QUT CASE STUDY 2 - THE COORDINATORS OF LARGE UNITS PROGRAM

In 2001, QUT’s University Teaching and Learning Committee considered a submission from the Director, Human Resources (HR) Department to support a year-long program for Coordinators of Large Units (CLUs). Subsequent to this submission, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor allocated $20,000 in funding to conduct a program for CLUs in 2002. The program, jointly coordinated by Teaching and Learning Support Services (TALSS) and HR, aims to support CLUs in the teaching, student learning, management and leadership aspects of their role. The CLU program acknowledges the significant contribution made by sessional teaching staff to the delivery of large units and the concomitant need to provide professional development opportunities for CLU’s that enhance their skills in managing large teaching teams from both a pedagogical and administrative perspective.

The desired outcomes of the 2002 Coordinators of Large Units program were to:

1. Develop the individual and organisational capabilities of CLUs to improve their practice across teaching and learning and management and leadership
2. Uncover the systemic barriers to CLU effectiveness
3. Provide a forum for CLU networking across the university community
4. Provide a program to acknowledge the value and contribution of CLUs to the QUT teaching and learning environment.

A broader aim of the program was for these outcomes to ultimately lead to improved student learning outcomes in large, often first year units aligning to the 2003 - 2007 University Teaching and Learning Plan, Objective 3 and Strategy 3.1:

Objective 3
Facilitate students’ transition to University study.

Strategy 3.1
Develop strategies for improving teaching and learning in large classes.

University-level programs
A program to support coordinators of large units has been developed by TALSS and the Human Resources Department.

THE 2002 CLU PROGRAM

The 2002 CLU program incorporated:

1. Seminars and workshops delivered by experts from both within the QUT community and beyond (sessions included a catered lunch, to facilitate networking amongst CLUs);

It should be noted that efforts were made at the beginning of the 2002 CLU program to determine a quantitative definition of a Large Unit. However, in line with the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) national project that focussed on Teaching Large Classes, a functional definition was developed instead which recognises the diverse nature of QUT’s teaching and learning environment:

Large units are typically first or second year core units, which may be undertaken by more than one course cohort. Unit coordinators for these units tend to have an above average assessment workload and a significant management responsibility for tutors and/or demonstrators, who support the learning in the unit. Coordinators of these units play an important role in students’ transition to university. The student experience within these units forms initial and lasting impressions of teaching and learning in the university context.

An example of an individual capability is the ability to lead a team (such as the tutoring team in a large unit). An example of an organisational capability is the ability to negotiate the QUT systems for appointment of casual academic staff.
2. A reference group of CLU representatives drawn from across the Faculties who met to determine overall directions of the program. This group had the dual role of consultants to program directions and for providing communication links to CLUs within each Faculty. In many cases Reference Group members were representatives on Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees or equivalent;

3. A CLU grant scheme, which funded three faculty, based research and product outcome projects. Each project was funded for approximately $3000 and awarded on a competitive basis through an application process;

5. A presentation to a Heads of Schools forum featuring an introduction to CLU issues and asking Heads Of School to contribute to an issues paper;

6. The development of a CLU website;

7. Updates to University Teaching and Learning Committee.

The seminars and workshops of item 1 above were based around the following topics:

An introductory session with presentations from CLUs about managing the employment and support of sessional teaching staff

- Assessment in Large Classes
- Emotional Intelligence and Teamwork for CLUs
- Managing Upwards
- Student Learning support in Large Classes
- An OLT workshop specifically for CLUs
- An IT issues forum specifically for CLUs
- Presentation by the Director of Teaching and Learning Support Services and the Dean of the Faculty of Science at the Head of Schools Forum (see appendix 1)

A facilitation/development team undertook organisation and content elaboration of the 2002 CLU program with representatives from TALSS Teaching and Learning Hub and HR Strategic Services.

**THE CLU PROGRAM AND SESSIONAL TEACHING STAFF**

*Coordinators of Large Unit sessions with specific relevance to sessional staff*

A number of the sessions offered through the CLU program provided a direct focus on the need for better support and communication strategies relating to the needs of sessional teaching staff including:

*Coordinators of Large Units support and development for sessional teaching staff* - this session offered a number of presentations that focussed on the following issues: employing and resourcing sessional teaching staff, getting started on management and administration; embedding theory and skills across a unit; sessional teaching staff development program.
Coordinators of Large Units getting the most from QUT’s Online Teaching (OLT) system in communicating with large numbers of students and large teaching teams - this hands on session was conducted in a computing laboratory to provide the opportunity for CLUs to workshop OLT’s capacity for facilitating better communication across large units involving large numbers of staff and students. The session will explored ways that the OLT system can be used in more efficient and effective ways for communicating across teaching teams, establishing forums for teaching teams and developing information bulletins.

