



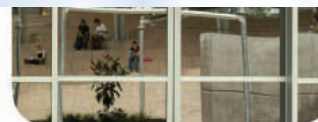
# KIFT ALTC SENIOR FELLOWSHIP: ARTICULATING A TRANSITION PEDAGOGY

COMMENTARY ON FIRST YEAR  
CURRICULUM CASE STUDIES:  
CAREERS AND EPORTFOLIO PERSPECTIVE

*COL McCOWAN*

## AUTHOR:

Col McCowan OAM has been Head of Careers and Employment at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) for the past 15 years. Col makes significant contributions to selected QUT projects such as: the Student ePortfolio Project, the Work Integrated Learning Project, the Transition Out Project and the Career Development Modules Project.



## AUTHOR

01. Col McCowan OAM has been Head of Careers and Employment at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) for the past 15 years. Recently his circumstances changed and he now works part-time at the same service and also makes significant contributions to selected QUT projects such as: the Student ePortfolio Project, the Work Integrated Learning Project, the Transition Out Project and the Career Development Modules Project.

02. He is a registered psychologist, teacher and counsellor who has worked in a variety of roles in the education industry for over 40 years in areas such as practitioner, academic, consultant, researcher, manager, and principal policy officer for both State and Commonwealth governments. He was also responsible for the formal introduction of the focus on the first year experience (FYE) at QUT.

03. His service at QUT has won national best practice awards: he won the 2004 National Excellence in Career Counselling Award and, in 2006, he was awarded an Order of Australia for service to the career industry in Australia. He is on the Editorial Board of the *Australian Journal of Career Development* and has authored three books, the latest being *Working the web: Career planning via the internet*. He has undertaken consultancies for UNESCO in Bhutan and Oman.

04. His other special interests are in generational research and research on decision-making processes.

## THE FIRST YEAR CURRICULUM PERSPECTIVE

05. The variety of case studies provides a colourful tapestry of shapes and forms to consider. They vary, for example, from small to large, discrete to embedded, regional to metropolitan, and

discipline-specific to broad scale. Each provides a comprehensive picture.

06. It is appreciated that, within the template and page limit constraints, there may have been limited scope in the particular examples to address the broader range of issues that are within my particular areas of interest, given my focus. Before moving to comment specifically on the case studies presented, I offer the following, general observations around matters that seem to me to be commonly absent, but of increasing importance, in the consideration of first year curriculum design, as has become evident in even the very best reported contemporary examples. These include:

- A lack of strong attention to the interrelatedness of different aspects of basic human development such as the social, affective, cognitive, physical, spiritual and career development in students. For example, the growth of self-efficacy or motivation or student wellness in students in a first year context is rarely addressed.
- The lack of focus on models of transition. For example, it might be important to apply something like a seven-step model of making a transition in a wide variety of circumstances, such as the transition into the first year experience, and the transition out of it at the end of the year.
- Limited acknowledgement of the increasing role of parents in some young people; for example, helicopter parents.
- Generational research has a contribution to make when considering the widely different audiences involved in this experience.
- An emphasis on learning styles does not seem to figure prominently.
- There are some good data collection practices but there seems little evaluation of the interventions themselves. For example, pre- and post-comparisons or follow up in year 2. Much of this is perhaps explicable by the relevant recency of several of the case studies' implementation.

Attrition is recognised but two aspects are of concern:

The substantial percentage of attrition that occurs between acceptance of an offer and before census date, ... The distinction between positive and negative attrition is rarely identified and addressed.

- There is good focus on capabilities and on reflection, but there seems to be limited focus on student self-assessment, particularly the use of self-audit and setting goals for targeted growth and development.
- Attrition is recognised but two aspects are of concern:
  - The substantial percentage of attrition that occurs between acceptance of an offer and before census date, which is not addressed.
  - The distinction between positive and negative attrition is rarely identified and addressed.
- Although managing expectations is sometimes addressed, the issue of students as consumers — many of whom want a transaction rather than an education — is rarely addressed.
- The reducing interest in higher education in Australia as a preferred pathway among both young and mature age students has important implications.
- That students spend, on average, 17 hours per week in part-time work has major implications for issues such as time management and flexibility.
- The need to take a career development approach of focusing students

on getting part-time work that is program/career relevant rather than the 'KFC' work that many picked up in high school and are reluctant to leave for comfort reasons.

- The inability of returning mature age students to effectively time manage has become something that universities should seek to address proactively.
- Extensive use of the student ePortfolio could address many issues concurrently.
- In large-scale programs, little comment is focused on how the interventions translate to individual students, while in small-scale programs little comment is focused on how the interventions could generalise to a large scale across a school, faculty or university.
- A need to focus on career development in these beginning stages is a priority and could act as a FYE framework from within which other issues can be considered.
- There have been a number of studies on career choice but there doesn't seem to be a consolidation of these. For example, some of the issues associated with this activity are:
  - My unpublished research involving 3000 17-year olds over three years revealed over 99 legitimate factors that could come into play in a decision about choice of program at university.
  - In Queensland, students have over 1400 program options to choose from and up to six final choices that they then need to prioritise.

A need to focus on career development in these beginning stages is a priority and could act as a FYE framework from within which other issues can be considered.

- Research on decision difficulty has something to tell us.
- Students often take a reductionist approach to simplify decision difficulty and studies have indicated that they often reduce their considerations to two of four factors that include interest area, outcomes, convenience and status.
- The unknowing reliance on marketing material information and the new emphasis on protecting self-image with peers and significant others mean that beginning students often have only superficial knowledge of the programs they choose, but they do have a detailed virtual impression of what program choice would be good for their self-image.
- Students often spend the first weeks in life as a tertiary student trying to resolve the contradictory notions of both challenging and confirming their choice. These simultaneous thought processes often initiate legitimate conflict and confusion.

07. Issues such as these need to be considered more holistically.

08. Many of the issues I raise represent my personal focus, but in providing such a focus I wish to strongly endorse the excellent work of all the case study authors in addressing such important issues across the full spectrum of FYE as an event and a process.

## THE CASE STUDIES

### LAW CASE STUDY (WESTCOTT, JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY)

09. Some of the qualities that stood out for me in this case study were the integration and coherence between subjects; constructive alignment of learning outcomes, teaching settings and assessment practices; agreed skills and attributes; academic support programs; administrative support;

use of wikis for group work; scaffolded assessment; consistency of look and feel across the materials; social integration; peer mentoring; authentic activities; the use of a portfolio device to build the experience; and timely reminders of critical incidents and events.

10. The interventions described seem very cognitive and take slightly less account of the strong affective dimension. It would be great to have comparative data available to support the qualitative data presented. The level of attrition would help provide another indicator. It would be useful to understand how students are helped to choose their electives or plan their individual career paths to fit in with the stated goal of 'graduates [who] will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes ... to take their place in their chosen career path ... in law and also for work and service to a broad range of sectors'. The interventions are comprehensive and may have even greater efficacy if grounded in an articulated framework for action.

### WRITING AND COMMUNICATION (BILBY) CASE STUDY (RADBOURNE AND LEROSSIGNOL, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY)

11. The approach taken to FYE for this subject focuses strongly on skills development and workplace orientation. Qualities that were greatly appreciated included: the case study approach; the extensive use of multimedia resources; the emphasis on real-life scenarios; independent learning; self-assessment; professional development towards career goals; focus on motivation and relevance; the constructivist approach; embedding the transition process into the teaching and learning; acknowledging student expectations; inclusion of career pathway understandings; learning styles; and links to support services and other subjects.

12. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a strategy to link the great work in this subject

to a student's wider university activity, leaving a danger of compartmentalising this activity rather than it contributing to a more holistic experience. Consequently, there seems minimal focus, for example, on the overall settling-in period and activities like mentoring.

13. There also seems limited comparative or pre- and post-evaluative practices (perhaps explicable by the relevant recency of the subject's introduction), while I was not sure how this subject's focus fits into the longitudinal nature of the degree program through, for example, the use of ePortfolios.

## ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (EXPLORATIONS) CASE STUDY (MARCHBANK AND FEE, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY)

14. The very positive aspects of this approach for me were: the interdisciplinary nature; focus on developing key skills; encouraging creativity; introducing an awareness of learning style; developing notions of citizenship; taking a more developmental approach to the whole transition process; taking a 'foundation' approach; individual attention; and assisting students to map potential programs and careers.

15. This *Explorations* activity could be reframed as a developmental delaying tactic to give students time to adjust and decide. Because at the end of the year they need to enter the real university world, it is critical to use the time both to sensitise and to advance the decision-making process. It may be useful to anticipate this transition in perhaps greater detail than by maps and information, to test out if students are advancing and if they are thinking of the most 'real' career/program pathway for them. Such an approach gets them ready for the real transition at the end of the *Explorations* year. The program has difficulty in monitoring the after life, but that is where some follow-up would indicate how *Explorations* students deal

with this next key transition.

## APPLIED SCIENCES (TECHONE) CASE STUDY (FEE AND MCCrackEN, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY)

16. In this program it is great that students take some core subjects and some elective subjects that will count towards the major program they may subsequently enter. This provides a testing environment for students to participate in a mini-trial of a possible career pathway.

17. Other positives are: the development of an online community portal; the strong use of the university's learning support services; the career/program 'tasting' interventions; team-based projects based on workplace teamwork; promoting understanding of broad types of students; the use of blogs as reflection tools; hands-on type experiences; extensive feedback; scaffolding of assignments; and starting the narrowing process of program selection using real examples from possible future programs. The retention figures confirm the value of the intervention.

18. Some more detail would have been useful in ascertaining if the program actually did prepare the students 'for their future careers as responsible and informed citizens and community leaders'. It would be useful to understand better how university-wide services, such as the Student Learning Commons, are made available across the total *TechOne* program, after the first major hit early in the program, whether some of the pastoral or specialised support was embedded throughout the program, and how individual students were monitored and supported other than through online activities.

## EDUCATION CASE STUDY (HEALY, QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)

19. This is very much a vocationally orientated program of activity that focuses on teaching professional standards and teacher practitioner attributes. The case study describes the use of teaching and learning strategies to challenge and reshape the students' view of, and control over, their own learning and teaching practices.

20. It includes good practices such as: the use of the ePortfolio as a recording and reflection tool; the developmental approach taken to the year; introducing teamwork protocols; using negotiated learning experiences and exploratory assessment ownership; the importance of evidence-based outcomes to audit and inform future practice; and, finally, the proposed year 2 follow up study.

21. Will this approach generalise to other professional areas? It is hoped that it would. Just because these students are on a vocational track, it does not necessarily hold that their career decision is confirmed. We know many teaching students withdraw after their first practical in second year. I also wonder if this issue could be facilitated in first year by a mini practical or virtual practical situation. It would have been useful to hear more about any strategies that might be in place for identifying and supporting at-risk students and/or students needing intensive support.

Just because these students are on a vocational track, it does not necessarily hold that their career decision is confirmed.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CASE STUDY (NELSON, QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY)

22. This program takes onboard the university's focus on 'real world' and 'employability'. As a new program, it provides an opportunity for both deep and lateral thinking. Some highlights are: the acknowledgement of workplace relevance; peer mentoring; fit to program structure; industry case studies; industry participation; addressing expectations that the marketing spiel builds; interview techniques; social connections; career planning; generic capabilities; pre-learning; academic literacy; social-technical systems theory; ePortfolio; learning styles; at-risk student intervention; attendance monitoring; and blogs.

23. The author has outlined some of the limitations that have arisen from organisational issues. They do raise the general issue of whether the work done with such a discrete new program could translate across the whole of first year for this faculty and/or even extend to other faculties. This program was likely to be labour intensive in terms of preparation and implementation, especially in the setting-up year. Can this be sustained even if there was faculty support?

24. Another issue is whether all the proactive interventions introduced by the author and her team were absorbed cohesively and students saw the connections between them or whether students just saw them as discrete actions. One suggestion is that more use could be made of the ePortfolio for teaching and learning purposes. Following this group through university should pay dividends in proving the efficacy of the support provided.

## SCIENCE (BIOLOGY) CASE STUDY (GLEESON, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE)

25. This new program takes a comprehensive approach to FYE. The attractions for me are: the focus on generic skills; transition as an up-front university activity; collaboration among first years subjects; seeking support rather than accepting support; study groups; consistent messages across subjects; vertical integration; horizontal integration; strong support for at-risk students and students with a non-science background; tutor on duty, pre-labs; the Academic Interactive Portal; English as a Second Language (ESL) support; cross-cultural recognition; feedback; career nights; independent learner emphasis; and dedicated spaces.

26. It is a little unclear whether and how attrition issues are proposed to be addressed and followed up. Evaluation would give a clearer picture of whether the strategies were embedded within each student well after the interventions were completed. An assumption that seems to underpin this first iteration of the *Melbourne Model* is that all students wanted to be there and were clear in their purpose. The career decision process is extremely important in this particular model. Also, does the general program approach meet expectations? Can students see the connections between a more general degree and future career pathways? Could career development

become embedded rather than seen as an add-on, sporadic activity?

27. The good attendance at specific career and discipline events gives a clue to the importance of these activities with students.

## CONCLUSION

28. **H**aving read these brilliant case studies, two overall thoughts come to mind.

29. The *first* is the feeling that it would be great to have a comprehensive checklist of all the discrete interventions across all of the case studies, but grouped and presented under a meaningful set of headings and sub-headings — for example, settling-in, career development, personal wellness, and so on — so we could tick off the ones we choose to do, knowing in a meaningful and informed way the implications of our prioritisation with respect to the ones we leave out.

30. The *second* is the desire to take the interventions and hypothesise how and where we could take them across into university-wide systems for the betterment of all students in the first year of university life. Some of the interventions are somewhat boutique and it would take policy decisions and financial and staff decisions to make them much more systemic. This exercise however, would give us a clue as to those interventions that are worth pursuing outside specific discipline and/or faculty areas.

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