Culturally inclusive teaching and learning

Abstracts

**Question 1:** What appropriate and respectful teaching practices do you use when teaching diverse students?

- Lamberton, Ashton-Hay, von der Heidt, and Zhou - Bilingual strategies to support Chinese undergraduate business students at SCU
- Blom - Diversity, inclusivity and atmospheres: the role of the educator in the tertiary learning landscape
- Mason, Cooper, and Seton - Reducing cognitive load in exams for ESL students
- Roche and Leslie - Academic immersion: Empowering diverse international students through academic literacies

**Question 3:** How do you draw on the diverse cultures students bring to your classes to enrich the learning experience of all students?

- Anstee - Teaching international final year tertiary students from the USA
- Cumings and Alexander - Achieving inclusion to support the access, participation and success of LGBTIQ+ students
- Anderson, Gatwiri, and Townsend-Cross - Creating safer spaces for teaching: shared perspectives
- Luke – Yarning Science

**Question 4:** How have you implemented GA7 or the RAP in teaching practice, curriculum design or assessment?

- Bruck - The loss of linguistic and cultural diversity across Australia and the world
- Adam, Shipway, and Yeigh - Left, right, wrong? Teacher identity, student engagement and the ‘culture wars’
- Doran – Integration of Indigenous health across our curricula – reflections on the journey in HAHS
- von der Heidt, Boyd, Rowe, den Exter, Garbutt, and Lake - How is ‘cultural competence’ addressed in SCU capstone units?

**Question 5:** How do you support first year students with their transition into university culture?

- Brickhill and Roche - Addressing academic integrity in mathematics for novice international students
- Watts, Witsel, and Wilson - The Treasure Hunt: Empowering first-year students to find the information they need through an innovative E-learning tool
- Chaseling, Benson, and Markopoulos - Reducing first year student attrition rates by improving student support through best practices
- Honey and Allen - The Digital Matrix: Engaging with digital literacy
Question 1: What appropriate and respectful teaching practices do you use when teaching diverse students?

Bilingual strategies to support Chinese undergraduate business students at Southern Cross University

Dr Geoff Lamberton, School of Business and Tourism
Dr Sally Ashton-Hay, Centre for Teaching and Learning
Dr Tania von der Heidt, School of Business and Tourism
Yining Zhou, School of Business and Tourism

Traditional monolingual education systems teach each subject entirely in one language, in order to avoid the possibility of interference between the first and second languages. Recently there has been an increase in programs which use bilingual education strategies as a way to add value to student learning (Anton et al., 2016). Bilingual education involves teaching in varying amounts in both a native and a second language. Such programs utilize the student’s first language when necessary, as well as strategies that assist content and language integrated learning. Bilingual learning programs recognize that ESL and EFL students learn more effectively when teaching programs are designed for their specific needs.

The study is set in the context of international Chinese ESL/EFL undergraduate business students studying in both Australia and China through the School of Business and Tourism. Because these students are accustomed to a Confucian-heritage cultural style of education, they face significant issues in adapting to teaching and learning in Australian university curriculum. While the students have achieved the formal English language level of proficiency required for admission to Australian university level studies, many students lag in speaking and comprehension.

A variety of techniques are used to enhance the learners' conceptual understanding of business-related concepts: Bilingual glossaries to build the disciplinary vocabularies; the use of bilingual teaching assistants to support international students; offering face-to-face assessment discussion clinics in Mandarin; the use of the dominant Chinese social media platform WeChat to connect and support students; and the bilateral support of the institutional cross-cultural relationship through staff exchange programs.

Preliminary results are drawn from student surveys, attendance records, and thematic analysis of social media interaction between staff and students. These results show that bilingual glossaries, as well as WeChat support provided in the students’ first language were effective in improving international student learning. The rich data set gained through the study provides a new perspective on how to add value to the internationalisation of student learning through a range of bilingual education strategies.

