About 240 of you attended this year’s Colloquium at the John Scott Meeting House last week. This is 25% more than last year’s record attendance, and doesn’t include those who watched the webcast, or parts of it.

A highlight of the Colloquium was the opening panel of first year students talking very frankly about their experiences and highlighting what they feel caused them difficulties, and what contributed to their success. They gave us much food for thought – but if there was one clear, shared message it was about the need for early, formative assessment – the need to know how you are going and to be able to talk to someone about how to do better.

A major focus of the Colloquium was providing an opportunity for staff to discuss the implementation recommendations emerging from the four Design for Learning working parties. As usual, a straw poll was taken of attitudes to each specific recommendation, and this will be invaluable in identifying areas where there is significant doubt about what is being proposed. I can report generally high levels of support for most (but not all) of the key recommendations. Early next year, Tom Angelo and I will be visiting all faculties and campuses to get further input and feedback about our plans for implementation.

I would like to thank the staff who presented their research findings to the Colloquium or participated in the panel discussions, and to congratulate the fabulous team from Psychological Sciences who were awarded the 2009 Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Teaching Excellence.

The staff of the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre organised this major event with efficiency, grace and good humour. If anyone else would like to know how to get perfect sound in the JSMH, talk to the CTLC.
Compacts and Teaching and Learning Performance Funding

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is about to release two discussion papers – *Measuring the Socio-economic Status of Higher Education Students*, and *An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Teaching and Learning Performance Funding*. The second of these papers proposes that all universities be required to report against four indicators of student success and they will be used to settle performance targets in the compact discussions next year:

- Student participation and inclusion (growth target and low SES/Indigenous targets)
- Student experience (including student engagement in their first year)
- Student attainment (progress, retention and completion)
- Student outcomes (including cognitive learning outcomes and employment/further study status)

The Government will be particularly interested in how our low SES, Indigenous and other disadvantaged groups perform on these measures. Most contentious of all will be the decision about how cognitive learning outcomes are to be measured. Options on the table include the use of the Graduate Skills Assessment Test (last championed by Brendan Nelson); discipline specific direct measures of graduate capabilities; or the use of moderation between universities.

The principles of Design for Learning should position us well for any of these approaches, but we will be arguing for program specific standards rather than generic ones. This is a very significant debate with major implications for us all.

Career Development: Some Major Milestones

*The new Academic Promotions Policy and Procedures* are now in place, and the first seven academic staff have been promoted after making their case against the new criteria. Some of these staff will be well known to their colleagues as remarkable teachers, but I can assure the University community that the discussion and debate on the new Promotions Committee has been robust and fearless, and our focus on evidence of achievement unwavering.

**Meanwhile, another 60 or so academics will complete the 3-Day Workshop on Effective Teaching for Higher Learning** this week, meaning that at least 225 academic staff will have completed this program this year. The impact of this is not only on the motivation and skills of the individuals who attend. More importantly, it is creating a shared platform of understanding about learning in higher education at La Trobe, with new groups and teams making lasting connections from the program. For those of you have not yet done the program, the feedback has been incredibly positive.

If we add up all the staff who participated in some kind of CTLC run professional development activity this year (including tutor training, CTLC workshops and forums) it comes to more than 1000!
Wise and Famous Visitors

In the second half of this year we brought to the Bundoora campus some of the best informed and most interesting experts on key current topics in higher education (and offered simultaneous webcasts to all staff). The second of the Vice-Chancellor’s Colloquia was held on 30 October and continued the theme of student equity from the first colloquium with Professor Richard Teese in September. Professor Trevor Gale, Director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education based at the University of South Australia, analysed the challenges we face in meeting the Government’s equity targets for higher education (40% of young people to have completed a bachelors degree, 20% of them be from low SES backgrounds).

