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Good Practice Guidelines: Leading Teaching Teams

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Good Practice Guidelines: Leading Teaching Teams

Abstract

1. The University of Wollongong is committed to providing an excellent teaching and learning experience for its staff and students. The University recognises that: a. the leadership of the Subject Coordinator can facilitate the development of a community of practice; b. an effective community of practice can result in a significant reduction in the overall time required for effective subject coordination; c. communities of practice entail a culture of respect, participatory engagement and collegiality where teaching and teachers are valued; d. teaching teams inspire teachers when they function as communities of practice; and e. the teaching team is a key site for the development of professional identity. 2. These Guidelines provide information to assist Subject Coordinators in their leadership role and the building of a community of practice.

Keywords

leading, teaching, guidelines, teams, practice, good

Disciplines

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GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES - LEADING TEACHING TEAMS

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1 Introduction

1. The University of Wollongong is committed to providing an excellent teaching and learning experience for its staff and students. The University recognises that:
 - a. the leadership of the Subject Coordinator can facilitate the development of a community of practice;
 - b. an effective community of practice can result in a significant reduction in the overall time required for effective subject coordination;
 - c. communities of practice entail a culture of respect, participatory engagement and collegiality where teaching and teachers are valued;
 - d. teaching teams inspire teachers when they function as communities of practice; and
 - e. the teaching team is a key site for the development of professional identity.
2. These Guidelines provide information to assist Subject Coordinators in their leadership role and the building of a community of practice.

2 Scope / Purpose

1. These Guidelines complement the University's *Code of Practice - Casual Academic Teaching*. They have been designed to assist faculties, schools and individuals concerned with improving supervision and peer learning at the teaching team level.

3 Definitions

Word/Term	Definition
Casual academic teaching employees ¹	Casual academic teaching employees are appointed to lecture in subjects, give tutorial instruction, or demonstrate in practical classes. They also may be required to mark assignments, be available for consultations with students at specific times, assist in the preparation of teaching materials, and the organisation of classes. They are responsible to the Head of a designated academic unit and are assigned responsibilities by the Head.
Casual Employment ²	"Casual employment" occurs when a person is engaged by the hour and paid on an hourly basis. Work is finished when the Head of the academic unit considers that all tasks have been completed.
Community of Practice ²	A <i>Community of Practice</i> is a collective where people share and learn from each other's knowledge and experience through dialogue. This variety of perspectives and experiences benefits the practices of all teaching team members, whatever their expertise.
Teacher	<i>Teacher</i> refers to the roles of lecturer, tutor, demonstrator, practicum supervisor, and so on: that is, those who are in a direct teaching role with students.
Teaching Team	The Teaching Team is a group coordinated by a Subject Coordinator, and comprised of permanent and casual teaching staff. The Subject Coordinator is responsible for the leadership of the whole Teaching Team ³ , aspects of the curriculum and the practical delivery of the subject.

¹ Definition taken from University of Wollongong *Code of Practice: Casual Academic Teaching*, 2008.

² Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.

³ Percy, A., M. Scoufis, S. Parry, A. Goody, M. Hicks, I. Macdonald, et al. (2008). *the RED report, Recognition - Enhancement - Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education*. Sydney: CADAD & Australian Learning and Teaching Council.



4 Key principles for Leading Teaching Teams

Recruitment and employment

1. To assist in the timely recruitment of the teaching team, the Subject Coordinator should:
 - a. ensure they are familiar with faculty procedures for the selection and recruitment of casual staff;
 - b. respond in a timely manner to the recruitment process;
 - c. cooperate with faculty administration in processes that enable teachers to be sent a letter of offer (contingent on student numbers), an email account form and casual authority; and
 - d. support late teaching recruits by providing close mentoring as required. For example, by being available in the first weeks to provide feedback and ensuring experienced members of the teaching team are aware of the need for collegial support.

Resourcing and access to teaching materials

2. To prepare the teaching team and adequately support them in their teaching role, the Subject Coordinator should:
 - a. provide, in a timely manner, the subject outline containing coherent and clear statements of subject objectives, design, contents and subject materials; and
 - b. make explicit the relationship between assessment tasks and subject objectives with the provision of written marking criteria.

Good Practice Example 1: Subject materials available online, print form and/or CD

All the necessary resources for a subject should be available to the teaching team online and/or in print form. For staff who have trouble accessing online versions of resources, a CD can be made with all the relevant materials and sent to them prior to commencement of semester.

