

A lecturer's toolbox: a 'just-in-time' approach for high quality first year student experience

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In this presentation, attendees will be invited to reflect upon the experience of a "first year student", based on the literature on FYE and consider the types of teaching strategies and approaches that might generate high-quality student engagement in a first year setting. The focus of this presentation is 'just-in-time', requiring consideration as to the types of challenges first year students typically face during a University semester, and how teaching practices and approaches of a lecturer of a first year class can assist in the first year experience. The example used in this session is of first year law, but the teaching practices discussed could be generally applied to other disciplines. This presentation is about laying the foundations for an excellent first year experience in a discipline-specific context, and for that reason is consistent with the conference theme.

The context of the 'just-in-time' approach to learning/teaching

The 'just-in-time' approach is a student-centered timeline for a managed learning environment based on the experiences and challenges faced by a first year student at a particular point of time in the semester. The 'just-in-time' approach also 'layers' student-centered learning approaches throughout the semester, and makes a seamless transition with institutional-supports for first year learning. To promote student engagement and therefore high quality student learning, a lecturer needs to be diverse and adapt to the first year experience *just before it happens, and as it is happening*. This pre-emptive and anticipatory approach to teaching is best able to support the first year as an experience, rather than a reactionary non-managed learning environment. Nelson, Kift, Humphreys and Harper have similarly partitioned the learning environment in first year as a holistic week-to-week approach in the semester. This presentation will concentrate on the individual lecturer's role in teaching approaches and strategies to first year, which should be ideally complemented by institutional designs based on the six principles of Kift's transition pedagogy (Kift (2008)).

The concept of a 'just-in-time' approach depends on a lecturer understanding the students, including the backgrounds, challenges, expectations and difficulties they bring to a first year class. In doing so, a lecturer has the best chance of generating high-quality student learning, as student engagement depends by definition on the involvement of students with activities and conditions for learning (Australian Council for Educational Research, AUSSE, 1).

Although students in transition are complex and diverse, both with their demographics, backgrounds and preparedness for tertiary study (Nelson, Kift, Humphreys, Harper, 2), a first year lecturer should be equipped with a general picture of the characteristics of a first year student entering University (eg Krause, Hartley, James, McInnis (2005), Hillman (2005)). From this starting point, informal and formal discussions and feedback can tailor the lecturers' response to create a 'just-in-time' approach to teaching.

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Characteristics of the 'just-in-time approach

Week	Experience	Just-in-Time Strategy (details below)	SEMESTER-LONG	SEMESTER-LONG	SEMESTER-LONG
Orientation & Week 1-2	New, exciting, Overwhelming, uncertainty, unsure, lots of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear, simple 'need-to-know now' information including student support services, 'frameworks' and weekly-planners. - Make student expectations explicit – 'what to expect, and what to expect of me' / the role of the lecturer as facilitator of student learning - Set up clear online resources and ground rules, manage in student-centered, welcoming way. 	Learner – centered approaches in formal lectures from Week 1 Eg. 'Fun Fridays!' (see below)		Encourage & foster social connections in class & beyond Eg. Links with Students' Society, peers and through social networking forums eg. first year Facebook group
Weeks 3-5	Realisation as to workload First assessments, feeling of 'inadequacy', "Am I Good Enough", What is the Standard? Help! Overwhelmed by the amount of work Is this the right course for me?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Demystify' and encourage class participation, interaction - Increase stimulating educational experience in class – eg. interactive powerpoints, link to current affairs / "real-life" examples - Explicit & Clear Assessment expectations – publication of FAQs, pro-formas, discussion, targeted skills support Acknowledge challenges in student lives -- Reassurance & link to student support services 		Weekly email & Integrated skills development & time management Eg. 'De-stressed!' informal study groups (from week 3-13)	
Weeks 6-8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Excellent Assessment feedback: individual & class detailed feedback based on ways to improve - Targeted skills advice on time management Reiterate course purpose/ big picture summaries, how this Unit "fits in", revision and review of earlier weeks, bring purpose back ! Continue Fun and engaging learning activities even during the "mid-Semester slump" eg. Guest speakers, visits to related-places of significance, bringing in later year students etc Reassurance & link to student support services 			
Week 9- 12	A real and worrying sense of panic, impending issues, 'how to cope'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted skills development for exam preparation – clear, explicit instruction, expectations - Big picture reviews and revisions, placing in context, making exam expectations clear Conduct practice exam period eg. Situational learning, approaches 			
Weeks after		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam debrief – provision of information as to exams; student consultations Dealing with failures Handover to next semester academic staff 			