Diversity, Inclusivity and Atmospheres: the role of the educator in the tertiary learning landscape

Simone Blom, School of Education

Just like any work or learning environment, the university teaching and learning space presents the normal challenges faced when people from a diverse range of cultures, social groups, economic statuses, histories and backgrounds come together. Part of the role of the educator in the tertiary setting, includes ensuring appropriate and respectful practices are employed to create an effective learning space. This presentation seeks to describe teaching and learning approaches that are inclusive of student diversity and empower students to know how to learn in the university context.

The approach I have adopted in my teaching practice is founded on two key principles: i) that everyone is equal independent of qualifications, background, culture, situation etc. and ii) that my role as educator is to facilitate and create a space that feels safe, conducive to learning and supports the development of respectful relationships.

Fundamental to this approach is disrupting the teacher-student divide that seem ubiquitous in traditional learning environments. Through this intention, I strive to empower students to have agency and ownership over their learning. Embodying this approach in the workshop/tutorial space has required a deep knowing and understanding of my role as an educator. Utilising what is known as the theory of “atmospheres” (Ash & Anderson, 2015), I have developed my capacity to be aware of and understand the atmosphere in the room to facilitate greater inclusivity and engagement through being able to feel, respond and change this atmosphere if and when required. Through this process students are made to feel safe, develop trust and contribute to the workshop/tutorial space in the knowing that i) their voice matters, ii) they will not be judged and most importantly, iii) their involvement is imperative in developing the learning community (Peacock, 2018). Through being aware of the atmosphere in the room and how the students are engaging and responding, I am aware of the best way to facilitate and support them in their learning.

This practice provides students with a place of belonging and where they feel included while also activating empowerment: they leave knowing they can “do” university. Through my experience in adopting this pedagogical approach, inclusive teaching and learning is about treating people as people and as such, as equal.


Reducing cognitive load in exams for ESL students

Dr Raina Mason, School of Business and Tourism
Dr Graham Cooper, School of Business and Tourism
Carolyn Seton, School of Business and Tourism

Human cognitive resources are limited. Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) demonstrates that learning and task performance is most effective when cognitive resources are used in activities that are relevant to learning and task performance, rather than those that are extraneous to it (Sweller, 2010).

Learning a foreign language is a task imposed upon students who study in a language different to their mother tongue. These students are effectively being required to attend to two competing, yet interdependent, tasks...learning the foreign language and learning the academic content of their discipline (such as marine science or programming).

Moreover, technical domains contain specific terminology that has subtle nuances over and above the colloquial usage of words. For example, students who are studying in English as a second language must attend to the technical usage of terminology such as ‘function’, ‘variable’, ‘row’ and ‘table’ within the discipline of computing and information technology.

Cognitive load can also be impacted by emotional factors such as stress. A person who is ‘preoccupied’ with thinking about certain (stressful) issues is effectively distracted, reducing their cognitive resources available to attend to tasks such as processing learning materials, producing an assignment or answering an examination question.

This presentation argues that international students who are operating in English as a second language and dealing with domain specific terminology during the ‘stressful’ situation of time-restricted examinations will experience heightened levels of cognitive load compared to their native English speaking peers. This will negatively impact upon their examination performance. It is further argued that the cognitive load experienced by these students can be reduced, and their examination performance enhanced, by adopting a set of interventions and support mechanisms engineered for their circumstance.

The intervention under consideration ensures that all examination questions are written in simple English and that all multi-component questions are unpacked into a series of single-component questions. In addition, students are provided a hard-copy reference sheet containing a glossary of technical terminology with explanations provided in their native language. Implementation of this set of interventions for international students studying a database unit produced enhanced performance in their examination. It is argued that these interventions are appropriate and justified to enable internationalisation and equity of assessment procedures.