Building a community of practice

3. To build a community of practice within the teaching team, the Subject Coordinator should:
 - a. articulate the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the coordinator and teachers;
 - b. foster a supportive and sustaining team culture, especially for late recruitments;
 - c. develop a shared awareness of the various constraints that impact on all team members in carrying out their roles;
 - d. trust teachers, appropriately, to teach and to exercise discretion in their role; and
 - e. value team members as a human resource and acknowledge their professional contributions in varied institutional settings.
4. To build a community of practice through communication processes, the Subject Coordinator should:
 - a. where faculty policy and payment allows, meet with the team professionally at the beginning and at least two other scheduled times during the teaching session (either face to face, by videoconference, or by teleconference);



- b. enable personal and regular communication with teachers;
- c. choose the most appropriate strategies and technologies to facilitate multidirectional communication within the team over the session;
- d. for multi-location teams, provide an e-communication facility or 'staff-only' e-meeting space (Tutors' Forum – Good Practice Example 4) as a virtual staffroom; and
- e. encourage team discussion about the praxis of subject implementation and student responses.

Good Practice Example 2: Team building strategy for multi location teaching teams

In a subject that is delivered to the South Coast and Southern Highlands campuses, weekly lectures are delivered by videoconference. A check-in and communication meeting of the teaching team occurs each week as the teachers join the videoconference link 10 minutes prior to the start of the lecture time. The brief videoconference meeting fosters cohesion, ameliorates isolation and models the team nature of the teaching to the students as they arrive and see the team in dialogue, shared problem solving, strategising and clarification.

Good Practice Example 3: Integration of feedback in development and review cycle

This good practice example comes from a first year Accounting subject (ACCY100) which has around 700 students, 20 teachers (18 casually employed) with a high turn over and is delivered at Wollongong and the satellite campuses. Particular emphasis is put on communication with both teachers and students. The coordinator encourages students to give feedback, and keeps an open line of communication with the students via their classroom teachers. An online students' forum is also used and is a valuable source of feedback. In communicating to the students, the coordinator suggests continued repetition is necessary in order to get a message across.

The coordinator keeps the teaching team constantly in the loop on all matters. This, the teachers say, makes them feel an integral part of the process. Worked examples of questions and answers to be used in the face to face classes are given to the teaching team early – this allows for any omissions or errors to be attended to before the class. Additionally, the coordinator incorporates question-answer examples developed by teachers into her subject which reinforces to the teaching team her openness to feedback and their part and value in the teaching process.

**Good Practice Example 4: e-learning Tutors' Forum for team resource provision and communication**

Synthesis of a group of teachers into a team is enhanced by discussion about the subject as a learning community: discussion should involve both teacher and coordinator expectations, and the context, philosophy and purpose of the subject. Such discussions can take place directly in face to face meetings, by videoconference team meetings and in a staff specific site on the subject e-learning site (Tutors' Forum).

The e-learning Tutors' Forum facility is a valuable communication tool for the timely dissemination of materials. It is located on the subject website and is available only to the teaching staff of a particular subject. The facility is particularly appropriate for the fractured timeframe of casually employed sessional staff, and for those at the satellite campuses or international locations. Feedback⁴ from both Subject Coordinators and sessional teachers clearly indicates that use of the Tutors' Forum saves the coordinator valuable time in reaching the whole team and receiving quick feedback and indications of potential problems. From the coordinator's perspective the Forum is for communication, sharing good teaching practice, providing professional support and facilitating quality assurance processes.

From their perspective, teachers say that the Tutors' Forum offers a space to connect, communicate and share with others in the team. As a result, they suggest that their motivation in relation to teaching practices significantly sharpens and their sense of belonging in a cohesive team strengthens. Research into tutors' use of the facility indicates that they prefer:

- dropping in to see what people are saying and thinking (in particular how the experienced teachers are handling things)
- using the discussion space as a sounding board; sharing suggestions on tutorial plans
- sharing current and past experiences
- reporting in on the state of the class and the students' progress and responses to activities
- using it as a source of enrichment and ideas on strategies and resources
- using it as a source of information and support network, particularly if there is a problem

The Tutors' Forum consolidates a team approach to teaching and facilitates engagement throughout the semester. Research into the Tutors' Forum indicates that it can be a powerful micro-practice that can build a strong sense of community and team engagement with the subject. The identified critical success factors for engagement were: an egalitarian style of leadership; professional respect; a sense of trust such that teaching problems can be openly discussed; and peer engagement and shared learning with teaching practices (Beaumont, Stirling & Percy 2009).

Good Practice Example 5: Inclusion of teaching team members' expertise

Good practice can include ways for the teachers to share their own expertise and knowledge. In some subjects sessional teachers are offered the opportunity to present a lecture, case study or expanded perspectives from the field of their own study and research where this is relevant to the subject.