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These approaches were compiled from recommendations as to engaging teaching practice as detailed in the following sources:

- Griffith University Good Practice Guide: Enhancing Student Engagement in the First Year: 10 Strategies to Success (Kerri-Lee Krause) available at www.griffith.edu.au/gihe
- Australian Council for Educational Research, Attracting, Engaging and Retaining: New Conversations About Learning: Australasian Student Engagement Report Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (2008).
- Nelson, Kift, Humphreys, Harper, 'A Blueprint for Enhanced Transition: Taking a Holistic Approach to Managing Student Transition into a Large University'

Specific application demonstrated in this presentation

MLL110 Law Society and Civil Rights – a first year first semester introductory law unit 200 students on-campus, Burwood, Victoria, Four hours of lectures per week + 1 hour tutorial + 1 hour “De-stressed” Skills Development Group + *Deakin Studies Online*.

Assessment: 70% examination; 30 % assignment consisting of legal research module (10%), written assignment 1500 words (15%) and bibliography (5%).

Some of the Just-in-Time Teaching Approaches to be discussed in this Presentation:

Learner-Centered approaches to law in “Fun Fridays!”



- Mindmapping/ brainstorming sessions
- Role plays

MLL110 Law Society & Civil Rights

A REVIEW OF TOPICS 1-4 in MLL 110 LAW SOCIETY & CIVIL RIGHTS by Claire Macken

There was once a beautiful and intelligent lady of slight build with flowing chestnut locks who came from a far away land. It so happened that in her travels she stumbled across the doors of a grand building in Northern Italy. A faded sign caught her eye:

"BOLOGNA SCHOOL OF LAW"

So she went inside. A Professor was standing inside the school, looking whimsical. "Law?" she questioned the Professor. "What is this 'law' to which you refer?"

The Italian Professor, clearly perturbed at the interruption, said: "What an annoying question! There is no simple or obvious answer!" (or more accurately *"che domande annoying! Non ci è risposta semplice o evidente"*) and with that, turned on his heels and slammed the door.

"Hmph!" she thought and continued on her way. In Paris, she travelled to the Louvre and saw 2.4 meter stone pillars named "Hammurabi's Code". In Normandy, some references to someone called "William the Conqueror", and a plaque commemorating the "Battle of Hastings" on the English South Coast.

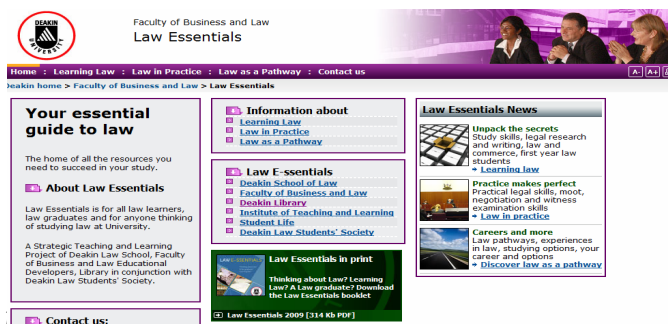


including these strategies:

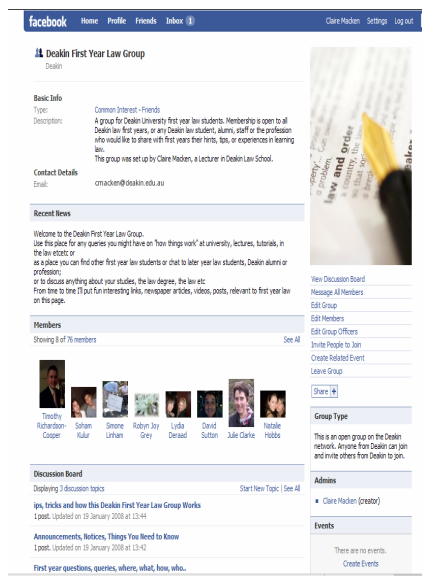
- Buzz groups
- Fishbowls
- Question/ answer sessions
- Teacher/

student swap classes

Formal and informal social and learning-related groups eg. Facebook First Year Law Group and User-friendly, clear simple approach to Deakin Studies Online and setup of “Law Essentials - www.deakin.edu.au/buslaw/lawessentials - a one-stop reference point for all law students on everything they need to know about studying and learning law and entering the legal profession



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‘Destressed ‘How to Study Law’ Groups

– targeted integrated skills development based on a “just-in-time” first year experience

- 1 hour “bring your lunch and coffee” fun, chatty, informal groups on “hot issues” in first year law.

‘How do I get started?’, ‘What is a case anyway’? or ‘How do I prepare for the upcoming assignment?’ Each week a ‘take-away’ summary and worksheet would complement in-class discussion

De-Stressed! How to Study Law Groups

Effective Reading in Your Law Studies

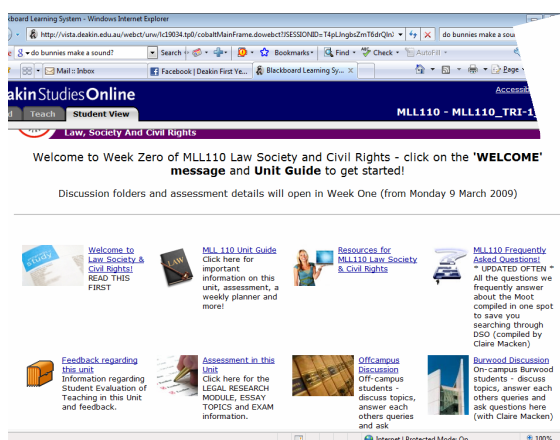
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Go to a Chapter of your Textbook. Any chapter!, or an article, or even a case & complete this exercise!

Before you read anything! ...assess

What is the title of this Chapter? What do you think you might be in?
Read just the Headings & sub-headings.
Read any captions under pictures, graphics etc
Are there any questions at the end of the Chapter or section (or in the Studyguide?) Read through those
Read just the Introductory paragraph and the Conclusion
What do you think this chapter is about? Why do you think it is part of the set reading? What do you know from this cursory examination?



De-Stressed! How to Study Law Groups

Planning Time for Your Law Studies

Every time you sit down to study, you could divide each hour into 45/15, meaning 45 minutes effective study followed by a 15 minute break. You might find 50/10 works best for you (50 minutes study, 10 minutes break). 3 or 4 sessions of 45 or 50 minutes is an effective way to learn.

Begin each study session with a 5-minute routine task that will help get you “primed” and prepared to tackle study. This could be something simple, such as getting out the text books for a particular subject, opening the relevant computer file, getting your pens and paper lined up. Anything – just something that lets your mind know “It’s now time to study”.

You should spend the next 5-10 minutes writing a plan for this study session of 2-4 hours. What do you want to cover in this session?

To write a plan:

- Write a big “to do” list for each subject. Look at your subjects and think about everything that needs to be done. You could even write a “to do” list for the entire month, or a whole subject. If you have a large task to

Feedback, Evaluation and Results

Student evaluation ‘Was this Unit Well Taught?’ from a score of 5

2005	1.88	Yes – 29.6% of respondents
2006	2.76 (different lecturer)	
2007	2.80 (different lecturer)	
2008	4.50	Yes – 94.6% of respondents



Implementation of learner-centered ‘just-in-time’ approaches to first year in MLL110 Law, Society and Civil Rights

Students commented in 2008:

“Absolutely loved Law Society and Civil Rights. Great lectures and tutorials. Very happy with the standard of this unit.”

