POLICY ON QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Introduction
Australian Catholic University shares with universities world-wide a commitment to high-quality teaching and learning, research and service. It is aware that its reputation as a higher education institution is based on its ability to excel in teaching and learning and to produce quality graduates.

Among the priority goals for quality assurance are the following:

- course development and review will contribute towards the realisation of the University’s graduate attributes;
- staff development will be directed towards innovative teaching and learning approaches in courses offered by the University;
- systematic feedback on teaching and learning quality will be incorporated into all courses offered by the University; and
- learning resources and student services will be related to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning activities.

Responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning resides in the Faculties. Within the framework of the University’s Teaching and learning Plan, each Faculty has a derivative Teaching and Learning Plan or equivalent, which is updated annually and in which the procedures for ensuring quality in teaching and learning are described in detail, with the enhancement of learning the primary outcome of quality teaching.

Understanding Quality Teaching
In one sense, effective teaching is very easy to identify: it is what leads to effective learning. It is not as easy, however, to specify what particular approaches and techniques will produce this desired result. The literature on effective teaching in higher education stresses that there is no straightforward formula, no single way of helping people to learn. Students testify that they have learned well in a variety of contexts, from a variety of teaching styles, ranging from the charismatic brilliant lecturer to the non-interventionist, supportive facilitator.

It is possible, however, to articulate broad, general principles as a guide to staff and students. In recent years, a great deal of work has gone into the formulation of such principles at a national level and very useful sets of guidelines have been published, after consultation with interested groups in higher education. These include AVCC’s Guidelines for Effective University Teaching (1993) and the DETYA document Benchmarking: A manual for Australian universities (McKinnon, Walker and Davis, 2000, Chapter 6).

In order to maximise the potential of the learning experience for all students at Australian Catholic University, members of the Faculties responsible for course delivery are encouraged to achieve the following characteristics of effective teaching.

Effective Teaching
- is conducted in the context of, and with reference to, the goals and objectives of the University, and its Faculties and Schools;
- is focused on learning outcomes for students, in the form of knowledge, understanding and skills and aims to develop the attitudes and values of mature adult learners;
- proceeds from an understanding of students’ knowledge, capabilities and backgrounds;
- is coherent, in the integration of objectives with teaching procedures and assessment;
- ensures the clear communication to students of expectations, requirements and ways in which they can achieve their potential;
- engages students as active participants in the learning process, while acknowledging that all learning must involve a complex interplay of active and receptive processes, the constructing of meaning for oneself, and learning with and from others;
- encourages questioning and criticism of accepted views and theories;
- is based on an awareness of the limited and provisional nature of knowledge in all fields;
is linked with the latest research and scholarship in ways that allow students to see how understanding evolves and is subject to challenge and revision;

• attempts to excite students about innovative developments in their discipline areas;
• promotes the development of co-operative learning among students and lecturers;
• provides opportunity for improved information literacy, including educational use of the Internet;
• makes use of a wide range of teaching strategies, including the use of various information and communication technologies;
• encourages students to develop independent learning skills by providing appropriate tasks to develop analytical and critical thinking skills;
• respects students’ views and responses;
• is grounded in a concern for the welfare and progress of individual students;
• assists students to form broad conceptual understandings of areas of knowledge;
• encompasses an inclusive curriculum, being open to a range of perspectives from groups of different cultural background, and is committed to creating learning climates, which are supportive of all students;
• is sensitive to the particular needs of students with disabilities;
• encourages awareness of Mission focus including ethical dimensions of issues and problems;
• takes into account feedback from students about their learning and the perceived effectiveness of teaching strategies, obtained regularly through a range of formal and informal evaluations.

The University’s Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning focuses on providing assistance to lecturers in many of the areas listed above. It also responds to expressions of need identified by academic staff either formally through the Academic Staff Review Planning Program or informally as a result of individual staff requests.

Understanding Quality Learning
While the learning promoted by all universities is focused primarily in the areas of knowledge and understanding and cognitive skills, Australian Catholic University focuses particularly on learning leading to the holistic development of its students and staff. Good teaching can enhance many aspects of learning, including physical, aesthetic, intellectual and personal dimensions. However, an individual's beliefs, dispositions, attitudes and values all influence personal learning and effective personal learning depends upon an open-minded response from the learner.