Academic Immersion: Empowering diverse international students through academic literacies

Associate Professor Thomas Roche, SCU College
Sharon Leslie, SCU College

Pathway programs play an important role in the higher education sector in Australia, preparing an increasing number of international English as Additional Language (EAL) students for enrolment into university (Murray, 2018). English for Academic Purposes (EAP) pathway programs vary in how they conceptualise and operationalise academic English in their program design and delivery (Roche, 2017). This presentation reports on SCU College’s EAP program and the teaching practices it employs to prepare a diverse range of international students for success in their undergraduate studies at SCU. Our presentation focuses on the intersect between academic English (Lea & Street, 1998) and digital literacies (Beetham & Sharpe, 2011) in SCU College’s EAP teaching and assessment practices. These digital and academic literacies are embedded in class through exploring how students access, assess and disseminate information in digital modes; as well as through addressing issues of identity and text ownership as practiced at university. We then investigate how embedding these literacies in our teaching and assessment approach impacts on students’ performance in- and perception of difficulties in subsequent undergraduate study. We argue that students who enter SCU via such a university EAP pathway with teaching practices including an explicit digital literacy focus, perform better than international students who enter directly into SCU undergraduate programs. We will then invite discussion and questions on best teaching practice for international students at SCU.


Teaching international final year tertiary students from the USA

Gillian Anstee, School of Education

This abstract focuses on a case study of students from Ivy League universities in the United States who have come to Australia for a three month Summer School. They experience blended learning, incorporating face to face and online experiences.

I always begin classes with Circle Time to encourage understanding, tolerance and the development of empathy between students. Reflection leads to deeper understanding and broadening of beliefs (Roffey, 2017). This practice involves paying respect to the knowledge each student brings to class by inquiring and allowing them to share their current knowledge, understandings and beliefs. This allows students to ask questions freely, establishing a class culture (Rubie-Davies, 2014). They share relevant stories and anecdotes for memorable learning (Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011).

I utilise a mental model (PECSS) to be aware of the cultural diversity of the students, considering the aspects through the questions for each student.

1. **Physical** - The student’s physical location. What is outside the window? What do they each see?
2. **Emotional** - Emotionally are they in a good mood? Is the student a glass half full type? Has an event occurred during recent times that may affect learning for the student?
3. **Cognitive** - Cognitively are they in possession of the intellect and pedagogical knowledge to proceed successfully? Are there gaps in their prior learning that need to be considered and catered for? Is there a disability?
4. **Social** - Socially, does the student have friends and is the student cooperative with others and collegial? What considerations are needed?
5. **Spiritual** - Spiritually some students are of strong faith and there may be allowances that need to be considered? Ramadan?

The students are aware of this model and also use it themselves when delivering their teaching or subject matter to colleagues during their career path.


Achieving inclusion to support the access, participation and success of LGBTIQ+ students

Robert Cumings, Equity and Diversity Office
Katrina Alexander, Equity and Diversity Office

Language is powerful and dynamic. We use it daily, yet may rarely reflect on how we include or exclude people. Inclusive language helps people feel safe to participate, they ‘see’ themselves and their experiences reflected in the conversation.

Although diverse, LGBTIQ+ people experience high incidences of marginalisation, discrimination, harassment and violence. This can be characterised as overt and covert, institutional and personal.

Dr Michael Flood, post-doctoral Fellow at La Trobe University observes “Gay men and lesbians experience cultural invisibility, they are routinely told that their innermost feelings and desires are disgusting, dangerous, just a phase or non-existent, they are denied civil and legal rights and the recognition of their partners and relationships, their consenting sexual relations are criminalised and policed, and they are subject to verbal and physical harassment, bashings and even murders” (Flood and Hamilton, 2005). The Australian Human Rights Commission notes that a large number of LGBTIQ+ people hide their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of violence or discrimination (Flood and Hamilton, 2005).

Discrimination experienced by many LGBTIQ+ people means they also experience educational disadvantage due to stress, fear, consequent mental health impacts, homelessness and involuntary time away from school (Australian Human Rights Commission). Consequently, LGBTIQ+ people may transition to university anxious about entering a, potentially, hostile learning environment (Robinson et al., 2014). In the context of access, retention and success, LGBTIQ+ students must feel acknowledged, supported and visible.

Acknowledgment is a good start to creating connection and inclusion, however acknowledgement alone is insufficient. Inclusivity needs to be embedded in language, teaching, research methodology and our students’ learning experiences.

This presentation provides a ‘safe space’ for participants to ask questions and discover ways in which they can enhance LGBTIQ+ inclusion in their pedagogical practice.

