

Foundations of University Learning and Teaching Program: Report on the first three years

The Foundations program is managed by the Teaching Development Unit and taught by TDU staff with contributions by guest lecturers from across UWS.

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1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and formal evaluation of the first three years of the Foundations of University Learning and Teaching Program (hereafter called the Foundations program) at the University of Western Sydney.

In 2006, the University of Western Sydney (UWS) approved a plan to offer all newly appointed academics (Levels A, B and C) a professional development program to enhance their teaching effectiveness. The **Foundations of University Learning and Teaching Policy** came into effect in 2007 and the first Foundations program was offered in July 2007. Since 2007, the program has had 46 graduates, with 62 academic staff currently enrolled (September 2010).

The policy states that there should be a formal evaluation of the program after three years and the purpose of this report is to fulfil that obligation, and to reflect on the growth of the program and its achievements. This report draws on independently led focus groups with graduates, individual interviews with three Heads of Schools, collated survey data from the successive programs, and reflective feedback from the program facilitators, the academic staff in the Teaching Development Unit (TDU).

Overwhelmingly both current participants and graduates consider that the Foundations program is a valuable induction for those commencing their teaching at UWS. The primary impact, acknowledged by both graduates and Heads of School, is that graduates have become better teachers. This outcome aligns with the **Making the Difference** strategy which aims to develop staff capacity for high quality teaching in order to create a superior and engaged learning experience for students. As UWS increases its staff profile, the program will continue to play an important part in developing quality teaching.

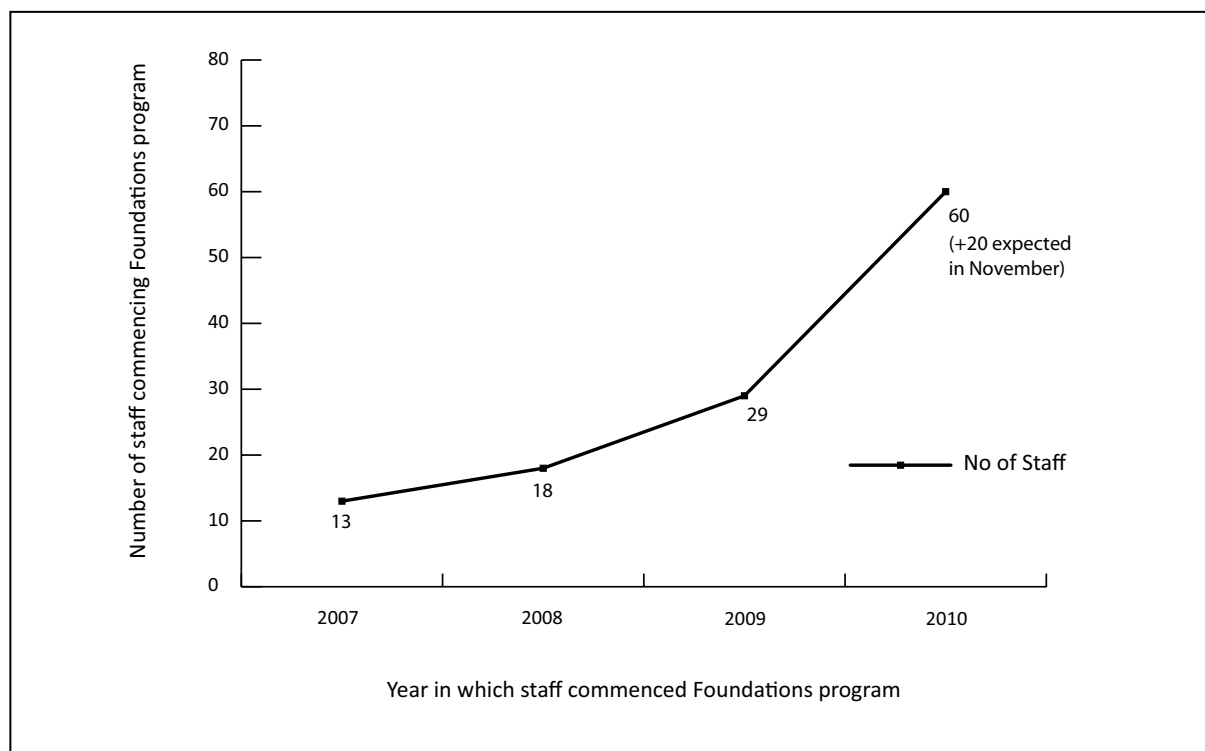
Graduates highlighted the following features of the program as instrumental in the success of the program:

- flexible structure of the program which accommodates the diverse learning needs and work demands of participants;
- exposure to research and literature in teaching and learning in higher education and to teaching practices used by colleagues at the University, which enables participants to broaden their expertise and try out a greater range of possibilities for improving their own teaching and assessing practice;
- valuable involvement in microteaching and cycles of observation and feedback on teaching which enhance teaching effectiveness;
- flexible assessment which enables participants to investigate areas of interest and value to them, and helps them recognise the value of researching their own practice; and
- valuable feedback on learning throughout the program and on assessment tasks, which promotes continuing learning.

Heads of School reported positive feedback from staff about the usefulness of the Foundations program. They said that staff had gained tools for reviewing and developing their teaching and assessing practice; that participants often formed ongoing working relationships focused on developing and refining their teaching practice; and that graduates encouraged new colleagues to view the program positively.

The program has been under pressure this year to increase the number of programs offered as a result of an increase in new academic staff at UWS. The following figure shows the increase in the number of new academic staff commencing the Foundations program since 2007.

Figure 1: Increase in enrolments in the Foundations program



It is recommended that:

1. the success of this program be noted by the Executive;
2. appropriate resources be made available to meet current and future resource implications of the staff recruitment agenda;
3. Colleges and Schools reach agreement that all staff participating in the program will be allocated at least 100 hours workload for this purpose over the duration of their enrolment in the program; and
4. the program continue in its current format, with continuing regular updates and revision of material.

2. Background

In 2006, the University of Western Sydney (UWS) approved a plan to offer all newly appointed academics (Levels A, B and C) a professional development program to enhance their teaching effectiveness. The Foundations of University Learning and Teaching Policy came into effect in 2007 and the first Foundations program was offered in July 2007. The program is managed by the Teaching Development Unit (TDU).

The policy states that there should be a formal evaluation of the program after three years and the purpose of this report is to fulfil that obligation, and to reflect on the growth of the program and its achievements. Whilst there is evaluative data from surveys gathered from each program that has been used for this three year evaluation of the program, the Teaching Development Unit decided it would also be useful to use an independent evaluator to facilitate focus groups with graduates to garner additional qualitative feedback about the program. In order to gauge the reputation and possible impacts of the program, it was also decided to interview three Heads of Schools from Schools where larger numbers of new academic staff had completed the Foundations program.

