

Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) Project

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OVERVIEW OF ACTION LEARNING INITIATIVES

November 2010

Jane Allnutt:

Position, Department/Faculty: Lecturer – School of Nursing,

Project Title: Increasing awareness of Mental Health through Interactive Lecturing

Project Details: Guide and mentor a sessional employed to teach a Mental Health specialty to third year nursing students through the use of current educational research methods related to interactive learning. Previously students have not performed well when assessed on their knowledge of Mental Health. Past lectures on this topic have been evaluated by the students as 'boring' and 'a waste of time'. I planned to introduce various interactive lecturing styles to the sessional thus empowering her to make a decision on how she feels most comfortable at imparting her knowledge on this topic to the students via lectures. The sessional is fortunate that she can repeat the lecture at a later date to a different cohort of students thus enabling the sessional to reflect and review the lecture and improve the revised lecture.

Thus there is an issue related to understanding mental health. The sessional and I will discuss this issue, challenge her views and understanding, perceptions, assumptions and encourage her to construct her own ideas on how to improve the situation. The sessional will initiate on her new ideas by testing them out in the lectures. After the original lecture we will further discuss what worked and what didn't work, draw conclusions, define learning and then the sessional will integrate the new knowledge into the repeat lecture. (need plan, action, observe, reflect)

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

- Witnessing the sessional's growth in lecturing techniques over the 6 week semester – through the sessional's own observation and reflection
- The excitement and gratitude of the sessional at having academic mentoring
- Valuable lessons learnt at weekly meetings with sessional - great place for sharing information on how obstacles were overcome, and what could be done better to improve next lecture
- Videoing sessional lectures and viewing with sessional to get feedback
- Students invited to complete pre- and post-question on sessional's lectures – satisfaction of integrating this new material into the next lecture
- Implementing and sharing my knowledge of lecturing to the sessional.
- Observing other lecturer's techniques, reflecting on these and implementing some of these into the sessional's own lectures
- The sessional mastering the available lecturing technology

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- Initial time to set up project as sessional only brought on staff when teaching semester started – difficulty in starting project
- Having weekly time when both sessional and myself available for a meeting – only a 6 week teaching semester and workloads
- Limited time to gather resources for sessional prior to meetings
- Linking adapting the lecture changes and maintaining cultural respect of students – some students are not prepared to interact during lectures

Fiona Anastas:

Position, Department/Faculty: Lecturer in Technology, School of Arts & Sciences

Project Title: Establishing an effective team of new staff (lecturer-in-charge and tutors).

Project Details: The lecturer-in-charge is new to the position in this unit and the 2 sessional staff are new to the University. This project aimed to put a number of activities and procedures in place that would assist new sessional staff in working at ACU in the textiles units. These procedures could also be applied to other technology units. This project was developed based on the lecturer's own experiences of being a sessional staff member.

The project particularly involved the strengthening of the following the *Integrated Competing Values Framework* (iCVF) capabilities:

Developer – Building a team and running effective meetings.

Deliverer – Organisation and dissemination of information in a timely manner.

Monitor – evaluate the effectiveness of tutorial activities, timing and assessment tasks

Major Project Achievements:

- Implemented pre-semester meeting schedule. A number of meetings were held prior to the unit outline being published, prior to week 1 and immediately before the first tutorial. These meetings were a success in establishing a rapport between the teaching team and allowing all staff to have input into the content and tutorial activities.
- Organised and implemented detailed tutorial schedule. Any additional material was placed in an inbox system set up in technical officer's room on a weekly basis
- Regular weekly communication between tutors and lecturer maintained. Success/failure of tutorial activities discussed each week. A blog was set up on Blackboard to facilitate this weekly discussion but we reverted to email as both sessional staff already have multiple pin/passwords and their personal email would be accessed more often

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

- Viewing and discussing the Unit Outline prior to publishing helped to ensure that all staff understood the requirements for assessments and allowed changes to be made. This strategy was particularly effective in making sure the sessional staff would be available for work in the future as they felt that their expertise and contribution is valued.

