The Graduate Teaching Program:
Coordinator's Report - 1995

John Clanchy

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November '96 marks the end of the two-year pilot stage of the Graduate Teaching Program (GTP). Four programs have now been trialled, each lasting a semester and each involving significant variation and experimentation in content and methods. As of November 1996, ninety ANU PhD student tutors and demonstrators have successfully completed a semester-long program of concurrent teaching and training, 56 of them Faculties-based scholars, 34 from the IAS (three of these CSIRO). All Faculties and all Research Schools and Centres have now participated in the scheme, and virtually every teaching Department (including the MBA Program) has had at least one tutor or demonstrator undertake the program.

The two-year pilot scheme had three basic objectives:

i. to test the level of demand among students and of support among staff for the introduction of a program of teaching support for graduate students;

ii. to determine the kinds and level of support (the human and other resources) needed to mount an ongoing program of high quality; and

iii. to explore different ways of designing and mounting such a program, with the eventual aim of settling on a model that best fitted ANU conditions.

As will be evident from what follows, the 1995-6 pilot program has established an extremely solid ground of support and satisfaction in the University, particularly among its participating student members. The GTP proper is now set for a bright and exciting lift-off in first semester '97, under their leadership of the incoming Coordinator, Dr Trevor Vickers (Computing Science, Faculties).

The 1996 Program: Content, Methods and Personnel

The Program consists of a semester-long series of weekly seminars and activities on various aspects of university teaching. Each of these weekly sessions is one to one-and-a-half hours long, and many are led by ANU staff recognized for their outstanding teaching or related professional skills. Topics covered include such matters as: time and self management (integrating research and teaching); academic leadership skills for specialized teaching contexts such as the tutorial or science laboratory; lectures and other formal presentations - including videotaping and analysis; group management and dynamics; information on the
social, cultural and educational backgrounds of ANU undergraduates; student assessment; and the use of media in teaching. The basic structure of the program involves specialist input and activities in one week and follow-up discussion and reflection in the next. (A copy of the syllabus for either semester of 1996 is available on application to the Coordinator.)

The three most significant innovations for 1996 were:

i. a doubling of tutor numbers from 15 per semester in 1995 to 30 per semester for both intakes in 1996.

ii. the division of the Program on (broad) disciplinary grounds: Science and Humanities/Social Sciences. Participants undertook many more specialized workshops in their areas of disciplinary interest than was possible with the smaller, integrated groups operating in 1995, though they also occasionally came together in one larger group for more generic topics such as "Time- and Self-Management: handling teaching alongside your PhD". This flexible model of incorporating both generic and discipline-specific sessions has proved very popular with students.

iii. the introduction of a 'sponsor-a-tutor' scheme whereby the Graduate School has reimbursed Departments in the Faculties for the tutoring costs of a number of IAS-based PhD scholars. The need for such a scheme emerged from the experience of the 1995 program wherein only four of the thirty participating tutors were IAS-based.

In 1996, 31 of the 61 tutors or demonstrators were IAS-based, 14 of them 'sponsored' by the Graduate School at a cost of approximately $23,000. These funds - provided from the Graduate School's "Quality Distribution" - were used to supplement the usual teaching votes of Departments employing IAS-based student tutors. By this means, a much more equitable distribution of teaching opportunities among PhD students across the campus was achieved, and the same scheme will operate for 1997. Thereafter, IAS-based scholars - in the absence of other money becoming available - may have to look to their home Departments and Schools for the source of such 'sponsorship'.

The GTP could not work - or certainly not as effectively as it appears to - without the assistance of academics and professional support staff from across the campus. Dr Rosemary Martin (BOZO) and Mr David Adams (Political Science), two outstanding academic practitioners, have played a key role in the seminar series and earned both the admiration of the student tutors and the gratitude of the Coordinator. CEDAM staff, especially Dr Malcolm Pettigrove and Ms Gerlese Akerlind, have again assisted with core elements of the Program, though they - and the Study Skills Centre - have been less free to participate than in 1995 because of staff cutbacks. Other staff who have contributed to seminar activities in 1995 include: Dr Trevor Vickers (Computing Science), Dr Nicholas Brown (Urban Research Project) and Mr Geoff Mortimore and Mrs Leila Bailey (Counselling Centre). The Coordinator of the Program is assisted in countless crucial ways by the Administrator of the Graduate School, Mrs Lorraine Lewis and, above all, by the Dean of the Graduate School, Professor Ray Spear, whose support and enthusiasm for the Program has been constant since day one.

