From
Teaching
to Learning

Leading change at a large research-intensive university:
A personal reflection

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Introduction

IT WAS AN UNUSUAL REQUEST to see the Vice Chancellor, but here I was in his office and he was explaining that UNSW was performing poorly in student survey's on teaching and thus the University had decided to create a senior management position with a direct responsibility for the quality of education. Next, I expected him to ask for advice on potential candidates, given my long-term interest in teaching, although at the time my research in gut microbiology was dominating my life. But no, he asked me if I would be interested in putting my name forward. "*Oh No John*!" was my immediate response " *I retire next year and intend to keep travelling the world talking about my beloved stomach bugs.*" Such is the persuasive power of VCs that I agreed to think about it and was given the weekend to make my decision. Two days of lists for and against followed, plus consultation with colleagues. Despite having successfully taught medical and science students for more than thirty years, global interest in my *Helicobacter* bacteria made the retirement and travelling idea very attractive. However, on reflection I had complained about lack of attention paid to teaching, lousy staff development and a dominant culture of research over teaching for many years. Here was the chance to do something about it and to be able to try and change the culture, and so I realised I wanted to take on the challenge. Monday came and my hat was in the ring. After a gruelling interview by the selection committee, here I was crossing to the 'dark side' of university administration as Pro Vice Chancellor (Education) of a large research-intensive university with 40,000 students who were not wild about their teaching and a perception amongst staff that teaching was not valued and research was king.

This article is a description of the strategies used over a six year journey during which, due to a wonderful group of staff and supportive senior management colleagues, we did appear to change the culture. Evidence shows that students had certainly become much more satisfied with their learning experience. It is written in the hope that some of the ideas and activities we implemented may be of use to others charged with improving the quality of their students' experience. Prior to writing this paper, three years into retirement, many of the staff involved in the communities described below were surveyed about the impact of some of the activities we had implemented and throughout the text some of their comments are included with acknowledgement and thanks.

First steps

REMARKABLY, I STARTED WITH A CLEAN SLATE. There was no job description. There was no predecessor whose path I could initially follow. True, there were a number of administrative units (e.g. The Learning Centre, The Aboriginal Education Program) with responsibilities for some aspects of teaching included in my portfolio but what I did was up to me. Where to start? Instinctively, the first step was to commence an active consultation process; not only to generate ideas but to let staff know that the University was at last taking teaching seriously and there was a champion for the student experience and staff support in teaching at the Executive Group table. As senior managers, we all too often don't consult enough; we have the experience and already know the answers. Even if we do, consultation with staff is essential to give them some ownership in the processes we initiate.

This does not mean that we have to start from scratch. I had my own opinions and prejudices and knew we could not work on all aspects of teaching. Therefore, four priority areas were selected to work on initially, based on my experience as a teacher, in my activities on the Academic Board and as a Head of School. The consultative aspect of this strategy was the formation of a working group for each of my priority areas. Groups were charged with the generation of ideas working with me as a member of the group. Clear goals were drafted and modified by the groups who met regularly.

The priority areas selected were:

GROUP 1: Effective ways of monitoring the quality of education

GROUP 2: How to ensure we gain maximum benefit from advances in information technology

GROUP 3: Staff support in teaching

GROUP 4: The first year learning experience

All of the ideas and strategies described below came out of the input from these wonderful and dedicated groups. I attended all group meetings and we had some spirited, creative and energetic times together. Each group consisted of between 11 and 22 academics with a proven interest and talent in teaching, general staff with responsibility for some aspect of the student experience and 1-5 student members except for (Group 3).

The groups gave me an opportunity to communicate with key UNSW staff and were the beginning of a mission of convincing staff of my and the University's genuine interest in teaching. However, there was also a need to inform all of my new appointment. Most university publications and broadcast emails are not read by staff, resulting in the great communication gaps commented on in most university audit reports! Thus I sent a personal letter to all academic staff and general staff who were in some way involved in teaching. The opening paragraphs of this first letter are shown below. The wording was important in firstly providing an opportunity to reassure them that there were changes afoot with respect to teaching and also to give them a chance to contribute. Many useful responses were sent in and some group members were invited onto my working groups due to their replies.

Extract from my first letter to staff:

"The invitation to put my name forward for the position of Pro Vice Chancellor was an honour and provided a great opportunity for me to contribute to UNSW, an institution that has given me so much. While I will miss the excitement and buzz of research, I look forward to the major challenges ahead in education. I hope to work with you to enhance the quality of the educational experience we offer and to ensure our reputation for effective and innovative teaching parallels our reputation for productive and innovative research. I have a list of evolving goals for my five-year term. Below I identify what to me are the four priority areas and some of my thoughts on these areas. Finally, I invite you to identify the key issues in your School with respect to education. It is my intention to come to each School over the next few months and your comments will help make our discussions more focussed and relevant to your special needs."

"The decision to create a new position on the executive with a specific responsibility for education is a major step forward and an acknowledgment that more emphasis is to be given to teaching at UNSW. I can assure you that I will take this responsibility very seriously. I have strong views about the need for us to provide a quality intellectual experience for our students. I mean to achieve my goals by working with you and trying to give you appropriate support to help you in your task of providing quality education while also being involved in first class research. As a first step in the process, I invite you to complete the following page and return it to me. I don't need your name but I would appreciate knowing what School you are in. Should you wish to work specifically on any of the four priority projects described above please e-mail me" ❯❯

The Strategic Priorities Fund: The miracle that made it all possible.