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- Face to face meeting time. There was never a time when all of us could meet during semester. This was anticipated prior to the project commencing and an online blog was set up through Blackboard to overcome this. We ended up reverting to email as both sessional staff already have multiple pin/passwords and their personal email would be accessed more often. Email communication ended up working quite well and we now have a record of our thoughts from each week that will be used to review the Unit before it is next implemented.
- Perhaps we could have consulted more regarding the practical standards that we all set for our students, as the quality of work across the tutorials was not always consistent. This challenge has not affected the formation of a successful teaching team, but will instead be a project to be implemented next time the unit runs – setting up exemplars of student work

Additional Comments: This unit is being run again next semester with the same sessional staff and lecturer in charge. A meeting is scheduled for early December to reflect on the semester, look at the teaching evaluations and plan for next year. Changes to content, schedule, assessments and marking criteria will be implemented based on comments made by each of us during semester on blog and via email. The Lecturer also intends to develop a checklist for sessionals that will be adapted for use in other schools and faculties of ACU, with the assistance of the Learning and Teaching Centre.

Dr Robyn Bentley-Williams:

Position, Department/Faculty: Senior Lecturer Diversity and Inclusive Education,
Faculty of Education

Project Title: Cognitive coaching and mediating self-directed learning with sessional staff

Project Details: My project was designed to support a sessional staff member through applying an internal people focus on the iCVF Developer component in planning career and professional goals. A cognitive coaching approach was adopted to explore the sessional staff member's thinking in five states of mind in areas of efficacy, consciousness, flexibility, interdependency and craftsmanship. The project engaged the sessional staff member in planning, reflecting and problem-resolving perspectives in learning and teaching in the complex fields of diversity and inclusive education. My goal was to facilitate the sessional staff member in achieving a deeper understanding of self-as-learner.

Major Project Achievements:

- Supported the sessional staff member in articulating career and professional goals
- Mediated the sessional staff member's self-directed learning by engaging in cognitive coaching planning
- Developed a collaborative relationship with the sessional staff member through reflective processes
- Guided the sessional staff member in becoming more resourceful in decision-making through a problem-resolving approach

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

- The project was successful in facilitating the staff member's capacity to set realistic outcomes in career development and catering for learners with diverse needs. During career planning conversations, the sessional staff member expressed her intention to pursue an academic career and successfully applied for and was offered a university lecturer's position. Professionally, the sessional staff member developed an increased awareness of university teaching and learning resources for learners with vision impairments and was able to accommodate a student assessed as legally blind in tutorials.
- Lessons learnt from implementation of the project included a greater awareness of the importance of:
 - having realistic aspirations
 - facilitating a cognitive shift
 - reflecting on the coaching process
 - accessing specialised teaching and learning resources

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- Time constraints and the sessional staff member's PhD demands affected the length of meeting times in implementing the project. Ideally, the three cognitive coaching sessions would have been conducted over a 40-60 minutes timeframe rather than the available 20-30 minutes. Although the project was successfully implemented, a greater amount of engaged meeting time would have increased the opportunity for more self-directed learning by the sessional staff member

Additional Comments: The CLASS project was valuable in raising my awareness of a sessional staff member's needs and aspirations. Implementation of the project contributed to rapport and capacity building for both the sessional staff member and me as we considered ways forward in improving teaching and learning for students with diverse needs.

Bronwyn Gordon:

Position, Department/Faculty: Lecturer, School of Nursing (NSW & ACT)

Project Title: Increasing the awareness of the “Transition Module” for Sessional Lecturers through mentoring by the Lecturer in Charge.

Project Details: This project was developed to guide and mentor a sessional employed to teach a Foundational Nursing theory unit to nursing students through the use of current educational research methods related to successfully transitioning to tertiary learning. I will develop the sessional lecturers’ ability to deliver content that is integrated into the Foundational Nursing theory unit of study. This aspect of the project involves my role as a “Developer” of a sessional lecturer and demonstrates my “People focus” (Vilkinas, Ladyshevsky & Saebel, 2009).