While staff input is crucial, the most valuable personnel remain the student tutors themselves. Time and again in their evaluations students point to the fact that they learn as much from each other - particularly from listening to others reflect on contrasting or parallel classroom experiences - as they do from the seminar presenters and chairs. They constitute a mutual learning cooperative that is as close to the ideal of a 'university' as one is likely to find.
Evaluation

i. Processes: As befits a pilot program, the evaluation processes used have been largely formative in nature, drawing heavily on tutors' responses to the program they are undergoing or have just finished. Each semester's evaluation has resulted in significant changes for the program that followed, some of them quite major, e.g. items of content being added or deleted; or components that were formerly optional extras (such as the microteaching segment in the very first program) becoming integrated and compulsory.

Evaluation of the program works at five levels:
- on-going, informal soliciting of tutors' views in meetings and, via email, at two or three strategic stages in the course of each program;
- a more formal, wind-up discussion, audited by the Dean of the Graduate School, in which tutors reflect on strengths and weaknesses of the program and make suggestions for change;
- an extensive (5 page) written evaluation of the program completed by each participant (both quantitative and qualitative, and covering the goals of the program, its content, ambience, load, the role of the Coordinator, suggestions for change, as well as a personal and professional self-evaluation in the light of the program);
- follow-up reflection with tutors 9-12 months after completing the program in order to gauge its longer-term effects and newly emerging needs for those going on to an academic career; and
- occasional external evaluation, such as the week-long visit and evaluation conducted in October 1995 by the Director of the Bok Center for Teaching and Learning of Harvard University.

The results of these evaluations are reported in detail each semester to the program's Advisory Committee and, in a more concise form, to the Senior Officers, Deans and Heads of Departments throughout the University.

ii. Outcomes: Responses to the pilot program from student tutors have been strongly positive. Eighty-eight of the ninety respondents rated the overall effectiveness of the program in achieving its aims between 5 and 7 on a seven point scale (mean ratings for the four semester pilot programs were, in order, 5.5, 5.8, 5.9 and 5.7). Ninety-five per cent indicated that they would 'unreservedly recommend the program to a peer'. Other, supplementary indicators confirm this strongly positive attitude on the part of tutors. Only one tutor, for example, failed to complete the semester program, and only two others missed more than two meetings in the course of a semester. To date, no minimum standard of attendance has been set for 'successful completion' and the awarding of a certificate, first, because there has been no need, and, second, because of a concern that the very act of setting a minimum often induces a normative 'satisficing' reflex: 'There is a minimum requirement of eleven out of fourteen meetings - so I can afford to miss three.' Instead, a strong expectation is expressed from the beginning that all tutors will attend all meetings and, to now, tutors have taken that expectation and their obligation to one another seriously.

Amid the mass of qualitative data (three hundred handwritten pages of tutors' comments), three persistent themes stand out. First, there exists the sheer relief of discovering that teaching support is available. One tutor's *cri de coeur* eloquently made this point:

> It probably sounds a little melodramatic but I don't know how I would have survived this semester without this program. I (like many others) was given five days notice before teaching began, to prepare for three tutorials in a course that I had very little idea about ...

Others echoed the point - if somewhat less plangently - reminding us how isolated and cut-off the graduate student cum casual tutor can actually be:
It has been good to know that I, as a tutor, am not the only sufferer in the university teaching environment. Sometimes that sense of belonging has helped me overcome the anxiety and fear associated with teaching in my first year ...

Without participating in the program, I would have known only one other graduate student who was involved in teaching ...

It [the program] was a graduate teaching trauma support group - nice to know I wasn't alone in experiencing some of the problems I had encountered.

In fact I think where I got most out of the program was probably chatting to a whole range of separate people, and discovering that the things I was worrying about and dealing with were the same for everyone.

Clearly, for many tutors, between the initial flattering invitation to tutor and the eventual reality of facing the weekly tutorial falls the shadow of self-doubt, even terror. A program such as the GTP can make the difference between surviving and going under. At the very least, it offers: 'The reassurance that I'm not alone and that there is a whole support network out there'.

The second most common theme in tutors' responses involved a growth in awareness or understanding of the nature of the teaching process itself and of their own role as tutors within it. The expression of this theme was rather abstract yet nonetheless clear and convinced of its authenticity:

The program helped crystallize ideas that had been developed the hard way - by trial and error ... I now regard teaching less as a random collection of skills and more as a coherent philosophy.

I think about my teaching in a much more structured way. Not having been involved in setting up a unit, I just did what was put in front of me, but now I reflect more on appropriate teaching methods and the way that a lecture or tutorial is structured ...

