From the Director

It is the role of agencies such as the Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) and Learning Solutions to support the University of Sydney in meeting its professional development responsibilities, and it is important that this provision both informs, and is aligned with, institutional needs. The ITL contributes to this process through, for example, development programs for staff new to teaching, surveys providing staff with information from students on their teaching, and support for staff applying for teaching awards and grants.

In addition to professional development of staff, units such as ITL also support, and in some instances lead, the planning for and carrying out of educational development. These activities include work on faculty-based projects such as course development or assessment redesign, on University-wide working groups and committees such as the Learning and Teaching Committee of Academic Board, and in the provision of research literature and data to support educational decision-making.

In 2007, the ITL began a process of shifting the focus of its role in supporting professional and educational development more towards a discipline-based approach. In doing so, it is acknowledging the advances in knowledge about the pedagogies of the disciplines and how this might be used to meet the needs of individual faculties. The main changes in ITL have been in three areas: in the structural systems through which ITL work is conducted, in the resources needed by ITL to implement such an approach, and in the academic development programs that provide the means for individual professional development in teaching.

Following a review in early 2007 of the three main academic development programs offered by ITL (Principles and Practice of University Teaching and Learning, Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) and Research Higher Degree Supervision Development Program) the form in which those programs are to be offered from late 2008 has changed. They will include more flexibility for participants in what they choose as the focus of their development work, and more discipline-based elements in that choice. Further details of these changes are provided on pages 14 and 15.

In the six years prior to 2007, five or six Strategic Working Groups in areas such as the first year student experience and research-enhanced learning and teaching, running in parallel, were the main structural systems though which ITL work with faculties was conducted. Each group contained a nominee of the Dean and met 4-5 times a year to grapple with the issues related to effective faculty implementation of that particular university strategic initiative. While much was achieved through this structure, the outcomes from the groups differed in quality, and even in the more effective Working Groups, the changes achieved were not experienced evenly across the faculties.

During 2007, a new structure was developed that involved a closer working relationship between the Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) in each faculty and the ITL. Meeting monthly with the ITL and the Deputy Provost, the Associate Deans have continued to engage with the strategic issues identified by the University, but in addition, are developing specific action points from their own faculty teaching and learning plans aimed at improving student learning. Each action plan has been developed to meet the needs of each faculty, and is being endorsed by the Dean of the faculty. The ITL will discuss the plans with each Associate Dean, and where feasible contribute resources.

To support the achievement of the targets set for each faculty action point and in order to develop the new discipline focus of the restructured academic development programs, changes have been made to the expertise of the academic development support in the ITL. A previous focus on generic development expertise is being replaced by discipline expertise. Four new senior academic development staff, each with experience in
teaching, and in leading teaching and learning development, in one or more of the University faculties, will be appointed to ITL in 2008. One will work with each of a group of four or five faculties (clusters).

Now, in mid 2008 this process of change in ITL is largely complete. Two members of academic staff (Angela Brew and Kim McShane) left the Institute early in 2008, and Tai Peseta will leave at the end of this semester (this is last issue of Synergy that she will edit – thank you Tai). Three new members of academic staff have either arrived or are about to arrive (Susan Thomas has joined as a Senior Lecturer and Teaching Development Co-ordinator for the Arts/Social Sciences Cluster and Kath Aufflick and Cynthia Nelson will join us in July as academic development Lecturer and Senior Lecturer respectively). While three of the cluster co-ordinator positions remain unfilled, the planning of the work with the faculties that they will be involved with, has begun.

The changes are anticipated to have significant effects on the ITL and on the way it works. In addition to the outcomes expected through the network of Associate Deans, relations between ITL and the faculties are expected to be improved, and the needs of the faculties are more likely to be met. While the research conducted in ITL is expected to continue to be internationally competitive, the changes could mean that the research topics and themes are likely to be more discipline-based or have more of a local ‘flavour’.

While 2007 was a difficult year for ITL, the restructuring is now largely complete, and a unique opportunity exists for it to make a major contribution to professional and educational development at the University of Sydney.