Major Project Achievements:

- **Action Plan**
- **Outcome 1:** Enhance the ability of the sessional lecturer to support students undertaking the Transition module.
- **Actions:** Discuss ideas, Consider the impact of the first year experience on students, Reflection
- **Outcome 2:** Broaden the sessionals’ ideas of content delivery options
- **Actions:** Review of Transition module content, Review of Transition module’ variety of delivery techniques, Sessional’s attendance at a Transition module session, Reflection.
- **Outcome 3:** Assist the sessional lecturer to develop her capabilities as a “deliverer”.
- **Actions:** Sessional lecturer marks student assignments, Reflection, Discussion.
- The sessional lecturer was successfully mentored and supported to increase her awareness of the “Transition module” and its place in the first year programme, and was able to support students who undertook it. The increased familiarity with the “Transition module” through the review of its content, delivery techniques and by attending a session enabled the sessional lecturer to be more confident in supporting students in all areas of their study in this unit.
- The lecturer in charge and the sessional lecturer were able to monitor the progress of the Action Learning Plan throughout its implementation using discussion, reflection and written memos.

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

- **Successes:**
- The ability of the sessional lecturer to support students undertaking the Transition module was enhanced
- The sessionals’ ideas of content delivery options were broadened.
- The capabilities of the sessional lecturer as a “deliverer” were developed.
- **Lessons learnt:**
- If time is to be available for conducting such a project, it must be scheduled into the timetables of both Lecturer in Charge and sessional lecturer, long before the beginning of the semester

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- As identified in the project proposal, time constraints were the key challenges. These were challenges for both myself and the sessional lecturer. It was very difficult to schedule time to meet, time to journal reflections on the process and time to write up the results of the project.
- Ultimately the success of the project was not negatively affected by the lack of time. However, the implementation of the project and the documentation of the activities and reflections was negatively affected.

Additional Comments: Goodwill is a very important element of any research activity of this kind

Kelly Johnson:

Position, Department/Faculty: Education and Exercise Science

Project Title: Reflective Journal - Experiences in the mentoring relationship

Project Details: This project aimed/explored/was developed to write a reflective journal about my learning experiences as a first time LIC. The challenges/successes and the strategies/skills used in my role will be recorded and evaluated to discuss progress, difficulties, suggestions, feedback and to make the necessary adjustments to become more confident and capable as a LIC.

Major Project Achievements:

- To be able to put my experience, skills and knowledge into practice in another context
- To adapt to the expectations and role of LIC
- Planning to modify the unit content delivery and assessment tasks
- Administration requirements – unit outline, assessments, tutorial lists, marking schedules/deadlines (all the behind the scene expectations of LIC)
- Student issues with assessments, tutorial changes and the college process/guidelines
- Overall I have set out to achieve new skills and knowledge by seeking guidance and advice involved in a mentoring relationship.

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

- Having a mentor, David Greene, was very helpful as I felt I was not on my own, providing advice with organisational issues, addressing concerns and validating achievements. “There comes that mysterious meeting in life when someone acknowledges who we are and what we can be, igniting the circuits of our highest potential” (Rusty Berkus cited in Rowley 2006 p.9).
- The mentoring experience was able to revitalise my career and commitment. It was an empowering experience; it developed personal autonomy and promoted knowledge and awareness. David inspired me with enthusiasm and optimism, demonstrating self awareness and empathy in formal and informal meetings. Throughout there were opportunities to collaborate and this strengthened my own personal and professional skills.
- My experience in this mentoring relationship could be developed into a professional learning programme for sessional teachers or those new in this role. It is a valuable opportunity to ‘tap’ into experienced LIC’s and learn together. The mentoring has identified important features in my professional learning and encouraged conversations and an insight to my academic development.

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- Finding my feet and the ‘unknown’ of a new role
- Time management
- Administration requirements
- These challenges were demystified due to the capabilities of the administration staff that were extremely helpful, available and organised.
- My mentor was experienced, realistic, enthusiastic and encouraging. He role modelled a sense of what I was becoming by providing direction, support and insight.

Additional Comments: This experience has given me “the disposition to look at old landscapes with new eyes, an open mind and heart and the capability to think outside the square” (Cannon 2007 p.33).

I loved the challenge and felt at the start I underestimated my ability- however I found that I could do this and had the background knowledge, skills and experience already. The mentoring experience was most rewarding and affirming.

Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) Project

Dr Maria Cynthia (Cindy) Leigh:

Position, Department/Faculty: Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing (NSW & ACT)

Project Title: Mentoring a new sessional to be a well-prepared and reflective teacher of a large Year 3 Nursing unit

Project Details: This project aimed at mentoring a sessional academic staff to prepare, teach, assess and reflect as a competent teaching team member of the unit NRS346 in semester 2, 2010.

