

April Blog – Foundation Courses
30 April 2007 - 4 May 2007
Guest Blogger
Frank Lyons, Director, Centre for Foundation Studies, Portsmouth University

About Frank Lyons

I have been developing customer-focussed and work-based approaches to learning at the University of Portsmouth since 1991. These work-based learning initiatives in the University have included foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. This curriculum development work has been in diverse fields including sales management, applied bio-medical science, community justice (probation), flight testing, early years education, information operations, logistics, business, computing and engineering. My expertise is about the learning, teaching and assessment processes including support for the learner workers and their in-company mentors. These learning in work degrees have been tailored to the professional development needs of individuals, or to meet the requirements of professional institutes and business organisations.

I have been a lifelong learner at the University Portsmouth in two senses. First I have learned through my life to adapt and develop my role moving from researcher to lecturer and then to developer. I taught sociology from 1968 to 1990 and on the way to taking up my current post in 2005 as Director of the Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Foundation Direct, I have been: Director of the University's Learning at work scheme, the Partnership Programme; Acting Head of the University's Department for Learning Development and Associate Dean (Curriculum) in the Faculty of Technology. Secondly I has been a lifelong commitment to the University of Portsmouth.

I have provided consultation to many UK universities enabling them to establish their own work-based schemes and become known internationally through conference papers in Australia, Thailand, South Africa and the USA. I particularly enjoyed working as a Visiting Fellow at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia in 2004 and at the Charles Darwin University Northern Territory and Victoria University, Melbourne NSW in the summer of 2006. I have contributed to UK Government advisory panels on graduateness, did a lot of development work on levels indicators and am working at the moment with the UK's Higher Education Academy group on work-based learning. I was awarded a National Teaching Fellow in 2003 and indirectly this led to the development of our Centre of Excellence.

I look forward to blogging with you and will be starting with an explanation of Foundation degrees that should follow on very well from the discussions you have been having with Jenny Naish about work-based learning.

Relevant

Publications

Lyons F.S. and Bement J.M. (2006) *Angels in Concrete: Work-based Learning and Change in Higher Education in The Realities of Change in Higher Education* Hunt, L., Bromage, A. and Tomkinson, B. (2006). Routledge. Oxford.

Lyons F. S. and Bement J.M. (2001) *Setting the Standards: Judging Levels of Achievement in Work-based Learning: A New Higher Education*. Boud D. and Soloman N. pp 166 - 183 SRHE/Open University. ISBN 0 335 20581 X (pb)

Regards Foundation degrees and work based learning

Hi

Frank

I believe you have created a really valuable and interesting discussion here regarding foundation degrees and at USQ we should be examining more closely and critically what we are teaching in terms of content and delivery and look at getting the balance right in terms of theory and practice to prepare our graduates to give them best possible opportunities in the work place

How do you get employers engaged?

I believe this is a difficult challenge for universities and requires a lot of work on the part of individual disciplines within the Universities to make the effort to develop the relationships with employers in a way that they see value in the relationship and is not intrusive on their day to day. Is there any support from Government to facilitate such engagement in the UK?

Learning and how to do it so students achieve their goals.

There is an enormous amount of information about Learning and Cognition available - but it seems odd that some capable children can still leave Primary or Secondary School and be unable to know how to learn.

Is there a section in the curriculum of teaching that teaches teachers how to teach basic information in a way that allows children to know they are learning and how they are doing it? I have met children in Grade 8 who did not know how to learn anything. They knew a lot but were not independent learners when it came to actually committing something basic to memory. Heavy processing of basic number facts was needed while they were dealing with maths problems and they lost the point of the question. Saying that they can use calculators does not help with estimating what the answer may be so they have no idea whether they are close to the answer or not.

The article in the last Weekend Australian Magazine about Carol Dweck's (studies on Self Esteem Theory and how uselessly it has been applied over the past 20 years is most enlightening. She found that undistinguished praise that told children that they were 'smart' for whatever they did has undermined the confidence of smart children because they were valued for being 'smart' not for the effort needed to learn.