Having a clean sheet and opportunity to formulate whatever strategy I chose to achieve my modest goal *"To enhance the quality of the educational experience at UNSW such that our reputation for effective and innovative teaching parallels our reputation for productive and innovative research"* was a luxury. The downside was that the portfolio of PVC (Education) came with no budget to achieve this goal apart from the monies allocated to the units under my supervision. There was one chance to change this. The Vice Chancellor had allocated significant funding in the form of a Strategic Priorities Fund (SPF) to address priority issues which he had identified during 2001-2. The money was open for competitive bidding from all the University. Given support for teaching had been demonstrated by my appointment, there was clearly an opportunity here; I had to write an application for SPF funding. But what was the best way to do it? By now the four working groups had begun to bear fruit and some very promising ideas had evolved that could be the basis of the application. I decided to think big and make a very substantial claim for funding. It was the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC) that had to make the funding decision. How could the large amount of money needed solely for teaching, be justified? My decision was to make the application for both teaching and research and write it on behalf of my senior management colleagues.

Thus I sat down one weekend and wrote a 29 page joint proposal with me as lead author together with the Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) Academic & Research, and the Presiding Member of our Academic Board. It was entitled *Justification for allocation of a significant proportion of the Strategic Priorities Fund in the year 2001-2002 into initiatives in Education and Research at UNSW*. The proposal was written to achieve two of the six priorities listed in the five year University Strategic plan namely to:

- Improve the quality of the educational experience and outcomes for students.
- Sustain and improve research performance

To soften the sense of a complete focus on teaching, the application included a proposal for a major funding initiative in research, that is, the creation of the UNSW "Goldstar" Maintenance Grants. Fifteen two-year maintenance grants for staff members who had received a majority of excellent reviews from the major granting agencies but were not funded. Also, funding for two new postdoctoral fellowships and 25 PhD Scholarships was requested. In a novel initiative to help talented new staff put effort into their teaching but still build a research team, we requested six UNSW Research Relief Grants to fund a postdoctoral fellow or a research assistant. The Presiding Member of the Academic Board had suggested creation of a training scheme for supervisors of postgraduate students, so funding for this initiative was requested. Over the three years the funding for these research initiatives would be $2,710,000. The funding requested for all the teaching initiatives coming out of my working groups was $5,646,400 also over three years. My gamble was that the request for this huge amount for learning and teaching would be more acceptable when VCAC saw the research initiatives in the package.

I entered the council chamber for the meeting of the VCAC to allocate SPF funding with great trepidation. My bound copy of the proposal document was cluttered with stickers to indicate the areas where I was prepared for a vigorous defence of my requests. We reached the agenda item and I held my breath. The proposal was accepted in full, with not one suggested modification! With out doubt this was the greatest moment in my time as PVC, as it was this funding allocation that made all the initiatives described below possible.

There are two lessons to be learnt here. Firstly, the strategy to package the request to include both research and teaching and include colleagues on the Executive Group as authors was a good one. The appeal of the research initiatives, made VCAC ready to accept the very significant requests for teaching support. Also, if one is trying to change a culture with respect to teaching one has to think big. Significant money has to be invested. Token amounts will ensure failure. It is to the credit of my senior management colleagues and the deans that they were happy to agree to this major funding. It was an investment and in the following years the success of the initiatives has returned funds to the University.

The outcomes of the projects funded by the SPF are described below with some limited evidence to show the contribution they made to achieving the overall goal of supporting staff and improving the student experience.

ITET: The Innovative Teaching & Educational Technology Fellowship

Early discussions on how we could gain maximum benefit from advances in information technology took a predictable course. Some suggested competitive grants on IT teaching projects and our technology experts proposed that two more multimedia experts be appointed. It was suggested that faculties allocate at least one staff member to work with the Educational Technology Centre on faculty-specific projects. However, while all considered the technological skills of some staff would be enhanced by these ideas the working group felt there was not enough emphasis on the pedagogy and limited opportunity for transference of technological skills. One member then asked "What about a Fellowship Scheme?" From here all fell into place and ITET was born.

The ITET Fellowship was a full-time, six-month fellowship for groups of 15-20 academic and other staff involved in supporting learning and teaching. With the support of

their Head of School and Dean, each applicant nominated a project that addressed an educational issue of priority for the school and that involved educational technology. Successful applicants were funded for full teaching, administration and, in some cases, research relief for six months. Fellows also contracted to complete a comprehensive program of group and individual learning activities focused on student-centred learning and teaching, both online and face-to-face. Common components of all ITET programmes were:

- An introductory 3-day workshop run by a professional facilitator to establish the Fellows as a group who would work together for the next six months, using models of experiential learning and group work.
- Mixed discipline action-learning groups, to support project development.
- Workshops on learning and teaching topics, chosen and run by the Fellows themselves.
- Skills workshops in online learning and educational media development.
- A 1-day ITET Symposium for to all University staff, run by the Fellows.
- A final 're-entry' workshop to explore how the Fellows were going to share the benefits of the Fellowship with their colleagues when they go back to their former duties.

Components that changed as a result of feedback and/or external events included:

- Workshops to explore educational theories.
- An online learning component.

Lessons to be learnt from this initiative were the importance of Fellows gaining relief from their normal activities, the inclusion of some non academic general staff (e.g. from the library and a Faculty webmaster), and the importance of me as PVC attending all the three day intensive group building sessions and other ITET activities where possible. This latter commitment from me was very important. It is too easy for members of the senior management team to be too busy and not become a part of our initiatives. Showing our face, being actively involved in some activities in learning and teaching is essential if we are to be credible and highly effective drivers of change.