The provision of a formal induction program to learning and teaching for new academics is an initiative that is now offered in all universities, although at varying degrees of depth. For UWS, the initiative aligns very closely with the **Making the Difference** strategy, in particular 'Building organisational strength' and 'Developing high quality staff'.

In the development stages of the program, UWS drew heavily on the University of Wollongong's well regarded Foundations program and entered into a formal arrangement to adopt many of their principles and teaching materials. The program has now evolved into an entirely UWS designed program. It is coordinated and taught by the academic staff in the TDU, with contributions from other UWS teaching academics.

The UWS Foundations program has been benchmarked with the literature and with Foundations programs offered by other universities through discussions with program coordinators attending the annual Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Foundations Colloquium. UWS's program is one of only a small number of programs that provides new academic staff with a flexible, contextualised and assessable induction to learning and teaching.

In 2008 and 2009, the Foundations program was provided each February and July. Due to a greater number of new academic appointments in 2010, the program is being offered four times (February, June, July, November). Since the program commenced, 46 academic staff have graduated and 62 are currently enrolled in the program; a further 20 staff are expected for the November program. Detailed enrolment data is provided in the following section of this report. A Certificate of Completion is issued to staff who satisfactorily complete the program. If they wish to, academic staff can seek advanced standing for one unit in Deakin University's Graduate Certificate in Higher Education. Communication with graduates indicates that only four staff have taken up this pathway.

3. Program Overview

The Foundations of University Learning and Teaching program is a professional development program which is mandatory for all new full-time UWS teaching staff, employed at the Associate Lecturer, Lecturer, and Senior Lecturer levels where the appointment is for 12 months or longer.

The key concepts taught in the program are student-focused teaching, constructive alignment and reflective practice. These concepts are the three most common and strongly interrelated concepts taught in academic development programs in Australia and the UK.¹ Staff develop expertise in how to actively engage their students in learning, including how to successfully plan and align their teaching. They learn that they can continue to develop their teaching through reflection on what works and why, and by engaging in the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SOLT). Two key texts are used in the program² and a full list of readings (see Appendix 1) used in Module 1 is made available to participants through the program's website.

The program is offered in blended mode, incorporating face-to-face sessions, online learning and independent study. Face-to-face sessions at the beginning of the program enable staff to learn with and from peers and to gain exposure to different disciplinary examples. These couple of days spent together establish a strong group dynamic amongst participants and are a good preparation for the following modules which are conducted largely through online learning and independent study. The blended format of the program caters to the multi-campus nature of UWS, requiring only a small amount of cross-campus travel over the course of the program.

Staff teaching in the Foundations program model teaching styles that are interactive and adaptable to a range of different teaching contexts. Teaching styles are responsive to concerns and issues of importance to academic staff. Each session in module 1 includes group or individual activities designed to accommodate and extend different levels of expertise. Sessions are also designed to challenge assumptions and to offer alternative perspectives about learning and teaching.

The Foundations program consists of three modules, completed over two semesters.

Module 1: Teaching Skills Workshop

This is a 2.5 day face-to-face workshop. The mode of delivery for this module is essential to achieving the aims of the program and establishing strong relationships between the facilitators and participants.

Module 1 provides participants with practical assistance in designing and implementing teaching activities and supports them in broadening their exploration of teaching and learning in higher education. Workshop sessions focus on topics such as understanding student learning, approaches to teaching and designing units, introduction to blended learning, teaching for active learning, assessing for learning, and giving and receiving feedback on teaching. On the third day of module 1, staff apply theory discussed during the previous two days to their own context through designing and 'microteaching' one concept or skill (*teach it in ten minutes*). Microteaching is conducted in groups of five participants with one facilitator, and as of 2010 the session has been videotaped and given to the microteacher as a resource for them to use after the session. Participants receive feedback on their microteaching session from peers and a facilitator. The use of microteaching in module 1 leads into cycles of observation and feedback on teaching in module 2. This serves to normalise teaching observation and encourages practices that enhance teaching effectiveness.

¹ Kandlbinder, P. & Peseta, T. (2008). Key concepts for foundation subjects on higher education teaching and learning. *Presentation at Foundations Colloquium, Enhancing Quality, 29-30 September, James Cook University, Townsville.*

² Biggs, J. & Tang, C. (2007) *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does (3rd ed)* Berkshire: UK: Open University Press.

Kember, D. & McNaught, C. (2007) *Enhancing University Teaching: Lessons from research into award-winning teachers.* London: Routledge.

Module 2: Reflective Practice on Teaching

This module is practice based and utilises a network of support colleagues within the Schools to advise and support staff through several peer reviews of teaching cycles.

Module 2 is based on cycles of peer observation, feedback and reflection on teaching. Staff plan, teach, gain feedback from a peer observer and students, and reflect and write about the experience. Staff also observe two colleagues (known as nominated and support colleagues) as they teach classes during the semester. They reflect on these experiences in an online learning journal; four reflective entries are required during the semester. Two recall meetings are held between modules 2 and 3: the first to provide an orientation to module 3 and the second to provide feedback on participants' proposed projects for module 3.

Module 3: Negotiated Project

This module provides scope for each participant to investigate one aspect of their teaching in more depth.

Module 3 explores the relationship between teaching, learning and evaluation in the participant's discipline, within an area of their choice. Staff negotiate their project topic, aims and process with the module coordinator and undertake the project independently. Projects involve scholarly inquiry into practice and build on an aspect of the participant's critical reflection from module 2.

Many projects align with the **Making the Difference** strategy, in particular with the strategy to 'create a superior and engaged learning experience'. Examples of module 3 projects include:

- Using web technologies for teaching, allowing greater flexibility for students to listen to lectures, activating students' management of their own learning and enabling more opportunities for discussion and feedback;
- Implementation of weekly online learning tasks to further engage students with course readings, promote a deeper level of reflection on course content, and generate online peer discussion;
- The significance of self-assessment in enhancing students' critical thinking and essay writing skills;
- Using exemplars to improve Nursing students' perceptions and understanding of research based units;
- An investigation of Nursing students' perceptions of the effects on their learning of 'de-contextualised' diagnostic maths papers (ie questions only) and 'contextualised' diagnostic maths papers (ie medication labels, syringes, medication charts and I.V. drip set-ups along with questions), and exploration of the barriers and motivating factors in their learning.

