

# FIRST YEAR CORE COURSE LEADERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOOLKIT

## FIRST YEAR COURSE LEADERS TOOLKIT ITEM

*Professional development  
and teaching scholarship*

### THE USQ CoPs PROJECT

Faculty of Arts CoP  
and  
Faculty of Business CoP

<http://www.usq.edu.au/cops>

### Professional development and teaching scholarship:

**Teacher(s):** Bernadette Lynch, Kim Southey and Shalene Werth.

**Course:** MGT1000 - Organisational behaviour

#### Rationale

Applying for the Faculty of Business teaching award was the team's first step towards a series of professional development initiatives, including conferences and papers, teaching seminars and an external teaching award application. Working this way ensures that one piece of writing does hard work in providing the basis for multiple outcomes.

#### Activity

Applying for a Faculty teaching award requires applicants to prepare a submission, which addresses particular criteria. Applicants must use primary evidence, such as student evaluations and student performance outcomes, and secondary evidence, such as higher education research, to show that they have met the award criteria.

#### Sample text

Faculty award application [over page].

## **Faculty of Business Awards for Excellence (2007)**

Category: Excellence in Teaching (Team)

### **A Team Effort: MGT1000 Organisational Behaviour**

Bernadette Lynch, Kim Southey and Shalene Werth

#### **Summary Statement**

Teaching a large first year course is simultaneously challenging and exhausting. The excitement and stress involved with presenting to a class of over 200 on-campus students while managing an online course website for an additional 300 or so students carries with it its own set of anomalous stressors. Some of these include planning the semester, crafting teaching materials and designing presentations and all of these are creative tasks which are not well defined by any workload. So it is hardly surprising that much of our own course design and delivery has evolved organically over time, through a long association with students and an understanding of their needs and an equally long association with teachers and an understanding of their needs. Key pedagogical concepts for higher education, such as the issues of transition, the importance of "social presence", constructivism, and reflective practice all provide sound theoretical bases for our teaching. However, in our case their application came about largely through the practical wisdom and accumulated experiences of the teaching team: it is a happy coincidence that we later found our approach to teaching was supported by both university policy and theory (Hambrick, 2005 in Kilduff, 2006).

The course in question is MGT1000 – Organisational Behaviour (OB). It is offered over every semester and is a core course within the Bachelor of Business. The total number of students enrolled each year is approximately 1100 individuals. It is offered at various campuses within USQ and by a large number of overseas partners. While OB is a core course, it is often chosen as an elective by students from other faculties. This brings a new dimension to the course as it then needs to meet the needs of students who have little interest in business as an area of study but who may potentially find the key concepts useful, particularly in relation to future management or supervisory positions.

#### **The Team's Teaching Philosophy**

The impact of the Team's teaching philosophy on the evolution of the course has been profound. The Team has adopted a principle-based approach to teaching in which they test each innovation and or/each reflection against three key principles:

- 1) Is what we're doing educationally sound? That is, will it enhance learning outcomes?
- 2) Is what we're doing equitable to other students?
- 3) Is this a reasonable expectation that will not drain the life force out of us or our students? (This involves inserting a concern for work-life balance for both the Team and students into our curriculum design).

We also regard the acquisition of a University education as a socially and politically significant process. One of the major mechanisms for wealth re-distribution in Australia is through employment and income and, currently, there is a positive correlation between high income and education (Keating, 2006). Consequently, university qualifications can assist in seeking higher paid forms of employment and should be available to all capable students, not just those individuals who finish schooling with a history of academic achievement and not just those coming from families with a history of academic achievement and familiarity with the rigors and challenges of a University education.