Coordinators of large units and those involved with managing and administration of large units and large teaching teams are invited to help create an "IT users perspective issues paper" - This session provided an opportunity for CLU’s to improve the quality of IT provision at QUT by work shopping the IT issues that are of significance in the delivery of large units. The objective of this session was to provide an information gathering and discussion forum to inform an "IT User Perspective Issues Paper" that will be tabled at relevant QUT Committees, such as the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Information Technology Strategic Governance Committee, which advises the Vice-Chancellor on IT matters.

Team work and the coordination of large units - this session focussed on strategies that can be used to engage the whole team in developing a course.

Coordinators of Large Units Faculty-based project scheme 2002

The three projects funded under the 2002 Coordinators of Large Units Faculty-based project scheme were all directly related to improving support and development for sessional teaching staff:

- Innovative induction of new Coordinators of Large Units in the Bachelor of Education: Development of staff management and leadership (Faculty of Education)
- Enhancing the development of tutors by developing and implementing a comprehensive Tutorial Teaching and Learning Resource Kit to improve the effectiveness and consistency of small group teaching and learning activities in large units (Faculty of Health)
- A Practical Toolkit to assist in a large unit to resolve conflict within a teaching team (Faculty of Law).

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

A plan for evaluating the CLU Program for 2002 was developed using the Flashlight Methodology. In brief the Flashlight framework is built around an issue of interest from which a problem is highlighted. This problem is explored through a triad of three key areas:

- the desired outcomes;
- the activities (learning activities) that have been used to support the desired outcomes;
- the technology or strategy that has been used to support the activities.

By considering the effectiveness of each of these three areas and the relationship between them, questions are posed as a means to explore the issue of interest. In the case represented here, the evaluation of the 2002 CLU program was the focus of the evaluation to:
• determine the effectiveness of program activities of 2002 in achieving the desired outcomes, where effectiveness is defined across a spectrum from positive reactions from participants through to changing practice within the organisation

• develop a proposal for a CLU program in 2003

• develop the rationale and methodology for the 2003 program.

A number of questions were posed and data was collected via:

1. Immediate feedback from each of the seminar presentation
2. Semi-structured interviews with CLUs; who:
   a) participated in the program activities and
   b) did not participate in the program activities, ensuring representation from all Faculties
3. A feedback meeting with CLU Reference Group members
4. Discussion and comments made at the Heads of School Forum
5. A reflective meeting of the Facilitation/Development team (HR and TALSS).

*Note that final reports on CLU projects are due in February 2003 therefore minimal attention was given to outcomes of this component of the program in this evaluation process.

CONCLUSION

The CLU program for 2002 began the process of providing development opportunities for a cohort of academic staff in the University who are key to QUT’s success in supporting student learning. Coordinators of Large Units face a number of challenges in a role requiring skills in not only teaching and learning but also management and leadership. The ultimate beneficiaries of a program of this type are the students and the sessional staff who make a substantial contribution to teaching and learning in large units.
Appendix One: Summary of the Discussion from the Heads of School Forum

The Head of School (HOS) Forum on involved the presentation of a draft issues paper highlighting some of the intersecting issues that CLUs face. Professor Gail Hart Director of Teaching and Learning Support Services introduced the session in which a model of CLU issues was presented (see Figure A4.1) and discussed. Professor John Gough Dean of the Faculty of Information Technology reported on the Faculty of Information Technology’s initiatives to support CLUs. Discussion included:

- The IT Faculty reported on the model of administrative support which they developed and implemented;
- There was interest from other Heads of School in the model as well as discussion around what is administrative and what is academic?
- Some discussion also on allocation of CLUs in which some HOS mentioned that they really had no choice because they had so few people who were able to do those roles;
- One HOS mentioned that first year CLUs were senior staff because this was the means of "attracting" students to their discipline area
- There was broad interest and support for the CLU program but it was also apparent that HOS were grappling with issues about how to support CLUs within their own constraints.