This presentation will address 3 Main Questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ students?
2. What policy-settings and services are in place at the University in relation to LGBTIQ+ students?
3. What can academics do to address inclusion of LGBTIQ+ students?
Creating safer spaces for teaching: shared perspectives

Dr Leticia Anderson, School of Arts and Social Sciences
Dr Kathomi Gatwiri, School of Arts and Social Sciences
Dr Marcelle Townsend-Cross, School of Arts and Social Sciences

Effective, culturally inclusive teaching and learning practice requires ‘uncomfortable pedagogies’: approaches to teaching which challenge and unsettle dominant ideas about power, ideology and society (Townsend-Cross & Flowers 2016). Teaching in this way and about contentious topics such as racism frequently evokes strong emotional reactions as well as resistance from students (Zembylas 2012). Strategies for creating safer spaces within which to do this work can involve specialised pedagogical approaches such as developing students’ awareness about their own positionality in society and encouraging deeper, dialogical approaches to teaching which facilitate transformative learning experiences (Davis & Steyn 2012). A practice example of an exercise for this purpose based on sharing the cultural meaning behind participants’ names will be demonstrated in the presentation. However, these approaches bring risks as well as benefits. In classrooms where the majority of students are from dominant cultural backgrounds and hostility towards culturally inclusive teaching is high, attention to the safety and wellbeing of students and staff of minoritised backgrounds is particularly imperative (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2016). This paper will focus in particular on highlighting issues which can contribute to a lack of safety in higher education learning environments, before outlining a number of strategies (including conduct inductions, curriculum scaffolding, class enrolment limits, co-teaching, debriefing, and feedback pre-screening) which can support increased safety for educators delivering culturally inclusive teaching and learning experiences.

Yarning Science

Cultural safety is extremely important for indigenous students who wish to study science, as well as for students from diverse cultures. An important aspect of cultural safety, is the sense that your culture is valued as a relevant and powerful way of living, and understanding the world. Science itself is an extremely effective approach for developing our understandings about the world, and natural phenomena. However, scientific approaches have largely developed from ways of knowing that are often both anthropocentric, western-centric and reductionist. This is very different to the way in which Indigenous peoples view and understand Country, a term that encompasses people and place; physical and metaphysical; past, present and future. In Indigenous cultures, connection is everything, and ways of knowing that connect are commonly utilised across indigenous societies. The yarning circle is one learning approach that can be used in a wide range of settings, with students from diverse backgrounds. Over the past two years, I have introduced yarning circles into my introductory science classes, both face to face, and online. The yarning circle is a way of learning that facilitates people to share their own reflections on their learning, in light of their own experiences, pre-existing ideas and cultural backgrounds. I would like to share some of the ways in which I have used the yarning circle to enhance student learning, while providing a safe space for all students to speak and listen, demonstrating that indigenous ways of knowing have a place in science.
The loss of linguistic and cultural diversity across Australia and the world

Patrick Bruck, Centre for Teaching and Learning

Australia and the world are losing much of their cultural and linguistic diversity. It can be argued that this is a consequence of a more globalised and 'connected' community which has witnessed the rise of a small number of dominant languages and cultures. We should consider the consequences of the vast loss of human capital and erosion of identity and seek ways to address their decline.

According to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2018), only 120 of the 250 languages that existed on the Australian continent at the time of white settlement in 1788 are still spoken today. Walsh (2005, p.2) asserts that the reasons behind the loss of language were that they were “of less value than English [and] this view soon hardened into government policy, which was reinforced through education and employment practices.” Wilford (2007) estimates that globally, approximately half of the world’s 7000 languages are in danger of becoming extinct by the end of the century; many of those being Indigenous languages. This equates to one language being lost every two weeks. With the loss of language also comes the loss of identity and self-worth, as indicated in a global survey supervised by Becker et al. (2014) that revealed that people’s self-worth is based on the values of the dominant culture, independent of personal values.