When a group of children who were given 50 minutes of information about how the brain was a muscle that grew with exercise along with lessons on study skills were compared with the control group who received the same study skills information but not the 'brain development information', their teachers could see the difference in a few weeks. 'Dweck says 'Emphasising natural intelligence takes it out of the child's control, and it provides no good recipe for responding to failure'. Being praised for effort and specific information about their achievements is a much more effective way to help children develop confidence than taking competition away and giving blanket praise.

Let's give children skills and confidence rather than giving them the impression that they can achieve without effort.

Learning how to learn

Learning how to learn is perhaps the most important thing that we can learn. I have seen amazing results when we design curricula this way. It is a key principle in Deep Learning that learner's need to be actively engaged and for me this means that students need to take control and have responsibility for managing their learning with Learning Contracts, or have Personal Development Planning, or learn through tackling problems. On a different but related

tack, I also think that Brain Gym work is good for warming up the brain muscle at the beginning of a class and if this exercise can also involve a warm up related to the subject of the class, so much the better.

Frank

Is "learning how to learn" embedded in the USQ TPP?

Hello TPP Team,

Research and practice still suggest that the increasingly important "learning how to learn" ability is not being properly/deliberately developed through the primary and secondary school system. What is the USQ TPP doing about it and how?

Maria
LTD

learning how to learn for students with learning difficulties

There is a lot of debate about how best to teach students with learning difficulties (including those with specific learning disabilities) and that more structured approaches work more effectively than other approaches for these students. What is your opinion of the most effective way students with learning difficulties learn?
Nicole

Reflections on the debate so far

Thank you for your rich input on the confusing title of Foundation degrees and the widening participation agenda (see my comments on those debates). But let me turn to the big picture about what sort of education is implied by Foundation degree. Recent research by "Foundation Degree Forward" (I do recommend you to www.fdf.ac.uk) reports on how employers and students don't want a "dumbed down" education and value the academic backbone of these degrees. I would argue the academic is just the subject alongside work knowledge and the backbone is professional development process. At Foundation Direct we are helping curriculum redesign of existing programmes and the development of new degrees to include a "long thin professional development module" about professional standards in communication, thinking, ethics, research, career planning in parallel with knowledge planning, and so on. Feedback from students is that this module builds confidence, helps integration, is transformative and results in them finding new communities. The module is driven by assessments that require students to integrate their learning in the three areas: theory, practice and the self. (see attached)

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Frank's Attachment - Foundation Degrees

The information provided in Frank's attachment provides an interesting overview of the reasoning behind the establishment of work based foundation degrees in the UK.

In terms of labour shortages in various professional and technical jobs, Australia is facing a similar situation to the UK, particularly in areas such as nursing, teaching and engineering. When I think about UK Foundation degrees I'm reminded of Associate Diploma programs, which for many have been a nice stepping stone to a full degree and often have been kicked off by applicants having been given some credit or recognition of prior learning in TAFE programs or from work experience. What the UK seems to have done is formalise this process further and embed the actual learning process much deeper into relationships with employers and work activities.

A further interesting thought for me is the 'reality check' of curriculum for professional courses. I've heard many times from graduates (particularly Education graduates) who got their qualification and landed a teaching job in a school; turned up filled with the idealism of their teacher education program and then suddenly had the bubble burst when they had to deal with the behavioural reality of kids in classrooms and inflexible bureaucracy of education authorities, even though their program had included a number of practice teaching weeks. Perhaps Foundation degrees can provide a more realistic overview of what to expect from the real world of work? Food for thought.

Cheers,

David

Foundation Degrees

As an Indigenous academic, I am very aware of the low levels of Indigenous Australian participation in higher education. Many Indigenous Australians follow the VET course, enrolling in TAFE in often essentially trade-based programs. The development of structured RPL approaches to provide such students with credit for TAFE programs would possibly provide a viable avenue to increase Indigenous Australian enrolments at USQ. Within KNL, we have been surveying members of Toowoomba's Indigenous community involved in government agencies or NGO's, with a view to investigating access to direct enrolment and to credits based on extensive work experience.

The foundation degree program appears to meet both these needs for improving Indigenous participation.