Administration of the program

Since its inception, TDU has relied on casual administrative support for this program. The administrative load is heavy and there is a need for additional program support in the 2011 budget to meet the increase in staff recruitment. Administrative duties include liaising with new academic teaching staff and facilitating enrolment, preparing program materials, managing the vUWS site for each program, and coordinating online evaluation for modules 2 and 3.

Teaching staff

The program is taught by academics in TDU. The PVC (Learning and Teaching), Professor Stuart Campbell, is invited to meet Foundations participants on the first day of Module 1 and to provide an overview of the latest issues and directions in learning and teaching at the University. A TDU staff member is given responsibility to co-ordinate the program, and for the last two years this has been Ms Rosemary Thomson who has done an outstanding job. TDU academic staff contribute to individual sessions in Module 1 and facilitate the microteaching activity on the third day of that module. TDU staff share the responsibility for responding to learning journals and providing feedback on module assessment tasks. Where appropriate, TDU involves other academic staff, from Schools and the Student Learning Unit, in presentations and activities in Module 1. In 2010, TDU recorded an interview with a Foundations graduate to highlight to new staff how the process of reflection had led to a positive change in assessment activities in a unit with a previously high failure rate. It is expected that as more staff graduate from the program, there will be further opportunities to draw on their experience within the program.

Foundations participants

The range of teaching experience in Foundations cohorts can vary from no teaching experience to substantial experience but no formal qualification in teaching in higher education. In some cases, academic staff are new to teaching at University, coming from either a professional or a research role. Other staff have been teaching casually at University whilst completing PhD studies and as they take up their first tenured appointment, are required to undertake Foundations. Another group of participants have either taught extensively overseas but have no formal qualification in teaching in higher education or have returned to University teaching after an absence. This means that the program must be adaptive and responsive to the range of experiences in each cohort group.

Assessment

At the end of each module, staff complete an assessment task which applies theory to their own teaching and learning context. Assessment is ungraded (Satisfactory or Not yet satisfactory). The total breadth of assessment is equivalent to one unit in a postgraduate degree. Feedback on assessment tasks helps staff see how they might continue developing their teaching practice.

Evaluation

Each program and module is formally evaluated using feedback surveys, with a view to continuous improvement. For details of program evaluation and results, see Section 4 of this report.

Liaison with Schools

TDU notifies Heads of Schools when school staff commence the Foundations program and when they complete the program. A minimum of 100 hours workload allocation over the duration of the program is recommended. The actual workload allocation given to staff completing the program varies widely between Schools, and ranges from 0-144 hours for the duration of the program.

Enrolment process

The enrolment process is handled jointly by TDU and the Office of Human Resources (OHR). OHR notifies TDU of relevant new appointments (full-time staff appointed to teaching positions at levels A, B and C, where the appointment is for 12 months or longer). TDU contacts identified staff, providing details of the Foundations program and commencement dates. The unit will continue to work with Heads of Schools to ensure that all relevant new staff have been identified and invited to participate in the program. The program has gained such a strong reputation that Heads of Schools sometimes contact TDU to ensure that new staff are enrolled.

Completions and current enrolments

Since the program commenced in July 2007, it has been offered twice a year, with two additional programs offered in 2010 due to increased numbers of new academic staff being appointed. Enrolment figures reflect particular recruitment cycles in the University. The following table (Table 1) shows the number of staff who have completed the Foundations program, and the number currently completing Modules 2 and 3. A further 20 staff are expected in the November program.

Table 1: Completions and current enrolments (to September 2010)

	Number of staff who have completed Foundations Program	Number of staff currently completing Modules 2 & 3
College of Arts:		
Communication Arts	7	2
Education	3	4
Humanities and Languages	-	5
Psychology	2	2
Social Sciences	2	4
Total - College of Arts	14	17
College of Business:		
Accounting	4	2
Economics and Finance	2	
Law	6	
Management	-	
Marketing	3	1
Total - College of Business	15	11
College of Health & Science		
Biomedical & Health Science	6	8
Computing & Mathematics	1	2
Engineering	2	6
Medicine	1	2
Natural Sciences	-	3
Nursing & Midwifery	7	13
Total - College of Health & Science	17	34
TOTAL	46	62

Exemptions: Exemption from enrolment and completion of the program can be sought on the grounds of:

- a. completion of a postgraduate qualification in higher education or adult education;
- b. completion of an equivalent teaching development program from another university; or
- c. demonstrated experience and excellence in teaching as evidenced through documentation of their teaching achievements over the last three years and evidence of reflective practice.

Since the program commenced in 2007, fifteen staff have been granted exemption from participating in the Foundations program (Table 2).

Table 2: Exemptions approved (to September 2010)

Grounds for exemption	Exemptions granted:
Postgraduate qualification in higher education or adult education	8
Participation in an equivalent teaching development course at another university	4
Demonstrated experience and excellence in teaching as evidenced through a portfolio documenting teaching achievements over the last three years	3
TOTAL exemptions	15

Additional enrolments

On several occasions, TDU has been approached by a Head of School asking for special placement for a staff member in the Foundations program. Provided there has been a place available, TDU has endeavoured to meet such requests.

4. Evaluation

The **Foundations of University Learning and Teaching policy** stipulates that formal evaluation of the program should occur on a three yearly cycle. This section draws on a range of data to provide a comprehensive overview of graduate and participant feedback, as well as feedback from three Heads of Schools where a number of staff have graduated from the program. The section concludes by providing examples of how previous survey results have been used to continuously improve the program. The following section of the report (Section 5) highlights the impact of the Foundations program on learning and teaching practice at UWS and on academic staff capacity.

Each Foundations program and module is evaluated through participant surveys, which are summarised in this section. In addition to the survey feedback, it was decided to seek feedback from graduates of the program through focus groups, and from Heads of Schools through individual interviews. In order to provide professional independence to the focus group process, TDU employed Mr Paul Parker (Student Learning Unit) to lead a series of focus groups with fifteen staff who graduated from the Foundations program between 2008 and 2010. Each focus group ran for approximately one hour. With participants' consent, sessions were audio taped and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Mr Parker assisted the TDU team with preliminary identification of themes from the focus group data. More detailed analysis of themes between the data sets was carried out and is presented here.

Individual interviews with three Heads of School were conducted by Ms Rosemary Thomson, the Foundations Coordinator (with Heads of School from Accounting, Biomedical & Health Sciences, and Law). A number of staff from each of these Schools have completed the Foundations program. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in length and were audio taped and transcribed with participant consent.

