The University of Melbourne >

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Researching the First Year Experience:
A workshop on strategies and practical
approaches for scholarly evaluation, research
and publication

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My goals for the workshop

1. To share my experience in conducting HE research,
   including the possibilities and pitfalls.

2. To discuss potentially fruitful areas for investigation.

3. To help you consolidate your own ideas for possible
   research/evaluation projects and the ways in which these
   might be conducted — if possible, to leave the workshop
   with a draft sketch of a project (but this is entirely up to you!)

4. To discuss the opportunities for publishing.

This won't be Research Methods 101!

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The proposed program

1. Doing research: You, your role and your context.
2. Key questions that every researcher must consider
3. Brainstorm: the interesting, researchable issues.
4. Getting grants
5. The methodological possibilities: nuts and bolts
   questions around planning a good study.
6. Alternative approaches to the evaluation of teaching
   and learning (mini-lecture).
7. A Grand Tour[*] through the existing questionnaire tools
8. Publishing

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Research or evaluation, or both ?

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What is 'Research'?

• Research is the creation and communication of new
  knowledge about the world (that will do for our purposes
  today, no epistemological discussions!)

• Research can be many things:
  * the search for information as yet uncollected or
  uncollated;
  * new connections between existing bodies of
  knowledge; * new insights, interpretations or syntheses
  from existing information/data.

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What is 'Evaluation'

• Evaluation is in essence more normative in orientation,
  but need be no less rigorous.

• The core difference between research and evaluation is
  that evaluation usually involves making an assessment
  of a situation against pre-defined objectives or
  expectations.

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Educational research

- Because educational research is usually so applied and so highly oriented towards professional practice it is inevitably highly normative - it is necessarily oriented towards improving practice, or leads to conclusions about improving practice.

- Nonetheless, it is a mistake to be too normative at the outset if you wish to undertake good educational research.

Experience self-rating scale

Please rate on the 1-5 scale:

1. Your experience in conducting educational research
2. Your confidence in conducting educational research
3. Your experience in conducting evaluation of programs
4. Your experience in securing research grants
5. Your experience in giving conference papers
6. Your experience in publishing in refereed journals
7. The time you have available for research

Experience self-rating scale

Please rate on the 1-5 scale:

1. Your experience in conducting educational research
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3. Your experience in conducting evaluation of programs
4. Your experience in sec...
5. Your experience in giv...
6. Your experience in pub...
7. The time you have ava...

How many of you are sitting on good unpublished data?

Key questions that every researcher must consider …

How must research do we need into the FYHE?

How much can the 'market' bear?
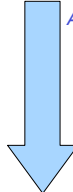
Where might you find a niche in this terrain?

Are your interests located in an related area to the FYHE that might offer more scope?

Analyse an existing dataset (e.g. LSAY)?
Collect new empirical data?
Conduct a meta-analysis?
Theorise, 'think aloud'?

Slide 1

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Collect new empirical data?
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Theorise, 'think aloud'?

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY

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Slide 2

The decision to do research

Why am I doing this? What do I hope to get out of it?
(for example, a PhD, career advancement, name in lights, DEEWR points)

What level of commitment will the research require?
Am I willing and able to give this level of commitment to a research project?

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Slide 3

The decision to do research

Why am I doing this? What do I hope to get out of it?

What level of commitment will the research require?
Am I willing and able to give this level of commitment to a research project?

1.

Please jot down some notes on where research 'fits' with your present role, personal goals and career

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Slide 4

The decision to do research

Why am I doing this? What do I hope to get out of it?

What level of commitment will the research require?
Am I willing and able to give this level of commitment to a research project?

2.

Please jot down some notes on the possibilities your context provides for research/evaluation

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Slide 5

What do I want to study? What would I like to be expert on?

Is it original? Why is it worth doing? Will it investigate a pressing question?

Is it feasible and manageable: within what time frame? within the resources likely to be available?

Will it make a contribution to policy, practice, and/or conceptual development?

Is it of interest to a wide audience? Is it likely to lead to significant findings worthy of publication?

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Slide 6

What do I want to study? What would I like to be expert on?

Is it original? Why is it worth doing? Will it investigate a pressing question?

3.

i. Please jot down 2-3 research areas/issues that you've considered or that intrigue you.

ii. Please frame these as reasonably tightly focused research questions.

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Key principle:

Research is usually only as good as the clarity of the research questions and the questions we ask of participants!   This is true regardless of the research method.

The issues that are important to study are significantly framed by time and context ….

Here are a couple of the questions asked in the original first year survey* at Uni of Melb in 1955!