#### **Curriculum Planning**

Our approach to curriculum planning also reflects our philosophy, but it also conforms to disciplinary understandings of 'best practice' for team teaching and large first year classes with a diverse cohort. The Teaching Team's approach to curriculum planning has two significant qualities: first, it is student-centred, with a focus on the development of key skills which

facilitate the transition of first year students into higher education (Chanock, 2001; Kirkpatrick & Mulligan, 2002; Barrie, 2003), and contribute to the development of USQ graduate attributes. This is important because it reflects a key outcome of the business curriculum in higher education: to facilitate the transition of students from teacher-pupil dependency to adult independent learners (Boud, 2000). Second, it is collaborative, with all members of the OB team making a vital contribution to the planning and implementation of curricular innovation.

The Faculty of Business preferred enrolment pattern recommends that students undertake this course in their first year of study. As a result, a large proportion of our students are new to the university environment. The Team has developed a curriculum that aims to facilitate the transition of first year students from a high school to an adult learning context. Because of its teaching philosophy, the OB Team consider this a prime opportunity, if not an obligation, to provide students with the opportunity to develop skills in the areas of research, the importance of accurate referencing and the implications of plagiarism, critical thinking and written communication. The Team's view is that these are fundamental skills that contribute to retention and progression by - enabling students to successfully complete their chosen program. This has the added advantage of contributing to the development of the following USQ graduate attributes: (1) analytical and critical thinking skills; (2) information acquisition, organisation and independent learning skills; (3) communication and presentation skills; and (4) an awareness of the need for, and an understanding of high professional standards and ethical behaviour.

At a fundamental level, the curriculum develops students' comprehension of the traditional OB theory taught across universities. However, disciplinary content is delivered in a way that transcends the traditional paradigm of 'teaching content', which students are expected to use 'intuitively' to solve management problems. In OB, we constructively align (Biggs, 2003) teaching practice with expected learning outcomes, such as problem-solving, by setting a challenge or problem for students to solve, providing them with task-specific learning support, feedback and explicit skills-based teaching, which enables them to resolve the challenge. This process is explored in detail under the criteria of course content, teaching methodology and learning resources.

Innovations in the course curriculum have evolved as a result of a collaborative team process - with each of the triad providing an essential contribution which has had a significant impact on course design and delivery. This reflects a well-known OB maxim that teams are more than just a group of individuals. It requires team synergies and reflective practice to maintain our focus across semesters whilst team members rotate through the course leader role. As an example of individual team contributions, Bernadette currently fulfils the overall leadership role which involves such things as undertaking the major rewrite and scheduling of assessment topic areas. Her contribution tends to reflect her experience with the theory of the course as well as her extensive teaching experience. Shalene provides expertise in developing the exam database to which the three members diligently contribute in successive semesters. She also improved aspects of social presence and collaborative learning in the course by laying the foundation for effective use of the discussion board and online media for all students but, in particular, distance education students. Kim uses her teaching experience to challenge team norms and contributes alternative ideas in relation to grading and assessment practices. Her talent for playing "devil's advocate" in our reflective practice discussions has provided a significant catalyst for change within the course materials. Kim's interest and involvement in the assessment practices of the course also resulted in an enhanced version of the assessment rubric.

## **Course Content**

In addition to its theoretical focus, the course content demonstrates a sensitivity to its overall position in USQ's business programs, as well as an awareness of the first year context with its inherent issues of student retention and transition. Consequently, we provide several skills-based modules, which are embedded in the course content. These include two modules on the essential elements of essay-writing preparation. These research and academic writing

modules cover areas such as: finding journal articles using USQ databases; guidelines on using the internet to search for sources; locating research support services from the Library; providing guidelines on how to analyse a case study; providing information on good writing resources, and; providing students with exemplars of good essays. These are designed with the end user in mind: for example, pictures of screens used to access USQ databases provide students with all the information they require to successfully navigate this area and find the information they need.