Overwhelmingly, feedback on the program from graduates, Heads of School and current participants was consistently very positive. The Foundations program is seen as supporting staff to become more accomplished and confident teachers. The program produces graduates who feel comfortable and capable in designing teaching and assessment situations which model best practice and meet the needs of their discipline and student cohort. Graduates and Heads of School highlighted the following features of the program as instrumental in its success:

- flexible structure which accommodates the diverse learning needs and work demands of participants;
- exposure to research and literature in teaching and learning in higher education (Scholarship of Learning and Teaching – SOLT) and to teaching practices used by colleagues at the University. This purposeful, supportive and timely exposure enables participants to experience a greater range of styles which in turn opens a greater resource of possibilities for improving their own teaching and assessing practice;
- valuable involvement in microteaching and cycles of observation and feedback on teaching which enhance teaching effectiveness;
- flexible assessment which encourages reflective practice and enables participants to investigate areas of interest and value to them. It also enables participants to recognise the value of researching their own practice; and
- valuable and timely feedback on learning throughout the duration of the program and on assessment tasks, which promotes continuing learning.

The following section provides detail from three sources of feedback:

1. Focus groups with Foundations graduates
2. Interviews with Heads of Schools
3. Summary of feedback from participant surveys

Feedback from focus groups with Foundations graduates

A total of fifteen graduates participated in focus groups held at Campbelltown, Parramatta and Penrith campuses in May 2010 (11 graduates) and at Parramatta Campus in September 2008 (4 graduates). The fifteen graduates represented ten Schools across the three Colleges. Each of the focus groups was facilitated by Mr Paul Parker from the Student Learning Unit. Mr Parker was an independent evaluator, not connected with any teaching or assessing on the Foundations program. During the focus groups graduates were asked about their general perceptions of the program and in particular:

- what they believed they had learned during the program and whether this had led to any ongoing changes in their teaching practices; and
- suggestions for how the program could be improved for future participants.

What graduates said they had learned during the program and whether this had led to changes in their teaching practice

Three main themes were gleaned from focus group discussions: thinking about teaching from the perspective of student learning, implementing changes to teaching and assessing practice, and how exposure to research in learning and teaching increased participants' interest in research.

The first theme, **thinking about teaching from the perspective of student learning** revolved around graduates identifying changes in how they thought about teaching in terms of student learning as well as content delivery. There were significant shifts moving from a content focus to a student focus.

"I was almost entirely content focused I think, I really didn't think about how I delivered the information. And now I'm looking at the process and also planning ahead much more than I did." (FG1-Sep08)

"I'm thinking more about the students' perspective. Like if I was a student, would I like sitting in this lecture and would I learn what I want them to learn? So that helped a lot." (FG2-May10)

The second theme, **implementing changes to teaching and assessing practice**, had graduates identifying how they were consciously and purposefully implementing changes to their teaching practice, assessment tasks and learning activities.

"I actually think quite a bit about the lecture and what we talked about in Foundations when I'm planning a lecture, like I'll often throw in things and a few colleagues have gone 'You can't do that in a lecture, it won't work'. And because we've talked it through at Foundations, I go 'Oh well, you know, I'm going to', and it's made the lectures a lot more interesting I think." (FG4-May10)

“You do have to have this really high level of engagement within the lectures, so introducing that into lectures I found more beneficial and it was certainly an eye-opener and I think it was one of the most useful things ... seeing that you can engage two hundred plus students in a lecture to do something.” (FG2-May10)

“I’ve restructured the assignments, making a more practical focus rather than writing an essay ... making the students feel ‘Okay, this is a job I’ll have to do when I graduate’. So I think the students like it.” (FG3-May10)

Graduates repeatedly commented on the notion of constructive alignment (aligning learning outcomes + teaching and learning activities + assessment) and how they were finding this a powerful tool in helping them continue to improve student learning in their respective units.

“And the idea of constructive alignment ... we just keep on coming back to it, and we keep on assessing ‘okay, they’re not getting this, there’s something misaligned, what can we do to realign this so that they’re actually doing the very thing that we want them to do?’” (FG4-May10)

“I have been teaching for fifteen years, but it [constructive alignment] was really a turning point in terms of making teaching more effective and making the students active in the classroom.” (FG2-May10)

Graduates also identified how powerful the project based assessment was within the program. This assessment allowed participants to engage with learning and teaching ideas which were particularly relevant to their teaching context.

“The best part I learned, as part of my project was to sort of analyse the change to assessments and how that went down with students and to just keep doing that and trying to find time if it’s not part of the project to actually go back. Whether it’s how you give lectures or about assessment items, it just gives it a reality check.” (FG2-May10)

Graduates said they had an increased sensitivity to factors affecting student learning, including the social climate of the learning environment.

“I’m sure it’s easier to learn in an open and understanding environment, as opposed to just being this person [who is] totally abstract to them ... preaching at them.” (FG2-May10)

The third theme, **exposure to research in learning and teaching increased participants’ interest in research**, was identified by participants as facilitating a deeper understanding of how students learn and how to plan teaching accordingly. Graduates commented on the value of being exposed to research in learning and teaching (Scholarship of Learning and Teaching – SOLT) through the Foundations program.

“To me that opened a complete new world, like there’s people actually doing research on the sort of problems we’re facing in a teaching environment and being new to it and that was actually quite useful and eye opening.” (FG2-May10)

“For me overall, because I’m coming from a business background and a professional background, it got me engaged in the idea of research which I was previously fairly adverse to.” (FG4-May10)

“To me, I reckon it’s important to do a thread of educational research....as a teacher, as an educator ... and that’s something I took from the program...it’s important to have a dual research career, to have a career in your discipline and in education, because it makes you a better educator, and I think that’s something I definitely took from the program and really took to heart, because I found that my interest in the research actually did give me a lot more fire in my belly about the teaching improvements.” (FG4-May10)

Features of the Foundations program that graduates said supported them in improving their teaching practice

Graduates commented on the features of the Foundations program that supported the kinds of changes outlined above. While they identified particular learning resources and assessments tasks associated with the program as examples of stand-out features, overall graduates highlighted the overarching program characteristics as key support elements; that is, the flexible structure and assessment, valuable guidance and feedback, the usefulness of microteaching in module 1, and the value of observing colleagues teach.

The first theme focused on the **flexible structure and assessment within the program which accommodated diverse learning needs and work demands of participants.**

“The sort of structure that allows you to be flexible on time lines and topics and whatever levels you are [at], I think is what makes it really, really powerful for everybody to gain something out of it.” (FG2-May10)

“I thought it was good as in just meeting other people that are in a similar situation. You know, your back is against the wall and you’re trying to, I guess, swim before you can tread water. You know, if you’re new to the actual teaching experience, that gives you a lot of confidence and helps you out, you know and helps you structure your lectures and made you think more about how students actually learn, that there are different ways in which to learn.” (FG2-May10)

The second theme, **valuable guidance and feedback promoted effective and continuing learning,** highlighted that graduates reflected on the value of guidance and feedback received during the program, and on responses to their learning journals and assessment tasks.