To stress the importance of promoting holistic learning, a "Learning Paradigm" is embedded in the University's Strategic Plan:

What value the Learning Paradigm adds to the style and substance of this University's existence is central to its raison d'être. The University should provide the right kind of learning experiences, be they academic, spiritual, ethical or other; and the University fundamentally should be at the service of its students as it attempts to assist each of them, "its entire diversified and dispersed student body", as part of their "personal, spiritual and moral development" so that they will become "valued in employment and in the life of the community at large". The Learning Paradigm reflects this self-understanding of the role and purpose of the University as it aims to discern methods and approaches that best suit the needs of the students. (Australian Catholic University Strategic Plan Working Paper No 2 – The Learning Paradigm).

Effective Adult Learning
• is autonomous and self-motivated;
• is characterised by the individual taking satisfaction in the mastering of content and skills;
• realises the development of a sense of the academic disciplines;
• proceeds from the learner striving to grasp the "meaning" of what is being learnt, both for the wellbeing of the individual and the community;
• can be fostered by cooperation and respectful interaction with others;
• has a lifelong orientation for the enhancement of the individual and society;
• is open to educational contributions through the use of the Internet and of various information and communication technologies;
• is critical, looking beneath the surface level of information for the meaning and significance of what is being studied;
• includes the development of an historical perspective;
• seeks awareness of any pertinent spiritual, moral and justice issues related to the material being studied;
• values individuality and personal interests, moderated by a sense of responsibility and commitment to the ideals of community.

Support for Teaching and Learning
Effective teaching and learning at Australian Catholic University is encouraged by a range of strategies, which have been endorsed by Academic Board for the support of quality teaching and learning. These strategies are related to the following:

• Academic Skills program
• Academic staff mentoring
• Academic Staff Review Planning Program
• ACU National On-line
• Australian Awards for University Teaching
• Australian Universities Teaching Committee projects
• Australian Catholic University Award for Excellence in Postgraduate Research Supervision
• Australian Catholic University Excellence in Teaching Awards
• Australian Catholic University Teaching Development Grants
• Course and unit evaluation policies and practices
• Institute for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning
• Involvement by staff in research and conferences
• Outside Studies Program
• Promotion of academic staff
• Promotion of the nexus between teaching and learning, and research
• University Teaching and Learning Committee, which reports to Academic Board
• University Teaching and Learning Evaluation Committee which reports to the University Teaching and Learning Committee
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY ON QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Procedures for Ensuring Quality in Teaching and Learning

The University focuses on quality teaching and learning guided by the University’s Teaching and Learning Plan. Examples of procedures which have been adopted to ensure a high standard of teaching and learning are:

• processes of teaching and learning based on explicit objectives which are consistent with course aims and outcomes;
• teaching methods which are varied and innovative where this would be appropriate in pursuit of stated objectives;
• teaching which is structured to make effective use of available facilities, equipment, material and resources;
• teaching which is well-planned and prepared to meet the diverse needs of students;
• pace of teaching which takes due account of the nature of the curriculum, students’ varied abilities and prior learning, and the specific needs of the total spectrum of students;
• collaboration by academic staff through discipline networks to ensure quality in the planning, preparation, delivery, assessment and evaluation of subject units;
• implementation of formal, standardised processes of unit evaluation involving both student and lecturer review at the end of each semester.

A process of monitoring quality has been established by each Faculty. Responsibility for each of the above procedures has been identified and the steps to be followed have been documented. The maintenance of records has also been addressed and the record-holder nominated.

As part of the ongoing focus on quality assurance the Faculties determine priorities for each year. Recent examples of improvements identified have been:

• consideration of the basic objectives of courses, to accommodate a flexible approach to course completion requirements without compromising standards;
• maintenance of academic standards for all students, while allowing flexibility in the arrangements for students with disabilities;
• improvement of academic staff members’ awareness of issues related to students with disabilities;
• assistance to students with disabilities to gain equal access to lectures and to course materials and assessment procedures;
• promotion of sharing of resources and strategies for teaching common Faculty units across the campuses;
• development of some units for flexible delivery using distance education and off-campus modes;
• encouragement of best practice in teaching within a Faculty;
• utilisation of internal and external moderation, including outside marking of a sample of final year assignments and all Honours and Research theses.

Indicators for determining successful outcomes in these areas of improvement have been identified, for example, numbers of students from equity groups who enrol and successfully complete courses, and monitoring applicants for Excellence in Teaching and Postgraduate Research Supervision Awards and Teaching Development Grants. Data relating to teaching and learning indicators have been collected and analysed as part of the University’s “Culture of Evidence” project.