



## Academic Management of a Multi-location Teaching Team

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### Abstract

**This case study illustrates one example of how the coordinator for a subject delivered to multiple campuses and involving a distributed team of teachers meets the challenge of facilitating clear, consistent and effective communication; professional learning opportunities; collegial reciprocity; and cohesive teaching across all sites. Over and above the induction process already available through the faculty, the academic management of this teaching team includes a reference package, an online resource called 'The Tutors' Lounge' to facilitate quality assurance as well as ongoing professional development through shared collegial practice, marking standards processes and a final teaching team meeting.**

### Context

ARTS112: People and Place is a first semester, first year Humanities subject that is currently the only core/compulsory subject for the Bachelor of Arts: Community, Culture and Environment designed specifically for the regional campus network.

It is delivered using a range of methods which include face-to-face teaching, online learning/teaching and videoconferencing. The subject design has an embedded sequence of exercises to facilitate the learning of academic and multiple media skills. Subject content introduces students to multiple – and sometimes conflicting – ideas about nation and national identity.

Because the theory is complex, classes demographically diverse, and skills levels widely varied, the subject poses distinct challenges for tutors. Over and above the actual teaching, they have to manage the student stresses that can sometimes arise from trying to find a way into new and challenging ideas.

Each semester there are five to seven tutors teaching the subjects across four campuses. The most geographically distant of these campuses is located in a rural community some 400 kilometres from the central institution, the most urban, 86 kilometres.

### Aims

- To develop processes that assure quality teaching in the subject
- To build a sense of community among the multi-location teaching team
- To support professional development of casual teaching staff to enhance student learning.

## Outcomes

A connected and engaged teaching team

A community of practice characterised by reciprocity and trust

Iterative improvements to the subject design and delivery based on tutor feedback

Effective workload management for the teaching team

Professional development through dialogue with peers

## What was done?

### Induction

The Faculty of Arts provides a formal induction for all sessional staff at the beginning of each year. During this induction, teaching team meetings are scheduled with the subject coordinator.

This initial meeting is used to:

- introduce new teaching team members to the rest of the team;

- brief the teaching staff on the aims of the subject, its objectives and assessment and other requirements;

- work through the subject outline and assessment tasks; and
- reflect on the delivery of the subject in the previous year.

## Course materials and tutorial guides

Tutors are provided with a package which includes the subject outline, the students' subject workbook and the Tutor Notes Booklet.

Tutor Notes Booklet: this is a teaching and reference resource for the delivery of the subject. It includes:

- A Welcome from the subject coordinator that acknowledges each member of the team and establishes context for the community of teaching practice;

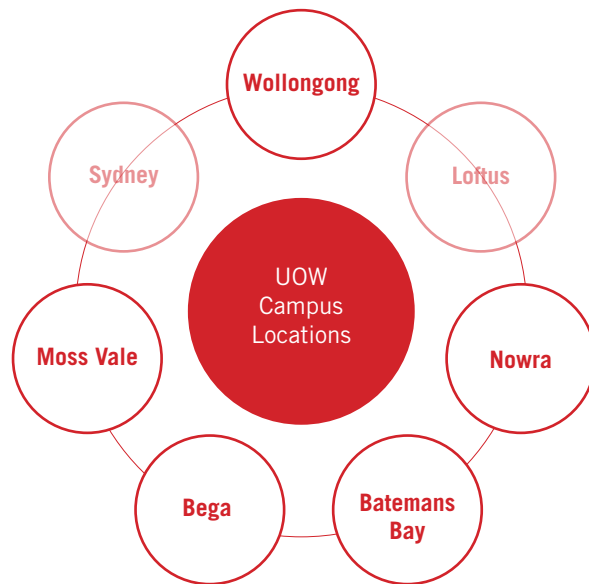
- 'Team duties and Responsibilities': a section that explicitly outlines the duties and responsibilities of the subject coordinator and the tutors;

- 'The Subject': provides an outline of the pedagogical design and teaching requirements for the subject;

- 'WebCT Discussion': provides details of how this component links with in-class discussion topics;

- Description of assessment tasks and pedagogical frameworks;

- Suggested weekly tutorial plans and activities; tips for managing small group work in tutorials.



### The Tutors' Lounge

'The Tutors' Lounge' originated as an online communication device specific to the subject. It is located on the subject online site and accessible only to the teaching staff.

From the subject coordinator's perspective, the Lounge is for sharing good practice, providing professional support, and quality assuring subject delivery and grade standards across all sites.

Research into tutors' use of the Lounge indicates they prefer:

- dropping in to see what people were saying and thinking (in particular how the experienced tutors were handling things);
- using the discussion space as a sounding board; sharing suggestions on tutorial plans;
- sharing current and past experiences;
- reporting in on the state of their class and students' progress and responses to activities;
- using it as a source of enrichment and ideas on strategies and resources; and
- using it as a source of information, particularly if there is a problem; and using it as a support network.

### Marking equity process

A random double marking model is used in this subject for selected assessment tasks. 'The Tutors' Lounge' is used to organise this process. The process works as follows:

for each assessment, each tutor is allocated a marking partner to whom they will pass on four selected graded assignments (one from each grade category, eg. Pass, Credit, Distinction, High Distinction);

the person they receive extra marking from and the person they pass their assessments onto will not be the same person;

for each assignment, all Fails are discussed with the marking team and the subject coordinator (normally inside the Tutors' Lounge); and

any disagreements between marking partners about an assigned grade is discussed by the team in 'The Tutors' Lounge'.

All additional marking is factored into the tutors' marking pay scale.

### Final marks meeting and lunch

At the end of semester, the whole team meets to discuss borderline cases, a selection of high distinctions and all fails.

The team then has lunch where they discuss issues that have arisen within the subject over the semester, and possible changes for the next iteration.

### Critical success factors

The initial face-to-face meeting, either in person or via videoconference, is crucial to engaging team members at an individual level and establishing team collegiality from the outset.

The distribution of integrated materials, including the Tutors' Notes Booklet, and that initial pre-semester team discussion allows the team to prepare approaches to content and workload schedules.

'The Tutors' Lounge' consolidates a team approach to teaching and facilitates continued engagement throughout semester. Research into the Tutors' Lounge indicates that it can be a powerful micro-practice that can build a strong sense of community and team engagement with the subject. The data collected identified as critical success factors: an egalitarian style of leadership; professional respect; a sense of trust such that teaching problems can be openly discussed; and peer engagement with teaching practices.

### Review and improvement

The end of semester team meeting is used to review the subject and collect feedback from all members about what aspects might be restructured. The timing of this subject review is crucial to allow for feedback to be factored into the next iteration.

The meeting is also used to identify any unmet teaching support needs and collect ideas for how this might be addressed in the following semesters.

### Challenges

Having tutors' engagement with 'The Tutors' Lounge' recognised as a legitimate professional development and quality enhancement practice that should be recognised within their workloads.

### Links and Resources

Valuing Casual Academic Staff, Faculty of Arts - UOW Good Practice Case Study  
[www.teaching.uow.edu.au/tlgp](http://www.teaching.uow.edu.au/tlgp)