Preserving language and culture gives people voice and perspective that they would otherwise not have. Specifically in Australian universities, it does not seem that we are sufficiently preparing the ground for those students coming out of schools with indigenous language skills. Our universities could consider providing more opportunities for indigenous language learning through explicit courses. Other such initiatives could be to make Indigenous language learning compulsory in schools. This would strengthen Australia’s understanding of its past and present and inform our country’s identity into the future.

Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into the Australian school and university curricula across all learning areas will be important in coming years. This does not necessarily imply that particular curricula would need to be removed from current learning programs. Rather, it requires we teach and learn from a different perspective; an Indigenous perspective. Other inclusive and respectful practices could also be introduced, such as ongoing cultural immersion amongst students of different cultures. Research could be conducted regarding the nature of such immersion that brings mutual benefits for all our participating cultures. Such efforts will help us truly preserve our cultural and linguistic diversity.


Educators face significant challenges in a global milieu characterised by the diversity, complexity and scale of sociocultural interactions. The more conflictual interactions tend to be expressed in the vernacular as ‘culture wars’ and ‘education wars’, where combatants take sides beneath binary oppositional banners of ‘left’ and ‘right’. The culture wars and education wars invoke a range of complex social issues with significant implications in a society where whole organisations, sectors and industries can act, or be perceived to act, in terms of left or right values.

Understanding and navigating the left-right spectrum is a challenge for educators, in part because Australian education is a highly politicised sector entrusted with assuring the cultural competency (CC) and intercultural understanding (IU) of its graduates. In the tertiary sector, CC reflects ‘knowledge and acceptance of difference, respect and recognition of other cultures, knowing your own ‘lens’ and valuing difference in society’ (Southern Cross University, 2018, n. p.). In the school sector, IU ‘involves students learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect’ (Australian Curriculum, 2018, para 1). As noted in the Southern Cross University (2018) overview for CC, ‘Embedding CC in teaching can be a challenge for teachers as it can prove tricky to really understand and integrate, on a personal and professional level’ (n. p.). How might educators approach this ‘tricky’ problem?

The Values, Issues, Ethics and Worldview Study (VIEWS) is an ongoing project in the School of Education. Specifically, it uses the left-right construct to theorise, survey and develop pedagogical and curriculum responses to five interrelated questions:

- What are the biopsychosocial origins of the left-right spectrum?
- What are the constituent values of the left-right spectrum?
- Why is the left-right spectrum important for teachers and learners?
- How can educators approach the left-right spectrum in curriculum and pedagogy?

The aim of the broader project is to engage teachers and learners in critical, creative and consilient thinking about the left-right spectrum as well as from the left-right spectrum.

---

1. For example: Immigration policy, marriage equality, euthanasia, marijuana legalisation, mandatory sentencing, indigenous constitutional recognition, foreign property ownership, gender quotas.
Integration of Indigenous health across our curricula - reflections on the journey in HAHS

Dr Frances Doran, School of Health and Human Sciences

This presentation will provide an overview of some of the work undertaken by the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) to progress the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health within the nursing and midwifery curriculum. The School of Health and Human Sciences has been actively engaged in this work with CATSINaM. I will highlight areas considered key to content inclusion within the nursing and midwifery curriculum that form part of the CATSINaM health curriculum framework. Reflections on this journey will be shared; what we have done so far, the importance of building staff capacity and learning about cultural safety, challenges regarding “uncomfortableness” as well as opportunities to enhance the integration of Indigenous health across our curricula.


How is ‘cultural competence’ addressed in SCU capstone units?

Dr Tania von der Heidt, School of Business and Tourism  
Professor Bill Boyd, School of Environment, Science and Engineering  
Steve Rowe, School of Business and Tourism  
Dr Kristin den Exter, SCU Engagement  
Dr Rob Garbutt, School of Arts and Social Sciences  
Dr Warren Lake, School of Environment, Science and Engineering

Graduate Attributes (GA) define what a university values as outcomes of learning and “prepare students for continued learning activity beyond university” (Kelleher, 2017, p. 1). One of the less well-understood of SCU’s GAs is GA7, Cultural Competence - the “ability to engage with diverse cultural and Indigenous perspectives in both global and local settings” (Southern Cross University, 2017). As high-end integrating units, capstone units are in a perfect position to address cultural competence. In this presentation we examine the role of capstone units in promoting the University’s GA7.