Do your rooms have adequate heating?

Do you have a steady friend of the opposite sex?

*The University of Melbourne's First Year Student Survey (FYSS) was designed by the Student Counsellor, Robert (Bob) Priestley, and Assistant Counsellor, Don Anderson … who went on to head the **????????????** *

Here are a couple of the questions asked in the original first year survey* at Uni of Melb in 1955!

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*The University of Melbourne's First Year Student Survey (FYSS) was designed by the Student Counsellor, Robert (Bob) Priestley, and Assistant Counsellor, Don Anderson … who went on to head the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT)

What do I want to study? What would I like to be expert on?

Is it original? Why is it worth doing? Will it investigate a pressing question?

3.

i. Please jot down 2-3 research areas/issues that you've considered or that intrigue you.

ii. Please frame these as reasonably tightly focused research questions.

(avoid 'make sense of', 'explore', 'examine')

RESEARCH IDEAS BRAINSTORM

Is it original? Why is it worth doing? Will it investigate a pressing question?

Is it feasible and manageable: within what time frame? within the resources likely to be available?

Will it make a contribution to policy, practice, and/or conceptual development?

Is it of interest to a wide audience? Is it likely to lead to significant findings worthy of publication?

Sources of ideas

- *Journals and books (obviously)*
- *Times Higher*
- *The Age HE supplement on Wednesdays*
- *Campus Review*
- *National reports (such as the AUSSE report)*
- *The Horizon reports*

*

Graham Little wrote which influential book ……… ?

Little, G. (1975). *Faces on campus: A psychosocial study.* Parkville: MUP.

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*

Who was the principal author of the following report?

??????, Crebert G. & O'Leary, J. (1994) *Developing lifelong learners through undergraduate education.* National Board of Employment Education and Training. AGPS, Canberra.

Candy P. C., Crebert G. & O'Leary, J. (1994) *Developing lifelong learners through undergraduate education.* National Board of Employment Education and Training. AGPS, Canberra.

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What is the 'bible' for all researchers of the student experience?

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How college affects students, Vol. 2.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

GETTING MONEY

Do I really need money? What for?

The sources of funding?

What are the priorities of different agencies?
Under what conditions do they make funds available?

Where does ALTC fit?

Common weaknesses in grant applications

- The proposal is submitted in an inappropriate format.
- The proposal doesn't address priority areas
- The proposal fails to demonstrate awareness of work done or being done elsewhere, or will duplicate such work.
- Vague and unclear aims
- Significance and relevance of the investigation not made clear.
- The project's relationship to existing policy, practice, and/or research not made clear.
- The project is too ambitious.
- The budget claim is too grand and/or not justified
- The research team lacks the expertise to be able to complete the project.
- The strategy for disseminating the findings of the research is too vague.

Qualitative or quantitative, or both ?

(shallow question really, the research methods are far more nuanced than this simple dichotomy)

A short excursion into Research Methods 101

Conducting good interviews...
- Well crafted, clearly laid out questions
- Good listening skills
- Preparedness to follow important 'leads' which emerge
- A reliable digital recorder
- Good note-taking skills
- Time put aside for immediate writing-up

Do I need a collaborator(s)? Why?
What will be the benefits?
Who? What will be their involvement?

The benefits of collaboration?

?

The (possible) pitfalls of collaboration?

?

Fishing vs focussed ?

Unit of analysis ?

Student
Subject
Course/Program
Staff member
University
Nation

Whole group vs sub group?

Pre- and Post-intervention?

Controlled experiment?

Pre- and Post-intervention?

Controlled experiment?

… a sea of variables to consider

Slide 1:

Ethics … argghh!

Slide 2:

The emphasis?
Transition
First year experience
Student experience
In-class experience
Out-of-class experience
Something altogether new?
etc., etc. …

Slide 3:

Alternative approaches to the evaluation of teaching and learning in higher education

(mini-lecture)

Slide 4:

Alternative approaches to the evaluation of teaching and learning in higher education

- **Who's the evaluation for?** Is evaluation for management purposes? Or for academics and other professionals?

- **What are we trying to evaluate?** What really counts in teaching and learning in universities? How do we know when we're achieving our goals?

- **What sources of information are available ?** The results from the assessment of student learning? Student evaluation of teaching? Peer review of teaching? (What can students tell us? What can't they tell us?)

- **How do we interpret the findings from evaluation?** Against what reference points should we compare findings? How do we adjust for contextual differences?

Slide 5:

- **Who's responsible for evaluation?** Is evaluation for management purposes? Is it the obligation of professional academics? Or is it both?