Widening Participation

The UK also has problems about participation in HE. We have achieved very high levels for the middle class 18 -21 year olds but participation by the working classes (and this often includes ethnic groups) is very poor. Happily there is already data to show that participation rates from such backgrounds is significantly higher than their involvement in standard Bachelors degrees. Furthermore significant numbers of entrants to Foundation degrees come with no formal qualifications and are admitted on the basis of their learning from work.

Foundation degrees, flexibility and negotiated learning

David,

What you are suggesting is very relevant to the direction USQ appears to be going. An important issue here is to find a balance between recognising prior work/study achievement and preparation for the workplace, whilst maintaining academic standards. This implies quite intensive negotiation on an individual basis, to suit individual students' needs, which in turn would require quite intensive staff involvement in the negotiation stages. I guess I'm wondering what the workload implications are and I'm wondering how this works in the UK.

This is quite different from TPP however, which provides a 'foundation' for entry into undergraduate courses. Should the TPP become more 'flexible' and 'negotiated' in line with the above model?

More food for thought...

Well I think that

Well I think that flexibility that allows negotiation gives ownership and this leads to learning and sticking with it.

Frank

With regard to your comment

With regard to your comment about the TPP I think we have a lot of scope in this regard. Just yesterday I was at Bond University where their new preparatory programs are about to kick off. After successfully undertaking a full year of preparatory courses, they intend to give students two credit points towards their degree. Obviously this is a recruitment ploy to ensure they stay on at Bond but it does raise questions about the type of curriculum they are undertaking in the prep program, at the moment I think this is still being negotiated.

Credit at Bond

Hi David, It appears that Bond is getting in early with credit for preparatory courses. There have been discussions in a number of centres about allowing credit for work done in a prep course. Like you, I wonder about the equity and justification for this. Unless we can incorporate specific aspects of core courses of undergraduate offering into the prep courses, and give partial credit, I would be reluctant to allow direct credits. Any one else have thoughts on this?

Ron

Credit for preparatory courses

I agree Ron. Before credit can be given we need to ensure a level of rigour and content consistent with undergraduate courses. But in doing so, all we are really doing is shifting the coursework from u/g to prep level, no real advantage at all.

Given however that many normal entry first year students are less than proficient with some of the basic academic skills I could be persuaded to reward alternative entry students, who have demonstrated a high level of those skills in a preparatory course, some recognition for their achievement.

I think in the future, while the higher education system remains so competitive for places, we will continue to see bigger and better carrots being offered to attract and retain students.

Cheers, David

TPP content appearing in USQ undergrad courses?

David,

I agree that credit should only be given when rigour and content of prep courses equate with undergrad courses.

However, I have already noted that some TPP materials have been utilized in USQ undergrad courses. For example, I've seen bits of Studying to Succeed appearing in FOE1000.

This might suggest that some Faculty colleagues might already see the equivalence we have been discussing.

Has TPP content been used in other USQ undergrad courses?

Cheers

Nick

An Example of a Credited Prep Course

I see great similarity between USQ's TPP and a course I taught into at the University of East London as part of that university's Widening Participation initiatives. Their preparatory course was titled New Beginnings, and included six assignments that culminated in a 1500 word fully referenced essay. Courses were delivered in the evenings or Saturdays and usually entailed about six intensive five-hour sessions. The students who participated in the course were from low socio-economic regions, or were mature age learners, single mums, or from ethnic minorities etc etc. It shares quite a few commonalities with my TPP experience here at USQ.

In order to pass students had to: attend every tutor-led session; submit coursework on time; and meet each assignment criteria.

Like the TPP a pass on New Beginnings gave you entry to a UEL undergrad degree, but additionally "a pass on New Beginnings 2 means that you will be awarded 20 level 1 credits, demonstrating that your work is of a first year degree course standard".

This extra carrot proved to be extremely popular (of course), but also motivational. Essentially upon graduating from New Beginnings the students should be ahead of the game, and able to transition smoothly into their Sem 1 studies, and the credit points seemed to partially be a means of reflecting that they were already capable of meeting the initial S1 assignment requirements of new UEL students.

In terms of USQ and TPP I am seeing more S1 courses taking a developmental approach to their S1 studies, and students are walked through the process of researching and drafting an academic essay. Those good TPP students should already be able to do this and it might be possible to consider whether they should be granted some form of additional reward. It certainly seemed to work rather well in East London.

Cheers

Nick

PDP unit and personal support

Dear Frank

Here goes for my first blog...

I am interested in ways in which support services can be provided to students using online strategies. I noticed that you had academic skills, library and careers staff involved in the PDP unit. I was wondering if you had more personal support available as part of the unit and if so, how was this delivered and how well did it work?

Could you please comment on this topic?

Thanks

Laura (Counsellor)

Online Counselling

Laura,

We provide skills development through websites that present resources including streamed video, examples and text that typically link to exercises that the student is asked to complete either individually but more often working with an online group. For example report writing will have an associated exercise in which students are asked to sort a series of paragraphs into the order they would be in a report and then debate the reasons for their ordering. This then leads into

further exercises that explore the importance of keeping in mind the aims, structure and audience of the report when writing. These are familiar exercises that can benefit from online animation and learning through exploring resources (students seem more prepared to do this than to browse in a library) and work very well when made relevant to the subjects the students are studying. Another example: to explore professionalism we explain the principles, show them the Hypocratic oath and ask the students to write their own ethical code. This exercise proved very successful with our Early Years foundation degree students and resulted in extensive online discussions.

We haven't moved into online counselling in Foundation Direct although the University of Portsmouth Counselling Service is being asked to think this through. I have always felt that although the well being of students is vital to their learning, problems are best handled separately unless it is study problems we are talking about.

Frank

Discussion about "Uberbau" but where are the fundamentals?

We are talking about teaching, learning and different assessment approaches...all this is done on, to and with a generation which is (only a little bit?) younger than ourselves...It is all nice and politically correct talk. Nothing against such niceties. But we have to be honest also. Reflective retrospection is a buzz word also. I strongly believe practicing a certain degree of reflection may help us –in these times of information as bits and bytes – to separate chaff from the grain. And, also, to separate the big issues from the small ones. To separate what is the Grundbau and what is Uberbau; the fundamentals from the mere embellishments... What WE talk about here in the LTSU blogsite is small thing compared with a state of education of the young Australians. A senior journalist and commentator Greg Sheridan wrote recently a damning assessment of the level of student knowledge about Australian history in his on-line blog (The Australian, 26-4-2007). He calls the teaching practices used in teaching history bluntly: Dereliction of Duty. The new generation (Greg speaks about his three sons and his experience with what they have learned in the high school) has not heard anything about Monash and nothing about Deakin. They may know the names of the illustrious Universities bearing such names, but would not know who were the people after whom the seats of high learning were named.

"The internet generation will not be the best educated generation in history, as it has the potential to be, but the worst educated generation in a long time because it will not have been taught the most important things."

So Sheridan.

We educate also teachers. They are our products. We have been teaching them our respective subjects. They may have heard history from us. We have been introducing them to intelligent analysis and synthesis, to logical reasoning. We pass, or suppose to pass, the distilled wisdom of our lives, experiences and knowledge, onto them.

Where have we failed? Why did we fail? Can we draw any learning matter out of this bitter assessment of our own work?

What can we do?

Knowledge of Deakin

Just a quick note - I named my son, Deakin and I find that people older than me (in their late 40s and above) know that Alfred Deakin was Australia's second prime minister but people younger than me have no idea who Deakin University was named after.

Right Place Right Time

This LTSU Blog is an experiment to generate discussion on thematic issues and to share information with colleagues who may not be as engaged with professional development as they might like to be. This includes sessional staff, and staff at Fraser Coast and Springfield. It is designed to be collegial and to develop learning and teaching knowledge around themes.

An important aim of the LTSU experiment in blogging is to provide opportunities for staff to share ideas internationally. For this reason LTSU has prevailed on international colleagues to lead discussions.

As you will see from the introduction of this week's guest Blogger, Frank Lyons, is one of the most experienced academics in the UK on matters associated with work-integrated university learning and foundation degrees. Many of the ideas embedded in LTSU's Information Flyer on work-integrated learning were gleaned from the work that Frank has influenced in the UK.

Please check the LTSU website <http://www.usq.edu.au/ltsu/flyers> for the information flyer on work-based learning.