“The mentor suggested different directions to start thinking in, and perhaps connections to educational theory that might be useful in shedding light on what I was personally finding. And for me that was incredibly helpful. I’ve always been a very reflective person anyway, but I think this made that stand out. It was a lot more to think about, and with that feedback ... it really got you thinking.” (FG4-May10)

“I also found really helpful the feedback on the modules it’s not only that somebody actually read what we put together; but there was actually some useful feedback coming back off, where to go and where to take it from there. So I think those things together, the flexibility of the guidance and the patience and the feedback on the last two modules is what probably makes it so successful and helpful to anybody no matter at what level you come in because it is so flexible and you can take it to wherever you personally have issues with and need to expand.” (FG2-May10)

A third theme recognised **the value of microteaching in prompting participants to reconceptualise how effective teaching can occur.**

“I thought the microteaching session was very useful ... that’s where I learned to strip out a lot of the content and just get down to the nuts and bolts and if you can actually get the bare nuts and bolts across, if the foundations are laid correctly, then you can build on it.” (FG2-May10)

Another theme, **the value of observing colleagues teach**, was important in that it emphasised how graduates associated changes in their own teaching practice with the experience of being able to observe colleagues teach. Participants also identified the profound impact of the experience of giving and receiving feedback on teaching between peers had on them.

“I love the way it gave me the opportunity to observe the teachers, especially my nominated colleague, which was so wonderful and I learnt a lot.” (FG4-May10)

“It was really interesting how different disciplines [in the Foundations program] actually teach. You can actually think ‘Okay, well I can bring in some of that.’” (FG3-May10)

The final theme, **learning resources increased participants’ awareness of possibilities for active learning in large classes and helped them see how particular strategies worked in action**, was also identified as a powerful learning experience which opened participants to other ways of “doing” teaching.

“There was this guy engaging this huge hall of students – it was a real eye opener to me – and having them being really interactive within the lecture and that’s obviously been going on in other institutions around the world, you know this wasn’t a new video, it was a real eye opener.” (FG2-May10)

“The DVD ... Teaching teaching and understanding understanding. That was fantastic. That’s probably one of the most enlightening things of the course, it might sound stupid, but it was excellent.” (FG2-May10)

Suggestions for improvements to the program

The prompt question about suggestions for improvements had graduates indicate a **desire to provide and benefit from ongoing support** after completing the Foundations program. They suggested a learning community or network of graduates where they could continue to share their learning.

“Everybody takes different bit out of the actual [Foundations program] and each of us could become a mentor in certain aspects I guess that we took away.” (FG2-May10)

“Some kind of network to say ‘Look, I’ve tried to use this work for this’ and then [it’s up to people] whether they take it up or not. But to have some sort of network to keep in touch about those issues because I think they are important to all of us since we have to teach.” (FG2-May10)

Participants highlighted the **need for workload allowance for completing the Foundations program**. Some participants indicated that they had been given an adequate workload allowance for the program, but others had received none

“If everyone is expected to do this course as a new staff member, there needs to be consistency [in workload allocation to do the course] university-wide.” (FG4-May10)

Participants also talked about the **desirability of raising awareness within management of the difficulties faced by new staff given units to coordinate** without necessarily having much teaching experience.

“Something that the University actually does poorly [is] preparing people to be a unit coordinator and actually teaching. If you’re not a teaching academic coming into the University, you’ve been in research and you come in probably the mentoring in most schools is really poor.” (FG2-May10)

Feedback from interviews with Heads of School

Individual interviews were conducted with three Heads of Schools whose staff had completed the Foundation program: Heads of School of Accounting (Associate Professor Phil Ross), Biomedical & Health Sciences (Professor Gregory Kolt), and Law (Acting Head of School, Associate Professor Mac Collings).

The Heads of School were asked to comment on the following prompt questions during their interview with Ms Thomson:

- what they believed their staff had gained through participating in the Foundations program;
- whether they had seen any evidence that participation in the program had led to any changes in teaching and/or assessing;
- what, if any, other impacts they had noticed from staff participating in the program; and
- whether they had any suggestions improvements to the Foundations program.

Heads of School reported positive feedback from staff about the usefulness of the Foundations program

Each of the Heads of Schools commented that staff in their Schools had provided positive feedback on the program.

“They came out [of the program] saying yes, it’s really influenced how they teach and what they’ve done, which has been quite positive.”

“Feedback is invariably good and they range from very enthusiastic to others who are more nuanced, but none of them are negative.”

Foundation program facilitators are conscious of participant attitudes and experience so it was pleasing to hear a Head of School state that:

“Most of what I expected to hear from some staff that have gone through the program is about how they knew it all anyway but that hasn’t come out at all. There has been a staff member who was having a fair bit of difficulty with the teaching part of their role, with direct feedback from students to that effect as well, and I think that individual is far more comfortable with their teaching now as a result of participating in the program.”

“People tell the story about how they came in with a particular approach to teaching, style of teaching but through the program, they picked up ideas and ways and methods to try and put into action, then they have a look at their next year’s results and found quite a difference. So that’s certainly been quite positive.”

Heads of Schools reported that staff had gained tools for reviewing and developing their teaching and assessing practice

Each of the Heads of School reported changes in the way graduates thought and talked about teaching; they had also seen graduates reworking teaching and assessment tasks during and after participating in the program.

“[The program] has probably generated a greater enthusiasm for wanting to look at different ways of doing things that are both educationally more sound and also more efficient in terms of the staff member’s time.”

“They’re all good teachers. Whether that’s because they did [Foundations] or whether they’re naturally good teachers, I don’t know, but certainly they’re all good teachers so you might think that maybe [Foundations] was part of the explanation.”

“I think they’re probably more self critical as a result of going through the program. They’re able to look at their own practices and evaluate their own practices.”

“They get good teaching evaluations, they think about it, [and] they change their courses.”

Heads of Schools reported that participants often form ongoing working relationships focused on developing and refining their teaching practice

Each of the Heads of School observed that Foundations participants often formed ongoing working relationships focused on developing teaching practices.

“One of the things I observed was that it had brought the new staff together in a way, so that was a positive impact – that they were working on these things together. I saw them working together on issues and talking about issues and to some extent it had the effect of building a bit of camaraderie between the new staff [even though] they were across different campuses.”