There were five ITET Fellowship programs spread over three years providing funds for 76 staff to undertake projects and the intensive sessions on learning and teaching and staff development. Being an ITET Fellow carried some kudos and many of these Fellows have had major impact throughout the University, particularly by taking leadership responsibilities (e.g. Heads of School, Faculty Associate Deans, Members of the Academic Board, Presiding Members of Faculty, Faculty directors of learning and teaching).

> 66 *I would like to thank you sincerely for your role in advancing my career. The boost in confidence and motivation provided by the ITET Fellowship and by developing online formative assessments for Phase 1 Medicine has allowed me to take on a leadership role in Learning and Teaching within the Faculty.* 99

Obviously ITET is about much more than technology although the Fellow whose quote follows did indeed introduce a very effective web-assisted, modular structured first year course in English with an emphasis on creative, collaborative learning experiences. More importantly, he also became Head of the School of English with a great opportunity to impact on the quality of teaching.

"It taught me to think about a course in terms of learning outcomes. What do I want students to be able to do at the end? It showed me that aligning assessment with the content was absolutely crucial. That was probably the most transforming thing. No longer was I just delivering content. I was thinking about the students' learning experience and encouraging them to think about it to"

Others referred to a paradigm shift in their approach to teaching and stressed the importance of freeing up time.

"The ITET Fellowship was a paradigm shifter for me. I had been interested in the student experience--specifically, that of research students, which is why I gained the ITET in the first place--but during the Fellowship I was exposed to (a) educational theory and practice, which was new to me; and (b) a group of like-minded fellow "Fellows" as well as Adrian, Michele and others, which was very supportive and stimulating. I continue to communicate and sometimes collaborate with many from that ITET year, in the form of publications, joint Workshops (e.g. UNILT) and other projects (e.g. Portfolios)."

There was another way ITET spread the word as illustrated in the following comment from a Head of School:

"The real value of the ITET Fellowships extended well beyond the individual projects undertaken by individual academics. The community/network generated among the ITET Fellows and the information networks generated with Heads of Schools at the reporting on project sessions was by far the most significant. These events enabled communication and reflection and engagement with the notion of improvement and innovation. The impact on me as Head of School, was immense. I found the session not only engaging but also inspirational. I began to see new opportunities for teaching and learning improvements more generally and began promoting this awareness to ❯❯

other members of the School. This meant that ITET benefited not just the Fellow but the School more generally"

Later more will be said about the success of the ITET Fellows as change agents in their Schools and beyond. But this was not uniform. In one Faculty, with a small group of Fellows and entrenched resistance to improving teaching, we appeared to have failed given this comment from their Associate Dean (Education)

"ITET benefited the individual involved, but very little dissemination afterward This was not for lack of trying but was mainly due to lack of interest on the part of others in the Faculty"

Staff support: FULT

IN RESPONSES TO MY ORIGINAL LETTER to staff, 28% of all teaching staff had identified their most significant issue to be addressed as the need for professional development, in training programs for staff as teachers and educators, and in providing constructive feedback on assessment of teaching. My past experience in staff development as part of the George Miller inspired strategy to improve global health-care education around the World via staff development of health educators and as a member of the WHO Regional Teacher Training Centre based at UNSW (1), had convinced me that improved staff development in learning and teaching had to be a major plank of my PVC strategy. Thus Working Group 3 in the original brainstorming groups was charged with the task "To develop a "blue sky" proposal for staff development at UNSW as a first step in devising a feasible plan that acknowledges the inevitable tension between teaching and research"

A major outcome of these deliberations was the Foundations of University Learning and Teaching Program (FULT) for new staff. This was a much more intensive program than had existed before and has been very successful. It is not appropriate to describe FULT in detail here but there are key strategies that I consider contributed to its success. Firstly, it was intensive rather than the usual series of half-day staff-development activities. Staff had to commit to a full five-day program followed up later in the year by two further full day sessions. They had the option of undertaking an additional project and thus completing a unit in a revamped Graduate Certificate in University Learning and Teaching. Staff were from mixed disciplines and there were about 20-25 in a FULT group who worked together over the week. The program "practised what it preached" in that student-centred perspectives and approaches to learning and teaching were modelled throughout the program. I remember to this day, my first exposure to staff development as a fresh new lecturer at a session on lecturing. The person running the session put their first overhead transparency on the screen, which was a completely illegible page of 10-point text! I did not return for more. Staff development has to be good. The contract for FULT was that staff had to like it. If the feedback questionnaire did not show at least 80% satisfaction, the program would be changed. Fortunately the results were good. Of 88 participants in FULT 1-5 in 2004, 90% stated that they had found the five-day workshop a valuable learning experience with only 3 responding in the negative.

> **"** *FULT is a really useful program and although people often resist doing it at first they are often surprised and delighted by how much they learn from it and how much more effective they can be. I think FULT really has had an impact on teaching across the university – we have changed from a university, which did have problematic teaching in lots of areas to a university where teaching is paid attention and where students generally expect the teaching to be good. That is a difference.* **"**

As with ITET, I tried to be present at the introduction of FULT programs and the inevitable wine and cheese at the end (more on this later!). Where possible, I ran a session on small group teaching. I have both lasting positive and negative impressions of my attendance at FULT sessions. Firstly seeing how resistant academics mellow over the week and become genuinely enthusiastic about teaching by the end was very pleasing. Then there were those genuinely committed and enthusiastic new staff who were attending against the advice of their Heads of School who had told them research was all that mattered if they wanted to progress. The distress of these wonderful young people firmed my resolve to fight harder to change the culture. The working group had rebelled at making FULT compulsory but there had to be a way to get all new staff to FULT (again more on this later!).

Teaching grants; "No such thing as a free lunch"

ONE APPROACH DECIDED UPON to support the First Year Experience (FYE) goal was to seek funding for a number of projects that would be openly competed for by groups of staff. Originally the idea was to fund six $50,000 projects but after running a workshop with students exploring their views on how to make the first year learning experience more fulfilling, it was obvious that more projects were needed. So in the first year, 2002, 24 projects were funded with grants of up to $15,000. This was not novel, all universities offer learning and teaching grants to staff. However there are two aspects of the strategy we used that are worth sharing and which are strongly recommended to any university offering a grant program focused on learning and teaching.

The main well-documented problem with any grant system be it national or within an institution, is the issue of transferability and sustainability (2). Firstly, there are limited opportunities for other staff members in the university to hear about and share the ideas generated by the project. Secondly, once a project is completed or the enthusiast leader moves on, the benefit of the project for students is often lost.

In an attempt to help minimise these problems, acceptance of grants was made conditional. Before they were given the money, awardees had to agree to attend three full day workshops to further their learning and teaching practice and to share issues, experiences and achievements across disciplinary boundaries. Hence, the strategy of "No such thing as a free lunch." Examples of sessions included in these workshops were:

- Reviewing and developing project designs
- Inter project presentation and discussion
- How will your project enhance student engagement in learning and teaching?
- Project evaluation strategies
- Looking ahead; planning implementation and management

Staff with particular expertise in these areas facilitated these sessions and small and whole group discussions dominated. A useful technique, also used in FULT, was to have a panel of students talking about their own experiences and discussing them with the whole group. Over the four years I was involved in the grant programs and workshops, I was amazed at the networks amongst academic staff and general staff that participation in these workshop sessions catalysed.

> 66 *Attending the FYE workshops and symposia also exposed us to people across the university who were tackling similar issues, and sharing solutions. That is, it created another supportive community of practice.* 99

You are encouraged to reflect on grants on learning and teaching awarded in your institution or awarded to your staff by external bodies such as the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). How often have these groups been brought together to share and learn?

Finally, another part of the contract with the project groups was that they were required to present at a full day forum on learning and teaching to the whole University. Sometimes they would make a presentation, although based on the experiences of the ITET annual forum, some groups chose to run workshops

for groups of staff. The forums were often supplemented by an invited outside speaker and a student panel as well as awardees. They were well attended and provided another vehicle for me to push the line that the University was taking teaching seriously. Getting the VC to come along was also successful. As senior managers we have impossibly busy lives. However, we often forget just how important it is to be at functions like this. It is seen as making a statement. I once attended such a learning and teaching forum at another place and the Vice Chancellor could not attend because he had arranged meetings on strengthening research in the faculties at the same time. Not a good look!

UNILT-UNSW Network in Learning and Teaching

It would be wrong to claim that all the advances in learning and teaching at UNSW came out of a grand well-thought out master plan. This is certainly not the message I am trying to give. Rather, things evolved and fell into place and give pointers as to what should be included in such a master plan for anyone taking on my task elsewhere. This is illustrated well by the evolution of UNILT.

There was a common theme in ITET, FULT and the UNSW Learning and Teaching Grants. In all cases, practising academics shared their experiences with other staff via forums or workshops. ITET Fellows were encouraged to devise sessions on learning and teaching to deliver in their schools, they contributed to the FULT Program, and Grant awardees presented what they had done to staff at the annual forum, sometimes as a workshop.

While reflecting on the challenge of staff development programs for other than new staff, the concept of UNILT evolved. One of the criticisms, which are sometimes unfair, of learning and teaching support centres in universities, is that the staff are not real academics and thus don't have the credibility they might deserve. While watching, for example, a workshop session run by a group of ITET Fellows, it was clear that their credibility in the eyes of participants was very high.

> 66 *They were very well-run, and because they were led by other academics, they did not feel too theoretical, too abstract. People attending these sessions learned from each other as well as from the presenters, and the latter learned from other attendees. Crucial to the success was the fact that we shared experiences across faculties and schools, and learned from the differences (as well as sameness) that others experienced.* 99

Why can't these practicing academics be more formally involved in staff development? I thought. Thus UNILT was created. UNILT was based on the idea that a full and rich program of staff development in learning and teaching should include opportunities for staff involved in any aspect of learning and teaching to contribute. It provided for people who were directly engaged in the everyday life of the students at UNSW; both facilitators and workshop participants to explore together current issues in learning and teaching, to share strategies, difficulties, expertise and experience, and ways forward.

A pool of nearly 170 people volunteered to be UNILT facilitators The network consisted of members of continuing or experienced academic staff with a demonstrated interest in learning and teaching, and who wished to have active ongoing involvement in staff development. UNILT comprised ITET Fellows, participants in the Learning and Teaching grants, and the Vice Chancellors' Teaching Excellence awardees.

The staff of the Learning and Teaching Unit coordinated UNILT. The Program was developed based on results of student surveys, interviews with Heads of Schools and Associate Deans and from UNILT members themselves.

All those who wanted to facilitate UNILT workshops had to attend at least one preparatory workshop at the beginning or the year. The workshops were designed to allow facilitators to meet each other, to form interest groups and to ensure the workshops themselves were well-designed and facilitated according to good learning and teaching practices.

In preparation for a workshop, facilitators met two or three times with a coordinating member from the Learning and Teaching Unit. Workshops ran for three hours and participants received readings and other resources. Examples of workshop topics included: improving lectures, problem based learning, and writing course outlines.

Although dedicated, UNILT members needed reward so we invented "UNILT credits". At a reasonably generous hourly rate, UNILTers could apply for credits based on the number of hours of staff-development activity they had accumulated. A fund was set up from which these monies could be allocated. Credits could only be used for staff development activities such as conference travel (educational or research). Credits were given at a lower rate for participation in the preparatory workshops. The rewards must have been enough as significant numbers of staff offered their workshops many times with very good results. All UNILT workshops were evaluated and, in general, responses were positive.