“This is an essential introduction to a daunting new environment and is handled very well by all the staff, who are approachable and friendly... the atmosphere and the support were the best aspects by far.”

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“Law, Society and Civil Rights is always the highlight of my week. Thankyou!”

Claire's enthusiasm and passion for the law really shone through in her translation of the materials. Claire's use of videos, songs and other visual materials was a fantastic way to teach the material required. Not only did she provide exceptional insight, but always did so with a smile!

“Claire is the best lecturer ever! She was highly entertaining, whilst still covering course material in detail. the lecture slides were engaging and the additional videos she created were good summaries of topics we had covered”

The Transferrable Outcomes of the Initiatives in this Presentation

The purpose of this presentation is to provide a ‘just-in-time’ engagement framework for a high quality first year student experience. ‘Just-in-time’ in this context referred to a student-centered timeline for a managed learning environment based on the week-to-week experiences and challenges faced by a first year student at a particular point of time in the semester. The engagement framework in this presentation is situated within teaching strategies based on the approach of a discipline-specific unit, a first year law unit at Deakin University in Victoria, Australia.

In terms of transferable outcomes, the just-in-time engagement framework in this presentation can be modelled into three stages for a first-year University semester, complemented by continuing and integrated teaching strategies. Throughout the Semester, teaching strategies within the framework should be designed to embed skill development within the curriculum, reduce student anonymity, foster involvement and integrate learner-centered approaches to learning (Australian Universities Teaching Committee 2001).

Semester-long teaching strategies should include:

- Clearly explained ‘learner-centered’ approaches in class;
- Integrated study and generic skills within the curriculum (Asmar, Brew, McCulloch, Peseta & Barrie 2000).

The first stage of the just-in-time engagement strategy is one that assists students in overcoming their uncertainty of entering a new unit, a new degree, tertiary education for the first time in addition to equipping students with the immediate skills they need to deal with the overwhelming volume of information the first few weeks bring (AUTC 2001). Strategies should be in place to deal with the stress, anxiety and tension the transition to University brings (Darlaston-Jones, Cohen, Drew, Haunold, Pike, & Young 2001). The first stage should also capitalise on the overall positive outlook of first year students, and the expectation that University will provide an opportunity for intellectual challenge (Krause et al 2005).

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The second stage of the just-in-time engagement strategy is intended to address the loss of momentum, motivation and coupled with the return of first assessments, and is in weeks 4 to 10. At this time of semester, first year students may find themselves challenging their social identity, who they are and what they are doing, and feel stressed, frustrated or 'a failure' as a result (Eijkman 2002). Feelings of inadequacy may cause students to consider withdrawing from their course (Darlaston-Jones et al 2001). Students may have difficulty in juggling work and study (Hillman 2005).

The third stage of the just-in-time engagement strategy is one that particularly focuses on the end-of-Semester assessment, further integration of specific skills development and the provision of 'summaries' and 'big picture' advice to assist students in consolidating their unit knowledge. Practice exam sessions and sample exam questions and answers can assist in setting expectations. At this time, it is also important that students have a sense of purpose and belief in their own abilities (Asmar et al 2000).

The rationale for the engagement framework in this presentation is the imperative that for student engagement and high quality student learning, teaching strategies in a semester should be able to adapt to the learning challenges of a first year student *just before it happens, and as it is happening*. By pre-empting the types of challenges students face at a particular time of the Semester, the approach in this presentation can provide a seamless transition between *all* aspects of the FYE, to aid early student learning, engagement and success (Kift 2008). This is part of a co-ordinated, sustained and embedded institutional-wide to approach to first year (Kift 2008). The framework in this presentation, therefore, moves beyond simply the 'characteristics of an effective University teacher', which are well-known and documented (Ramsden 2003; Coates 2006), to the appropriate use of teaching strategies to assist academic staff to manage and lead effective forms of engagement (Coates 2006), as applied to the FYE. Although this presentation is focused upon an individual lecturer implementing teaching strategies for engagement, a 'just-in-time' engagement strategy is only successful when embedded and co-ordinated at an institutional level (Kift 2008).