Winning is always nice……..

La Trobe won three ALTC Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning this year, and they were presented at a major ceremony held at the NGV last month.

Congratulations to Professor Richard Broome (Historical and European Studies) for sustained teaching excellence, Associate Professor Ishaq Bhatti (Economics and Finance) for Australia’s first Islamic banking and finance course; and the First Year Biology Learning and Teaching group for their work on improving the first year experience of a very large and diverse student cohort.

It was a fine thing to see the range of disciplines and ages representing us there. The drinks obviously went down well…

Food for thought

A short provocative piece by Professor Paul Ramsden (until recently head of the UK Higher Education Academy, and also architect of the CEQ) appeared recently in the Times Higher Education – link below.

Just to sharpen your interest, Paul begins by proposing that ‘challenging students to think, which most academics would say is at the core of their job, is being lost beneath the twin tides of consumer satisfaction and the pressure to produce obedient employees’. We have invited Paul to come and give a talk at La Trobe when he is next in Australia, so watch out for news about this later this year.

http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=412794

Moodle Implementation

Plans for moving to our new Learning Management System, Moodle 2, are well developed. A contract is in place with NetSpot – to provide services and training – and the Project Team and Reference Group are up and running. The Reference Group has met twice and has already made valuable contributions to the project.

We now know that there are a larger than usual number of new subjects commencing in 2011, so training opportunities and staff access to Moodle 2 are being brought forward to assist those who are developing new subjects.

The timing of content migration from the current LMS remains focused on early October. Staff will be able to work with their LMS subjects directly within Moodle and will have the following options:
• review and update the transferred LMS subject or,
• start afresh with a new Moodle version of a subject or,
• copy selected parts of the transferred LMS subject to a new LMS subject on Moodle and work on the copy.

The project team will soon be gathering information to determine which subjects need to be moved across for Semester One 2011 to Moodle. If you are asked about this, please reply promptly so that we can complete the migration process as soon as practicable.

Please be assured that there will be information, assistance, demonstrations and training available to help you with all these options from the time the interim Moodle becomes available up to the commissioning of the new LMS in 2011, and thereafter. To keep in touch visit http://www.latrobe.edu.au/lms2011/

Design for Learning Implementation

During August, Tom Angelo, Mark Reedman and I, met with almost all course and program coordinators in order to talk about how everyone is managing the implementation of a redesigned First Year Experience for 2011. Over 100 academic staff attended these meetings, raising questions and identifying concerns – but also talking about the great work that has been going on in preparation for next year.

One point that was usefully clarified during these consultations was the role of early diagnostic assessments. Each faculty will determine if there is evidence to suggest that some incoming students are underprepared in one or more key academic skills - to the extent that they are unlikely to succeed without extra support.

There are several projects under way to determine effective and efficient forms of diagnostic assessment which could be used, together with related proposals for how such students can be best assisted. Follow up for students needing assistance will include specific language focussed subjects such as are already offered at Bendigo; extra tutorials alongside or embedded within first year subjects with high failure rates; and shorter forms of assistance which may well be provided by well-trained more senior students.

After the last of these meetings I wrote to all attendees summarising the main questions that had been raised and putting in writing the answers that were given on the spot. This document is available on the DfL website under News and Events and I hope it will be helpful to a much wider range of staff who are involved in implementing DfL.

http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ctlc/dfl/

This feedback document includes information about the First Year Academic Preparation Group, which includes many LAS staff, and the First Year Engagement Working Group which is working to develop a set of indicators for students who are not academically at risk, but at risk of disengagement for a variety of individual or social reasons.

CTLC Workshops to support DfL Implementation

CTLC staff will be organising workshops on ‘Writing and Revising Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for Courses and Subjects’, ‘Cornerstone Design’ and ‘Setting Standards for Graduate Capabilities’ over the next three months. Given the looming deadlines for writing course and subject ILOs, developing cornerstones, and setting standards, I am sure they will be well attended...
Positive feedback externally for DfL

A variety of important external feedback has confirmed the very high value placed on the development of the Graduate Capabilities which we have agreed upon as a University. This includes a significant piece of market research conducted for the Faculty of Law and Management; a recent lunch with school principals and careers teachers about DfL; and many many comments on Open Day from prospective students and their parents.

And evidence of the increasing importance of being able to measure student learning is to be found in the recently announced OECD feasibility study on Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) which is being led by the Australian Council for Educational Research. For a useful summary of this project:


A newly defined role for Language & Academic Skills at La Trobe

This month, the University’s language and academic skills staff will finally approach the last phase of an organisational change process that began in late 2008 when we conducted a review of these functions across the University. Once this has been finalised we will embark on a widespread campaign to communicate with you about how academic language and learning support will be delivered in the future, as it will be significantly different in some areas. In a nutshell, LAS staff will work more closely with discipline-based teaching staff to embed academic language and learning development in course curricula. Their focus will be on core or cornerstone subjects in order to reach large numbers of students, and also on subjects and courses where we know there are large numbers of underprepared students. Above all, the new structure will mean that more LAS staff are available in the faculties. More information will be provided in my next newsletter but look out for information sessions and University-wide emails on the topic later in the year.