I joined the ITL in February (on secondment from the Faculty of Arts) as Teaching Development Coordinator for the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences faculty cluster. As former Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts, I was no stranger to its teaching and learning practices, but over the past eight months have had the wonderful opportunity to step outside my home faculty into new spaces and engage with teaching and learning scholarship, leadership and initiatives across the other three faculties in the cluster. It has been my privilege to take part in the many emerging projects and developments, and to get to know the individuals driving these innovations. I have learned so much from these intrepid scholar teachers that I asked several of them to share their experiences in this issue of Synergy, which focuses on learning spaces: where does learning happen? How do we learn? How do our students learn? How do we measure and assess learning, and what we do with these outcomes?

In the feature article, *Uncomfortable Learning: Connecting to Country*, Alyson Simpson and Jane Moore, both from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, recount the learning journey recently undertaken by staff from the Faculty of Education and Social Work. These staff members were literally taken from their comfort zones and challenged on their preconceived ideas about learning, with each person taking their own lessons from the day and recognising the limits of their ways of knowing. The article invites us to reflect on our own learning processes and perhaps see them in a new light.

In *Investigate the shouting!: Reflections on teaching for excellence in international journalism*, Penny O’Donnell argues for a more global approach to teaching journalism students. I met Penny recently in the July Principles and Practice of University Teaching program, where she did her microteaching exercise on an analysis of mainstream newspapers and their representations of the world. Her piece is an extension of this theme, as it explores the shortcomings of outdated, mainstream approaches to teaching journalism and advocates for a fresher, student-centred methodology.

While WebCT is often discussed as a useful vehicle for enhancing traditional units of study, Jennifer Rowley and Sharon Tindall-Ford, in *Professional Experience and WebCT at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music*, explore its capabilities for supporting pre-service teachers on Professional Experience. They discuss how Web CT enables pre-service teachers, once isolated from university lecturers and peers, to interact and collaborate with peers and academics anywhere and at any time—via the many opportunities for asynchronous communication offered online.

And for those readers already familiar with *Synergy*, you’ll
find all the regular highlights, one being a conversation with three students from the Faculty of Arts, as part of the ‘Talking’ Series. These students – a third-year student, a second-year student, and a mature-age first-year student – generously agreed to field questions on student responses to the USE questionnaire. This interview was conducted as the student research component of a TIES large grant project being conducted by myself and Dr Brigid Rooney (Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Arts). Our project, Systematising Quality Enhancement and Assurance Processes to better support student learning, aims to clarify the USE process and provide a set of recommendations for maximising the benefits of the USE process for both students and staff—and for closing the feedback loop so that students understand how their comments are being used. The students were lively and engaging and, as we had hoped, stimulated our thinking by raising issues that we had not yet considered.

The ‘Profile’ for this issue is Fran Waugh, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) in the Faculty of Education and Social Work. At a time when the work of Associate Deans is becoming increasingly important in terms of policy implementation and faculty reporting processes, it seemed worthwhile to learn more about what an Associate Dean brings to the job from past experiences and how this work informs her theories of teaching and learning. Fran shares the rationale behind her faculty’s three teaching and learning priorities, each with a sharp focus on improving the student experience.

And then there are the usual features. In ITL Focus, we welcome two new staff members: Kathryn Bartimote-Aufflick and Cynthia Nelson. In T&L Snapshots, we congratulate our 2008 Teaching Award, Citation, Grant and Fellowship winners—and announce a new University teaching and learning award (and its inaugural winner), sponsored by the Co-Op Bookshop. Finally, in ‘Bookshelf’, Cynthia Nelson reviews Thesis and dissertation writing in a second language: A handbook for supervisors (Routledge, 2007) by Brian Paltridge and Sue Starfield.

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to edit this issue of Synergy, since the bar had been set so high by the previous editor. Tai Peseta served Synergy faithfully for five years, working tirelessly to raise awareness of teaching and learning research and initiatives at the University and throughout Australia. On behalf of my colleagues in the ITL, I would like to thank Tai for her dedication to Synergy and for her great commitment to teaching and learning development at the University of Sydney. She will be deeply missed in these pages—and by all of us who had the good fortune to know her and learn from her.

I must also thank our IT guru and photographer extraordinaire, James Tracy, who not only put in the long hours of layout and design, but showed me the ropes of the publication process, offering valuable advice at every turn.

Please continue to offer us your feedback and comments by email at synergy@usyd.edu.au, or visit us at the website: http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/synergy.

Dr Susan Thomas, Issue Editor
Institute for Teaching and Learning

Education consists mainly of what we have unlearned.
—Mark Twain

Teaching is the highest form of understanding.
—Aristotle