Professor Gale pointed out that these goals are particularly ambitious given the lack of unmet demand and the lack of sufficiently qualified applicants. We do not have good measures of low SES nor of students’ potential to succeed at university. We don’t understand enough about why so many secondary students think university is not for them. And if we succeed in enrolling more students from disadvantaged backgrounds we will need to change our teaching to recognise their different socio-cultural backgrounds.

Professor Gale’s presentation can be watched at www.latrobe.edu.au/ctlc/webcast/index.html.

We were also fortunate to be able to entice Professor Bill Massy to La Trobe on 20 November whilst he was in Australia for the LH Martin Institute. Bill is an Emeritus Professor of Education and Business Administration from Stanford University, and President of the Jackson Hole Higher Education Group Inc. Bill gave a timely presentation on academic productivity at the Faculty and School level, attended by many Deans and Heads of Schools. Before you get alarmed, I’d like to assure you that the seminar was not about cost cutting, but how to maximise the quality of the work we do, given the resources available.


Australasian Survey of Student Engagement - AUSSE

The University has received a preliminary report from ACER on our results in the 2009 AUSSE, and the related staff survey. Once again our Student Engagement team did a fine job promoting the survey, with a 25% response rate from first year students; a 22% response rate from third year students; and 26% response rate from academic staff.

The preliminary analysis shows that La Trobe performed above the national average on a range of measures including the amount of time students spend in class and out of class working with their peers, the amount of interaction enjoyed between different ethnic groups, and the amount of time spent on campus outside of class times. Not surprisingly, given the lack of widespread focus on work-integrated learning (WIL) at La Trobe, we rated as underperforming on scales such as ‘blended academic learning with workplace experience’; ‘explored how to apply your learning in the workplace’; and ‘acquiring job-related or work-related knowledge and skills’.

On the six student engagement scales (academic challenge, active learning, student and staff interactions, enriching educational experiences, supportive learning environment, and work integrated learning), La Trobe was performing similarly to the institutions against which we are benchmarked. I expect that by 2013 when we have fully implemented Design for Learning, we will see significant
improvements on all the AUSSE scales. With the introduction of first-year coordinators in all faculties next year, we could possibly see improved results much sooner than 2013.

All staff need to be familiar with this survey as it is likely that a survey of student engagement in their first year of study will be developed and used by the Government in the awarding of performance funding in the sector from 2011.

For those of you interested in examining the AUSSE results in more detail, please refer to the reports page of my website early next semester when we hope to have the final report from ACER.

Teaching and Learning Operational Plan

The Vice-Chancellor will shortly be releasing the University’s 2010 Operational Plan – the high level ‘must do’ list of objectives for the coming year. It’s in a more straight forward format than in previous years and lists nine priorities for Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. Not surprisingly, these are mostly covered by the Design for Learning Project (including clearly mapping all bachelor level programs, finalising the graduate capabilities framework, increasing flexibility in timetabling, location and online delivery of teaching, developing a first year experience plan for implementation in 2011, and increasing levels of professional development for academic staff).

Donydji captures some more imaginations

In response to recent newsletters, a few more people have approached me about possible links they would like to explore with the Donydji community in North-East Arnhem Land. These include the University’s Art Museum and the Graduate School of Management. Dr Neville White is taking these ideas back to the Donydji elders to see if they are interested in collaborating on those particular projects, and we’ll continue to move slowly and in the direction that suits the community. The Vice-Chancellor and I continue to receive emails from La Trobe students who have spent time in the community and we’re delighted to hear what a transformative experience it has been for each of these students.

Happy Holidays

This has been a year of momentous change at La Trobe on many fronts, and particularly in the area of curriculum, teaching and learning. Many people have been working incredibly hard – sustained, I hope, by their real enthusiasm for what we are trying to achieve. Next year will be another cracker – but I hope you will see it as an investment that will be paid back in terms of creating time and increasing job satisfaction for staff as well as improving student achievements.

I am incredibly grateful for the energy, enthusiasm and tireless commitment of so many staff. I hope you will have a relaxing and rejuvenating break over the Christmas holiday.

Season’s greetings