aesthetic, intellectual and personal dimensions. However, an individual's beliefs, dispositions, attitudes and values all influence personal learning and effective personal learning depends upon an open-minded response from the learner.

To stress the importance of promoting holistic learning, a "Learning Paradigm" is embedded in the University's Strategic Plan:

What value the Learning Paradigm adds to the style and substance of this University's existence is central to its *raison d'être*. The University should provide the right kind of learning experiences, be they academic, spiritual, ethical or other; and the University fundamentally should be at the service of its students as it attempts to assist each of them, "its entire diversified and dispersed student body", as part of their "personal, spiritual and moral

development" so that they will become "valued in employment and in the life of the community at large". The Learning Paradigm reflects this self-understanding of the role and purpose of the University as it aims to discern methods and approaches that best suit the needs of the students. (*Australian Catholic University Strategic Plan Working Paper No. 2 – The Learning Paradigm*).

In the implementation of the Learning Paradigm, the University promotes and facilitates learning that:

- is autonomous and self-motivated;
- is characterised by the individual taking satisfaction in the mastering of content and skills;
- realises the development of a sense of the academic disciplines;
- proceeds from the learner striving to grasp the "meaning" of what is being learnt, both for the wellbeing of the individual and the community;
- can be fostered by cooperation and respectful interaction with others;
- has a lifelong orientation for the enhancement of the individual and society;
- is open to educational contributions through the use of the Internet and of various information and communication technologies;
- is critical, looking beneath the surface level of information for the meaning and significance of what is being studied;
- includes the development of an historical perspective of knowledge;
- seeks awareness of any pertinent spiritual, moral, ethical and justice issues related to the material being studied;
- values individuality and personal interests, moderated by a sense of responsibility and commitment to the ideals of community.

Support for Teaching and Learning

Effective teaching and learning at Australian Catholic University is encouraged by a range of strategies, which have been endorsed by Academic Board for the support of quality teaching and learning. These strategies include the establishment of dedicated units and organisational structures, policies and procedures, programs and professional learning opportunities, and grants and reward schemes. Examples of these are:

- Academic Skills Unit
- Academic staff mentoring
- Academic Staff Performance and Review Planning Program
- ACUonline
- Australian Catholic University Awards for Excellence in Postgraduate Research Supervision
- Australian Catholic University Excellence in Teaching Awards
- Australian Catholic University Teaching Development Grants
- Carrick Awards for Australian University Teaching
- Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education projects
- Contribution to teaching and learning as an essential criterion for probation and promotion
- Course, unit and teaching evaluation policies and practices
- Graduate Certificate in Higher Education
- Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning
- Involvement by staff in research and conferences
- The Library's information literacy program
- Online induction unit on Teaching and Learning at Australian Catholic University
- Outside Studies Program
- Promotion of the nexus between teaching and learning, and research
- Regular professional learning for staff in teaching and learning, including online teaching and learning, across all campuses
- Review of all courses at least five-yearly

- Seminars by Carrick Citation recipients, Excellence in Teaching Award, TALES, Teaching and Development Grant and Awards for Excellence in Postgraduate Research Supervision recipients
- Teaching and Learning Enhancement Scheme (TALES)
- University Online Teaching and Learning Committee, which reports to the University Teaching and Learning Committee
- University Teaching and Learning Committee, which reports to Academic Board
- University Teaching and Learning Evaluation Committee, which reports to the University Teaching and Learning Committee
- University's Teaching and Learning Plan.