

as a means of recognising good teaching within the faculty which staff had felt was not valued as an activity in itself or for any purpose, even personal promotion.

The law faculty also has had a long-standing teaching interest group, which has addressed many current issues in teaching and learning over that time, including issues in assessment, curriculum development and innovation, demonstrations of teaching technique, use of technology in teaching, skills development, incorporation of generic capabilities in the curriculum, and reflections from visiting academics about teaching and learning in their institutions. However, although the group is valued by staff, particularly as a means of disseminating interesting innovations from their own classrooms, and encouraging peer mentoring, it does not represent a structured response to the need for teaching improvement or training.

The question must be asked as to whether the imposition of teaching accreditation will have an unduly detrimental effect on academics in law schools. One of the dangers of accreditation is that the schemes developed are trying to be a 'one size fits all' approach. Different subjects need to be taught in different ways. Different teachers communicate differently. Mandatory accreditation runs the risk of simply being a generic qualification and another barrier to academia.

What do current law teachers think they need? The most pressing requirement for law teachers in the attainment of a doctoral qualification. Since this qualification demands total dedication to the writing of a thesis, there would seem to be little time left to complete a teaching qualification as well. In addition, law teachers might specify that they require assistance with the following, pending changes in the curriculum to include more skills training and use of technology: training in technological skills that includes the pedagogical aspects of websites; assistance in determining the most meaningful use of teaching aids; help in dealing with English as a Second Language students; more guidance in respect of the increasing emphasis on contextualisation; guidance in the differences of approach and techniques needed for large and small group teaching; guidance in terms of Mooting and problem setting skills; and more expert level training on all the skills needing to be included in law degrees.

A position of encouragement of voluntary training in a set time frame represents the best outcome, and one which may add the most value. But which form of voluntary training? Perhaps one answer might be training courses offered with continuing education points attached. The courses would need to be refereed and each academic staff member might be asked to accumulate a number of training points per year.

Small group learning in real property law

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TEACHING METHODS & MEDIA

The learning and teaching of real property law is a challenge for both student and teacher. Students of Property Law, which is a core, full year subject at Monash University, Australia, are generally in the second or third year of their law degree and have completed a small number of law subjects. It is the first conceptually difficult subject that students encounter in their undergraduate degree and, as a result, Property Law often has the highest annual failure rate in Monash Law.

Traditionally, Property Law has been taught by means of lectures, supported by tutorials. Students have also been encouraged to study in small groups. Although the tutorials provide a forum for interaction, discussion and problem-solving in a medium-sized group, the enrolments in each lecture stream and the size of the lecture spaces needed to accommodate them are not conducive to encouraging students to engage actively with the class and with the subject matter. Assessment has traditionally been by examination or by examination and research assignment.

The authors sought to improve student attitudes to and the learning and teaching of Property Law as well as the profile of the subject. They decided to pilot a small group learning project that would implement principles of good teaching practice and provide a team based, collaborative learning environment in which students of Property Law could gain confidence and learn among their peers, engage in active learning and extend their interpersonal and communication skills.

The project was comprised of two components: self-learning groups (SLGs) and research assignment syndicates (RASs). The tutorial group was used as the vehicle for the project. During the year each SLG was required to present two problems from the booklet to their tutorial group, one in each semester. Assessment took into account each student's tutorial attendance and contribution to class discussion as well as preparation for and presentation of the two problems, a total of five percent.

One of the main motivational factors for introducing small groups was the recognition of the importance of cooperative working among peers with the resultant enhanced communication skills and tolerance of divergent points of view. Students' ability to 'feed off' one another has both positive

and negative connotations. It encourages the sharing of ideas and drawing of inspiration from one another. On the negative side, the authors envisaged a potential problem with freeloaders and the outsider. The code of ethics and work program were intended largely to circumvent this issue.

When canvassed informally in tutorials prior to experiencing small group learning in Property Law, many of the students seemed to have a positive view of working in small groups for tutorial presentations. However, fewer students seemed to feel positive about completing their research assignment in groups.

When the idea of small group learning was introduced to students, the information provided was sparing and in general terms. With hindsight, and with the benefit of the insight provided by case studies, it would have been preferable for additional and more specific information to be available to students to provide them with a firmer foundation for drafting of a more detailed code of ethics and for better mental preparation for the tasks ahead.

Feedback was provided to students about the content of their research assignments and group presentations. However, the authors offered little input about or evaluation of the groups' working as a team or the division of tasks. Students were thus offered little guidance on how to operate within the group rather than as an individual, but generally seemed to develop the teamwork skills required.

Pedagogically the small group team based approach is a sound one. As the respondents reported, it provides students with an opportunity to share information, opinions and ideas through in depth discussion as well as to interact and communicate with one another in an environment of mutual support. This cooperation and pooling of resources in turn can lead to a greater understanding of the subject matter and improved study techniques and problem solving skills. Students can also acquire or develop interpersonal skills including the ability to communicate, compromise and cooperate in a group.

There was some commonality between the top SLG and RAS benefits identified by the students: sharing of opinions and discussion; sharing of workload; acquisition of interpersonal and academic skills; social interaction; and increased understanding of Property Law. The difficulty that stands out for both forms of small group work is logistics and is one of the variables encountered in group work that are generally beyond the control of the teacher.

Notwithstanding the benefits of the RAS identified by respondents, in light of the nature of the difficulties experienced and the relatively high proportion of the students' annual assessment attributable to this component and given that the average reaction was negative, it is hard to justify the continued use of the RAS. Conversely, despite the range of difficulties associated with the SLGs, in light of the nature of the benefits gained and, given that the average reaction was more positive, the authors believe that SLGs should continue.

However, given that administering SLGs and oral presentations is also extremely time consuming and resource intensive, it may not be feasible to maintain small group learning in the form described. Even if it is not possible to continue with SLGs on a formal basis, students of Property Law are still encouraged to form and work in SLGs informally as before.

TECHNOLOGY

Information technology and US legal education: opportunities, challenges, and threats

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Digital technology holds out exciting opportunities to US law schools. They can involve academics, lawyers, and judges situated anywhere in the world in their educational program; offer both less costly and more flexible educational arrangements; provide access to students currently excluded by cost and distance; distribute faculty scholarship more widely, at less cost; share courses and students; and extend their reach to regions and educational audiences previously closed. It also exposes US law schools individually and collectively to severe challenges.

Not only may others take advantage of the new opportunities opened by digital technology, but they may also upset the current market for JD education. Possible futures include: the emergence of a few dominant programs, at least for some segments of the already stratified legal education marketplace; law schools retaining credentialing authority while more and more of the preceding education is delivered by commercial entities; failure for law schools that cannot deliver value for the added costs entailed in residential instruction; and erosion of the symbiosis between faculty teaching and scholarship.

Many schools lack the institutional competence to respond effectively. Among the organisational and cultural elements that handicap law schools in the current environment are: limited capacity to respond quickly and strategically to external change; narrow notions of mission and market; an approach to academic program planning and governance generally that defers heavily to individual