- **What are we trying to evaluate?** What really counts in teaching and learning in universities? How do we know when we're achieving our goals?

- **What sources of information are available to us?** The results from the assessment of student learning? Student evaluation of teaching? Peer review of teaching? (What can students tell us? What can't they tell us?)

- **How do we interpret the findings from evaluation?** Against what reference points should we compare findings? How do we adjust for contextual differences?

Slide 6:

- **What are we trying to evaluate?** What really counts in teaching and learning in universities? How do we know when we're achieving our goals?

So many questions here!
Are we evaluating teaching?
Or are we evaluating student learning?

IF SO, are we evaluating learning in a narrow sense or are we looking at the student experience overall?

Slide 1 (top-left):

A framework for considering approaches to evaluation teaching and learning

1. Direct assessment of student learning

2. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
   (i.e. their reports of their behaviours)

   b. their beliefs about their learning

3. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. teacher behaviours and the overall learning climate

   b. their 'satisfaction'

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Slide 2 (top-right):

A framework for considering approaches to evaluation teaching and learning

1. Direct assessment of student learning
   Direct measure of OUTCOMES- the REAL McCOY!

2. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
   (i.e. their reports of their behaviours)

   b. their beliefs about their learning
   PROCESS MEASURES All proxies, one step removed

3. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. teacher behaviours and the overall learning climate

   b. their 'satisfaction'
   PROCESS MEASURES TOO, and proxies also, perhaps two steps removed

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Slide 3 (middle-left):

A framework for considering approaches to evaluation teaching and learning

1. Direct assessment of student learning

2. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
   (i.e. their reports of their behaviours)

   b. their beliefs about their learning

3. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. teacher behaviours and the overall learning climate

   b. their 'satisfaction'

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Slide 4 (middle-right):

1. Direct assessment of student learning

   Could be 'absolute' (against an external academic standard) or 'relative' (value-added from entry level). We don't yet have the capabilities to do the latter at all well.

   Ironically, internal university assessment is rarely trusted for evaluation purposes. And external moderation is uncommon in Australia.

   The ACER Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA) is limited to generic skills.

   A further complication is that the data in this area are often highly lagged.

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Slide 5 (bottom-left):

A framework for considering approaches to evaluation teaching and learning

1. Direct assessment of student learning

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   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
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   b. their beliefs about their learning

3. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. teacher behaviours and the overall learning climate

   b. their 'satisfaction'

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Slide 6 (bottom-right):

2. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
   (i.e. their reports of their behaviours)

   Mock examples: "I regularly visit the library" "I often buy textbooks" " I often work with other students"

   Do we really know what questions of this kind to ask?
   And further …which if any of these are under our control?

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Slide 1:

A framework for considering approaches to evaluation teaching and learning

1. Direct assessment of student learning

2. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
      (i.e. their reports of their behaviours)

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Slide 2:

Mock examples of Type a:

"The staff explained things clearly"
"I knew what was expected of me"
"The workload was appropriate"
"I felt part of a learning community"

Mock examples of Type b:

"Rate the quality of teaching"
"Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of teaching"

Little hope of measuring value-added here!

3. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. teacher behaviours and the overall learning climate

   b. their 'satisfaction'

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Slide 3:

A framework for considering approaches to evaluation teaching and learning

1. Direct assessment of student learning

2. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. their patterns of engagement and activities
      (i.e. their reports of their behaviours)   The AUSSE ✱

   b. their beliefs about their learning

   Graduate Survey of generic skills 'GSS"… used in LTPF

3. Student or graduate reports of:

   a. teacher behaviours and the overall learning climate
                        CEQ 'GTS'… used in LTPF

   b. their 'satisfaction'
      CEQ 'OSS' … used in LTPF

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Slide 4:

THEORISING … possible concepts for you to utilise…

Academic adjustment
Academic application
Sense of purpose
Sense of belonging
Academic identity
Alienation
… Engagement

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Slide 5:

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Slide 6:

Publishing

'It's not research if it's not published'
Emeritus Professor John McKenzie

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Slide 1

- Know the journals, know the 'conversations' going on in them. Find out the length of the publication queue.

- Follow <u>to the letter</u> the submission requirements

- Write in a direct and lively way

- Submit an impeccable paper.

Slide 2

Common flaws

- Papers too long

- Scene-setting 'lit reviews' too long

- Focus too local, too small.

- Case studies too 'what-we-did' in tone.

- Lifeless writing

- Papers that are significant enough and/or aren't interesting enough.

Slide 3

The proportion of conference papers turned into journal articles: 4.2% !!

Slide 4

The next steps