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Collaborating to embed academic literacies and personal support in first year discipline subjects

Abstract

This article discusses a Design for Learning project in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, where academic and personal support for students was interwoven in their first semester. Staff of the Academic Language and Learning Unit (ALLU) worked with discipline staff to develop their students' capabilities across a range of disciplines, while the Faculty's First Year Coordinator organised dedicated tutors to identify and support students who struggled to engage with their first semester's work. ALLU staff, consulting with subject coordinators, designed extra tutorials focussing on the subjects' readings for four weeks, and working towards the first marked assignment. Using ALLU's design, subject tutors showed students what is characteristic of thinking at university; how that is embodied in the structures and styles of academic texts; and how sources are used. Feedback from students, tutors, and coordinators was mainly favourable, and a comparison of students' entrance scores and first semester marks with those of previous cohorts found that As and Bs rose in most subject groups, while Ds and Fails decreased, despite lower entrance scores overall.

The article situates this initiative within the movement towards "embedding" development of students' academic literacies into their disciplines' curricula. It looks at the educational advantages of this method, as well as some difficulties of acceptance, ownership, and organisation. It focusses, in particular, on the benefits of involving ALLU staff, with their expertise in Applied Linguistics, in designing activities to focus both students and subject lecturers on the particular discourses used in their discipline subjects.

Keywords

transition, embedding, academic literacies, early intervention

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

The transition to university study, on which students' persistence and success depends, is a complex process which La Trobe University is trying to influence from several directions at once through its *Design for Learning* (DfL) Project. This article focusses on an initiative in one Faculty – Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) -- where academic and personal support for students was interwoven in their first semester. Staff of the Academic Language and Learning Unit (ALLU) worked with discipline lecturers to develop their students' capabilities across a range of disciplines at first year, while the Faculty's First Year Coordinator organised dedicated tutors to identify and support students who struggled to engage with their first semester's work. This initiative was supported by funds from the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (2011). This is an Australian Government program aimed at improving the access, retention, and completion rates of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, a significant cohort at our university. Retention was a particular concern in the context of a drop in students' entrance scores; we recognised that the best we might do, by increasing support for first years, was to retain as many as in former years when the cohort had arrived with higher scores. In fact, we achieved this and more, for the students' grades also rose in comparison with those of the previous cohort.

This article considers the strengths of a whole-of-institution approach, but also the drawbacks. While a central mandate for change lends clout to those involved in bringing it about, the distance between central inception and local implementation can give rise to issues of ownership, engagement, and responsibility, while logistics can also be challenging. Our program was successful, in terms of helping students learn, but unsustainable in its original form; and the article closes with suggestions about how the benefits of a collaborative approach might be achieved with more economy of effort and expense.

For readers in the field of Academic Language and Learning, this critical account of an effort to embed development of capabilities may be of interest because, despite a growing consensus that embedding is best practice, it is frequently hampered by institutional and social distance between staff perceived to be concerned with 'content' and those concerned with 'skills'. For readers on the 'content' side of this divide, we hope to elucidate what it is that collaborators can contribute, which discipline staff may find it difficult to do on their own. Finally, our account contributes a hybrid form to the literature of embedding: a sort of bridge unlike the models we have seen described elsewhere.

The context

La Trobe University's *Design for Learning Project* assigns initial responsibility for developing academic literacies to first-year cornerstone subjects. It describes them as intended 'to ensure that all students have the opportunity to develop ... those often implicit but critical elements of University academic culture that we refer to as academic literacy' (Design for Learning: Curriculum review and renewal at La Trobe University 2009, p. 9). These literacies, understood broadly to encompass oral, social, and electronic ways of dealing with knowledge as well as print literacies, are then to be developed further throughout the degree. Their development is monitored by assessing the University's Graduate Capabilities at three points during the course: writing, speaking, team work, inquiry/research, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving.

