



## A Multi-layered Approach to a University Tutor Training Program

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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\* In 2007 the Faculty of Commerce and Economics (FCE) amalgamated with the Australian Graduate School of Management (AGSM) to become the Australian School of Business (ASB).

### Abstract

This case study describes a three-module program, **Principles of Tutoring**, designed for new tutors in the Australian School of Business at UNSW. Input from students, new tutors, experienced tutors, lecturers in charge and course coordinators was strongly encouraged during the program's initial and ongoing development. The learning outcomes, structure and content of the program draw on current higher education scholarship as well as adult education literature and theory.

The evolution of the program over the past three years has resulted in a holistic approach that focuses not only on good teaching practice but also on self-management and critical reflection skills. This case study provides background to the program and highlights some of the features that more fully enable participants to balance the demands of their tutoring role with family, work and postgraduate study commitments.

### Context

The Australian School of Business (ASB) at UNSW consists of nine schools with over 8000 students and approximately 220 academic staff. Tutors teach in one or more of the Faculty's nine schools and teach at either undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Most of them are either undertaking postgraduate research work in the Faculty or are in the third or fourth years of their undergraduate degrees. Some of them have had prior teaching experience or have been leaders in the Faculty's Peer Assisted Support Scheme (PASS).

### Aims

The Principles of Tutoring program was developed in response to a growing awareness that tutors needed more support; tutor training was identified as a priority in the Strategic Plan of the Faculty's Education Development Unit (EDU); lecturers identified that many new tutors lack skills; and tutors themselves identified gaps in the skills required to meet the learning and teaching objectives of their schools.

### Outcomes

The establishment of an ongoing peer network for participants.

Opportunities for sharing classroom ideas and strategies.

A safe environment for role-playing classroom scenarios.

Opportunities for modelling good practice in a small-group setting.

### What was done?

While mentoring was considered as an option, the size of the Faculty made such an approach impractical. Instead, a training program was seen as the most effective way of preparing tutors for their role. Consultation was conducted with Heads of School, lecturers and tutors across the Faculty.

**The Principles of Tutoring program** broadly aims to lay solid foundations for good teaching practice by:

introducing participants to certain principles that underlie effective facilitation of classes (wherever possible, these are embedded in the specific context of the participants' classes) and increasing their effectiveness in this area;

developing participants' confidence in and enjoyment of their tutoring role;

emphasising the importance of critical reflection; and

fostering growth in interpersonal skills and self-management.

It is the faculty's expectation that all new tutors will attend the entire program; indeed, they are paid to do so. In session 1 each year, as many as 60 new tutors enrol.

#### **Module 1 - Preparing to tutor**

This module is offered in the first week of session. Because most tutorials start in the second week, this module focuses on providing participants with strategies for their very first classes. The importance of the first class is emphasised for setting the tone and structure for the remainder of the session.

The module's topics include:

- understanding the importance of the tutor's role;
- establishing a relationship with your students;
- captivating the attention of your students;
- developing teaching techniques;
- structuring a learner-centred class; and
- planning your tutorial.

#### **Module 2 - Facilitating interaction**

This module is held at the end of the second week of session, after participants have taught their first classes.

The module's topics include:

- understanding learning preferences;
- responding to diverse needs and abilities;
- asking and answering questions effectively;
- encouraging active learning;
- achieving participation through awareness of cross-cultural backgrounds; and
- assessing class participation.

### Module 3- Self-managing

This module is taught in week 4 or 5, and it is typically a time when participants are starting to struggle with balancing other demands, most typically associated with their postgraduate study, family and other work commitments. Because this is the final module in the program, the emphasis is on gaining student feedback, reflection and ongoing professional development.

The module's topics include:

- building confidence;
- balancing your workload;
- dealing with difficult situations;
- reflecting on feedback; and
- ensuring continuous development.

Throughout the whole program, the participants are introduced to certain principles that underlie effective facilitation of classes. These principles also underpin the development and implementation of this course, which is described below. Broadly speaking, the principles are:

a student-centred approach to learning and teaching is likely to foster deep student learning;

students learn in different ways and their learning can be better supported by the use of multiple teaching methods and modes of instruction (UNSW Guideline 9);

effective student learning is supported when students are actively engaged in the learning process (UNSW Guideline 1);

the educational experiences of all students are enhanced when the diversity of their experiences is acknowledged, valued, and drawn on in learning and teaching approaches and activities (UNSW Guideline 8);

structured occasions for reflection allow students to explore their experiences, challenge current beliefs, and develop new practices and understandings (UNSW Guideline 4); and

external factors, such as inability to manage time and stress, impact on the quality of learning and teaching that participants provide.

### Resources

Participants are provided with a resource folder that is updated and revised each session. This folder contains the relevant materials for the tutor training classes, valuable supplementary exercises and suggestions, and readings that elaborate on the theoretical foundations of some of the program's principles.

The resource folder also contains useful information about the practical aspects of the Australian School of Business especially in relationship to human resources, equity, occupational health and safety and university policy.

### Certification

If participants have completed all of the program's requirements, they are presented with a certificate of completion by the Dean at the end of the year. This is a valuable document for participants to include in their teaching portfolios.

### Critical Success Factors

The process of planning and setting objectives for a tutor training program involves input from several different parties.

The effectiveness of changes is carefully monitored from many perspectives.

The program takes an holistic approach caring for tutors' whole beings, not just their teaching practice.

Participants respond well to opportunities for sharing with other participants their challenges, resources and ideas.

The involvement of lecturers-in-charge makes or breaks a tutor training program.

### Review and Improvement

All aspects of the Program are evaluated on a regular basis using student feedback, staff satisfaction surveys, and consultation with faculty staff at all levels.

One of the key factors that impacts on participants' capacity to implement the principles taught in the program is the culture of the school in which they are working.

It is clearly important that participants receive consistent messages about learning and teaching from lecturers-in-charge and the EDU staff who are facilitating the program.

This requires effective communication between the two parties. It has become essential for the program to be flexible enough to accommodate and support a culture that places more emphasis on content delivery and less on student interaction. It is also necessary to continue to seek feedback from lecturers-in-charge about the relevance of the program to their tutors' contexts.

These considerations have shaped the program's continual improvement cycle, along with feedback gained from the evaluation activities above. The program has now become more contextualised, and we have:

- increased the time given to reflection, group sharing, self-management and discussion of diversity;

- included panels in which experienced tutors share their experiences;

- reduced the focus on conceptual and abstract material such as experiential learning; and

- included more opportunities for reflection on the relevance and value of material to individual circumstances.

### Challenges

Encouraging Faculty staff to become more involved in the program.

Ensuring a continuous feedback loop between students, tutors, course coordinators and learning and teaching staff.

### Links and Resources

A full version of this case study can be found on pp. 31-52 of the *UNSW Compendium of Good Practice*.  
[www.ltu.unsw.edu.au/content/userDocs/Compendium\\_Issue4\\_Feb07.pdf](http://www.ltu.unsw.edu.au/content/userDocs/Compendium_Issue4_Feb07.pdf)