Design for Learning (DfL)

This year we will begin implementing the major curriculum review and redesign work we have been discussing for the last 18 months. The most recent round of faculty consultations has identified overwhelming support for the revised set of Design for Learning implementation recommendations, along with reasonable concerns about how to achieve some of them. We will now focus efforts on practical demonstrations and focused projects to meet these challenges. (Consultation feedback can be found at http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ctlc/dfl/involvement/feedback).

Later this month the Deans and Associate Deans (Academic) will meet to begin the real work of defining agreed, faculty-specific standards of student achievement against graduate capabilities. Meanwhile faculties are working very productively on curriculum mapping, and each has appointed, or is about to appoint, a first year co-ordinator and DfL project manager.

Substantial funds are now available for specific projects which are designed to meet the DfL objectives for this year. In addition, a significant proportion of the professional expertise and workload of educational and academic developers from the Faculties and the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Centre will also be devoted to the overall DfL project. 2010 will be a very big, but equally very interesting and very rewarding year.

A shared understanding of curriculum change

Introducing major change in large, complex and devolved institutions like universities is fraught with difficulty, and creating a shared understanding of what we are trying to do and why is a challenge. In early February, 49 academic leaders of the University, including the Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Associate Deans, Heads of School, Course Coordinators, and Directors of Teaching and Learning, took the highly unusual step of participating in a three-day workshop on effective leadership for curriculum change, led by Professor Tom Angelo, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Curriculum and Academic Planning).
The highly interactive workshop involved a mix of activities and tasks, including homework, designed to challenge participants’ views and to advance that broader shared understanding of La Trobe’s unique approach to curriculum, teaching and learning.

CTLC Academic Development Update

2010 is only the second year that La Trobe has provided support for new tutors, demonstrators, casual lecturers and clinical staff to attend CTLC-led workshops on small-group teaching strategies. Already this semester, more than 500 tutors and demonstrators and 50 casual staff have enrolled in these CTLC workshops.

In addition, nearly 100 continuing academic staff have already completed the CTLC Three-Day Workshop on effective teaching and subject design this semester.

In the coming weeks, CTLC staff will continue to offer the Three-Day Workshop, as well as workshops on developing ALTC grant proposals, curriculum (re)design, and other topics of interest.

For information on and to enrol in upcoming CTLC programs and events, please visit: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ctlc/

The Federal Policy Environment – and Standards!

Draft policies released over the summer make it clear that future funding to universities will include a significant element to support the enrolment and successful graduation of low SES students and other disadvantaged groups. Federal funding will also include performance funding which will reward those universities able to show improvement against the key measures of student engagement in the first year, retention and success, including some explicit measure of student achievement (i.e. performance standards).

Given the standards based approach we are adopting in Design for Learning, the Federal Government’s focus on standards should not frighten anyone at La Trobe. However, it is possible that the government will continue to focus on defining ‘minimum’ standards across very broad discipline areas – an approach which will be both difficult to achieve and unpopular in the sector. In hopes of promoting an alternative approach, La Trobe is participating in a pilot project involving several universities to trial light touch, independent moderation of student work in third year.

This fits well with our current DFL Project work this year on defining explicit standards for our graduates in all programs, and may allow us to benchmark graduate capabilities with other universities.

2010 Operational Priorities

Earlier this year the University agreed its key operational objectives for 2010. Faculties are currently finalising their own operational priorities in line with these. (View the University’s operational priorities for curriculum, teaching and learning on the staff intranet at https://intranet.latrobe.edu.au/matrix/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/3821/ltu-operational-guide.pdf)

The Vice-Chancellor is finalising a new La Trobe Strategic Plan which will include a major focus on transforming students’ lives. This will provide the foundation for our ‘compact’ negotiations with DEEWR and DIISR later this year. Government information about these compact negotiations is still sketchy, but all universities have been encouraged to focus very clearly on what makes them distinctive, and how they will contribute to meeting the Government’s growth and equity targets. (See Minister Gillard’s recent speech to the Universities Australia Annual Higher Education Conference at http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Speeches/Pages/Article_100303_102842.aspx)

Welcome to Academic Life

In February the CTLC, supported by People and Culture, organised the second Welcome to Academic Life to orient new and recently arrived academic staff
to La Trobe. The Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and I introduced the 49 participants from all five faculties to the University’s major strategic initiatives in *Design for Learning* and the University Research Plan, and a panel of current staff provided useful survival tips for first semester teaching.

**Teaching Space Upgrades**

A significant number of teaching rooms were upgraded over the summer break with a new desk and equipment for Lectopia recording, including brighter projectors, updated touch screen controls, and document cameras.

La Trobe also received about $2million in federal funding to develop new teaching and learning spaces, including the refurbishment of the Eastern Lecture Theatre and large, flat floor, flexible teaching and learning spaces.

**Workload Management System – Project Update**

Many of you will be aware that the University is developing a Workload Management System to ensure there is a consistent approach to managing workloads across the University and to better recognise the multiple demands placed on academic staff.

A Design Team made up of academics from a wide variety of disciplines, including NTEU representatives, have been working with Simon Avenell from PricewaterhouseCoopers to develop the core categories and parameters for a new system. A ‘framing document’ developed by the Project Steering Committee was posted on the web for staff comment at the end of last year, and then last month all the feedback on the document was posted to the WMS site on the La Trobe intranet [https://intranet.latrobe.edu.au/strategy-management/wms](https://intranet.latrobe.edu.au/strategy-management/wms).

The latest version of the system design will be viewed by Heads of Schools at meetings with the consultants in the coming weeks.

Meanwhile an early set of categories and parameter was tested against selected subjects from three Schools to test for major bugs. By the end of the month the Steering Committee hopes to circulate a full draft document and begin a process of consultation with all staff.