This approach is consistent with the literature suggesting that best practice in relation to developing students' academic literacies is to embed explicit instruction, practice, and assessment of these into the curriculum of their degree (e.g., Australian Universities Quality Agency 2009; Baik & Greig 2009; Bath, Smith, Stein & Swann 2004; Burns & Sinfield 2004;

Chalmers et al. 2010; Cotterell 2001; Gibbs 2009; Kift & Moody 2009; Mitchell 2010; Mitchell & Evison 2006; Skillen 2006; Star & Hammer 2008; Wingate 2006; Young & Avery 2006). In contrast with generic support that is offered at a distance from the disciplines (see, e.g., Allan & Clarke 2007), and often struggles to be seen as relevant (Baik & Greig 2009; Durkin & Main 2002; Myers & Gibson 2010; Young & Avery 2006), embedding the development of academic literacies offers a number of advantages. It becomes part of the regular workload of the discipline subject, no longer competing with this for the student's time and attention. Students see it as normal and essential for university study, rather than remedial (Mitchell & Evison 2006). Moreover, all students benefit from it, not just the mix of the underperforming who are referred to extra classes and the overzealous who seek them out (Hill, Tinker & Catterall 2010; Kift & Moody 2009; Skillen 2006; Wingate, 2007). Because the work is not about academic reading and writing in general, but about reading and writing the texts assigned in the subject, students appreciate its relevance more readily. At the same time, the subject teaching staff develop their capacity to explain how the work that they assign, with its particular procedures, forms and discourses, carries out the purposes of enquiry in their subjects. This is important because, while some 'skills' are broadly generic, such as managing time and complying with referencing conventions, most of what students need to understand is more complex and importantly variable from discipline to discipline. This includes the purposes of academic tasks, which derive from the discipline's epistemology, and the forms, language, and conventions that flow from these various purposes (Baik & Greig 2009; Bazerman 1981; Durkin & Main 2002; Elton 2010; Gimenez 2011; Jones 2009; Magyar et al. 2011; Reid & Parker 2002; Wingate 2007).

The project to which ALLU staff Kate Chanock and Craig Horton were assigned did not, however, fit into any of the usual categories in the literature of embedding. It was taught alongside particular discipline subjects, focusing on the discourse used in each subject, like the models variously labelled as 'bolt-on' (Wingate 2006), 'adjunct' (e.g., Snow & Brinton 1988; Baik & Greig 2009), or 'dedicated' (Al-Mahmood & Gruba 2007). However, it differed from those models in that it was taught by discipline tutors, not language and learning staff. Nonetheless, it fell short of being 'built-in' (Wingate 2006), 'infused', or fully 'embedded' (Al-Mahmood & Grub, 2007), in that it was designed by language and learning staff, and delivered as an addition to, rather than a part of, the regular subject curriculum. To the extent that this arrangement brought ALLU and discipline subject coordinators together to focus jointly on the subject discourse, it brought about a shift in the coordinators' understanding of what students need to know, and how to show it to them. To the extent that coordinators delegated responsibility for the program to casual tutors, however, the benefits were limited.

The project

Many parties collaborated, in various roles, to implement this complex project, as shown in Figure 1 below:

Months	Executive Dean	ALLU	Subject Coordinators	Tutors	1 st Year Coordinator	Lead Tutors
January	Initiated project				Planned Lead Tutor Program	
February		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulted with Coordinators • Researched subject readings & tasks • Trained tutors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplied subject materials • Consulted with ALLU 	Trained by ALLU	Trained Lead Tutors	Trained by 1st Yr Coordinator
March		Advised & revised tutorials as needed during teaching		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught parallel tutorials • Feedback to ALLU 	Monitored & advised Lead Tutors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitored students' difficulties/ disengagement • Contacted struggling students • Offered support
April		Surveyed students, tutors & coordinators	Completed evaluation survey	Completed evaluation survey		
Semester break		Compared marks & entry scores with previous years				