Professor Keith Trigwell
Director, ITL

2008 ALTC (Carrick) Fellowship Award
Dr Christine Asmar, Senior Lecturer at the ITL, has been awarded a 2008 Associate Fellowship by the newly-named Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) – formerly the Carrick Institute. The Fellowship has a value of $90,000 and will support Christine in carrying out a project in 2009 titled: ‘Indigenous Teaching and Learning in NSW Universities: Developing Research-based Guidelines for Good Practice’.

In collaboration with Indigenous colleagues at a number of NSW universities, Christine aims to develop a set of resources and guidelines for more effective practice in the field of Indigenous teaching – which she defines in broad terms as involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. After reviewing good practice in this field (and the evidence for it) she will identify examples or case studies across NSW, then arrange for them to be showcased at a Forum to be sponsored by the University of Sydney at the end of 2009. The set of research-based guidelines and examples resulting from these processes, Christine hopes, will then be published and disseminated nationally. She welcomes suggestions – just email her at c.asmar@usyd.edu.au

Welcome to Dr Susan Thomas
I joined the ITL in February 2008 on a five-year secondment as Senior Lecturer and Teaching Development Coordinator for the Arts and Social Sciences faculty cluster. I have a PhD in English, with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition, from Georgia State University. I was initially appointed in 2004 as a Lecturer in the English Department, where I served as Coordinator of Academic Writing, Director of the Bachelor of Arts and Sciences Degree Program and Associate Dean Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Arts. I remain active in my home faculty as Director of Academic Writing in the new Arts Teaching and Learning Network, which I helped to design. My teaching and research have focused primarily on theories and practices of academic writing, grounded in Ancient Rhetoric, but I am also interested in American Civil War Rhetoric, the learning and teaching theories of Fred Newton Scott, student learning gaps in the transition from high school to university, and academic teaching and learning development.

I am currently working on two Large TIES projects, one on streamlining USE practices in the Faculty of Arts (with Brigid Rooney and Simon Barrie) and the other on developing a model for a Virtual Exchange program (with Rebecca Johinke). I am also working with colleagues at Stanford University and institutions around the world to develop a Centre for Cross-Cultural Rhetoric, and I am the Academic Partner for Concord High School’s Quality Teaching/Action Learning Program, funded by a national Department of Education grant.

I am a member of the executive board of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (USA) and I serve on the editorial board of the Young Scholars in Writing journal, which showcases undergraduate research. I am the editor of What is the New Rhetoric? (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) and am currently completing my first monograph, Teaching Writing Beyond US Borders: the Risks of Assuming.
Academic Development Programs Review

In 2007 the ITL undertook a review of its contributions across four of the university’s academic development programs:

- Sessional staff development programs
- The Principles and Practice of University Teaching and Learning program (P&P)
- The four units of the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education)
- The Research Higher Degree Supervision Development Program

In addition to the considerable existing evaluation data on these programs, the review considered anonymous submissions from past and current individual participants in the programs through online surveys, and data collected in interviews with Associate Deans L&T in which they reported on their internal faculty consultations in relation to these programs. These submissions and contributions were invaluable and I would like to thank everybody who took the time to share their ideas and experiences.

The review was a very positive experience for the ITL and provided us with the opportunity to explore new ideas for the renewal of the programs. In 2008 we will be working with the university community to begin implementing some of these ideas. The planned changes will bring these academic development programs into alignment with the new structure of the ITL as well as with the University’s new overarching teaching and learning management structures and strategies.

Broad Directions

While there are some specific strategies related to particular programs, there are some general features which the 2008 renewal of the programs will incorporate.

Firstly, we will be seeking to provide greater flexibility across all the programs. This flexibility relates to broadening the choice of learning experiences that make up these programs; broadening the teaching contributions to these programs – especially in terms of faculty input; broadening the entry pathways (RPL); ensuring better articulation with diverse disciplinary pedagogies and faculty cultures, and better linking with faculty academic development programs.