"I think I gained the most valuable insights from listening to the experiences of the other participants {in several UNILT workshops} It was great that you provided a forum for us to come together to discuss learning and teaching

issues. I believe it was extremely beneficial for us to come together to hear about teaching successes and failures from academics in departments other than my own."

"I am one of those just starting out and gained a lot of insights from the UNILT workshops I attended this year on assessment, writing course outlines and group learning. I have had great feedback from others in my School who have been impressed by the transformation of my approach to designing my course (now much more student centred, focussed on learning outcomes and aware of the importance of clear communication via outlines etc"

> **66** *Please continue to use academics (who have experience from the field) for these workshops. It is important in running workshops for academics that people leading them are open and flexible and not threatened by the natural academic tendency to ask questions, test and challenge.* **99**

The building of communities

WHEN I STARTED AS PVC I have to admit to being unaware of the writings of Wegner on "Communities of practice." I was too busy reading about my stomach bugs! (3-4) Now, reflecting on what I did that contributed most to the success of my endeavours, I appreciate that it was a deliberate strategy of building communities. These communities, ITET, FULT, and UNILT are all classical examples of communities of practice as defined by Wegner. In her terms, "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." (5)

"We cannot overemphasise the importance to us of the L&T communities that sprang up around the PVC's office and the learning & teaching unit. The opportunity to mix with like-minded people from other schools and faculties gave us new ideas to test out, it gave us enthusiasm and new hope, it challenged us to take our ideas and innovations further, and it gave us a sense of support and acknowledgement that took away the niggling feeling of resentment that had been common among those at UNSW who most cared about teaching. It was wonderful to have people around who would actually help you teach better, who would find time for you, and do so with enthusiasm and a sense of common mission."

This had indeed been the strategy I used when I was Head of School. For example weekly morning teas where one staff group (e.g. research team), provided food for the whole School on a rotating basis. This worked wonders.

Communities have to be worked at. Deliberate nurturing strategies are needed to sustain them. One of my favourites involved food and wine! At any meeting

where a community gathered, social time was allocated at the end, usually with cheese, wine and soft drink.

> **However the consumption of good food and wine in company helps lead to the building of communities. The teaching and learning networks you established did more than anything else at UNSW to break down those silos between disciplines and between faculties.**

A key was to have very good wine. I used to raid my own cellar and produce some very good aged wines that could not justifiably be charged to the Divisional Budget. It seems trivial but the good wines became a draw card. When asked to rank the importance of the many strategies described in this paper, one staff member commented:

"Well obviously good quality red wine is number 1!"
Another said:

"This should not be underestimated. The innovations discussed here came as a change that was fun to be part of. There was great spirit involved, and good food and wine contribute to that spirit, to that community."

Associate Deans as a community

THERE WAS ONE COMMUNITY that had been neglected and needed special support; the Associate Deans (Education) {ADE} or their equivalent. ADEs were committed senior staff members, who believe so much in the importance of good teaching that they were prepared to battle with their research-driven colleagues to fight for improvements in the student experience. We as senior managers often forget how important it is to nurture groups such as these as a community. They should be consulted, worked with and given a responsibility to contribute to policy and important initiatives in learning and teaching. You are invited to reflect on whether this group or their equivalent in your institution ever meet as a group. Do you meet with them? Meeting with deans only is not enough, as often associate deans do not feel valued. They do much of the work in the faculty related to teaching yet often feel unsupported.

"Exceptional value to share experiences/aspirations/frustrations. We can now "Hunt in a pack" to voice concerns with the DVC(A) and Director of the L&T@UNSW when warranted"

A University philosophy on Teaching: Guidelines on Learning

DESPITE ALL OF THE ABOVE, I felt something more was needed if we were going to change the culture with respect to teaching in the University. What I hoped for was more emphasis on the student learning experience. The goal was to move away from a focus on teaching, that is, what the lecturer told the students to a focus on activities that would help students learn. Our task as university teachers is to create the conditions where students are most likely to learn. This move from teaching to learning seems simple but it is hard in an environment where didactic teaching has dominated. Staff find the concept quite hard to grasp; they need help. This is when my "shower idea" happened and the concept of the "Guidelines on Learning" was borne. The driving premise for the Guidelines was simple.

- Our task as university teachers is to help students learn.
- There is a vast research literature on how students learn and a wealth of good practice available
- As a research intensive university, our teaching should be informed by that research on student learning

Busy academics do not have the time to become familiar with this research literature. We need to help them. Thus, I drafted a set of guidelines that summarised the main points of what we know about student learning and modified them in discussion with Michel Scoufis who had been appointed director of the newly formed Learning and Teaching Unit. There was much to help me do this and the priceless Chickering and Gamson article of more than twenty years ago was a great starting point (6). Next there was a need to get ownership of the idea by the University community. Another mistake we senior managers often make is to forget about the importance of ownership. We have great ideas and off we go implementing them. Wrong! There has to be a period of consultation, modification, acceptance and ownership. In this case, I was fortunate in having a very supportive Deputy President of our Academic Board. She formed a subgroup and brought my rough draft to them. They redefined the guidelines, changed the wording and in the process assumed ownership. Sixteen guidelines were drafted and they were taken to the full Academic Board »