Figure 1: Roles and actions of participants across the first semester

In 2011, a month before teaching would begin, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences decided upon a program of semi-embedded tutorials designed to develop students' academic literacies, and the University's designated Graduate Capabilities in particular, in core first year subjects across nine disciplines (like most Arts degrees, ours lacks a common first year subject). The subjects had enrolments ranging from 350 students to 800, with many of these students enrolled in more than one (and up to four) of the subjects involved. ALLU staff were asked to design the tutorials, but not to teach them. Their role was to research the curriculum in each subject; to write four tutorials for each that would focus students on the graduate capabilities involved in doing the work of the first few weeks of the subject; and to train the 40 discipline tutors who would teach these 'parallel' tutorials. Those tutors might be, and for the most part were, at the same time tutors in the subject for which they were engaged to teach the parallel tutorials, and some of them were able to be involved also in consultations held by ALLU staff with subject coordinators during the planning phase. Most, however, were casual staff taken on very shortly before teaching began, as numbers in each subject emerged from the process of enrolment. This meant that ALLU staff had to script the tutorials for teachers who were not familiar with the subject curriculum, nor with ideas about discourse, but who would be asked to take students through a close examination of the texts assigned in the early weeks. Chanock and Horton were not confident that a list of teaching points would serve this purpose, so they scripted the tutorials in full. They devoted the three hours of training to introducing the tutors to the aims and structure of the program. They then advised them to read their scripts in order to understand what was intended for each tutorial, and then to adapt them to suit their own teaching styles and emphases. During the weeks of the program, Chanock and Horton stood by to rethink and revise in response to the tutors' experience of teaching the materials; and at the end, with the aid of Mark Reedman of the Curriculum, Teaching and

Learning Centre, they evaluated feedback from all concerned, as well as looking at the students' success in terms of marks and retention.

The engagement of subject coordinators was uneven, largely because the program had been imposed by the Faculty executive, with little consultation and very little time for planning. It was undertaken by the Faculty in response to expectations around the *Design for Learning* project; and while central support was an offer that discipline staff could not refuse, the program encountered problems common to top-down efforts at reform. Some subject coordinators welcomed the initiative, but others were sceptical – in part, for reasons that have been noted elsewhere in the literature. Discipline lecturers often reasonably feel that they lack the expertise to teach academic literacies (Bailey 2010; Donahue 2010), and cannot find the time or motivation to learn. Time is a problem, again, in relation to already crowded curricula: it is understandable that discipline staff are reluctant to teach literacies if they believe that this will take time and attention away from the teaching of content (Wingate 2007, p. 396). Such reservations can only have been confirmed by the hasty roll-out of the Faculty initiative, which meant that coordinators were scrambling to engage staff, find suitable rooms, and accommodate the program on their subject websites in time for the start of the semester. Some dealt with this by delegating management of the program to tutors on casual contracts.

What ALLU staff contributed

Nonetheless, for those who did engage, the program demonstrated that a focus on the discourse of their subjects need not distract from content but can, instead, provide an extra layer of attention that enhances students' understanding of the content (Chanock 2010; Evans et al. 2009). Coordinators expressed surprise at the close attention that ALLU staff gave to the weekly readings, saying they had not realised that 'students have to be taught how to read'. This is because it is common to attribute students' difficulties with reading to poor study habits, lack of effort, general ignorance, and/or inadequate vocabulary, none of which a discipline lecturer can hope to do very much about. What ALLU staff contribute is a different perspective on reading, which comes from Applied Linguistics. Research in this area has shown that the purposes, values, and epistemological assumptions of a discourse community shape the structures, language choices, and intertextual practices characteristic of its texts (e.g., Swales 1990). It is not adequate, therefore, to think that students should come to university already equipped to read scholarly texts; nor to think that the texts in one discipline can be read in the same way as those in another. It is true that a restricted vocabulary or grasp of English grammar will severely hamper a student in reading. However, fluency in English and a good attitude are not enough to ensure that students can read their subjects' texts.

For teaching staff, however, the structures and language of the readings they assign have often become transparent with use. They are in the position of a native speaker of a language who is assumed to be able to teach it to others, because s/he is fluent in using it. But knowing a language does not mean that one knows how to talk *about* it in a way that illuminates its use for learners; and it is this ability to talk *about* subject discourses that ALLU staff can bring to a collaboration with teachers in the disciplines. This was perhaps unexpected because we were supposed to be addressing the Graduate Capabilities, and reading is nowhere mentioned on the list. However, the capabilities depend upon the ability to read effectively. Students must be able to see how the texts that they are required to read and write *are structured to solve problems*; how *critical thinking is exercised* in these texts; and how they *present the results of enquiry/research*. These were the things the tutorials were designed to make explicit.

