QUT

Creagh, Tracy A. and Nelson, Karen J. and Clarke, John A. (2010) *The development of a "Good Practice Guide" for first year curriculum development, revision and evaluation : a moving feast.* In: 13th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, 27-30 June 2010, Intercontinental Hotel, Adelaide, SA.

The development of a "Good Practice Guide" for first year curriculum development, revision and evaluation - a moving feast

Tracy A. Creagh
First Year Experience Program, Queensland University of Technology

Karen J. Nelson
First Year Experience Director, Queensland University of Technology

John A. Clarke
First Year Experience Program, Queensland University of Technology

Abstract

Since 2002 QUT has sponsored a range of first year-focussed initiatives, most recently the Transitions In Project (TIP) which was designed to complement the First Year Experience Program and be a capacity building initiative. A primary focus of TIP was The First Year Curriculum Project: the review, development, implementation and evaluation of first year curriculum which has culminated in the development of a "Good Practice Guide" for the management of large first year units. First year curriculum initiates staff-student relationships and provides the scaffolding for the learning experience and engagement. Good practice in first year curriculum is within the control of the institution and can be redesigned and reviewed to improve outcomes. This session will provide a context for the First Year Curriculum Project and a concise overview of the suite of resources developed that have culminated in the Good Practice Guide.

Introduction

Since 2002 QUT has sponsored a range of first year-focussed initiatives, most recently the Transitions In Project (TIP) which was designed to complement the First Year Experience Program and be a capacity building initiative. Over the course of a two-year period (2008-2009) the project engaged over 40 first year unit coordinators, more than 30 first year units and over 10,000 commencing students in all faculties to embed and institutionalise good practice, curriculum design and support for commencing students. In particular, it formed a sustainable community of practice for staff involved with first year units, advised on the development, revision and/or implementation of individual and suites of first year units, designed, trailed and embedded student learning resources and identified and successfully supported over 800 students deemed to be at-risk of disengaging from learning and the institution.

The Good Practice Guide is the culmination of significant activities undertaken and resources developed around the review, development, implementation and evaluation of first year curriculum.

Background

In 2002 QUT released a series of issues papers that came to represent the three principles which guide the First Year Experience Program (FYEP) at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). Consequently, QUT has sponsored a range of first year-focussed initiatives. These have included those that have a bottom-up focus on the development and dissemination of good practice: The *Enhancing Transition at QUT Project* (ET@QUT) (QUT, 2007) [during the period 2006-2007] and the *Transitions In Project* (TIP) (TIP Report 039, 2010) [2008-2009]; and a complementary top-down focus on policy development and implementation: The appointment of a Director, First Year Experience [2006-present] to coordinate the FYEP and chair the FYE Committee, the *First Year Experience Priority Project* (Kift, 2007) [2006-2007] and the endorsement of an *Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Senior Fellowship* (Kift, 2009) [2008-2009].

The FYCP in TIP built on a previous *First Year Curriculum Project* that was carried out at QUT in 2006-2007 (QUT, 2007) and developed a set of broad organising principles for first year curriculum design—the First Year Curriculum Principles (FYCPs) (Kift, 2008). Initial work carried out by Nelson (2006) and Healy (2007) also provided a solid base on which to build this project.

Five Checklists, based on the FYCPs (Kift 2008), were developed and have been used in all faculties. Both the Principles and the Checklists have assisted in pulling together key elements for the construction of guidelines for first year unit outlines. Outcomes from the establishment of a community of practice of first year coordinators (First Year Coordinators Network) reiterated the requirement for additional support and resources for first year staff. An evaluation framework was developed as a result of the Network activities and acts as a template for monitoring the development of first year units. Both the Checklists and Template have been mainstreamed and are being used by the Director, FYE, curriculum design teams and Learning and Teaching Developers to promote good practice in first year curriculum design, implementation and evaluation.

The implementation or embedding of the principles within curriculum design continues this year under the auspices of QUT's FYEP. Taken collectively, this suite of resources forms the "Good Practice Guide" to assist in the development, revision and evaluation of first year curriculum. The elements that make up the suite are discussed in turn.

Developing good practice: the story so far ...

Checklists and principles

The *First Year Curriculum Project* and an ensuing ALTC Senior Fellowship awarded to the then First Year Experience (FYE) Director Professor Sally Kift endorsed the identification of six First Year Curriculum Principles (FYCPs) – "a set of interconnected organising principles to facilitate all students achieving desired learning outcomes to the best of their ability" (Kift, 2009, p. 10). These six guiding principles—Transition, Diversity, Design, Engagement, Assessment and Evaluation and Monitoring—have been endorsed by QUT as a set of broad organising principles for curriculum design (Office of Teaching Quality, 2008)

Subsequent project work has included the development and evaluation of a set of "audience-specific, practitioner focused 'checklists' based on these broad, organising principles" (Duncan et al., 2009).

Inclusive in these documents is a:

- Course Coordinator's Checklist;
- First Year Unit Coordinator's Checklist;
- First Year Unit Writer's Kit;
- First Year Tutor's Checklist; and
- Evaluator's Question Pool.

To bring the principles together at a unit (subject) level a first year unit outline template, which included unit design guidelines, was developed.

Unit outline guidelines for first year units

QUT's unit outline template encompasses nine key areas: Rationale, Aim, Learning Outcomes (inclusive of graduate capabilities), Content, Approaches to teaching and learning, Assessment, Academic Honesty, Resource Materials and a Risk Assessment Statement. The guidelines—colloquially known as "FYEing your unit outline"—interpret what is required for each area in the outline, provides an example statement/notes for each section, link each area to the FY curriculum principles and importantly, outline good practice directives. This resource may be utilised across a diverse array of first year units

The performance of first year units (curriculum) and first year academics (unit coordinators) are often assessed by administering teaching and learning evaluations. Unit or teacher performance may also be influenced by the degree and type of support available to the subject or course coordinator.