> **The ADE community is a wonderful one, many have "come through" that community of practice building of the previous 6-7 years so they came through with a depth of working together with a variety of L&T groups. The ADEs eschew competitiveness in favour of collaborative, supportive development that benefits students, staff and the broader uni community.**
> **Associate Dean 2009**

for endorsement. They became the "Guidelines on Learning that Inform Teaching at UNSW" I then worked with colleagues on a hard copy booklet and more importantly a website that was intended to be a resource for staff. Each Guideline was written on a single page. A couple of pithy quotes from the literature were used to explain what the Guideline meant and most importantly there were links to websites that had examples of teaching activities that illustrated each Guideline in action. This is best illustrated by inspection of this website at:
 http://www.guidelinesonlearning.unsw.edu.au/

This was a great step forward but it was not enough. Many universities have compiled similar sets of principles or guidelines but they are rarely read, little used, but always trotted out at audit time. The key is to have strategies to encourage staff to use such guidelines. Therefore an essential part of the process at UNSW was the formation of a "Toolkit". Basically this was a simple downloadable MsWord template that for each Guideline had spaces for the following:

- Example
- Reflection
- Constraints on applying this guideline
- Resources
- Staff development opportunities

The aim was to assist staff to reflect on the effectiveness of their practices. They were invited to use the Toolkit to review their classes, course, or program, and as a reflective tool. Basically they were asked to reflect on their own teaching and give an example of an activity they use that is an example of that Guideline in action. If they could not think of one then the idea was for them to reflect on why not and to look at the resource links for ideas of how they might.

"The Guidelines were a breakthrough in highlighting the importance of focussed reflective L&T practice"

By the time I left UNSW, I felt the Guidelines were not as well used as intended. This recent comment by an Associate Dean supports this view:

"Useful and thoughtful document-but in reality seldom consulted by new or longer time staff"

One of the main reasons for this situation is that the systemic embedding process that was part of the overall strategy, and which is described below was only just happening by the time I left. Currently these strategies are no longer being championed by senior management. Another Associate Dean found the Guidelines useful in one way that they were intended to be.

I am so convinced of the value of this approach for helping institutions to move from a Teaching orientation to Learning, that in my retirement I am working with other universities encouraging them to develop their own Guidelines on Learning. An example is at MIT where a set of guidelines is being used by the MIT Teaching and Learning Laboratory: http://web.mit.edu/tll/learning_guidelines_2007.pdf

A new generic website has been created at http://guidelinesonlearning.com/ which is intended to be used as a starter for institutions wishing to create their own guidelines.

Reward: Increased recognition for teaching via promotion

At almost all universities with whom I have worked, including in my role as an Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) auditor, there is the universal plea from staff that teaching is undervalued and research rules. Even staff who genuinely want to put time into teaching and improve their students learning experience are emotionally torn. They believe or are told by their supervisors that if they want career progression all their effort should be put into research. I realised that however creative I was, there would be no real progress until staff felt that teaching was genuinely valued and rewarded. While other rewards are valued, the one that counts most is promotion; whatever we say as senior managers. However many times we assure staff that teaching is valued, they simply will not believe us until they can see that it is possible for teaching excellence to be a pathway to promotion, all the way through to professor.

Thus we have to work hard on our promotion processes. One does not demean a university if it is possible to be promoted on excellence in teaching as well as via excellence in research as long as the bar is set high. It is possible for a university to excel in both teaching and research. In fact this should be our goal. So I started on a long and difficult route to devise a new process for promotion on the basis of teaching; helped by an imaginative and committed team. By the time I left, we were on the way and many staff were convinced that good teaching would be recognised and there was a much more robust process in place to recognise good teaching other than via student evaluation ratings.

"The work in improving the status of teaching achievements in the promotional process is still work-in-progress, but the improvements have been marked and greatly

"As Director of Academic Studies, it has been extremely helpful to have a university-wide statement on the objectives and aspirations of teaching, namely the Guidelines on Learning that inform Teaching at UNSW. I have required of all staff within the school that their course outlines address which aspects of these guidelines are addressed by their courses."

appreciated. The forms of evidence needed are now well understood around the university, and the indeed the forms used in applications for promotions and awards also became better known, better designed and more standardised."

> **"A very fruitful initiative has been the restructuring of the promotion process to recognise high quality teaching within the university. I have observed the effects of this both as a faculty subcommittee member for promotion based on teaching and learning, and also as a recipient of a promotion to professor, where my teaching and learning initiatives were a significant and recognised factor. "**

"The amazement that teaching might really be "counted" in promotion is still seen amongst staff. But this last professorial round, academics were promoted on their "teaching"- These were staff who were engaged in the L&T communities and enthused by the possibilities of developing exciting new ways of working with students during the beginnings of the L&T "revolution" at UNSW." Associate Dean 2009

This is not the place to describe the process in detail but there were a few features that may be useful to those wishing to enhance their promotion practices to better recognize good teaching. Another pragmatic fact is that promotion procedures can also be a driver for achieving better teaching and should be an essential part of a systemic approach to teaching effectiveness as described below.

- Applicants nominate a weighting, within a prescribed range, they want to ascribe to teaching, research and teaching. This allowed a staff member to nominate teaching as their main criterion for promotion.
- All applicants have to include a teaching portfolio of at least six pages. This included headings such as the "rationale behind your approach to learning and teaching". This section has the power to influence even those who are putting research achievement as their main contribution
- All Faculties have to have a Faculty learning and teaching review panel. These panels are responsible for evaluating teaching portfolios, submitted in conjunction with an application for promotion, when applicants have assigned a weighting of 50% or more to their teaching. The panels are required to provide confidential written evaluations for each applicant for the consideration of members of Faculty Promotion Committees and University Promotion Committees. The evaluation must be attached to a cover sheet that includes the names of the members of the corresponding Faculty learning and teaching review panel, and is signed by the Presiding Member

and all panel members. This was the breakthrough. Evidence of excellence in teaching became based on genuine peer review, as is research. No longer were student evaluations the sole criterion.

