

FIRST YEAR CORE COURSE LEADERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOOLKIT

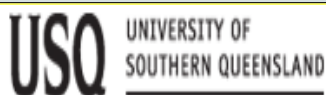
FIRST YEAR COURSE LEADERS TOOLKIT ITEM

*Professional development
and teaching scholarship*

THE USQ CoPs PROJECT

Faculty of Arts CoP
and
Faculty of Business CoP

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Topic: Professional development and teaching scholarship for first year convenors

Developing your professional practice

What is the intended outcome?

To engage in professional development activities that provide the basis for improved practice, and improved student learning outcomes, as well as opportunities for the receipt of awards, grants and promotion.

What is the established practice?

Many first year convenors do attend formal workshops, and increasing numbers now complete graduate studies in higher education. However, some continue to see research as the primary means to attain promotion and other awards.

What are the advantages of professional development for university teachers?

Professional development of teaching practice provides an increasingly viable alternative means for pursuing awards and honours, including promotion. As well as generating improved teaching and learning outcomes, professional development in this area also provides the basis for scholarly publication, thereby bridging the gap between what have traditionally been seen as the competing interests of teaching and research.

Background

Professional development and teaching scholarship provides opportunities for academic staff to improve and document innovations in their teaching practice. This is important for them because it provides a foundation for building teaching expertise, as well as progress towards both professional awards and promotions. However, it is also of benefit to students because the professional development of academic teachers can also lead to improved learning outcomes.

Challenge

The challenge for first year convenors is to manage the process of professional development in what is often a comparatively challenging professional context. Teaching large and diverse cohorts provides a rich vein of professional experience, as well as particular challenges. These include decreased available time for professional development, lower on-average evaluation scores from less experienced first year students, and greater pressure to achieve efficiencies instead of innovation in teaching and assessment practices.

Academic solutions for maximum impact

Some community members have chosen formal staff development options such as enrolling in [learning and teaching workshops](#), and/ or in the [Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching](#). These options provide first year teachers with language, theory and ideas to support and explain their teaching practice.

Others have applied for [internal teaching awards](#) and internal [teaching grants](#) as a means of pursuing recognition for excellent or innovative teaching practice. This process also provides documentation of teaching practice in preparation for both promotion rounds and applications for [external teaching awards](#) and [external teaching grants](#). Documentation can be stored and presented as a hard copy or [electronic teaching portfolio](#).

Community members who pursued this path have also re-structured and edited teaching award applications for teaching publications in [conference proceedings and journal articles](#). For busy first year teachers, this strategy derives optimum professional development outcomes from minimal input.

More informal professional development strategies include the engagement of [professional mentors](#), and the group mentoring and support obtained from [first year communities of practice](#) in learning and teaching. Mentoring and communities of practice provide participants with practical, experience-based insights from peers about teaching practice in an informal, democratic setting. Studies on communities of practice have argued that professionals often learn best in such informal networks.¹

Key points for effective professional development processes

- Formal professional development strategies such as enrolling in teaching workshops or postgraduate study can benefit participants by providing them with a grounding in recent theory and practice
- Pursuit of teaching awards and grants provides professional development benefits, such as recognition of excellence in teaching practice, as well as the basis for promotion and publication
- Informal, peer mentoring and communities of practice provide academic staff with a professional support network, as well as opportunities to improve their practice based on shared experiences

Final word

First year, and other, convenors can often defer professional development activities on the basis of inadequate available time. The exemplars on this site demonstrate that it is possible for first year convenors to make time for some kind of professional development, whether this is formal or informal. Professional development also has the potential to generate positive learning experiences for students. However, additional spin-offs for academic staff include awards, grants, publications and greater possibilities of promotion.

¹ Wenger, E. 2004, Knowledge management as a doughnut: shaping your knowledge strategy through communities of practice, *Ivey Business Journal*, January/February, pp.1-8; Bathmaker, A. & Avis, J. 2005, Becoming a lecturer in further education in England: the construction of professional identity and the role of communities of practice, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol. 31, No. 1, February, pp.47-62.