

Embedding Academic Skill Development in Unit Content: Moving from Remedial to Proactive Support

Dean Hanlon (Department of Accounting and Finance) and Catherine Barratt (Faculty Education Office), Faculty of Business and Economics, Caulfield Campus.

In 2006, Dean Hanlon took over leadership of the core Master of Practising Accounting unit, AFX9500. The unit had a significant international enrolment, unacceptably high failure rates and, as the beginning of a sequence of compulsory study, was failing to adequately prepare students for higher level postgraduate accounting content. Furthermore, feedback from the accounting profession emphasised the inadequate communication skills of recent accounting graduates, and Dean and his department felt that more should be done to address this issue.

Working closely with a team of academic development specialists, Dean developed an assessment and intervention strategy which designed to target “academically at risk” or “communication skill poor” students through early identification, feedback and referral into a series of workshops which closely link unit content with generic skill development. Initially, students who were considered to be in need of remedial assistance were the target of this strategy but, over time, all students have been encouraged to participate.

The initiatives introduced into AFX9500 have significantly impacted student learning outcomes. Pass rates in the unit have improved, as has student satisfaction (see summary table). More importantly, the workshop series – branded as “ADEPT” - has been successfully repositioned away from provision of remedial support and towards self-directed skill development. This, in turn, has had significant impacts on student participation and engagement.

Unit evaluation results for key target areas:

Unit evaluation questions	Q5. I received constructive feedback on my work	Q. 6 The feedback I received was provided in time to help me improve	Q.8 Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this unit	Q15. Other support material available in this unit helped my learning
Sem 2 05	3.34	3.34	3.63	3.55
Sem 1 06	3.60	3.59	3.82	3.51
Sem 2 06	3.75	3.73	3.92	3.74
Sem 1 07	4.04	3.91	4.11	3.84
Sem 2 07	4.10	4.10	4.12	3.86
Sem 1 08	4.07	3.97	4.16	3.96

About the presenters

Dean Hanlon is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Accounting and Finance. Dean has been Chief examiner of AFX9500 since Semester 2, 2005 and recently received a Dean's Commendation for Excellence in Teaching. Dean is also the co-recipient of a Faculty-sponsored teaching grant to develop a program that allows the electronic submission, and automated marking, of assignments to provide individualised and timely feedback to students.

Catherine Barratt is Student Development Manager with responsibility for 'transition in' issues within the Faculty of Business and Economics. Catherine was the Project Manager and designer of the ADEPT program at its inception in 2006, and continues to manage the program for the Graduate School of Business. Catherine's extensive background in learning and teaching (with a specific focus on curriculum design and assessment) and her teaching experience with international students informed the design of the program.