CALL FOR PAPERS
2007 International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (IS-SoTL) Conference

From July 2-5 the University of Sydney is to co-host the 4th annual IS-SoTL conference with the University of NSW. Held at the UNSW campus, the theme for next year’s conference is Locating Learning: Integrative Dimensions of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. The theme is intended to cover wide terrain and looks at three in particular:

- Perspectives: the multiple points of view we bring to the understanding and development of the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Pathways: the different ways that the scholarship of teaching and learning is developed
- Change: the impact of the scholarship of teaching and learning on students, academics, institutions, and what constitutes evidence of change and/or impact.

The conference promises to be an exciting forum for those who have been working to develop the scholarship of teaching and learning, and those interested in how to develop it. Conference participants will be able to exchange and test their ideas about learning and teaching with an international audience of disciplinary-based colleagues and to learn about initiatives going on elsewhere.

The IS-SoTL conference will also host the launch of a new book edited by Angela Brew (ITL) and Judyth Sachs (PVC Learning and Teaching)—a book that showcases the work of the University of Sydney in developing the scholarship of teaching and learning. Several colleagues from across the university have contributed chapters to the book and its launch promises to be one of the conference highlights.


University Farewells
PVC (Learning & Teaching)
Professor Judyth Sachs

Before the year is over, the university will say farewell to PVC (Learning and Teaching) Professor Judyth Sachs. After 10 years at the university, 4 of those years as Chair of Academic Board and 3 years as PVC (L&T), Professor Sachs takes up the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Provost) at Macquarie University.

“During her time both as Chair of the Academic Board and also as PVC (Learning and Teaching), Judyth has been a tireless supporter of good quality teaching and learning. One of her key achievements as Chair of the Academic Board was the establishment of the Faculty Reviews. In identifying areas of good practice and areas needing improvement, these reviews have greatly assisted the ITL in its work to support the faculties in learning and teaching and in their efforts to improve the student learning experience. Our own ITL reviews have also been positive and valuable experiences. As PVC (Learning and Teaching) Judyth has utilised her expertise in professional education to bring people together in collegial forums for discussion of learning and teaching issues and strategies. She been an invaluable supporter of ITL work and we wish her well in her new position.” Associate Professor Angela Brew

Learning & Teaching Plan 2007-2010

The University has a new Learning and Teaching Plan 2007-2010. The Plan is founded on a core set of values:

- Excellence: of students, learning environments and learning experiences
- Intellectual inquiry
- Academic freedom
- Diversity of defensible opinions and values, and
- Integrity and ethical practice in academic endeavours

It can be downloaded at http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/quality/curriculum_reform.shtml. To find out all the latest information about Learning and Teaching in the University, visit http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/

Learning & Teaching Symposium: Curriculum Reform and Renewal

On 3 November, the Office of the PVC (Learning and Teaching) hosted the third of its seminars on curriculum reform and renewal. The symposium was an opportunity to showcase institutional achievements in curriculum change.

In her opening remarks, Professor Sachs noted how changes to the higher education sector were strong drivers in shaping the nature of curriculum reform. She noted that widening access, professional accreditation, inclusivity, audit and accountability measures and competition/differentiation were now all part of the learning and teaching environment. Professor Sachs also observed how the Academic Board policy to standardise units of study to six credit points provided opportunities for conversation about workload, equity and assessment. Professor Richard James, Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, then gave a presentation on what has become known as the ‘Melbourne Model’. Of some interest were his comments about a compulsory 25% breadth-component across all the new generation degrees. This is the idea that 25% of the learning experience in the undergraduate curriculum will derive from a content area different from the degree major. Professor James also spoke at length about the curriculum change from three distinct perspectives: pedagogical, political, and market and logistical.

The remainder of the day was devoted to discussing the substance of curriculum change, reform and renewal within the university. Colleagues from the faculties of Arts, Economics and Business, Engineering, Conservatorium, Veterinary Science, Dentistry, Health Sciences and Pharmacy each presented on the on-going work in their contexts to drive curriculum change. What seemed clear from each of their examples were the following: the need to examine the rationale for change; how it might achieve a multiplicity of outcomes; the importance of strong leadership from Deans; the resourcing of curriculum change; its implementation from consultation, discussion and communication; and attending to the emotional costs and labour.

In summation, Professor Keith Trigwell, Director of the ITL, argued that the perspectives raised during the day provided different lenses through which to view curriculum reform and renewal. Firstly, it is the idea that curriculum might be seen as an expression of the university’s identity; secondly, it might be seen as a site for the nexus between research and teaching; thirdly, that curriculum is also intended to be an expression of the students’ experience of learning, and finally, it addressed the difficult of work of implementation. In ending the day, Professor Trigwell encouraged those present to continue to articulate the pedagogical rationale that sits behind key change and reform mechanisms.

To view the resources from each of the presentations, visit http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/quality/curriculum_reform.shtml

Upgrading to WebCT CE6

From January 2007, all WebCT sites at the university will be operating on CE6. The aim of the WebCT upgrade is to provide us with the capacity for greater capability, more flexibility and a more up-to-date learning management platform. Some changes you will notice after CE6 begins operating include tools that users have been asking for, such as:

- sign-up sheets;
- the ability for students to upload their own files into WebCT;
- better ways for staff to upload files.

Additionally, CE6 has other ‘backend’ advantages, and it will make it easier for the university to upgrade to new products that become available after the WebCT/Blackboard merger takes effect. Things are changing fast in the world of online education, and by upgrading the University learning management system we are ensuring that the quality of students’ online learning experience will not fall below the standards being established by the higher education sector in Australia and internationally.

Workshops will be held throughout November and December 2006, and January 2007. Further information available at http://www.usyd.edu.au/webct/teach_online/workshops/beg_ws.shtml

Synergy Issue 24 28