I think more globally about a course in the sense of being familiar with the whole journey at the beginning in order to convey some perspective to the students ...

I am more conscious of myself as a teacher and more aware of the interaction between what I do to teach and what the students do to learn.

The program helped in grounding tutoring in its proper context vis-a-vis me as an individual, a postgraduate student and a tutor. I feel more comfortable with the 'role' of tutor ...

This larger awareness of the nature and value of teaching sometimes moved out from the purely individual to embrace a sense of the whole institution:

The primary aim of achieving systematic support for teaching was fully met, the first and most important step being the recognition, by the University, of the importance of teaching. Throughout the semester I felt that the University was fully committed to this program, which enhanced the program's dynamics and productivity. We felt we were part of a university initiative that was important and innovative ...

The third, and most obviously predictable, theme was a growth in individual confidence, commonly tied to a perceived development in leadership, management and/or communication skills and in the habit of self-reflection:
The most obvious difference about the way I think about my teaching is confidence. I know that I can handle it ...

I feel more confident with my conflict-resolution skills... more comfortable with class/group discussion, dynamics ... 

I don't think I have changed my style a great deal ... I do feel more confident in dealing with students, though, now that I have a better idea of their expectations ...

The practice of self-reflection is probably one of the best skills I've learned from the program.

There were two areas of skills development in which some tutors continued to see themselves as inadequate at the end of the program. The first of these was the perpetual problem of leading productive tutorial discussions, a challenge - and a terror - also faced by many experienced academics, even to the end of their careers. The second area of perceived inadequacy was time-management, though this was strongly differentiated by disciplinary background, with Humanities tutors spending much more time on their preparation and on out-of-class interactions with their students than did laboratory demonstrators in the physical and biological sciences. These remain issues to be worked on in later programs.

Post-program: tutors' careers

Twelve months after each program is finished, the Co-ordinator meets with the 'graduates'. The purpose of these meetings is two-fold: i. to give the Co-ordinator feedback about the longer-term effects of the program on motivation for teaching and teaching skills; and ii. to trace the careers of the tutors after they complete their semester's teaching and leave the program.

In May and October '96, tutors from the first and second semester '95 programs respectively met to reflect on the program they had undertaken with the benefit of a year's hindsight. Apart from gathering useful reflections on the content of the program, it was possible to collect some data about the careers of 23 of these tutors.

Of 23 PhD tutors and demonstrators who completed the program in its foundation year:

- 6 have now either submitted or will do so by end of year.
  - (one of these has taken up a full-time research position at ANU, one a Lecturer A post at ANU, one is tutoring part-time in a university in WA, two are negotiating post-docs in USA, while the sixth continues casual teaching at ANU)
- 16 students are still in the throes of research or writing
  - one of these has taken a two year Lecturer B post at U of Sydney
  - two have taken up Lecturer A posts at ANU
  - two have taken up Lecturer B posts at U Can
  - seven are tutoring or demonstrating at ANU in 1996 (one of whom spent 2nd semester '95 as Lecturer A at U of Sydney replacing a regular Sydney staff member on OSP; another held a Lecturer B level post at ANU for 2nd semester 1995)
  - four are finishing their theses full-time and not teaching at present
- 1 student has suspended on maternity leave.

It is hard to say how representative this group is/will turn out to be. What is interesting is the speed with which they are, either immediately on completion - or even more surprisingly, while still on course - moving into academic positions that require them to design and deliver their own courses.

Continuing Challenges
Last year's report cited two problems which the GTP had struck in relation to the numbers and categories of students entering the program: an excess of demand over supply of places; and an imbalance in the relative proportions of Faculties-based over IAS-based scholars gaining employment as tutors.

Both problems have been alleviated to some degree in 1996. The absolute numbers problem has been reduced by a doubling of the intake from thirty to sixty student tutors per year, though a waiting list still carries over each semester. (The intention of CEDAM to run a program in 1997 for non-teaching IAS scholars may further alleviate the problem of those graduate students who want teaching and training but at present can gain neither.) The Faculties-IAS problem has been solved for '96 (and should also not arise in '97) because of the introduction of the Graduate School's 'sponsor-a-tutor' scheme (described earlier), which has seen Faculties and IAS numbers virtually equalized. The issue remains, what happens after 1997 when the Graduate School's funding support for IAS tutors ceases?

**Change of Coordinator**

The Co-ordinator of the pilot program, John Clanchy, is taking extended leave from the University from December 1996. The new Co-ordinator, Dr Trevor Vickers (Computing Science, FEIT), will take over from January 1997.

John Clanchy  
Coordinator, Graduate Teaching Program  
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