The tutorials began by spelling out the nature of academic enquiry, and how it is different from the public debate that has formed the students' ideas about opinion and argument up to this point. As this is a threshold concept common to all subjects in FHSS, all the tutorials used

the same presentation basing their discussions on material from the Faculty’s *Survival Guide* (Chanock & Horton 2011), extracted below:

	Public argument	Academic argument
Purpose	Something needs to be done (action)	Something needs to be understood (interpretation)
Stance	Only one perspective is right	Perspectives may be combined, and some things may remain unresolved (try to be clear, but don’t be afraid of complexity)
Persuasion	Good points from the other perspective just weaken your argument!	Ignoring good points from the other perspective weakens your argument; draw your conclusions from the evidence, like it or not.
Tone	May be aggressive, emotional	Formal, respectful, objective

Figure 2: Differences between public argument and academic argument

In this way, the tutors were able to explicitly reframe key ideas such as problem-solving, critical thinking, argument and opinion. All of these typically cause problems in first year when assignments require students to produce an ‘argument’, or to ‘critically evaluate’ or ‘discuss’ a viewpoint put to them, and their markers are unaware that students understand these words differently.

The general structure of texts that carry out the purpose of academic argument also needs to be explained as it is not intuitive. Indeed, the ‘point-first’ structure of anglo-academic writing — where the introduction foreshadows the answer it is going to argue, and each paragraph begins with the point it is going to develop — is quite uncomfortable for students from academic cultures where it is considered respectful to allow readers to draw their own conclusions from the information offered (e.g., Hinds 1987; 1990). The tutorials showed the structure common to scholarly articles and student essays, therefore, as providing answers (at left) to the questions an Australian academic reader brings to the text (at right):

Writer’s answers	to	Readers’ questions:
Introduction		
Topic	←	What’s this about?
Context	←	What larger discussion does it relate to?
Question/problem	←	What is this writer asking?
Thesis	←	What does s/he think is the answer?
Signposting	←	How is s/he going to show it to me?
Point I (explanation)	←	Why does s/he think this? (what does this mean?)
Evidence/example	←	Based on what?
Reference(s)	←	Where did s/he learn this?
Point II (and so on)	←	(same questions again)
Conclusion	←	So what? How does all this relate to what s/he asked at the beginning?

Figure 3: A common structure of discursive academic texts in Australian universities

The ‘readers’ questions’, moreover, are themselves not intuitive, but shaped by the rules of the game of academic publishing. Conventionally, writers must begin their articles by establishing that their problem *is* a problem and that it is shared by some community of readers, and then offer something at least a little different from what has already been said by others. If students are aware of this professional context that gives academic texts their peculiar form — in which the first idea encountered is often not the writer’s own ‘point’, but the context that provides the writer with a point of departure — they can navigate through that context with appropriate expectations. They can find the writer’s thesis; check the conclusion to see that it’s repeated there; and orient themselves to the argument by reading the opening sentence of each paragraph in between. If they are not aware of it, they can – and do -- waste a good deal of time taking notes from the contextual material and then feel offended when the point found there appears to be contradicted by the writer who ‘doesn’t seem to know what he really thinks!’

The tutorials quickly outlined the purposes and expectations that give form to academic texts, then used these insights to make sense of the subject readings. For example, Chanock annotated the abstract of an article read early in the History subject called *Global Migration Stories* (Kovacs & Cropley 1975, p. 221):

Abstract	‘Moves’
<p>The successful adjustment of immigrants is usually considered in terms only of their cultural, sociological and psychological fitting into the receiving society. However, this attachment process is invariably accompanied by estrangement from the old society – a process of alienation. The effects of this alienation may include severe behavioural breakdown. Even some socially approved behaviours may reflect alienation. Focusing on alienation rather than assimilation permits a re-examination of the adjustment of immigrants. It suggests that preservation of elements of the donor society’s culture would facilitate this adjustment. This view is, therefore, consistent with a multicultural model of ethnic group interrelationships.</p>	<p>What is usually thought</p> <p>Problematised this</p> <p>Why it matters</p> <p>Alternative perspective</p> <p>What the alternative perspective enables us to understand</p>