The key idea behind integrating learning support measures into this course has been to build confidence in the students, which, in turn, enables them to excel academically. Our premise is that we provide students with the research and academic writing knowledge required for success in the course, which in turn gives them the courage and knowledge to believe that they can succeed, irrespective of their high school OP score or previous study experiences. This is achieved through a 'scaffolding' approach, which makes both required learning processes and disciplinary content more transparent and accessible (Chanock, 2001). For example, we teach them to, firstly, access the library databases, provide guidance in effective research, from which point we tutor the students in critical writing. This developmental approach promotes student success and results in greater student retention and an improved transition process for students (Lawrence, 2005). Table 1, shows the pass/fail numbers of all Faculty of Business core courses. It shows that the OB course had the highest percentage pass rate of all the courses in this category.

**Table 1: Pass/fail numbers of students in core courses Semester 1 2005**

Course	Pass	Fail	Incomplete	Grand Total
ACC1101	268 (53.8%)	230 (46.2%)		498 (100%)
CIS1000	261 (54.8%)	214 (45%)	1 (0.2%)	476 (100%)
ECO1000	189 (56.7%)	141 (42.4%)	3 (0.9%)	333 (100%)
FIN1101	43 (41.7%)	59 (57.3%)	1 (1%)	103 (100%)
LAW1101	199 (62.9%)	116 (36.8%)	1 (0.3%)	316 (100%)
MGT1000 (OB)	340 (74.5%)	116 (25.5%)		456 (100%)
MKT1001	298 (70.6%)	124 (29.4%)		422 (100%)
POL1000	74 (45.3%)	87 (53.5%)	2 (1.2%)	163 (100%)

### Teaching methodologies employed & teaching/learning resources

This current iteration of our course materials has benefited from the collective wisdom of the Team and our collective philosophical commitment to student retention and student transition to university. The core course materials are primarily made up of: the Study Guide; the Text Book; the Introductory book; the weekly two-hour course tutorial session; the course webpage; remailers (emails sent to all students in the course); and the course CD which includes Powerpoint lectures (most with audio) for each week the of the semester. A key value that we embedded in the materials was user friendliness. For the Team, this meant that the materials needed to be something the students found easy to navigate. Consequently, we designed the Study Guide so that it is written in a clear, welcoming voice, which sets an overall tone for the course.

The voice adopted in the Study Guide and the remailers which are sent to students over the semester explicitly addresses some of the emotional support issues that students may have (Lawrence, 2005). For example, students are assured that being confused or uncertain or overwhelmed is normal in study. The stresses associated with essay writing and exams are explicitly addressed. The feedback we have received from students on the tone of the materials demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach:

*Personal comments in the study guide – felt like a 'person' was writing to me (USQ Student Feedback Form, Semester 3 2005).*

*Every thing was explained very well in the study book, so I don't know of any improvements... the study book was like she was talking to us face to face, so as*

*an external student, this made me understand it very well. Good job everyone! (USQ Student Feedback Form, Semester 2, 2006).*

In addition, the voice and structure of the study materials accommodate a range of learning styles, for example, audio breeze slides to reach mass numbers of external students.

*I found the weekly lecture slides very helpful – it was like actually being there with the lecturer ... this course was very helpful and clear – well done!’ (USQ Student Feedback Form, Semester 2, 2004).*

The structure and voice of the Study Guide take many of the unknowns out of study in terms of time commitment, for example, the course is made up of ten modules; one module takes approximately one week to complete. It usually involves reading approximately thirty pages from the text. In addition each module is given a rating on a one-to-five scale to reflect its level of difficulty. Extraneous information has been structured out of the study guide given students’ time poverty. Each module includes a brief overview of that week’s reading that acts as a kind of advance organiser. The following feedback is indicative of the general feedback we have received from students about this aspect of the study guide:

*I found the ratings and commentary for each module very helpful! I liked knowing exactly what I was doing in each module. The module objectives were made very clear and were easy to find in the textbook (USQ Student Feedback Form, Semester 2, 2006).*

Where appropriate, more difficult concepts are explained in some detail. These are written as a short stand-alone ‘essay’ with embedded exercises but no specific reference to the text. In terms of curriculum design these introductions take the student from:

- a. The simple to the complex (we start by analyzing a single definition and then move to comparing two and three definitions of the same concept as an introduction to critical thinking)
- b. The known to the unknown (we introduce the concept of organisational structure by looking at a family tree) and
- c. The concrete to the abstract (we introduce organisational structure by presenting a skeleton as a metaphor for organisational structure).

