Supporting Students with Disabilities

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Supporting the needs of students with disabilities is essential when trying to maintain an inclusive teaching and learning environment. Adjustments to your teaching strategies and extra considerations may be needed to accommodate the learning needs of these students. Given the range of possible disabilities, it is understandable that many staff may not know where to begin. Below, the ITL provides answers to some frequently asked questions that may guide you:

How can I ensure my teaching strategies are appropriate for disabled students?

The University of Sydney’s Disability Services (part of Student Services) provides a wealth of information designed specifically for staff about ways of accommodating disabled students in classrooms. They provide specific teaching strategies for teachers of students with hearing, vision, speech, physical, learning or mental disabilities and impairments: http://www.usyd.edu.au/stuserv/disability/staff.shtml

What services can I direct students to?

The first point of contact for students - as for staff - should be Disability Services: Ensure your students are registered with this service.

Fisher Library Disability Services provides technological support for disabled students in its assistive technology rooms. The library can also assist students with photocopying and retrieving books. For more information, see http://www.library.usyd.edu.au/libraries/fisher/disability.html

What other useful resources can I access?

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADDET) provides information about inclusive teaching, learning and assessment strategies, and support services, for people with disabilities in higher education. http://www.adcet.edu.au/

Creating Accessible Teaching and Support (CATS) provides resources and practical strategies to assist teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Also includes information about upcoming conferences. http://www.adcet.edu.au/cats/

Reasonable Accommodations: Strategies for Teaching University Students with Disabilities. A guide endorsed by the University of Sydney, the Australian National University, and other major universities. http://www.anu.edu.au/disabilities/resources_for_staff/reasonable_accommodations.php

Who can I talk to about these issues?

Contact Mary Teague of the University’s Disability Services (m.teague@usyd.edu.au) or Annetta Cairnduff of Equity Support Services (acairnduff@usyd.edu.au).

2007 Teaching Awards

We offer our congratulations to members of the university community who were successful in receiving 2007 Carrick Awards for Australian University Teaching. Alongside the University’s recent success in the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, these awards continue to showcase the excellent teaching practice. Two categories of Carrick awards have been announced so far: (i) Citations for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning and (ii) Awards for Programs that Enhance Learning.

Citations for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning

Mr John Baguley, Dr Christine Hawke, Dr Susan Matthew, Ms Melanie Robson, Mr Frederico Costa

For the development of authentic, varied and rigorous assessment procedures that foster independent and lifelong learning in veterinary professional environments

Dr Janette Bobas

For empowering students to learn and to teach mathematics with understanding through inspirational teaching approaches and innovative embedded assessment practices

Dr Lyn Carson

For sustained, innovative approaches to teaching that create democratic environments, within and beyond the university, which spark students’ democratic imagination and inspire lifelong, active citizenship

Mrs Joanne Elliot, Professor David Handelsman

For creating an unique opportunity for undergraduate students to experience genuine biomedical research in a state-of-the-art research environment with world class researchers

Ms Jacqueline Hicks

For specialised expertise in supporting the diverse learning and information literacy needs of students across a range of subject areas and candidature levels

Ms Jill Kelton, Ms Nadia Bradley

Enhancing the overall student experience by building a lasting sense of belonging and engagement through a Faculty-based postgraduate peer mentoring program

Dr Donna O’Connor

For specialist expertise in the unique design and outstanding implementation of an innovative MEd course resulting in a diverse learning environment that promotes student engagement

Awards for Programs that Enhance Learning

Educational Partnerships and Collaborations with Other Organisations

Associate Professor Scott Kable, Dr Simon Barrie, Dr Adrian George and Mr Justin Read

Advancing Chemistry by Enhancing Learning in the Laboratory (ACELL)

Below, Simon Barrie – a member of the team – writes on the origins, purpose and outcomes of the ACELL project.

ACELL originated in the late 1990s as a CUTSD (Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development, a part of the previously named Department of Employment, Education and Training) funded project led by three Directors, Scott Kable, Mark Buntine & Simon Barrie. The project aimed to address Australian physical chemistry academics’ concerns about student dissatisfaction with their laboratory experiences. Since then, the ACELL project has grown to include most Australian universities that teach Chemistry and a leadership group of eight Directors. The leadership group has expanded to include Professor Geoff Crisp (UAdeelaide), A/Prof Bob Bucat (UWAA) and Mark Buntine (UAdeelaide) and Dr Ian Jamie (Macquarie University). The project shares experiments that provide high quality learning experiences from chemistry departments around Australia, to the mutual benefit of all. The project has sought to bridge the gap between educational research and the development of quality chemistry laboratory activities. An effective means for evaluating the educational aspects of laboratory activities has been developed, providing an avenue for publication of rigorous educational validations of experiments in peer-reviewed journals. ACELL now has an editorial role with two such chemistry education journals, with ACELL review processes allowing for automatic publication. Dissemination of the materials relating to each experiment is facilitated through the ACELL website (http://acell.chem.usyd.edu.au/homepage.cfm), which also serves as a communications hub for the project’s professional development and community of practice. Website materials are freely available and the site attracts more than 500 unique visitors every month. ACELL also undertakes original research about aspects of student learning in the chemistry laboratory environment.

In the laboratory, ACELL influences student learning in two ways: directly, when students participate in activities improved through the ACELL development and review processes; and indirectly, by the increased awareness of key educational issues amongst academic staff and through the introduction of rigorous quality control / quality assurance standards for experiment evaluation. ACELL research publications and workshops also serve to disseminate participants’ student-focused research into improving the learning experience in laboratory-based work.

At least 35 Australian and New Zealand Universities have been involved in ACELL, reaching more than 20,000 chemistry students per year. Over the 7 year history of ACELL, 9 workshops have engaged staff and students across Australasia in rigorous testing and evaluation of the educational aspects of more than 80 undergraduate experiments. About 25% of all chemistry academics in Australia have attended an ACELL workshop, and most Australasian universities use at least one ACELL-validated experiment. Already, more than a dozen universities have adopted new experiments into their curriculum as a result of ACELL participation.

The project team also won a Carrick Citation in 2007 through the University of Adelaide and a Vice Chancellor’s Award for Support of the Student Learning Experience from the University of Sydney. The project team will use the prize money to fund the project over the coming year.

Excellence in Research Higher Degree Supervision

At the time of publication of the June 2007 issue of Synergy, the recipients of the 2007 Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Research Higher Degree Supervision had not yet been announced. Our congratulations now go to:

A/Professor Robyn Ewing
Faculty of Education & Social Work
University of Sydney

Professor Alex Frino
Faculty of Economics and Business
University of Sydney

Ms Ifdal Elsaket and Christine Kumar
Faculty of Education & Social Work
University of Sydney

Mr Justin Read
Faculty of Arts
University of Sydney

Professor John Baguley
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

Dr Peter Galbraith
Faculty of Economics and Business
University of Sydney

Mr John Baguley
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

Dr Peter Galbraith
Faculty of Arts
University of Sydney

Ms Jill Kelton
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Sydney

Ms Nadia Bradley
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

Dr Donna O’Connor
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

Associate Professor Scott Kable
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

Dr Adrian George
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

Mr Justin Read
Faculty of Arts
University of Sydney

Dr Ifdal Elsaket
Faculty of Education & Social Work
University of Sydney

Christine Asmar
Faculty of Science
University of Sydney

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