

Teaching Matters

A newsletter from the Teaching and Learning Unit

Issue 1, 2009

<http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au>

Welcome to Teaching Matters.

For many staff and students, adjusting to the new spaces available at *The Spot* can be challenging. Over the semester we have seen more students start to make regular use of the lounge areas and the well-appointed computer labs have been consistently busy. However the teaching and learning benefits from the new spaces - especially the collaborative learning spaces - continues to present challenges to academics who work in these spaces.

In this issue of *Teaching Matters*, you will find details about the upcoming **Collaborative Learning Spaces demonstration event (Friday 29 May)**. We hope that you can join us at the event. It will be the first of many gatherings arranged by the TLU to share ideas about the teaching and learning strategies that work in these spaces.

The 2008 recipients of the **Dean's Awards for Teaching Excellence** write about their experiences of teaching and student learning in this issue. Congratulations to Leisa Sargent, Cynthia Hardy, Belinda Allen, Jennifer Frahm from the Department of Management and Marketing, and to Roland Hodler from the Department of Economics.

As a Faculty we take time out on the 30th of June to celebrate the teaching achievements of those who were awarded teaching certificates in 2008. To be a good teacher in higher education at this time requires a sophisticated set of skills. I congratulate those who are set to receive a certificate, but also those many academics who continue to explore new strategies in teaching and maintain their strong interest in students' learning outcomes.

This issue of *Teaching Matters* also includes information about the TLU's **Student Feedback project**. The work of the project is now available online.

The two Peer Tutor programs, the **Peer Writing Tutor** and the **Peer Maths and Stats Tutor** are outlined. We encourage you to promote this resource to your students. The TLU offers many valuable programs to our students and this service has proved popular.

All the best to you and good luck with your teaching in second semester.

Martin Davies
Acting Director, TLU

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Demonstration Event: Collaborative learning spaces

Date: 29 May, 10:30am-11:30am

Venue: Level 6 collaborative learning space (rooms 613-614), 198 Berkeley Street

The collaborative teaching spaces at 198 Berkeley Street present to lecturers opportunities and challenges...

- how does space impact upon teaching and learning?
- how can lecturers best engage students with the subject material in these spaces?
- what are some teaching strategies that have worked well in open, collaborative learning spaces?

The Teaching and Learning Unit, together with the New Building Group, will host a demonstration seminar in the Level 6 collaborative learning space.

The event brings together Tai Peseta (TLU), Albie Brooks (ABIS), David Shallcross (Head, Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, Faculty of Engineering) and Jon Peacocke (Program Manager, Learning Environments) who each have areas of expertise to share.

Each speaker will share their experience of collaborative spaces. In our case, lecturers and students are still getting used to the technology but beyond that there are examples from elsewhere that can help to form constructive ideas about space use.

Please RSVP to Sanchia Draper (sdraper@unimelb.edu.au) before Wednesday 27 May for catering purposes.

Further information and ideas about teaching in collaborative learning spaces refer to the new TLU webpage: *Using Collaborative Learning Spaces*:

http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/collaborative_learning/index.html

Teaching Certificates 2008

In celebration of excellent teaching in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce the Dean, Professor Margaret Abernethy, will host an event to present Teaching Certificates on Tuesday 30 June.

Professor Peter McPhee, Provost, joins us to recognise excellent teaching and research in the Faculty of Economics and Commerce.

Date: Tuesday 30th June 2009

Time: 5:30pm

Venue: Level 12 Boardroom, The Spot, 198 Berkeley Street

RSVP: Tuesday 24th June 2009 at: www.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/rsvp/

Invitations will be forwarded to certificate recipients.

Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching, 2008

The purpose of these Awards is to:

- recognise and reward the teaching achievements of individual academics or teaching teams
- encourage teaching excellence in academic staff through the identification of peer models for teaching improvement
- promote the value of teaching as an academic activity in the Faculty
- the emphasis of the award is on the scholarship of the recipient in relation to their teaching.

Award for Excellence in Teaching (Team) 2008

Leisa Sargent, Belinda Allen, Cynthia Hardy, and Jennifer Frahm
Department of Management and Marketing

Award for Excellence in Teaching (Lecturer) 2008

Roland Hodler
Department of Economics

Leisa Sargent, Belinda Allen, Cynthia Hardy and Jennifer Frahm discuss the training program for tutors in Organisational Behaviour:

“Our innovative tutor training program was predicated on the belief that, particularly in large classes, tutors play a pivotal role in helping students enhance their teamwork skills. While there were a number of useful guides for students about how to be productive team members, there was very little about how to develop tutors’ team coaching skills. To redress this gap we designed a distinctive and original training program for our tutors in Organisational Behaviour.

Using a research-led approach we crafted a 3-hour team coaching training session that is used on an on-going basis. This training session helps tutors develop a range of team coaching skills: how to help teams to set goals; observe group dynamics; use active listening skills; identify team performance problems and make recommendations to manage them; and resolve conflict. To complement the training session we also developed a website that provides a wide range of support materials for tutors. (See <http://www.managementmarketing.unimelb.edu.au/ttr/>; also available via the TLU website: http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/tutors/index.html). This was supported by a Faculty of Economics and Commerce Teaching and Learning grant.

Results from a quasi-experimental evaluation of the training program demonstrated that tutors were better equipped to help teams enhance performance; they felt more engaged with their students and more confident in their role. Moreover, students whose tutors had received training reported their team had significantly better functioning and higher productivity; and they also experienced their tutor as a more effective team coach than those students whose tutors had not been trained.

The breadth of impact of the training program has already been extensive with 70 tutors now having received training, with these tutors in turn having coached over 6000 students. The academic rigour of this work has also been recognised more broadly with an article forthcoming in the *Journal of Management Education*.”