Training and Professional Development

5. To encourage the professional development of team members, the Subject Coordinator should:

⁴ See Beaumont, R., J. Stirling and A. Percy (2009). Tutors' Forum: engaging distributed communities of practice. *Open Learning: Journal of Open and Distributed Learning*, 24 (2), 141-153.



- a. encourage team members to attend faculty induction;
- b. build on the formal faculty induction by enabling peer learning at the teaching team level;
- c. enquire about the professional development and specific training needs of the teaching team as individuals and as a unit in team discussions;
- d. encourage team members to engage in peer evaluation processes;
- e. encourage on-going training relevant for competence with multiple technologies and associated teaching strategies;
- f. encourage integration of team members into faculty and university activities; and
- g. encourage and support teachers applying for teaching and learning and research grants.

Good Practice Example 6: Using team meetings to foster professional learning

MacDonald and Edwards (2008)⁵ researched teaching team meetings over a three year period with sessional staff who were engaged with large first year classes, including practical classes that had high attrition rates. The team meetings sought to integrate reflective practices into procedures and thereby to develop into Teaching Communities of Practice.

Following a two day paid workshop, which was collaboratively run by educational developers and faculty staff, fortnightly teaching team meetings were convened for each unit; these focused on sharing experiences, discussion of big ideas coming up in that subject and collaborative planning of teaching methods. The emphasis was on reflecting on teaching practices which led to student learning.

Both teacher satisfaction and student outcomes rose with teaching approaches becoming more student focused and interactive. Through building team relationships, participants were able to develop a shared understanding of key concepts about learning and the objectives of the subject and skilful teaching practice. Most of the learning happened in the meetings. The initial workshop was regarded as essential and gave a shared language and framework for talking about educational issues in the subject. This was crucial to initial understandings and unpacking on-going experiences.

6. To facilitate their own leadership development, the Subject Coordinator should:
 - a. reflect on their own interpersonal communication;
 - b. seek peer mentoring on team leadership from an experienced and successful colleague;
 - c. seek support and guidance when taking over a new subject; and
 - d. reciprocally offer and provide support and guidance when handing over a subject for which they have been responsible. Quality assurance

Quality assurance

7. To develop sound quality assurance practices, the Subject Coordinator should:

⁵ MacDonald, I. and T. Edwards (2008). Developing Teaching Communities at the Program Level. In Percy, A. *et al.* (2008). *the RED report, Recognition - Enhancement - Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education*. Sydney: CADAD & Australian Learning and Teaching Council. (pp 49-51) Retrieved February 28, 2009 from <http://www.cadad.edu.au/sessional/RED/>



- a. institute formal processes to ensure the consistency of subject delivery and equity of learning and teaching standards;
- b. design a subject that clearly links meaningful assessment tasks with subject content, learning outcomes and identified graduate qualities;
- c. develop personal and team teaching strategies that are sensitive to cultural diversity, support student learning and encourage participation in a range of learning activities;
- d. take steps to ensure consistency and equity of standards in subject delivery if the subject is being taught at multiple locations; and
- e. ensure marking criteria for the subject are clearly communicated to students and subject teachers;
- f. establish processes to promote consistency in marking and in the amount and quality of feedback to students (eg. marking guides including reference to standards expected for grades of a certain level, standard feedback sheets to be completed with an example of the level/ type of feedback expected).

Good Practice Example 7: Marking equity

This good practice example is from subject code CENV112, the core (and compulsory) subject in the Bachelor of Arts (Community, Culture and Environment) delivered to the South Coast and Southern Highlands satellite campuses.

A random double marking process is used for selected assessment tasks. The Tutors' Forum facility on the subject web site is used to organise the process. All additional marking is factored into the teachers' marking pay scale.

For each assessment, each tutor is allocated a marking partner to whom they pass on four selected graded assignments (one from each graded category of Pass, Credit, Distinction and High Distinction). The person they receive extra marking from and the person they pass their assessments onto will not be the same person for each assignment. Any additional marking is factored into the teacher's remuneration scale.

All Fails are discussed with the marking team and the Subject Coordinator (normally inside the Tutors Forum). Any disagreements between marking partners about an assigned grade are also discussed by the team in the Tutors' Forum.

At the end of the semester, using two of the allocated paid meeting hours for this purpose, the team meets to discuss borderline grades, a selection of high distinctions, and all fails. The team then has lunch where they discuss issues that have arisen within the subject over the semester and any possible changes for the next iteration of the subject.

5 Version Control Table

Version Control	Date Effective	Approved By	Amendment
1	4 November 2009	University Education Committee	Guidelines established