

FACULTY OF LAW

Teaching and Learning: Progress Report 2005

In 2005 the Faculty of Law was engaged in a number of different projects to improve the teaching and learning of the Faculty. Many of the initiatives arise in response to the Academic Board review of teaching and learning in the Faculty. A progress report was provided to the Academic Board in November 2005 and this should be read in conjunction with this Report.

1. Curriculum Reform

In the light of the need to standardise our units of study to six credit points, the Faculty of Law engaged in a major curriculum review. This looked at the options for change to the entire Law curriculum. A set of proposals was taken to the Faculty Retreat in September 2005, and it was agreed that we would proceed in stages. The first stage was to revise the Law I curriculum, in order to ensure that Law is consistent with the requirements of our partner faculties. In 2006 we will go on to consider further the options for revising the Law II and Law III curricula, neither of which affect our partner faculties in the University.

As a result of these deliberations, two new subjects have been created. The first is Processes of Justice, and the second is Torts and Contracts II. There are also changes to Law, Lawyers and Justice which will be renamed The Legal Profession and to Legal Research. This has been divided into two components which will be taught at different stages of the Combined Law curriculum.

The Faculty is pleased with the outcome of these debates, and believes that the new curriculum will improve the teaching and learning of students in a number of areas, in particular in giving students a more nuanced and refined understanding of legal processes to complement their understanding of substantive areas of law.

2. Review of small-group teaching program

The Faculty has for a number of years endeavoured to teach all its classes in sufficiently small groups to allow for interaction and student participation. The ideal is that groups be limited to 40 to 50 students, and to groups of 25 to 30 students in the first year of Combined Law.

The Faculty remains committed to this pedagogical strategy. However, it has become unsustainable as a strategy for the entire undergraduate curriculum, in the light of resource constraints and increasing student numbers. The Faculty has therefore been considering how best to maintain its program, while recognising that not every subject can be taught in this way. In some units of study with a practical orientation, recruitment and retention problems also limit our ability to maintain this teaching model. We consider that overall teaching quality will improve if we have less reliance on casual teachers.

To promote further consideration of these issues, the Faculty has had a project funded out of the Teaching Improvement Fund, to consider the optimal teaching strategies for the undergraduate program. A draft report on those consultations was given to the Faculty Retreat in September 2005, and the report is now being finalised. In the meantime, the Faculty leadership is endeavouring to think strategically about areas which it finds hard to staff. It has decided that if changes are to be made to the seminar group arrangements in any subjects they should be in the later compulsory subjects of the degree where a greater variety is likely to be introduced.

3. E-Learning

A report was made to the Teaching and Curriculum Committee in December 2005 on the use of e-learning in the Faculty of Law. WebCT sites are now in use for all undergraduate units of study and for most postgraduate units. There has been a considerable development in the use of WebCT across the Faculty in the last two or three years.

4. Plagiarism

In 2005 the University adopted a new policy on plagiarism, and this has been implemented in the Faculty under the direction of the Pro-Dean (Teaching Programs).

5. Ensuring consistency of marking standards

The Faculty reviewed its policy on ensuring that where subjects are taught in different groups, as is standard throughout the compulsory program, that there is a reasonable degree of parity between groups in the students' results.

6. Review of SCEQ results

The Faculty has put in place better processes for examining the results of the SCEQ surveys. They will now be routinely considered by the Teaching and Curriculum Committee which will report back to the Pro-Dean (Teaching Programs) on any strategies which need to be developed to improve areas of weakness which emerge from the SCEQ. Until now the SCEQ results have been considered by the Dean and the Pro-Dean (Teaching Programs) but there has not been a routine process of consideration by the Teaching and Curriculum Committee. It is hoped that this greater engagement of the committee structure of the Faculty will ensure that better learning takes place from the outcomes of the student survey.

Prof. Patrick Parkinson
Head of School
3 April 2006