“They seem to get a sort of group synergy going and they sparked off each other so I think it was probably important from that point of view, but that’s got them enthusiastic. They seem to talk to each other about their teaching.”

Heads of School reported that graduates encouraged new colleagues to view the program positively

Graduates encouraged new colleagues to view the Foundations program positively, saying it would be useful to them.

“In general, those that have gone through the program are champions for the program out here in the school. Not champions for the program in terms of they’ll try and teach others what they’ve learnt, but champions in terms of saying ‘Yeah, yeah, don’t go into it you know with any scepticism, go into it with an open mind because you are going to get a lot out of it.’”

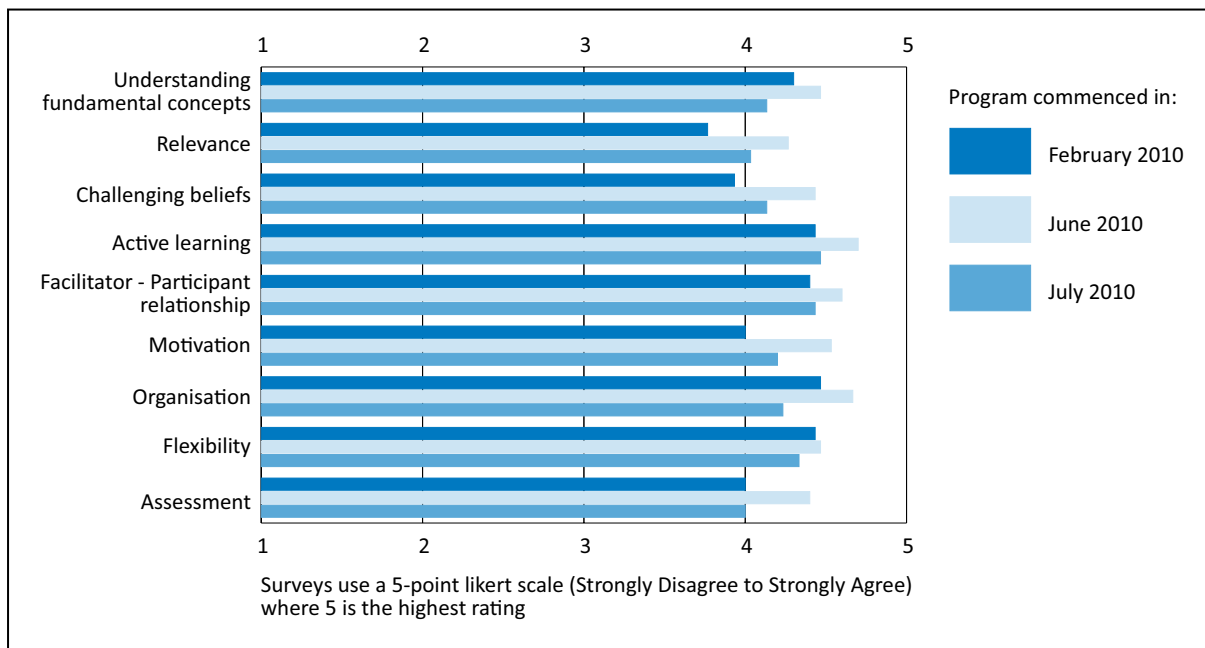
Summary of results from module and program evaluation surveys

Each of the three modules and the overall program is evaluated using surveys constructed to measure the extent to which the module/program aims were achieved. All surveys use a 5-point likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree), where 5 is the highest possible rating. Information gained from the surveys is used to improve future offerings of modules and the overall program.

At the conclusion of module 1, participants complete a (paper) survey based on Kember & McNaught’s (2007) Principles of Good Teaching Evaluation Questionnaire. The survey explores the extent to which the module supported participants to: understand fundamental concepts; perceive relevance of material through the use of examples and current issues; think deeply about important issues; and engage in active learning. As well, the survey seeks feedback on: the facilitator – participant relationship; motivation; organisation of the module; flexibility of the facilitators; and clarity of assessment expectations.

The following table summarises results from module 1 taught in February, June, and July 2010. The results are typical of module 1 feedback from earlier programs, showing consistently high ratings against all criteria. A full data set is available in section 7 (Appendix 2)

Table 3: Summary of module 1 survey results, programs taught in 2010



Open-ended comments provided on module 1 surveys often highlight **the usefulness of microteaching and the value of discussing teaching with colleagues from different disciplines:**

“I truly enjoyed the microteaching. I found this activity to be beneficial in allowing me to absorb feedback from my peers – something that does not happen very often. Class discussion was lively and entertaining. This allowed ideas and opinions to be discussed which were not otherwise written into the syllabus.” (July 09)

“The microteaching session was a great synthesis of all we were taught. Great to meet other participants.” (June 2010)

“Impossible to single out one aspect – or even 3. All aspects of the module extended my conceptual understanding re teaching – particularly appreciated the constructivist approach. The microteaching was great!” (July 2010)

Surveys evaluating modules 2 and 3 and the overall program evaluate the extent to which the aims of the module/program were achieved. Surveys are mailed out to participants or are made available online. Both distribution methods produce a lower return rate (50-60%) than the module 1 survey which is handed to participants in the last face-to-face session of that module (100% return rate).

The module 2 survey seeks feedback about the usefulness of the reflective practice cycles, the online learning journal activity, and feedback received from peers and the Foundations teaching team. Typically, responses are positive, indicating Agree or Strongly Agree responses.

The final survey seeks feedback on module 3 and the overall Foundations program. Questions ask about the usefulness of feedback in completing the negotiated project, whether participants believe they have improved their teaching since beginning the program, whether they talk more

with colleagues about teaching and learning issues and questions, and whether they have a better understanding of reflective practice in the role of professional teaching. Typically, responses are positive, indicating Agree or Strongly Agree responses.

Survey results from earlier programs have been used to continuously improve the program

The teaching team reviews each module and program, planning changes to future offerings based on participant feedback and recent research and literature on teaching in higher education.

Examples of suggestions by previous participants that have resulted in improvements to the program include:

- initial programs provided an extensive folder of readings which staff found a little daunting. Readings were culled and are now provided online in the program's vUWS site;
- participants requested more case studies of actual UWS examples of teaching practice. This led to the development of a video interview with Foundations graduate Dr Simon Myers, discussing how and why he has redesigned assessment in a large unit and significantly reduced the unit's failure rate. Further case studies will be added as they become available;

Institutional changes to policy have also resulted in improvements to the program. When the University introduced criteria and standards-based assessment, the teaching team prepared statements of expected standards for each of the module tasks. More recently, a feedback template has been developed which enables the provision of quality, individualised feedback while significantly reducing the amount of feedback/marking time.