A ‘capstone’ consolidates course knowledge and skills, and integrates graduate attributes and employability skills (Kelleher, 2017). Capstones are important in all disciplines and courses because they help to connect university study with the world of work (Bailey, van Acker, & Fyffe, 2012). While the literature on capstone unit design is abundant, there is little agreement on a single or ideal model for a capstone. SCU information to guide the effective design of capstone units is sparse; likewise there is no consolidated information about the prevalence, nature and roles of capstones in our curricula. Consequently, it is poorly known how best a capstone may address GA7.

Through a 2017 Teaching and Learning seed grant, we are undertaking institutional-wide research to identify and characterise all units identified as capstones, or equivalent, at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Levels 7 and 8 (Honours). Directors of Teaching and Learning identified 50 units perceived to be capstones in their respective courses. Drawing on work by Lee and Loton (2017), an online survey was developed and has collected, from academics involved with the identified capstone units, a record of the characteristics of our capstones, including purpose in relation to knowledge, skills, personal, quality assurance, preparatory and external expectations and standards. The data in this capstone inventory is supplemented with assessment and other relevant information available from UIGs.

Results show that only 22 of the 50 identified units acknowledge GA7, and detailed survey information is available for 18 of these units. Further research is needed to establish the extent to which GA7 is explicitly accounted for in terms of unit content and assessment tasks and marking criteria. Insight gained from such analysis may assist in identifying how GA7 may be more deeply embedded in capstones.


**Addressing academic integrity in mathematics for novice international students**

Dr Michael Brickhill, SCU College  
Associate Professor Thomas Roche, SCU College

In teaching international students within pathway programs, academics engage with students who are often academically and linguistically less prepared than students in bachelor programs. These students bring a richness and diversity of prior educational experience, however this itself can present challenges. Differences in academic practices can lead to students engaging in behaviour that is acceptable in their home countries but deemed unacceptable at their new institution (McGowan & Lightbody, 2009). These differences can manifest themselves as academic integrity breaches (Song-Turner, 2008, Sutton and Taylor, 2011).

Investigating plagiarism and/or collusion can be a fraught exercise, depending upon the assessment and discipline. Though research in sciences (Paxton & Frith, 2014) has explored related mismatches in academic practices, less exploration has occurred in mathematics (Isele, 2018), where many assessments are driven by procedures for which they are a finite number of answers and explanations.

MAT10706 Quantitative Methods with Economics is offered within Southern Cross University’s Diploma of Business pathway program. A major task in this unit asks students to present calculations and summaries explaining results and discussing mathematical assumptions and limitations. Historically, an appreciable number of students are referred for academic integrity investigation at this point, with submitted summaries deemed too similar to those of peers.

A pilot study was undertaken employing a decentralised, unit embedded intervention in which international students in this unit were asked to discern possible academic integrity breaches within three student submissions for an exemplar question. Students identified breaches in two of these submissions. Subsequent reduction in the number of submissions referred for academic integrity investigation suggests that this intervention may have been effective in boosting awareness and practice of academic integrity in this unit.


The Treasure Hunt: Empowering first-year students to find the information they need through an innovative E-learning tool

Dr Alison Watts, School of Business and Tourism
Dr Mieke Witsel, School of Business and Tourism
Craig Wilson, School of Business and Tourism