- Support for Faculty learning and teaching review panels and for academic promotion panels in general is critical. To support staff in articulating their case for teaching without similarly supporting panel members in judging the evidence produced is neither ethical nor effective. Much work was put into the development of workshops for these panels and they were well received by participants.

Another important strategy in getting this process in place was to convince my colleague, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) who was responsible for promotions, to drive the final stages of drafting procedures, which he happily did.

Reward: Budget allocation for performance in learning & teaching

WHILE CARRYING OUT an AUQA audit of the University of Queensland, I was impressed by a scheme they had in place linking a proportion of faculties' budgets to performance in learning and teaching. Here was a strategy that could be used to enhance recognition of learning and teaching. There is nothing like money to increase motivation but also if a university is seen to be linking performance in learning and teaching to budgetary allocation then it is seen as a statement that the institution takes teaching seriously. Academics are used to seeing money flow from achievements in research but not in teaching. Thus a process was introduced whereby a significant proportion of a faculty's budget was to be linked to performance against a set of indicators. Around this time, the Australian Government introduced the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF). Allocation of these very substantial monies ($70-100 millionper year) was linked to performance against a set of output indicators such as student satisfaction data, completion rates etc. Certainly the introduction of the LTPF helped me convince my colleagues that the introduction of UNSW indicators would be a good thing. This has been very successful and has evolved over the years into a sophisticated process and I have since worked with other universities to introduce similar schemes. The process will be described in detail elsewhere, however it is worth commenting on a number of guiding principles that have contributed to the success of the UNSW Faculty Learning and Teaching Performance Indicators.

- Each year the indicators need to be agreed to by the PVC and the Associate Deans Education (ADE)

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>> This gave the ADEs a sense of involvement and credibility within the Faculty; also an incentive to work with Faculty to improve. They were well placed to identify where change was needed. The discussions about what the indicators would be also contributed to the building of the ADE community.

> **_I spent time with each Head of School briefing them on what each indicator involved and why it was important, as well as the implications of adequate, if not superior performance for each. The implications included financial benefit. Accompanying financial benefit was recognition and reputation. In the first instance, money provided an incentive for the Head of School and also the financial benefit argument provided me with the entree/legitimacy I needed to interest the Head of School in engagement with Teaching and Learning._**
> _An Associate Dean_

• The associate deans were responsible, in conjunction with their Dean, to allocate within the Faculty any money awarded for performance against the indicators.

Again this enhanced the authority of the ADEs

• Deans were required to supply me as PVC with a document detailing their Faculty's achievement against the indicators. A small panel including an external member with significant experience in learning and teaching assessed the submission against an agreed on algorithm and recommended the allocation of funds.

This was important for the transparency of the process and the panel was required to provide feedback to each dean.

• The indicators should be both input and output measures.

This was initially a major issue between my senior management colleagues and me. As the LTPF was allocated based solely on output indicators, they felt this should be the sole basis for the UNSW indicators. I strongly argued that this provided no opportunity for me or the ADEs to encourage change. Eventually we came to a compromise of 60% output indicators and 40% input. In a scheme now instituted at Deakin University, this balance is 50%-50%, a much better ratio. It is worth describing two input indicators that illustrate how change can be induced via strategic drafting of input indicators.

Example of input indicators 1
In our analysis of student evaluation data is was clear that a major cause of dissatisfaction was that students had no clear direction as to what was expected from them. This was despite a directive from the Academic Board that each unit should have a comprehensive outline with objectives, method of assessment etc. Thus the following output indicator was included:

UNSW Learning and Teaching Performance indicator 1:
Quality of course outlines and extent of adherence to the UNSW Course Outline Template.

I randomly selected 30 units/courses taught by each faculty and requested the course/unit outlines provided to the students in that unit/course be included in the Indicators report. The assessment panel reviewed these outlines. Some were appalling and certainly explained why the students felt so ill informed. Faculties were marked down where this was the case. Over the next two years the quality of the course/unit outlines improved dramatically.

Example of input indicators 2
Despite the quality of the FULT program, Heads of School were not actively encouraging their new staff to attend FULT. Introduction of the indictor below had great impact! The enrolments for FULT went up dramatically.

UNSW Learning and Teaching Performance indicator 2:
New staff participation in the Foundations of University Learning and Teaching (FULT) program

The need for a systemic approach

AS ARGUED ELSEWHERE, there is a need to take a more holistic and systemic view of quality assurance in learning and teaching in universities (7). This is very true for the strategies described above; they need to all link together and be seen to be systemically embedded throughout the institution. All too often our approach to change in universities is piecemeal and isolated. We can come up with some great ideas but unless integrated throughout the institution their chance of having maximum impact is reduced.

Let me illustrate this with an example of embedding the concept of the "Guidelines on Learning" throughout UNSW. I believed that the use of the Guidelines as a reflective tool was potentially one of the best chances of achieving the goal of changing the culture at UNSW and moving from a focus on teaching to a focus on student learning. But how could one encourage the use of the Guidelines throughout the institution? A number of strategies were used.

Firstly, in course/unit outlines as described in the previous sections, an on-line template was made available to staff to help them prepare effective outlines. A section of the outline was titled *"The rationale behind your approach to learning and teaching"* with instructions to include a brief statement about the approach to learning and teaching used in the course/unit. The following suggestion was used in the template. *"When writing the rationale you might find it useful to draw on the Guidelines on Learning that Inform Teaching at UNSW"*.