I am the LIC of a final Year 3 BN subject (NRS346). This subject has a large enrolment (385 students) and is the consolidating unit that focuses in further developing competencies and attributes of students expecting to complete the course and be Registered Nurses in 6-months time. The only other subjects taken in the last semester is a Nursing Context unit (Nursing Practice in Specialty Areas) and 2 Clinical Placement subjects. As a subject that aims to assist in the transition from Nursing students to practicing clinicians, there are high expectations for the teaching team to create a positive learning environment and enthuse the students to learn.

My main objective for this Action Learning Project is to mentor the sessional staff to prepare, teach, assess and reflect as a competent teaching team member of the unit NRS346 in semester 2, 2010.

Major Project Achievements:

- Updated unit outline with LICs in Vic, Qld and ACT, prepared required new documents and sought assistance from non-School ACU staff to set up adequate resources on time for start of semester
- Assisted sessional to meet all university employment requirements, use of available resources and be a welcomed member of the School before and during the semester
- Developed capacity of sessional to teach the unit from week to week
- Enhanced the sessional's confidence in providing feedback to students, team members and coordinator for the improvement of current and future offerings of the unit.

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

To meet outcome 1: Update unit outline and prepare teaching materials and needed resources

Successes	Lessons learnt
Gathered all notes and reflections from semester 1 re suggested changes for the unit and brought to LICs' unit preparatory meeting	- good negotiation skills required to convince other LICs the applicability of suggested changes to the unit
Updated teaching materials and ancillary documents on Blackboard	-despite heavy workload of LIC, the Blackboard support staff fitted in and ably assisted the LIC before and during the semester - there are always more eLearning skills to learn and apply in my teaching
Updated librarian of UO changes (assessment & references), involved her in wk 1 workshop for students	- enthusiastic support from another non-teaching staff (librarian) at beginning and throughout the semester
Met all Faculty Implementation Committee requirements so UO and other docs can be accessed by students through Blackboard	- heavy workload of all LICs involved needed a couple of LICs (specially one with a CLASS project) to get everything set up on time

Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) Project

To meet outcome 2: Assist sessional to be “teaching-ready” when semester starts

Successes	Lessons learnt
Verbal approval of appointment from DHOS/HOS & confirmation of allocated teaching hours	- complex workload allocation process in the School and actual processing of forms, etc needed time for the DHOS & admin officer to get contracts done and sessional paid
Completion of employment docs; introd to School staff, structure, amenities	-hard to pin the HOS to attend to this task -the LIC as a mentor must make time to orientate and introduce sessional to other staff
Get access to office, computer, IPphone Get access to tut rooms and use of ePodium	- relevant administrative support personnel always made time to support academic staff
Attendance in Sessional Orientation workshop plus on-going orientation by LIC	-availability of sessional on workshop date was just lucky timing - finding common time for sessional & LIC to meet was a challenge

To met outcome 3: Develop capacity of the sessional to teach the unit

Successes	Lessons learnt
Assisted staff in understanding content of UO with emphasis on learning outcomes & grad attributes; weekly schedules, availability of references	-ACU teaching approach and process new to sessional and required time and effort for sessional to learn but once done, allowed sessional to manage quite independently
Access and use of Blackboard and all its components taught to sessional	-reinforcement of understanding and actual use from wk 1 onwards was straightforward for sessional provided materials are uploaded on time and queries to LIC are timely addressed
Informed staff re nature and conduct of unit assessments; use of prepared marking criteria	-reinforcement of understanding and actual implementation nearer due dates accomplished if a good initial discussion with LIC transpires at beginning of semester
Involved staff in conducting on-going (informal) and formal unit evaluation; use of personal reflective journal	-doing the LTC required paperwork on time for a week 7 unit evaluation allowed the sessional to be involved in the actual conduct of the unit evaluation and opportunity for positive verbal feedback from her students -sessional's view on doing evaluations and preparing a reflective diary is still up for future discussion

To meet outcome 4: Enhance sessional's confidence in providing feedback

Successes	Lessons learnt
Discussed feedback to students (in class) & during consultation hours with sessional availability of sessional aligned w/ student and LIC availability	- sessional found the use of the School Consultation Form and providing the “Communication at Risk” personally to students aided their rapport with students

Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS) Project

Successes	Lessons learnt
Giving and receiving feedback from other teaching team members occurred availability of sessional aligned with regular staff availability	- willingness of regular staff to be involved in mentoring sessional gave the sessional a morale booster
Discussed receiving and giving feedback to LIC	-once the regular meetings with the LIC had occurred, it was not hard to organise phone chats with sessional
Met whole team when doing group marking and when finalising grades	-this was one of the hardest tasks to achieve because of the conflict on availability of team to meet during the later part of the semester. Moderation of papers took longer to complete and finalising grades was left mostly to the LIC with staff consultation only occurring as needed.