Work-based learning is but one way of widening access to university and it forms part of the USQ agenda to promote flexible learning.

Widening access has other dimensions such as the work done by UniPrep and TPP at USQ. These programs provide the foundations for university study. Some questions that this dimension of Foundation Degrees might raise include:

- 1) Should we include successful completion of TPP programs as part of degree structures?
- 2) Are there ways in which elements of e.g. TPP courses could be embedded in degree structures to build students academic skills?
- 3) To what extent are Foundation Degrees similar to the new Melbourne University curriculum which provides just a few general degrees (broadly arts science etc) at undergraduate level with professional qualifications taught only at postgraduate level?
- 4) Are there any ways in which these ideas can inform curriculum innovation at USQ?

The next stage

I am very interested in the next stage of TPP development especially as it relates integration of academic skills into degree programs. For some years we have proposed to integrate specific courses into degree programs with no success. Often our degree programs do not have the flexibility to include such alternatives. Although a number of universities in Australia do just that. The trap is not to include a courses that is so generic that students will not value it...we have been that pathway before. Frank it sounds like you approach has addressed this problem well.

I have always been partial to a curriculum design that I call wrap-around structure. This means that a skills course wraps around a degree course to support and develop students as they move through the subject. We had something like this a few years ago for international students...but have not thought about this recently. What are others views on this type of integration? Should it only be for students designated as 'at risk' or for everybody best wishes Janet

(some background - I have designed and taught TPP programs for a number of years, am now coordinator of academic learning support at USQ)

What do we understand by the term "Foundation"?

Hi

Everyone,

Thought I would place an initial blog exploring the range of understanding we may hold about the use of the term "foundation". I suspect, here in Australia, we use this term, often in a general sense, to represent anything laying the footings for further study.

For example, around Australia, many universities and private providers target international students with foundation courses/programs which are designed as feeders to English Language programs and later into undergraduate degrees. Generally, these provide some discipline specific groundings encased in language skills development.

On the domestic front, we find the use of the term foundation being applied to preparatory, bridging, enabling and even supplementary courses, once again aimed at providing alternative pathways into higher education for those who don't hold the necessary pre-requisites to enter directly into a career path of study.

In the UK however, foundation programs seem to encompass a somewhat different focus, being much more work based oriented and often forming part of a higher qualification in a specific career. I don't know much about the range of UK foundation programs or the way in which they operate but I suspect that our guest blogger, Frank Lyons will.

Hopefully, this week we can explore what we understand by the term and more significantly the impact that the curriculum and pedagogy of these different programs have on students.

Happy

blogging

Cheers,

David

Foundation was just the wrong title

The confusion that many of you have mentioned about Foundation or Preparatory is familiar territory. Recently as part of a "Mystery Shopper" exercise I went into our University's Information Office and asked for details on the Foundation degrees offered at Portsmouth. I was pointed in the direction of what we have always called Foundation studies programmes which are preparatory for entry to HE courses. The explanation of the term Foundation in Foundation degree is that they are supposed to be a foundation for work - a sort of work-based academic study. The agenda is based on (1) employers comments that most graduates don't have the required skill and (2) that there are a lot of 18 year olds who are very bright but have vocational not academic backgrounds so they need a study programme to take them forward or we waste their talent. It has become clear that most students joining Foundation degrees (64%) already have good foundations because they are in work. So what should we call these degrees?

A sidestep but still about 'Foundation'

Hi

Everyone,

I agree with Linda and Clare that the rigour of our 'foundation' program, TPP, is of a high standard. Not sure if it should earn credit as part of the undergrad programs because it is a hurdle, but, on the other hand, once achieved would, as Clare says, save time and money (for those who pay for it) if it was included in the degree credits. Achieving TPP and direct entry is an incentive. Would other students accept that TPP students get a credit and they don't? Maybe we would be rushed by others wanting this route.

The real reason I responded was that I think all undergrads should do the Careers Section of the TPP7120. It has a very clarifying effect on a large portion of the students and using the Decision-Making Process makes them aware of the steps needed, the costs, the short and long term goals and how to evaluate their progress and also look for alternative directions should their first choice not pan out.