5. Impact

This section focuses on the impacts of the Foundations program. The introduction of a Foundations program in 2007 heralded a more professional approach at UWS to inducting new UWS academics into the experience of teaching in a complex, and at times, challenging environment. At the institutional level the program has provided tangible evidence of the **Making the Difference** strategies for *Building organisational strength and Developing high quality staff*.

The TDU staff work very closely with all participants of the program, and on completion of the program, we consider that participants have achieved the following outcomes.

Graduates:

1. are able to reflect on their teaching and assessing practice, and identify where and how to change their units with a view to improvement; and
2. are more confident in their ability to trial and evaluate new ways of teaching and assessing: they are more willing to take informed risks in their teaching, knowing that they have the tools to evaluate what happens and to redesign, if necessary.

The primary impact, acknowledged by both graduates and Heads of School, is that the graduates have become better teachers because of the Foundations program. The following comments (used with permission from the authors) are unsolicited comments emailed through to the Foundations Coordinator.

“I’ve just had some wonderful feedback on the 2 units I coordinated in Autumn, with specific reference to both my conventional and online lectures. I just wanted to thank you both for your expert steering of Foundations in University Learning and Teaching. Without a doubt this program has made me a significantly better lecturer and teacher, and bolstered by what I achieved in Autumn I’m really enthusiastic about continually improving and sharing what I’ve learned.”
(email communication, 29 July 2010)

“I ‘umhed and arrhed’ about sending a small selection of positive comments to you but decided I would ... mostly just to show you what a wonderful influence you have had on the student’s learning experiences. You may not always hear the end of the story ... however my positive comments are a result of your hard work and dedication. I know I couldn’t have achieved this without your support. You gave me confidence to try things and the tools to improve the learning experiences. So thank you ... “ (email communication, 10 August 2009)

As well as improvements in the quality of teaching, the Heads of School interviewed all commented on the ‘community of practice’ style of sharing and discussing teaching that developed amongst participants, even those across different campuses. One Head of School commented:

“One of the things I observed was that it had brought the new staff together in a way, so that was a positive impact – that they were working on these things together ... I saw them working together on issues and talking about issues and to some extent it had the effect of building a bit of camaraderie between the new staff ... they were across different campuses”.

The following examples of achievements by Foundations graduates are also an indication of the ongoing impact of the Foundations program:

1. graduates have redesigned assessment in their units to better engage students in learning required concepts, in one instance reducing the failure rate in the unit from 28% to 5.5%;
2. graduates have formed strong ongoing relationships with colleagues they met through the program, and many continue developing their teaching practice through dialogue with colleagues about their separate units, or through collaboration on the same unit (including where colleagues are teaching the same unit on different campuses);
3. graduates have drawn on their Foundations experiences and what they've done as a result of that in promotion applications which were successful;
4. several graduates have applied/are applying for teaching awards: one has already been successful in winning a College teaching award.
5. several graduates have had journal articles published on work that grew out of the Foundations program; and
6. several graduates have pursued further study in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education.

Graduates from Foundations are now contributing to the program. In 2010, module 1 incorporated a short video interview with Foundations graduate, Dr Simon Myers from the School of Biomedical and Health Sciences (Figure 3). In the recorded interview, Simon discusses how he redesigned assessment in one unit, generating much greater student motivation and significantly reducing the unit's failure rate. It is expected that further examples from UWS will be used in the program to illustrate excellent practice. This helps maintain currency and refreshes the program with recent examples of teaching re-design activities and their impact.

6: Challenges and recommendations

Evaluation of the first three years of the Foundations program shows convincingly that the program is effective in supporting new UWS academic staff to improve the quality of their teaching and learning.

The program will continue to be improved through:

- innovations by the teaching team based on research and teaching and learning in higher education literature;
- sharing examples of good practice developed by program graduates;
- drawing on the expertise of current UWS staff who are recognised as excellent teachers; and
- seeking feedback from each group of participants and using this information to enhance the next offering of the module/program.

The future holds a number of challenges, including maintaining the quality and depth of the program when it is offered more frequently and to greater numbers of staff. The increase in academic staff in 2010 has already resulted in two additional programs being offered this year, with larger cohorts in each program. It is expected that this trend will continue, placing more pressure on TDU to meet its requirements in offering the program to all new academics whilst maintaining its quality.

Greater class numbers or a substantial increase in the number of programs per year will impact on several key aspects that have made the program so successful. One example relates particularly to the microteaching activity built into the 3rd day of Module 1. Microteaching takes only a couple of hours and requires participants to put into action strategies that have been discussed in class. They consistently report on the positive learning that comes out of this exercise. The use of microteaching in module 1 leads into cycles of observation and feedback on teaching in module 2. This serves to normalise teaching observation and encourages practices that enhance teaching effectiveness. If class sizes increase dramatically, this valuable activity may have to be removed from the program. The TDU would resist any significant changes to the program as it has been so successful, however we acknowledge the pressures within the University context and will review the viability of the format if deemed necessary.

A very important issue for program participants is the level of support they receive from their Schools. The allocation of workload acknowledges the time needed to meet the requirements of the program. Actual workload associated with undertaking the program varies widely between Schools. When staff commence Foundations, TDU advises Heads of Schools and recommends a minimum of 100 hours workload be allocated across two semesters. In a recent survey of graduates and current participants, a significant number of staff advised that they received zero hours workload allocation for participating in and completing the program.

The Foundations policy does not prescribe workload but allows the workload to be negotiated with the Head of School as contexts differ between Schools. However it was not the intention that some staff would get no workload for doing the program. Given the benefits of the program to staff and to Schools, TDU proposes that Colleges and Schools reach agreement that all staff participating in the program be allocated at least 100 hours workload for this purpose. The Director, TDU, will be following up with each Head of School to discuss the workload issue as a result of recent graduate survey results.

The main recommendations from this report are that:

1. the success of the program be noted by the Executive;
2. appropriate resources be made available to meet current and future resource implications of the staff recruitment agenda;
3. Colleges and Schools reach agreement that all staff participating in the program will be allocated at least 100 hours workload for this purpose over the duration of their enrolment in the program; and
4. the program continue in its current format, with regular updates and revision of material.

The TDU and the Foundations teaching team reiterates its commitment to creating a superior and engaged learning experience for UWS students through developing staff capacity for high quality teaching.

Appendix 1: List of Readings for Module 1

Set texts

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does* (3rd ed.). Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.