Resourcing and support for first year coordinators

In 2008 and 2009, a first year community of practice, the First Year Experience Network (FYEN) was established across the institution under the auspices of the Transitions In Project (Transitions In Report 015, 2009). A significant outcome of the FYEN was the identification of disparate levels of support and resourcing across the schools and faculties that exacerbate their workload. A submission for appropriate institutional levels of resourcing and support to assist the implementation of first year policy and curriculum design principles was endorsed by QUT's First Year Experience Committee (FYEC).

Both FYEN members and the FYEC identified the need for a broad based Evaluation Framework, specifically targeted at large multi-disciplinary and multi-program units to evaluate resource and support provision as well as teaching and learning performance. This framework details the purpose or driver of the unit (i.e. why it was created) plus the audience and cohort. The framework also details the function, features, support, resources, design, evaluation and enactment of the unit as well as alignment with current FY principles. It is intended that this framework be used to emphasise the investment needed to support all first year units across the institution with the goal of improving teaching and learning performance and the experience of first year students.

Putting it all together: A Good Practice Guide for the management of large units

The culmination of work on Principles and Checklists, the outcomes of the FYEN on resourcing and support and the development of an evaluation framework for large first year

units has resulted in the development of the "Good Practice Guide." The Guide directly focuses on the management of large units, defining what is a large first year unit and outlining the responsibilities of unit coordinators. Included in the Guide are details around unit design, for example, alignment with FYCPs and Graduate Capabilities; the training and management of teaching teams specifically around transitioning students; and support and resource details, including administrative and technological support and communication processes.

Session Plan

This session will principally focus on the Good Practice Guide and the key resources and activities developed that underpin the relevance and importance of good practice in first year curriculum. In particular, there will be time to discuss what strategies can be used to raise institutional awareness of the importance of appropriately supporting and resourcing first year units.

Background (5 mins) Summary of initiatives to date – show examples of resources.

Introducing the Good Practice Guide (5 mins) - handouts for audience

Q&A about the resources and guide (5 mins) - audience discussion

Audience Discussion (15 mins): Questions and Prompts including:

What is 'good practice' in first year curriculum design and evaluation?

What strategies do institutions use to raise the profile of FY units and the support of FY unit coordinators?

What are your 5 top tips for introducing an institution-wide FYE good practice guide?

References

Duncan, M., Quinn, C., Nelson, K. Smith, J. Creagh, T. & Clarke, J. (2009). Operationalising first year curriculum principles. *Proceeding of the 12th International Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Preparing for tomorrow today*, Townsville, Australia. Retrieved October 12, 2009 from www.fyhe.qut.edu.au/past_papers/papers09/content/pdf/6C.pdf

Healy, A. (2007). *First year experience: Principles to practice in the Faculty of Education*. Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved December 3, 2008, from https://wiki.qut.edu.au/download/attachments/8702730/FYE+-+Healy+Oct++07+-+Policy+to+Good+Prac+examples.doc?version=1

Kift, S. (2008). The next, great first year challenge: Sustaining, coordinating and embedding coherent institution–wide approaches to enact the FYE as "everybody's business". Keynote address given at the *11th International Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, An Apple for the Learner: Celebrating the First Year Experience*, 2008, Hobart, Australia. Retrieved October 12, 2009 from

http://www.fyhe.qut.edu.au/past_papers/papers08/FYHE2008/content/pdfs/Keynote%20-%20Kift.pdf

Kift, S. (2009). *Articulating the transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education*. Final Report for the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Senior Fellowship Program. Retrieved February 12, 2010 from http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-first-year-learning-experience-kift-2009

Nelson, K. J. (2006). *FYE curriculum framework*. Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved December 3, 2008, from

https://wiki.qut.edu.au/download/attachments/8702730/2006_Curriculum_Framework_Guide.doc?version=1

Queensland University of Technology. (2002a). *Issues Paper 1: Engaging Learning Experiences*. QUT First Year Experience Program. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved February 12, 2010 from https://wiki.qut.edu.au/download/attachments/80840589/FYE_issues_paper_I.pdf?version=1

Queensland University of Technology. (2002b). *Issues Paper 2: Awareness of and timely access to support services*. QUT First Year Experience Program. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved February 12, 2010 from https://wiki.qut.edu.au/download/attachments/80840589/FYE_issues_paper_2.pdf?version=2

Queensland University of Technology. (2002c). *Issues Paper 3: A 'sense of belonging'*. QUT First Year Experience Program. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved February 12, 2010 from https://wiki.qut.edu.au/download/attachments/80840589/FYE_issues_paper_3.pdf?version=1

Queensland University of Technology. (2007). *QUT Committee Submission.* Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, Australia. Retrieved December 2, 2008, from https://wiki.qut.edu.au/download/attachments/63275578/tl-071030-6.5-fyedesignprincp.doc?version=1

Queensland University of Technology. (2010). *Office of Teaching Quality. Protocols: First Year Experience. Protocols to accompany the Policy for First Year Experience*. Manual of Policy and Procedures C/6.2. Retrieved February 4, 2010 from http://www.otq.qut.edu.au/guidelines/protocols_fye.pdf

Transitions In Report 015. (2009). *The First Year Experience Network Staff Development Project. Forming and sustaining a community of practice for staff involved with large first year core units: The First Year Experience Network*. Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, Australia

Transitions In Project Report 039. (2010). *The Transitions In Project - Final report*. Prepared for the Steering Committee. Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, Australia.