Each module includes a stand-alone section entitled ‘learning objectives from the text’, which lists each learning objective from the module and the page numbers in the text that relate to that learning objective. The following quote exemplifies the type of feedback from students about the presentation of concepts throughout the course:

*This course was inspiring. I enjoyed the information and could easily relate it to day to day events, past and present life experience. Should be a must for everyone!! (USQ Student Feedback Form Semester 2, 2004).*

A further key value that we wished embedded in the materials was transition friendliness. This has meant we wanted the materials in and of themselves to make the transition of students to university as easy as possible.

The Study Guide makes explicit many of the unwritten tasks that students must complete to be successful in the first few weeks of their study. For example A ‘Must Do Tasks’ section is included in the first few weeks that: identifies which learning materials students need to buy and where to buy them; it alerts students to the information technology demands of the course, it notifies them to the final date for dropping out of the course and directs them to the Student Services website for details on how to think through their options. The Study Guide also models, analyses and explains many foundation academic skills and values. These include: how to analyse a definition; how to compare and or synthesize two definitions; the use of different genres in academic writing and thinking; the basics of essay writing and referencing.

The weekly tutorial activities usually serve at least two purposes; content coverage and modelling of basic academic skills. For example in the week on organisational culture students complete a brief writing exercise in which they analyse a case study about Nike and write a couple of brief paragraphs using a formula for applying theory to a case study. The two weeks prior to the submission of the essay are devoted exclusively to essay writing – with no new discipline based content being provided. The following feedback indicates the value that students see in the time devoted to transitional issues for many first year students:

*An excellent course for first year students; guided us through essay writing and using electronic resources in a very clear and instructive manner, (wish I had of completed this course earlier!!!) Many thanks (USQ Student Feedback Form, Semester 3, 2005).*

*I loved this course. I found the two modules on assignment writing very helpful and will use that information with other classes (USQ Student Feedback Form, Semester 2, 2006).*

The challenges inherent in teaching a large, diverse student cohort have shaped our approach to curriculum design, course content and support materials. They have also shaped the Team's approach to teaching.

## **Student advising and counselling**

The team makes full use of the services provided by USQ to assist students with issues that fall outside our range of expertise or timeframes, for example, referring students to Student Services if they are having personal difficulties or to the LTSU for students that seek tutoring in writing.

In addition to this, the best way to demonstrate the team's competence at providing assistance to students is to cite evidence from the students themselves. The following quotes from students have been received as part of course evaluations and emails and are a sampling only of the feedback the team has received in relation to advising and counselling students:

*'I really appreciate your helpful advice. I have read all the preface material and I am feeling my way through the first couple of weeks ... This is my first semester studying in many years ..... Thanks again and I look forward to working with you this semester.'* (email to Kim Southey, 28 July 2004)

*'Kim Southey was very supportive of me personally, it was much appreciated.'* (USQ Student Evaluation Form, Semester 3 2005)

*'Shalene Werth was fantastic. Helped out and answered all questions on the discussion board. This is a great course.'* (USQ Student Evaluation Form, Semester 2, 2006).

*'I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your support and feedback this semester. We have been very fortunate to have such a dedicated lecturer and we truly appreciate all the hard work, time and energy you have put into the course this semester.'* (email to Shalene Werth, 20 November 2006).