Next, was inclusion in promotion documentation. In the revised process for promotion, all applicants were expected to include a section on teaching. The Academic Promotion Toolkit included the statement *"Evidence of the application of appropriate UNSW Guidelines on Learning that Inform Teaching to the development of courses at both lower and upper level"*. The instruction booklet for writing a UNSW Teaching Portfolio included the words" *"The UNSW Guidelines on Learning that Inform Teaching are drawn on current educational research and identify ways to best create an environment that interests, challenges and enthuses students while also ensuring, where possible, that what is learnt is engaging and relevant. These guidelines can assist you to identify your particular strengths as a teacher as well as your underlying conception of how students learn most effectively in your discipline"*.

Finally, the Guidelines were included in staff development activities. In the early sessions of the FULT Program, staff were asked to reflect on examples of good and poor teaching they had experienced. They were then asked to define a set of principles that could be gained from these combined experiences. This was a perfect lead in to revelation of the existence of the Guidelines. All were given a copy and the Guidelines were continually referred to throughout the FULT Program. All staff were given a booklet called Preparing for Teaching, this included a section on *"What is UNSW's Learning and Teaching philosophy"* and the Guidelines were introduced with ideas on how to use the Guidelines in the staff members teaching practice.

By including reference to the Guidelines in all the major policies or activities on learning and teaching, I felt there would be a greater chance of them having maximum impact.

Evidence of success

WHAT I HAVE ATTEMPTED TO DO in this article is to describe a major strategy for change in a leading research-intensive university. That is, a change in culture such that teaching is more valued, has improved and that the student experience is enhanced. As a scientist, I appreciate the need for evidence to demonstrate that change has indeed occurred.

Evidence with respect to a change in culture is, I admit, mostly anecdotal. The quotes from UNSW staff scattered throughout this article, are evidence of a mostly very positive response by staff to the initiatives listed.

With respect to the quality of the student experience, the evidence is more solid and quantitative. One of the reasons for the decision to create the position of PVC (Education) was the poor results in the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) which is administered each year to all Australian university students following graduation. UNSW students were giving low satisfaction responses on items relating to the quality of teaching. On taking up the position, I found that there was an internal student questionnaire being administered every two years and consistently results from this were as poor as with the CEQ. No action was taken in response to these reports as staff generally dismissed them on the basis of low response rates. In my first year as PVC, the internal survey was expanded, adding more items with open-ended questions and targeting a stratified sample until a 40% response rate was achieved. The results showed the same low student satisfaction ratings with respect to teaching as the previous surveys. Over the next six years, the results of these surveys did improve. However, the best evidence was provided by the results of the LTPF process. The first allocation of funds was in 2005 based in part on the 2004 CEQ data. These data related to students who would have started their degrees in 1999/2000. UNSW did badly and did not get any funding from the LTPF allocation (being the 33rd ranked University out of 38). In the CEQ-adjusted *"satisfaction with good teaching scale"* UNSW was rated last out of all universities in Australia. In the 2008 LTPF exercise, which was now ranking student satisfaction and other criteria in discipline categories, UNSW was the top ranked university in the country scoring better and gaining $1.4 million more than any other.

This was a remarkable turn around from nearly last to first and was clear evidence that UNSW students believed the quality of their learning was good (and much better than the quality perceived by earlier cohorts of students). Given the long lag for the CEQ results and the time taken to implement the many strategies described above, I like to believe that this is evidence of the impact of all those wonderful communities of UNSW academics who felt they had the freedom and support to work on providing a better learning experience for their students. In the words of one Associate Dean (Education):

"There was a fluorescence of creativity regarding Learning and Teaching from the early 2000s in which staff were encouraged and resourced and rewarded to try many new ideas; some worked others didn't but that is the necessary culture in which to release innovative and wonderful staff-student partnerships in Learning and Teaching. UNSW is now reaping the rich harvest of the passionate and enthusiastic commitment to making Learning and Teaching a key aspect of a fine student experience." ❯❯

›› Epilogue: Was it worth it?

MY SIX YEARS WORKING to change the culture at a large research-intensive university has reaffirmed my view that it is possible to excel in both research and teaching. We achieved much and it is refreshing and encouraging to see how the communities continue to exist and have impact on the student experience. Many members of the communities have moved on to senior influential positions. Hopefully students will continue to be increasingly satisfied with their experience. This paper has been written to share my experience, describe some initiatives that may be useful to others and to reflect on behaviours of senior management that increase our chances of success. I have never regretted my decision to cross to the "dark side". It was a privilege to work with those many staff members who passionately believe that good teaching is a fundamental responsibility for all and that students deserve no less.

To those charged with leading a university I reaffirm the key essentials for enhancing teaching quality:

- There needs to be a senior member (DVC or PVC) on the executive team with a responsibility for teaching quality on a par with the PVC/DVC Research

- The Vice-Chancellor/President should take special steps to convince staff that the University values and aspires to excellence in teaching

- Promotion procedures should be such that teaching excellence is comprehensively peer reviewed for those wishing to be promoted for teaching performance by a panel with significant experience in assessing teaching quality. Promotion to full professor should be possible for truly outstanding achievement in teaching

- A significant proportion of budget should be tied to performance in learning and teaching via achievement of a set of both input and output indicators agreed on by each faculty/department and the DVC/PVC (Education)

- Allocation of grant monies for development in learning and teaching should be contingent on awardees attending capacity and community building workshops

- Special strategies should be developed to form across-discipline communities of staff committed to enhancing the student experience

- Staff development activities should include major contributions by the universities best teachers who are rewarded for their contribution

Acknowledgements

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