Figure 4: An abstract of a journal article, annotated to show common rhetorical ‘moves’

In each participating subject, ALLU staff identified readings that lent themselves to a focus on some aspect of the subject discourse which they thought needed to be made explicit. These included text structures, as above; the use of sources as evidence in scholarly argument; or practices of quoting, paraphrasing, and attribution. Each tutorial group spent time examining these things in their subject readings, and practising them in preparation for their first marked assignment. In this way they developed strategies with immediate relevance for the work of each subject, while learning about the broader culture of enquiry that was shared by all. Although the program did not, in these few weeks, attempt to develop students’ capabilities in speaking and team work, the other capabilities were all addressed in an introductory fashion.

Evaluation

In evaluating the effectiveness of the project, we gathered a range of data that, when combined, gave us an overview of its benefits and limitations and a number of issues to address in any further iteration. We wished to know the extent to which the tutorials built confidence and necessary skills, and we also wanted feedback on the experience of teaching and learning in the program and on organisational and logistical issues (more relevant to

institutional reporting than to this article, so we do not include these here). In different questionnaires administered to students, tutors, and coordinators, we presented a series of statements, asking respondents to indicate their ‘agreement’ on a scale of 1-5, and to add any critical comments to help us improve the program. This evaluation was undertaken for purposes of teaching rather than research, and we acknowledge the limitation that ethics evaluation after the commencement of the program covered statistical data rather than quotations. Nonetheless, the written comments added to, but did not contradict, what we learned from the closed questions.

The 800 students who filled out feedback forms agreed that they would recommend the tutorials to others in a range from 3.8 to 4.3, with 75% of the subjects rating their agreement at 4 or above (see Table 1). Other areas that scored 4 or above included clarity of purpose, relevance for the subject, preparedness of the tutor (which does the tutors credit, considering the haste with which they had to be trained), and (with one exception) the ease of understanding materials presented in the tutorials.

Students’ Evaluations (mean)	History N=167	Anthro N=171	Arch N=101	English N=117	Media N=86	Philos N=31	Politics N=57	Sociology N=156
Purpose clear	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.5	4.4	4.2
Relevant for this subject	4.0	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.5	4.3	4.1
Relevant for other subjects	3.2	4.1	3.6	3.5	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.7
Tutor prepared	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.5	4.3	4.7	4.3
Understood materials	3.9	4.3	4.2	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.2
Enjoyed tutorials	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.7	3.4	3.7	3.9	3.7
Increased confidence	3.5	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.8	4.1	4.1	4.0
Recommend to others	3.8	4.2	4.2	4.0	3.9	4.2	4.3	4.1

Table 1: Students’ mean agreement, on a 5-point scale, with questions about their perceptions of the parallel tutorials. (N = students who filled out questionnaires in each subject; the response rate ranged from 14% to 54%.)

Tutors agreed that they would like to teach the tutorials again in a range across the subjects from 3 to 5, and coordinators thought the program should be repeated in a range from 3.5 to 5. In fact, in the interests of both economy and efficiency, the program will not be run again in the same way, but will evolve into an administratively simpler, conceptually more coherent, version. The next iteration of the program will involve subject coordinators and ALLU staff again identifying suitable readings from the subject curricula, which teaching staff will use to illustrate key points about thinking, reading, and writing for the subject. But those discussions can now be conducted in regular teaching time, by the regular subject teachers. This shift in delivery from an adjunct model to a fully embedded one will avoid the problems of staffing and logistics that arose the first time around. The original program did, however, recruit support for a more sustainable program by showing what the explicit attention to academic literacies could do for students’ learning.