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- Movement to other universities by senior academics who used to teach in this subject, no regular academic appointments, and increased number of students, created the need to employ several sessionals to teach in the BN program. This affected the composition of the teaching team for this unit. This semester, NRS346 teaching team is composed of 2 regular academics who also have their own subjects to coordinate and a sessional staff member who has never taught at University level but had several years of clinical experience and worked with new graduates from different nursing programs in NSW. This required more informal and formal meeting times between the LIC and the sessional staff member which developed a good mentor-mentee relationship and at the same time produced an unexpected outcome for the LIC to be better organised for the whole unit, be well prepared for the meetings and have a good grasp of what sessional staff not only need but want.
- The fact that in the 6th semester of the 3 year BN program, the 2 theoretical units only run in the first 7 weeks of the semester (with one non-teaching week in week 5) then the students go on clinical placements (note: the unit's face-to-face meetings were further shortened to 6 instead of 7 wks; 2 hrs instead of 3hr tutes per week compared with 2009). This created another imperative in ensuring that the learning environment for the 7 weeks is organised, monitored and conducted by a knowledgeable, student-centred and well-prepared teaching team. Hopefully, the positive feedback from the current teaching team will be complemented by results of the unit student evaluations.

Additional Comments: Teaching a unit using a commonly agreed upon unit outline (including all the assessments/marketing criteria and the formatting of lectures, tutorials and student directed learning sessions) ensures that the unit is taught to meet the standards set by the Faculty/LTC. Availability of other lecturers-in-charge and other teaching team members in other campuses expands the unit knowledge-base, pedagogical expertise and teaching resources that can be tapped on during the semester.

Although the 3 states and ACT have different student numbers and milieux, teaching teams with different levels of university teaching experience and approaches to learning and teaching, the special challenges to meet what is set in the unit outline and get positive peer and student evaluations will be interesting to look at the unit is taught annually

Dr Abdur Rouf:

Position, Department/Faculty: Lecturer, School of Arts and Sciences, North Sydney Campus

Project Title: Sessional Staff Advancement

Project Details: This project was developed to expand the potential of the sessional staff worked in the Applied Science for Practice 4 unit, at the North Sydney Campus of ACU. Sessional staff were introduced to the project initially via an introductory email and invited for an induction meeting in the first week of the semester. After some structured basic discussion about their teaching profile at ACU, further discussion continued related to the teaching roles of a University academic. They were provided with the [RED link](#) and copies of the CLASS project workshop materials held in June 2010 at UTS, for [reflection on their roles](#). This first discussion explored their cognitive thinking/awareness and motivation for further development. Sessional staff engaged in planning, reflecting and adopting to become better educators with appropriate support and resources.

Major Project Achievements:

- Sessional staff were encouraged to enrol in Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and successfully completed the final assessment of the first unit of GCHE. They are encouraged to continue and enrolled in GCHE unit-2.
- Sessional staff were supported in the areas they needed assistance in such as audiovisual technology, managing a class, encouraging passive students to become more engaged in class
- Sessional staff were encouraged and motivated to expand their potential and improve a particular skills/capacity (as per their personal issue such a taking tutorial and PBL class engaging passive students etc) in relation to learning & teaching.

Successes and lessons learnt from the implementation of the project:

- Sessional staff are capable of making further progress in their career if they are provided with opportunity and support. As I have experienced in this project they discussed with their learning and teaching issues candidly and we came up with some solutions and improvement. They are also enthusiastic to progress further in preparing classes different from their conventional class and they expressed that preparing for different types of classes provided them with a great learning experience.

Key challenges faced in the implementation of the project:

- Making time and keeping motivation and enthusiasm.
- Sharing concerns/ issues relating to teaching and taking notes on their concerns.
- Aspiring and motivating to be engaged.