- Chapter 1: The changing scene in university teaching
- Chapter 2: Teaching according to how students learn
- Chapter 5: Designing intended learning outcomes
- Chapter 7: Teaching/learning activities for declarative knowledge
- Chapter 8: Teaching/learning activities for functioning knowledge
- Chapter 9: Aligning assessment tasks with intended learning outcomes

Kember, D. & McNaught, C. (2007). *Enhancing University Teaching: Lessons from research into award-winning teachers*. London: Routledge

- Chapter 11: Ways of encouraging active learning

Further readings

Angelo, T., & Cross, K. (1993). Classroom assessment technique 6: Minute paper. In *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed., pp. 148-153). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Armstrong, S., Chan, S., Malfroy, J. & Thomson, R. (2008). *Assessment guide: Implementing criteria and standards-based assessment*. Teaching Development Unit, University of Western Sydney.

- Chapter 3: Writing clear learning outcomes and identifying criteria

Brinko, K. T. (1993). The practice of giving feedback to improve teaching: What is effective? *Journal of Higher Education*, 64(5), 574-593.

Brookfield, S. D. (2006). Understanding and responding to the emotions of learning. In *The skillful teacher: On technique, trust and responsiveness in the classroom* (2nd ed., pp. 75-95). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gibbs, G., & Simpson, C. (2004). Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 2004-2005(1), 3-31.

Jaques, D., & Salmon, D. (2007). Activities for groups. In *Learning in groups: A handbook for face-to-face and online environments* (4th ed., pp. 104-158). London: Routledge.

Kreber, C. (2004). An analysis of two models of reflection and their implications for educational development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 9(1), 29-49.

- Malfroy, J., Rankine, L., Correia, H., Griffin, T. & Ireland J. (2009) *Basic standards for e-learning sites: E-learning quality framework*. Sydney: University of Western Sydney.
http://tdu.uws.edu.au/qilt/downloads/basic_standards_LR.pdf
- O'Donovan, B., Price, M. & Rust, C. (2004). Know what I mean? Enhancing student learning of assessment standards and criteria. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 9(3), 325-335.
- Trigwell, K., & Prosser, M. (2004). Development and use of the Approaches to Teaching Inventory. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(4), 409-426.
- Vaughan, N. (2007). Perspectives on blended learning in higher education. *International Journal on E-Learning*, 6(1), 81-94.

Websites

- Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC). Assessing group work. Retrieved November 20, 2008 from <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html>
- Fully online module "Introduction to Blended Learning" Access this module via the TDU / Teaching Development Activities web page:
<http://www.uws.edu.au/teachingdevelopmentactivities>

Appendix 2: Module 1 survey results 2010

	Feb-10	Jun-10	Jul-10
Understanding fundamental concepts			
1. This module concentrated on fundamental concepts.	4.3	4.5	4
2. In each session the key points were made clear.	4.4	4.6	4.2
3. In this module I learnt the key principles.	4.2	4.3	4.2
Relevance			
4. Local examples were used to show the relevance of material.	4	4.3	4
5. I could see the relevance of material because real-life examples were given.	3.7	4.3	4.2
6. Current issues were used to make the course interesting.	3.6	4.2	3.9
Challenging beliefs			
7. In this module we were exposed to different points of view.	3.9	4.5	4
8. After participating in this module I have a better understanding of fundamental concepts.	4	4.5	4.2
9. There were times when the facilitator(s) made us think deeply about important issues.	3.9	4.3	4.2
Active learning			
10. Participants were given the chance to participate in the sessions.	4.4	4.7	4.6
11. There was discussion between participants in the sessions.	4.5	4.7	4.5
12. The facilitators promoted discussion in the sessions.	4.4	4.7	4.3
Facilitator - Participant relationship			
13. There was a friendly relationship between facilitators and participants.	4.4	4.6	4.4
14. The communication between the facilitators and participants is good.	4.5	4.7	4.4
15. Our facilitators knew the individuals in the sessions.	4.3	4.5	4.5
Motivation			
16. Our facilitators were enthusiastic.	4.2	4.6	4.4
17. I found the sessions enjoyable.	3.9	4.5	4.1
18. This was an interesting module.	3.9	4.5	4.1
Organisation			
19. This module was well organised.	4.5	4.7	4.1
20. This module was well planned.	4.5	4.7	4.4
21. This was an interesting module.	4.4	4.6	4.2
Flexibility			
22. I found facilitators helpful when I had difficulty understanding concepts.	4.2	4.4	4.2
23. The facilitators were sensitive to participant feedback.	4.5	4.5	4.3
24. The facilitators were helpful when asked questions.	4.6	4.5	4.5
Assessment			
25. What is expected in the assessment task is clear.	4	4.4	4
26. It is clear to me how my work will be graded.	4	4.4	4

Appendix 3: Images from Foundations



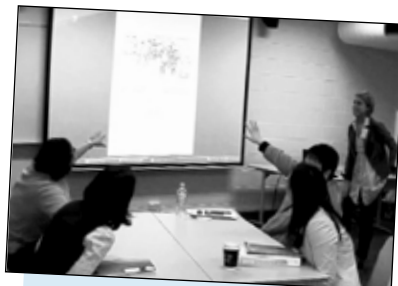
Group commenced February 2010



Group commenced June 2010



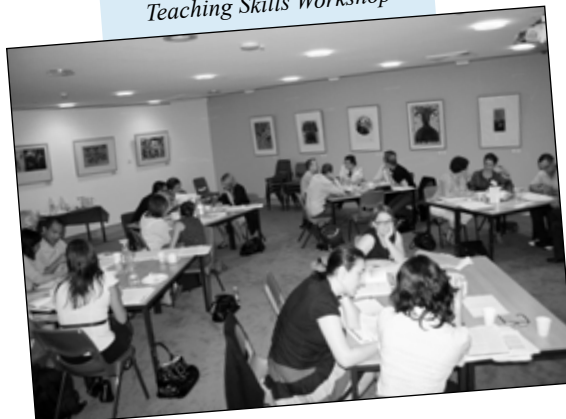
Group commenced July 2010



Scenes from Microteaching



Interactions in Module 1:
Teaching Skills Workshop



Comments from students:

The assignment made me think and I learned so much

The assignment was a great experience - it made learning metabolism interesting

Group assignments was good as it shared the workload and the critique was good to scale all students

Assessment task - able to learn and engage without being stressed and under pressure while being able to obtain great results

Dr Simon Meyers, School
of Biomedical & Health
Science in conversation with
Rosemary Thomson, Teaching
Development Unit



Foundations Program brochure