The online learning environment can be a daunting prospect for many first-year students new to university systems and culture. The vast arrays of information available in a university’s website, whether unit-specific content via the blackboard or the university’s library catalogue, are among the many online spaces that students are expected to master. This paper describes an online orientation exercise, The Treasure Hunt, that students complete as their first assignment in a large, common, first-year core unit. The Treasure Hunt is an online tool that has a dual purpose. Firstly, students progress through a five-step quiz that orients them to finding specific information within the university website; and secondly, it allows teaching staff to assess the level of each student’s engagement with the University’s online environment and early identification of ‘at risk’ students. The unit, Communication in Organisations, is delivered across ten locations including online and transnationally, in which students are asked to complete The Treasure Hunt across all modes and locations as an equitable and inclusive assessment that encourages students to take greater control of their learning (Carroll 2013). As an educational tool, The Treasure Hunt supports students to learn to be competent in their use of technologies, essential in facilitating their learning, and is a scaffolded assessment linked to the skills required in later assignments, such as locating peer-reviewed journal articles and other scholarly literature through the SCU Library catalogue. As a result, The Treasure Hunt supports a diverse cohort of first-year students in their transition to university culture as a useful and innovative e-learning tool, that both is pedagogically useful to teachers, and benefits students as they are introduced to the University’s range of technologies necessary to find the information they need for their studies.

Reducing first year student attrition rates by improving student support through best practices

Associate Professor Marilyn Chaseling, School of Education
Dr Jenelle Benson, School of Education
Dr Christos Markopoulos, School of Education

The aim of this investigation is to improve first-year students’ academic writing skills. A three-stage process was used: i) identification of the main issues in a cohort of first-year students’ assignment writing, ii) development and implementation of resultant initiatives, and iii) evaluation of the initiatives’ impact.

Beginning teacher-education students experience Language and Literacy as they transition into the new learning environment of university (Emerson, Kilpin, & Feekery, 2015). In keeping with the unit’s mantra of “Your success is our goal”, all students are provided with extensive feedback on their writing, via Track Changes and Comments. In 2018 Session 1, 100 of the 500 students had significant academic writing issues on their assignment, a requirement to pass the unit—e.g. paragraph and topic-sentence issues, incomplete sentences, third-person writing difficulties, run-on sentences, and referencing skills. Despite extensive feedback, the resubmits of sixty students still had significant issues. These students were required to resubmit again, this time with intervention support from the unit assessor or Academic Skills. The intervention included scaffolding, modelling, exemplars, and additional focussed resources. The idea behind this approach, was that if we can support students at this junction of their study, they will feel successful and continue in their program. All students, other than two, resubmitted their assignment at a pass standard.

Assignments are being analysed to provide a base line of students’ writing issues. A qualitative research study, based on in-depth interviews, (which has been approved by SCU Ethics) explored the in-sights of a random sample of students who participated in the one-on-one intervention. Findings will provide evidence for the interventions that could be of value for successive cohorts of first year students. The study will be submitted for publication in the International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education.

The Digital Matrix: Engaging with digital literacy

Tanya Honey, University Library
Talli Allen, University Library

Digital literacy is the “capabilities, aptitudes and attitudes an individual needs to thrive in a digital economy and society” (Blanchett, 2006). Within this new and constantly evolving digital landscape, University libraries and academics must be proactive, responsive and supportive when educating students about the magnitudes of these developments (Robinson & Bawden, 2001). To assess if Southern Cross University (SCU) students were effectively equipped with the skills to be digitally capable, the SCU Library evaluated student enquiries and determined that the majority of enquiries from our Information Desks or LibChat service were from first-year, international or online students. Detailed analysis of enquiries from these cohorts demonstrated a number of gaps in students’ digital capacity, highlighting the necessity to develop a program that would empower students to develop digital technology skills. Thus, a digital literacies project was initiated and will evolve over a number of phases. The first phase was a blog entitled 11½ Things consisting of 11 topics, undertaken by SCU library staff to learn and engage in digital literacy activities. The Digital Matrix has been re-envisioned for all SCU staff in the second phase of the project. It incorporates an expanded range of topics designed to enhance staff knowledge and engagement with digital technologies. By increasing SCU staff’s digital literacy skills, they will be more engaged and confident in applying these skills in interactions with students, as academics and support staff. The third phase of The Digital Matrix, which will be informed by evaluation of the previous phases, will be designed for SCU students, particularly first-year and international. The overarching objective of the third phase is to equip students with digital literacy skills to improve their engagement with content, content creation, and their understanding of academic integrity. Evidence shows this can be achieved by incorporating digital literacy into programs such as those offered to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students (Roche, 2017), thus supporting their transition into University culture and enhancing their employability on completion of their studies.