At the end of the semester, we conducted another quantitative evaluation that compared both the students’ marks for the relevant subjects with the marks of the previous year’s cohort, and the students’ entrance scores with those of the previous cohort. It is acknowledged that entrance scores may not be a reliable predictor of academic performance, as this is influenced by so many factors in complex combinations. However, it was not possible to compare our tutorial participants with any more satisfactory ‘control group’ that had not received the intervention, as it would have been unethical to offer the tutorials to some students while

withholding them from others. While it might seem that subjects which were not running parallel tutorials could provide a group for comparison, this would not have worked either, because students were expected to apply the skills they were learning in the targeted subjects to their work in other subjects as well. In this sense, no first year subject could be regarded as unaffected by the initiative. In the circumstances, we decided to use entrance scores as a proxy, while bearing in mind that such a comparison could only be suggestive rather than definitive. We were also aware that subjects are seldom identical from year to year, and variations in curriculum design and teaching could influence the outcomes for students. In this case, however, all but one of the subjects were taught by the same coordinator as in the previous year, and included the same readings and assessments.

Combining As with Bs and Ds with fails, it was found that, despite fewer students with entrance scores over 70 at all but one campus, As+Bs rose in 14 out of the 19 groups. At the same time, despite more students with entrance scores below 60, Ds+fails dropped in 16 out of 19 groups (see Figure 4 for summary).

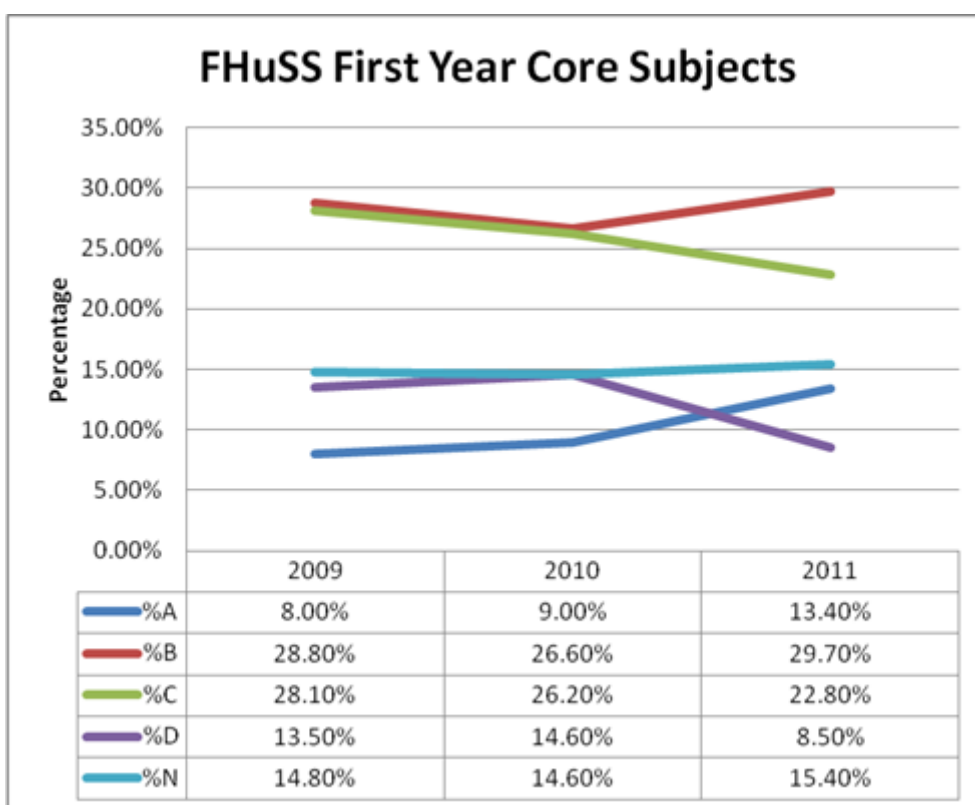


Figure 5: Changes in each grade range for all subjects combined, over 3 years (N= <50 [= fail]; D= 50-59; C= 60-69; B= 70-79; A= 80-100). Grades achieved are shown both graphically as trends and numerically as percentages.

Completion rates remained roughly unchanged – again, arguably a good result in view of the lower entrance scores. The groups in which marks were unaffected or actually fell were in those subjects whose coordinators had distanced themselves from planning and implementation of the program, while the groups with the greatest improvement were those whose coordinators had been most receptive and most engaged.

