DEVELOPMENT of the
TEACHING AND LEARNING ENHANCEMENT PLAN 2003-2007

Background

The University of Queensland is committed, through its Strategic Plan, to excellence of learning outcomes and opportunities as part of its aspiration to maintain the highest standards of teaching, research and scholarship, and the enhancement of society’s core values. Those aims are developed by the University’s Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan (TLEP).

This paper provides an overview of the current higher education teaching and learning challenges and the context for the development of the Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan for 2003 – 2007 at The University of Queensland.

Context

Major changes in higher education in Australia in the last decade of the 20th century include

- The creation of a mass higher education system
- A decline in funding per student and an increase in the student:staff ratio
- An increased contribution from students to the cost of their education
- An increase in the numbers and proportion of international students, both on- and off-campus
- An increase in the number and proportion of fee-paying postgraduate coursework students
- An increase in research higher degree students and a new focus on ‘timely’ completion for these students
- A new pattern of student disengagement reflecting greater time in paid work while studying and greater focus on vocational outcomes from programs
- Increasing attention to standards and quality assurance in higher education
- New challenges and opportunities flowing from information and communications technology affecting teaching modes, as well as other aspects of the student experience of university

Teaching and learning challenges for The University of Queensland

The basis of the university’s current practice and its aspirations can be gleaned from the way teaching and learning is expressed through the strategic plan. The reference in the University’s Strategic Plan and the TLEP (2000–2004) to the values of the ‘great universities’ provides some clues to the basis of our understanding of excellent teaching and learning.

We might find agreement from staff and many students that excellence in teaching and learning is

- A rich on-campus experience
- Exciting delivery in lectures supplemented by
- Small group interaction and/or experience in laboratory or clinical settings with intellectually stimulating, ‘cutting edge’ research ideas
• Access to a major library with deep research collections in the major areas of study
• A broad curriculum that gives students the opportunity to pursue in depth their field of interest
• Student activities that provide a variety of other sporting and cultural experiences to round out the life of a scholar

It is important that we are able to articulate the goal towards which we strive. It is equally important that the goal is credible and one towards which people can make progress. The higher education context in which we find ourselves challenges some of our deeply held views about teaching and learning.

• Increasing student:staff ratios challenge the ability to provide adequate small group interaction
• Declines in funding affect the breadth and range of curriculum we can provide comfortably – particularly in areas that attract small numbers of students
• New technologies challenge the paradigm of transmission of content by lecture followed by deeper engagement through seminars and practical sessions
• Student disengagement due to greater commitment to part-time work gives the lie to the extent of the on-campus experience and student involvement in activities beyond the classroom
• Funding stringencies threaten library collections, while paradoxically new technologies make access to resources better
• Student disengagement brings new challenges to on-campus library provision
• Mass higher education brings a more diverse student body with a range of expectations

Beyond these issues the changes in the student profile raise questions about teaching and learning for postgraduates

• Increasing postgraduate coursework student numbers challenge us to consider whether our practice is appropriate for this group. What should we expect the preparation and attributes that postgraduate students bring to coursework to be and what attributes and outcomes should we foster?
• Research higher degree students bring new challenges – what are our responsibilities and are our supervision models adequate?

The University’s vision has been to ensure excellence of learning outcomes and opportunities. We have been more focused on what we understand to be excellent teaching and an excellent learning environment than on learning outcomes. The challenge for the teaching and learning enhancement plan is to be clear about how we will achieve excellence of learning outcomes and opportunities and what we mean by this.

Consultation

In June and July 2002 participants at two teaching and learning workshops identified a set of key challenges and issues for teaching and learning at the University of Queensland, under the broad headings of Pedagogy, Curriculum Development, Learning Environment and Learning Outcomes. From these discussions a set of potential goals and objectives were identified that might form the basis of a revised Teaching and Learning Enhancement Plan.

A workshop on November 8, 2002 discussed strategies to advance the goals and objectives previously developed. The draft Plan that was formulated following this workshop was circulated for discussion and feedback to Executive Deans, Directors of...
Studies, Faculty and School Teaching and Learning Chairs, workshop participants, as well as to the Teaching and Learning Committee during 2003. The draft TLEP was also made available on the University’s Teaching and Learning website.

Following feedback, a revised Plan was developed and adopted by the Academic Board in August 2003. Accompanying the Plan is an implementation plan.

A Report on outcomes in relation to the TLEP 2000-2002 was also prepared.

Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
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