Cheers, to all Rhyl

Blurring between Preparation and Foundation

I have worked both in preparatory programs (international and local) and first year courses (both associate degrees and degree), and am concerned about the blurring between the prep programs, and what is here being called Foundation - especially in terms of curriculum content and getting credit for courses. I think a lot of what students do in the prep courses are of equivalent workload and intellectual rigour. It is more than a pity that (at least here) they are not at the moment given credit in some degree (use the term in more than one sense) for what they do.

my blogs worth Cheers Linda

Credit for Preparatory and Foundation Studies

Times have changed! So-called Foundation studies have now become core credit courses in an increasing number of programs. When entering such programs, if students provide evidence of having the skills from other studies (preparatory or otherwise), why should they not gain credit for that course, subject to fairly applied "credit" rule limitations? It is vital that we are fair in this way.

Consider from this angle too: if students are not granted credit for higher level school subjects (eg advanced mathematics) when they enter tertiary studies, then what incentive is there from them to do those subjects at school?

In fact, by lowering entry requirements and refusing to credit higher level school studies (or their equivalent in preparatory studies) universities effectively discourage intellectual effort at school - quite the opposite role we should play!

Pat

re blurring between prep and foundation

Having got to know the two higher mathematics preparatory courses at USQ a little better, I certainly agree with Linda's comments. A student that has received an A grade pass at level 3 could be credited with the undergraduate foundation maths course. Good incentive for preparatory students - both in terms of time and money.
Clare

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Clare

Blurring between Preparation and Foundation

Linda,
Are you suggesting that students doing preparatory courses (or parts thereof) be given credit towards an undergraduate degree? I agree that what students do in prep courses is in some cases of equivalent workload and intellectual rigour. However, would awarding credit towards an undergraduate degree not defeat the purpose of having a preparatory program, and confuse matters? (I'm playing devil's advocate here...I don't necessarily disagree with you).

Henk

Learning to blog

Hi. I'm Bruce Cook and I have recently been appointed Project Manager for the USQ Identity Initiative, working under Prof Jim Taylor, and I am learning to blog because blogging will be an integral component of our Open Course Ware work which forms an important part of the Initiative.

It's also directly related to the VCs paper on flexible learning so I think we have some very exciting times ahead of us.
Cheers

Blogging

Hi Bruce

I've been using a blog with a class of students for the past 9 weeks as we engage on reflection on our practice, on a forum for discussion and research sharing in the current production of "Mad Forest" by Caryl Churchill (Performance Centre).

My interest in e-learning, and specifically the potential for more flexible open-source learning spaces, as opposed to the rigid course management software of the Blackboard and Web-CT ilk, has been piqued by Jim Taylor's recent discussion paper, and your little hint at things to come.

For my money, getting the students engaged in the blogging process is worth the effort; the results (in this project at least) are so far very encouraging.

Open Course Ware

Hi Bruce, and welcome to the LTSU blog. I agree we have interesting times ahead of us. I'm interested in two points you're making and I'm wondering if you can clarify these a bit more. 1. In what way will blogs be an integral component of Open Course Ware? Does this not depend on whether course designers choose to include blogging facilities in their courses? Or is this going to be a requirement? I'm asking this because I teach into the TPP, and this has potential implications for TPP courses that may be offered as Open Course Ware. 2. How do you specifically envisage its relation to flexible learning? Clearly, there is an obvious connection in terms of the '24/7' characteristic of blogs, but I was wondering if you have a more specific thoughts on this.
Cheers,

Henk

OCW

Hi Henk,
Thanks for your welcome and comments. Without wishing to sound mysterious, I'll have to say "watch this space", because the details are not yet public. Keep in touch.

Cheers,
Bruce

Foundation Degrees Blog

Thank you Lynn and Queensland for inviting me to be an external blogger. Had I had time there was so much more to explore about mentoring, the impact on learners and their employers of Foundation degrees, training mentors and students as mentors - oh I could go on.

Although you don't have Fds in Australia all that we have been blogging about is relevant to work-based learning and placement learning, new customer oriented curricula and perhaps the shape of the Universities of the future. Perhaps we might re-engage sometime, it has been a good week.

Best wishes from Frank