This year we are also looking to broaden the ownership and engagement with these programs in some faculties. In part, this will be achieved through increased ITL-faculty collaboration and shared responsibility for aspects of the programs. We will also be working with faculty leaders to get a better match of individuals with identified development needs (for instance through PMD or faculty teaching QA systems) to the most appropriate program or alternative development strategy. This will also involve better alignment of academic development programs and strategies with the needs of different stages of the academic career (ranging from sessional staff to L&T leadership development) and emerging views of the academic role at Sydney.

We will also be working to develop a university strategy for recording teaching and learning academic development achievements of staff in relation to other development functions such as PMD, and to facilitate articulation with subsequent academic development programs.

Some changes for 2008

Two areas where you will see changes in 2008 are in the second semester of the Graduate Certificate and the introductory Principles and Practice (P&P) program. In the Principles and Practice program (P&P) we will be introducing some faculty-based academic development activities instead of the third day of the program. This is designed to recognise the fact that these activities already exist in many faculties and that new staff need an orientation to the contextual factors influencing teaching in their discipline or faculty. Each faculty will decide what is most suitable for their staff, however some of the activities that will begin to be available as part of P&P will include:

- Faculty-based peer observation of teaching
- Participation in faculty teaching & learning events
- Participation in faculty teaching mentoring programs
- Participation in faculty teaching development projects
- Contributing to scholarship of teaching activities in the faculty

The development and implementation of these faculty-based activities will be supported by the ITL, especially through the Cluster Coordinators as they are appointed. As part of the June P&P program, participants from the faculties which comprise the Arts and Social Sciences Cluster will be able to engage in
faculty-based activities developed collaboratively by the ITL Arts Cluster coordinator (Susan Thomas), together with the A/Deans from other faculties in the Cluster. The ITL will continue to offer a central program as the third day of P&P for participants from other faculties while we work with those faculties to identify and introduce suitable activities over the next year.

The teaching of the second semester of the Graduate Certificate will also be changing this year to give a greater emphasis to personally relevant and authentic learning. Participants will be able to work with their cluster colleagues on a greater variety of discipline based projects under the guidance of mentors in their faculties. The ITL is working with colleagues in each faculty to help identify potential projects for this year’s Graduate Certificate participants, but these will typically include the chance for participants to elect to contribute to existing faculty TIES projects or curriculum development activities; to undertake or plan faculty inquiry projects; to contribute to a teaching development activity; or to implement and evaluate a curriculum innovation in their discipline. The other change this year will be the introduction of a larger range of authentic tasks for participants to choose from as the basis for the reflective professional development portfolio. This year participants will be able to draw on activities such as completing a portfolio to support a teaching award or Fellowship application, a promotion application or to support their PMD. The focus on authentic tasks and discipline-based projects recognises the variation in needs of participants from different faculties and also, the teaching and learning expertise that resides in the faculties – especially amongst the 200 alumni of the Graduate Certificate. For these past graduates, contributing to the mentoring of these new faculty-based projects will, we hope, provide ongoing professional development opportunities. In second semester 2008, we will also be opening up a revised ITL Research & Scholarship seminar series to complement the Graduate Certificate seminars. While these are designed in part for Graduate Certificate participants, the seminar series is open to all interested members of the university community and will be one way of sharing the scholarship expertise that exists across the academic community. These seminars will be advertised on the ITL website.

What else is changing?

There are other changes we will be working on in the coming year in relation to the Grad Cert and P&P as well as the other academic development programs. If you want to read more about the various ways we are seeking to contribute to the renewal of these academic development programs, the ITL 2007 Review of Academic Development Programs document on the ITL website provides a summary. For example – one area we will be contributing to is the next phase of development of the Research Higher Degree Supervision Development Program to make the pathways to accreditation more flexible and relevant to faculty supervision contexts and development needs. Another area we will be working on in coming months is in supporting the university to develop a comprehensive sessional staff development strategy which draws on the excellent programs already provided in many faculties. We hope to include reports on these activities and perspectives from participants on these updated programs in future editions of Synergy.

Associate Professor Simon Barrie
Associate Director, ITL

Diversity and Internationalisation News

The ITL announces some useful resources:

