

Evaluation summary: Workshops for sessional tutors – April/May 2004

LS (TLSU) & DSL

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Preamble

In March 2004, 409¹ tutors were individually contacted by mail inviting them to attend professional development sessions at the three main teaching campuses. Since 105 tutors expressed interest in attending, four sessions were offered, 1 at Geelong, and 3 at Melbourne. (See Table below.) 17 respondents were unable to attend at the proposed times. No session was offered at Warrnambool because only 2 people expressed interest.

The sessions focused on *Dealing with Diversity*, and were aimed at increasing tutors' awareness about the different categories of students, providing some techniques for helping students learn more effectively, and informing them about University resources available to assist staff and students.

Campus	Date	No.	Venue	Arts	B&L	Educ	H&B	S&T	Other
Geelong	5/4/04	26	Portable	6	3	0	3	13	1
Melbourne	6/4/04 am	27	Lib staff mtg room	2	13	1	5	3	3
Melbourne	6/4/04 pm	19	Lib staff mtg room	5	3	4	2	3	2
Melbourne	11/5/04 am	16	Blue Room	7	3	1	3	1	1
Total		88		20	22	6	13	20	7

PART A

1. The areas covered by this session were relevant to my needs. (Responses: 81)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Geelong	5	20		
Melbourne - AM	13	11		
Melbourne - PM	6	12		
Melbourne – 11/5	2	11	1	
Total:	26	54	1	
Positive responses:	99%			

2. I would rate the overall workshop highly. (Responses: 81)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Geelong	7	14	4	
Melbourne - AM	7	16	1	
Melbourne - PM	6	11	1	
Melbourne – 11/5	2	11	1	
Total:	22	52	7	
Positive responses:	91%			

¹ Although the request made to HR was for tutors new to Deakin, names of some of the more experienced tutors were apparently provided as well. Hence letters were mailed to tutors for whom the sessions were not so relevant. Nonetheless most benefited from their involvement, as the data indicates.

3. The pace at which this session was presented was about right. (Responses: 81)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Geelong	3	11	9	2
Melbourne - AM	4	15	5	
Melbourne - PM	5	11	2	
Melbourne – 11/5	1	13		
Total:	13	50	16	2
Positive responses:	98%			

4. I felt free to ask questions and make comments. (Responses: 81)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Geelong	10	15		
Melbourne - AM	15	9		
Melbourne - PM	10	8		
Melbourne – 11/5	7	7		
Total:	42	39		
Positive responses:	100%			

5. The information was presented in a clear and interesting manner. (Responses: 81)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Geelong	9	15	1	
Melbourne - AM	13	11		
Melbourne - PM	7	11		
Melbourne – 11/5	4	9	1	
Total:	33	46	2	
Positive responses:	98%			

6. The venue and facilities were appropriate for the session. (Responses: 80)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Geelong	6	15	3	1
Melbourne - AM	6	15	2	
Melbourne - PM	7	10	1	
Melbourne – 11/5	4	10		
Total:	23	50	6	1
Positive responses:	90%			

PART B

7. Which sections of the session were most valuable for you, & why? (Responses: 71)

The following aspects received most frequent comment in terms of value and corresponded largely with the workshop aims:

- Opportunities for sharing ideas and experiences with other tutors through small group work were greatly appreciated. This helped reduce feelings of isolation and modelled good practice.
- Learning about strategies for dealing with diverse groups of students. In some disciplines, tutorial content is determined by unit chairs leaving tutors with less opportunity for flexibility in responding.
- Understanding the range of services offered by the University to assist staff and students in their work
- Learning about strategies for improving teaching and the conduct of tutorials.

Comments about the format of the sessions suggested it was effective in providing varying perspectives. *The scenario analysis gave us a chance to see how to deal with different issues. The group reports gave us a chance to find alternative solutions.*

8. What sections of this session, if any, did you consider were *not relevant* to your needs? (Responses: 35, only 13 of whom named something *not relevant*)

All aspects of the session were seen to be relevant by the majority of tutors. Only 7 commented on aspects they felt were not so relevant to them.

- Two thought it was less relevant because they had had some experience with teaching. (It is not clear why they attended since the sessions were designed for tutors who had not taught before.)
- Two noted that the topics relating to special kinds of students were not relevant to them, despite the fact that the title of the sessions was *Dealing with Diversity*.
- Group discussion work was seen to be less relevant to two tutors.
- 'Essay writing' techniques was less relevant for one tutor.

It may be useful to advertise more clearly the nature of the sessions and the tutor group for whom they are offered. More specialist sessions such as assessment, online teaching strategies, evaluation techniques, may well be relevant and useful for the broader group of tutors.

9. What was ONE thing that you took from today that you will use in your teaching? (Responses: 71)

A number of aspects were mentioned in response to this question though most frequent comments related to:

- Teaching strategies aimed at engaging students actively in tutorials so they are more likely to attend and learn from them.
- The use of techniques to cater for the diverse needs of students.
- The need to set boundaries and expectations for the conduct of the tutorial, both in terms of what is acceptable behaviour and what is expected from a learning point of view.

- The use of ice breakers to ‘get to know’ students and develop rapport with them.
- Targeted class-based evaluation strategies (i.e. formative evaluation) to improve teaching and learning throughout semester.
- Knowledge of the range of resources available to assist tutors and students with individual needs.

The evidence indicates that tutors are eager to improve their practice across a range of areas. The adoption of professional development strategies that tap into this enthusiasm and respond to individual Faculty-based needs would be an important strategy for improving teaching and learning across the institution.

10. Any comments or suggestions you would like to make regarding academic professional development will be much appreciated. (Responses: 35)

A number of comments expressed appreciation for the opportunity to attend a session and asked for more opportunities like it. *I think this was absolutely brilliant and should be offered more regularly. Thank you so much.* In particular, tutors would like *more on successful teaching styles and ideas to engage students.*

Other suggestions related to:

- The length of the session: Participants felt that parts of the current session were too rushed, so there was *too little time for the amount of material to cover.*
- Dealing with difficulties associated with ‘getting started’ at Deakin: Requests were made for information packs about what they need to organise, what services the University offers, and what their rights and legal responsibilities are.
- The apparent disinterest of some administrative and academic staff in assisting tutors at the beginning of semester. They are often left to find out things for themselves. *Personally, I got more information from this workshop than from the school I work for.* It appears there is a need for a more systematic approach for initiating tutors into teaching at Deakin.
- The establishment of an online discussion forum to enable tutors to share ideas and support each other.

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence suggests that tutors were very appreciative of the opportunity for professional development. Clearly, they need and deserve more assistance in being initiated into teaching at Deakin, and in learning more about effective teaching strategies, assessment and evaluation approaches, Follow-up sessions with specific foci could help to achieve this.