2008 SEMINARS BY TEACHING AWARD AND GRANT RECIPIENTS

Members provided progress reports on the organisation of 2008 seminars by award and grant recipients.

THE LEARNING PARADIGM

The Committee noted material provided on the Learning Paradigm (summarised at Attachment 1) and there was discussion about its inculcation across the University and in the organisational culture. There was a mixed response on this matter, with several examples of student-centred learning being cited. The observation was made that although many staff had adopted a student-centred approach to their teaching, the learning paradigm per se was not yet a clearly visible philosophy amongst staff. The second 2008 IATL newsletter would focus on the Learning Paradigm, including practical examples of ways in which staff involved students in their learning.

EVALUATIONS IN THE GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Committee gave consideration to a report outlining how evaluation occurred in the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education. It was suggested that extending the time to complete units might alleviate student workload and, in turn, encourage more staff to undertake the course. Another means of reducing pressure was to extend the timeframe for completing assignments. Members endorsed these suggestions and recommended that staff feedback be sought, via future evaluations, on continual improvement of the course and its mode of offering. A full review of the course was planned after 3 years, with the Course Review Committee involving key persons from each Faculty.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO TEACHING DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

The Chair advised that, in view of the small number of applications approved for Teaching Development Grants (TDG) in the last couple of years, the Teaching Development Grants and Awards Committee (TDGAC) was reviewing the existing criteria with a view to extending and refocusing eligibility. There was discussion on this matter, including the suitability of the name, potential broadening of the criteria, change to closing date, and amalgamation with TALES to form a two-fold award. A working party with the following membership was established to consider these matters:

- Professor P Goldburg rsm Faculty of Education representative [Chair]
- Professor Y Ryan IATL
- Ms P Palmieri Carrick Project Officer
- To be nominated Faculty of Arts and Sciences representative
- To be nominated Faculty of Health Sciences representative
ACCESS TO, AND SUPPORT FOR, THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Committee gave consideration to a new policy on access to and support for the Learning Management System. Following clarification of some aspects of the policy, the Committee agreed as follows:

THAT the Policy and Procedures on Access to, and support for the Learning Management System be approved.

MINUTES OF ASSESSMENT REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING OF 9 APRIL 2008

The Committee endorsed changes to the Assessment Policy and Procedures for the 2009 Handbook.

REVIEW OF POLICY ON QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Consideration was given to the Policy on Quality Teaching and Learning and any revisions required prior to its inclusion in the 2009 Handbook.

Professor Gabrielle McMullen
Chair, Teaching and Learning Committee
30 June 2008
The Learning Paradigm and Student-Centred Learning

Australian Catholic University’s Policy on Quality Teaching and Learning and the Teaching and Learning Plan are underpinned by the pedagogical principle of ‘the Learning Paradigm’. The following is an excerpt from the Policy on Quality Teaching and Learning:

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

What value the Learning Paradigm adds to the style and substance of this University's existence is central to its raison d'etre. The University should provide the right kind of learning experiences, be they academic, spiritual, ethical or other; and the University fundamentally should be at the service of its students as it attempts to assist each of them, "its entire diversified and dispersed student body", as part of their "personal, spiritual and moral development" so that they will become "valued in employment and in the life of the community at large". The Learning Paradigm reflects this self-understanding of the role and purpose of the University as it aims to discern methods and approaches that best suit the needs of the students. (Australian Catholic University Strategic Plan Working Paper No. 2 – The Learning Paradigm)"

The notion of a ‘learning paradigm’ as the core educational approach at ACU was introduced in 1998 through the above-mentioned Working Paper. It was based on a 1995 paper, ‘From teaching to learning — a new paradigm for undergraduate education’ by Robert Barr and John Tagg (Change, Nov.-Dec. 1995, 13-25). The paper argued that for too long, academics had followed an 'instructivist paradigm', in which their teaching practice was based on a lecture model ‘delivering' content to students. Barr and Tagg argued that we should rather be focusing on how students learned, and measuring what their 'learning outcomes' were. Their idea was to shift academics away from the idea of the teacher being the font of all knowledge, and on to the student as an active constructor of knowledge and skills and values, under the guidance of the teacher.

Since 1998, the term ‘student-centred learning’ has become the preferred term in describing the intent of Barr and Tagg’s argument. Academics will be more familiar with this term as a higher education principle than with the term ‘learning paradigm’. Yet they are essentially the same principle.

It is timely to revisit the terminology in which our educational principles at ACU are expressed, as we begin later this year to draft the new Teaching and Learning Plan for the period 2009-2011. However, it is also important for staff to understand that their current educational practices, which reflect their commitment to ‘student-centred learning’, are consistent with, and a continuation of, the University's commitment to ‘the learning paradigm’.

Statement prepared at the request of the May 2008 meeting of the Teaching and Learning Committee for inclusion in the next Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning bulletin