The Lead Tutors Scheme

It was not only the success of the Parallel Tutorials that these results reflected, however, but the combination of that program with another aimed at identifying and supporting struggling students. It is widely recognised in universities in Australia and elsewhere that the first few weeks are a crucial time for students in developing a sense of engagement with their studies, as well as a sense of belonging to the university (Kuh et al. 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991; Tinto 1993). If that engagement is not established, students are more likely to discontinue their studies (Braxton 2000; Kuh et al. 2008). This is both wasteful of the student's and taxpayers' investment, and can also be damaging to the student's self-esteem and life chances. Students are less likely to withdraw, however, if they see evidence that the institution cares how they are faring (McInnis, James & Hartley 2000) and offers support in a timely manner. For this reason, a number of universities have instituted some type of 'early warning' system, operated by professional staff, academic staff, peers, or a combination, to notice when individuals seem to be in difficulties and to let them know that somebody is aware of this, concerned for them, and ready to help (Johnston et al. 2008).

In the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, 'Lead Tutors' were appointed and trained by the First Year Coordinator, Bret Stephenson, to run such a system in the subjects for which the Parallel Skills tutorials were designed, as well as five additional subjects taught in second semester. In nearly all cases, Lead Tutors were senior subject tutors – primarily early-career academic staff and in some cases subject coordinators – who were already familiar and highly involved with the subjects and students they were charged with monitoring. The primary task of the Lead Tutor was to monitor overall student engagement within participating subjects in order to follow-up – via email, phone and in-person – with students who had shown the early signs of disengagement or difficulty. In this way the Lead Tutor Scheme was essentially an early intervention strategy. Lead Tutors would monitor four easily assessable indicators that stood as proxies for a number of potential student problems:

1. Tutorial attendance (including academic skills tutorials)
2. Failure to pass an assessment task
3. Failure to complete an assessment task
4. No/low hits on the subject LMS site

The Lead Tutors' primary role was to monitor each of these indicators and then contact those students who had activated one or more of the indicators. Lead Tutors then advised and encouraged the student to address the issue and directed them towards further assistance. The follow-up portion of the program additionally offered a secondary opportunity to increase student interaction with members of academic staff. It has been widely recognised that increased, and meaningful, interaction between students and academic staff that takes place outside of the classroom has also been linked to increased retention, persistence and positive student learning outcomes (Bean 1981; Chickering & Gamson 1987; Noel, Levitz, & Saluri 1985; Pascarella 2005; Wyckoff 1998). Capitalizing on the increased visibility and availability of the Lead Tutor, the scheme encouraged students to approach their Lead Tutor with any problems they might be experiencing. The Lead Tutor Scheme was well received, as evidenced by student subject feedback. In two of the largest subjects, a question was included in the standard evaluation administered at the end of the semester as part of the university's quality assurance processes: 'The use of a Lead Tutor in this subject was helpful 'always' (45.4%); 'usually' (26.0%); 'sometimes' (17.3%); 'rarely' (5.6%); 'never' (2.0%) or 'not applicable' (3.1%). The Scheme will be made more efficient in the next iteration by the adoption of an automated early-warning system to alert the Lead Tutors (now re-named Subject Support Tutors) to students' performance vis-à-vis the indicators.

Conclusion

Our program, while unsustainable in its original form, did enable us to trial an approach that can be adapted for sustainable use in the future. The ALLU staff's aim was to demonstrate that a focus on academic literacies and graduate capabilities need not be an 'extra' competing with subject content for attention; rather, this focus can provide an added lens through which to view the subject content. The uptake and success of such an approach depends, however, upon consultation with, and ownership by, the discipline teaching staff involved, which in turn depends upon institutional support, with time for thorough planning. In future, we hope to see a focus on subjects' academic literacies embedded in the regular curriculum, informed by consultation with ALLU staff, and taught by the subject teachers. At the same time, students were helped to engage, and encouraged to persist, by the concern and advice offered by the Lead Tutors throughout the semester. This component of the project was less costly and less complex than the skills tutorials, and should be sustainable regardless of the form in which skills embedding may be pursued.

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