*'Hi Bernadette, don't mean to clog up your e-mails but just wanted to say that you have been the most involved lecturer I have had. I haven't e-mailed you or asked any questions yet but have not felt the need as the information you have passed on has been fantastic. Anyway just wanted to say thank you as people as involved and interested in us passing as you are very rarely get the thanks they deserve so thank you.'* (email to Bernadette Lynch)

*Bernadette, Thank you for these words - they mean a lot and help to put it all into perspective as a first time first year external student that one fail does not a total failure make!!! Thanks for the moral boost (email to Bernadette Lynch written in response to a remler titled - what do I do if I fail the assignment.)*

## Innovation in teaching

Due to the large number and diversity of students enrolled in this course innovative teaching has become a hallmark of the course and a professional requirement for those who teach it. Some of the innovations introduced, whether they have been complex or simple in nature, have been introduced intuitively (Yoong, 2002) and have enjoyed success because they met the needs of the students. The flexibility and innovation of the OB team has provided an ideal platform for introducing changes to the course, which best meet the needs of both the teaching staff and the students. These innovations include: reflective practice (Radloff & del Harpe, 2001) and building relationships (Zimitat, 2003) in a mass education environment.

In the assessment for OB we have included a learning diary, completed by the students in order to formulate in their own minds what is and possibly what isn't, working with their own learning. This process has the additional benefit of providing feedback from the students to the Teaching Team each semester on how they perceive the relationship between themselves and the course. Reflective practice has also impacted on the way we work as a team. It has influenced the way Team members debrief after lectures, unpack critical incidents, discuss ideas before their implementation, and evaluation of the way current theory can improve our teaching and has proved to be an invaluable tool in enhancing our innovative practice.

Our experiences in OB affirm that social presence is a contributing factor to student success (Zimitat, 2003). In this course providing social presence to students in the form of regular class emails (remailers), the conversational voice used in the study materials and participation on the study desk has resulted in students feeling that they are relating to a real individual rather than a distant academic with no real identity or interest in their welfare. However, as this course is so large it has been important for the Team to set boundaries around the amount of time available for each student. As a result of this students are asked to always be prepared with specific questions when meeting with any of the Teaching Team; to have read all information relating to their topic of inquiry before asking for assistance, and to participate wherever possible in discussion groups and use other available on-line resources.

These are all reasonable expectations of students, particularly when they are provided with all of the necessary building blocks to be able to work things through on their own. Students are put in charge of their learning in other ways, running on-line discussion groups with the lecturer looking in regularly to monitor how things are going. This has resulted in a very collegial atmosphere on the course website, with students working to enhance their own learning and that of their colleagues.

## Student learning

Our efforts to provide effective teaching and learning support to our students have been quantitatively measured. It has been found that course retention and pass rates for students particularly in the low OP student group are the highest for any core course in the Faculty of Business. Table 2 shows that in OB students with an OP score lower than 16 (ie 16-18) still managed to pass at a rate greater than the other core courses.

**Table 2: Pass-fail rates of OP 16+ students in core courses**

Course	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
ACC1101	23 (20.9%)	87 (79.1%)	0
CIS1000	22 (22.2%)	77 (77.8%)	0
ECO1000	13 (22%)	45 (76.3%)	1 (1.7%)
FIN1101	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0
LAW1101	10 (21.3%)	36 (76.6%)	1 (2.1%)
MGT1000 (OB)	50 (51.1%)	48 (48.9%)	0
MKT1001	39 (48.1%)	42 (51.9%)	0
POL1000	13 (40.6%)	19 (59.4)	0

The OB Team believes that facilitating the transition of first year students into higher education provides a solid foundation for their future learning development. For this reason, we see

student learning and student transition as being intimately linked. Consequently, we endeavour to create a sense of belonging and community within the student group to facilitate students' social transition to the university. We also actively value and speak to the issue of emotional intelligence and its role in study. For example OB has at various times hosted a citizenship awards function to reward students who add value to the learning environment. Students may be nominated by either the staff or fellow students for this award. Research shows that reflective learning plays an important role in university study achievement (Radloff & de la Harpe, 2001). We regard it as a critical component of student learning. Our valuing of reflection is demonstrated through the inclusion of the learning diary exercise as a formative assessment piece.

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