Roland Hodler discusses the development of the new subject, Positive Political Economics:

“Soon after arriving at the University of Melbourne, I suggested to the Head of the Economics Department, Nilss Olekalns, that I could introduce a new fourth year subject on Political Economics. Political Economics is a fast growing field that applies standard economic concepts and tools to analyse politics and policy making. Nilss Olekalns and various other Professors supported the introduction of a Political Economics subject.

I first taught this new subject, Positive Political Economics (316-412/686), in 2008. I was excited from the very beginning when I started planning this subject. Notwithstanding all the work that was involved, I remained excited throughout the semester.

Developing this new subject was particularly time consuming because of the high demands that I had myself: First, I wanted the subject to be not only on the political economy of well-functioning democracies, but also on the political economy of weakly institutionalised countries. This seems most appropriate at a university in which many students come from countries that can hardly be categorised as well-functioning democracies. Second, I wanted to discuss both theoretical as well as empirical contributions to illustrate how they can complement each other. Third, I wanted to discuss classical papers as well as new research papers. The only good graduate-level textbook in this field, Persson and Tabellini’s *Political Economics: Explaining Economic Policies*, focuses on theoretical models of well-functioning democracies. I therefore added numerous recent journal articles and working papers with an empirical approach or with theoretical models on weakly institutionalised countries to the reading list, including recent papers of my own.

The students and I very much enjoyed this research-led subject.”

Learning about Subject and Curriculum Design

Learning how to design or review a subject is a more difficult task than one first imagines – particularly when your view of university teaching and student learning becomes more complex because you’ve had a chance to delve into a bit of the research literature and think about how it applies to the disciplinary context of your teaching. Not only do you need to know your content and prepare your classes accordingly, there are the subject objectives to think about and questions about assessment, criteria and standards to consider; perhaps you’re also managing a large group of tutors as well as coordinating the subject’s LMS web presence. And then there’s the matter of evaluation – how to do it well, how to respond to student feedback, what to learn and what to change and improve on for next time. It is all these activities together that often make teaching so exhausting!

All these issues (and more) have come up in this semester’s iteration of the TLU’s new program about Subject and Curriculum Design. With a generous and open spirit, the participants who’ve come along to the program have each brought the challenges and curiosities emanating from their teaching to the group, for collective problem-solving and consideration. Mostly, their curiosities have seemed simple at first but on closer inspection have proven to be more complex: How can I improve my QoT scores and still provide a challenging learning experience for students? Does my assessment suit the subjective objectives? What’s the best way to integrate generic skills in the subject? What theory of university teaching underpins explains my approach to teaching? The responses to these questions are what Lee Shulman (1986) called some years ago, ‘pedagogical content knowledge’.

In truth, the educational answer to these questions is often more than an individual academic needing to be a more charismatic or entertaining lecturer (although it helps). Many of the answers also need to be more than giving students what they want if we are truly committed to the idea that a *higher* education is more than preparing students for a workforce. Many of the answers sit with the design of our subjects and the links between subjects. Subject design is essentially a proxy for strategically influencing the choices students make about their learning.

The program will run again in Semester Two. A draft program is below.

Semester Two, 2009	Workshop focus
Week 2 Wednesday 5 August 11:00-2:00pm	Do we focus on teaching or learning? The case for student learning
Week 4 Wednesday 19 August 11:00-2:00pm	Why all the fuss about learning outcomes and subject objectives? Their promise and pitfalls for subject and curriculum design
Week 6 Wednesday 2 September 11:00-2:00pm	Using assessment and feedback to support student learning
Week 8 Wednesday 16 September 11:00-2:00pm	Constructive alignment: an integrated approach to subject and curriculum design
Semester Break	
Week 9 Wednesday 7 October 11:00-2:00pm	Utilising the LMS to enhance student learning
Week 12 Wednesday 21 October 11:00-2:00pm	Beyond the QoTs: additional strategies for evaluating the quality of student learning

If you'd like to learn more about the program, visit the program website: http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/subject_design/index.html. Contact Dr Tai Peseta in the TLU (tpeseta@unimelb.edu.au or ph: 8344 3501) for a conversation and additional information.

Reference

Shulman, L. (1986). Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), 4-14.

Tai Peseta

Improving feedback to students

The TLU has recently created a web resource on feedback practices entitled *Feedback - Sharing Good Practice*.

The LMS Community site contains video vignettes of your colleagues in action, discussing the design of their assessment and feedback. There is also a section with further feedback resources that you might find useful. The site is a work-in-progress. New video vignettes and resources will be added to the site progressively.

We welcome your contributions to this site and any questions that you might have about teaching and learning, and feedback in your subjects or courses. Please contact Kim Watty (kwatty@unimelb.edu.au) with contributions, questions or ideas.

For further information: http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/teaching_staff/resources/feedback.html

Peer Tutors

The Peer Writing Tutor and Peer Maths and Stats Tutor programs can assist your students.

The TLU runs two Peer Tutor programs for undergraduate students. The programs, the Peer Writing Tutor and the Peer Maths and Stats Tutor are available on a weekly basis from week three-week twelve of semester.

Peer Tutors do not provide answers to students, nor do they assist with assignments. Peer Tutors have been trained to work with the students who use the service to think constructively about the problems they face in their written and numerical work.

The Peer Tutor service is free, and if it can be beneficial to your students, we encourage you to place the timetable links on your LMS page:

Peer Writing Tutor

http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/students/undergraduate/peer_writing.html

Peer Maths and Stats Tutor

http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/students/undergraduate/peer_maths.html