Teachers inspiring learning

Candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Education share their ideas and approaches to teaching and learning

Centre for Educational Development and Academic Methods 2011
Introduction

This booklet features ANU staff who were candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards for Excellence in Education and celebrates the great teaching that takes place in our university.

Teaching is a highly personal activity and this booklet illustrates a wide diversity of approaches to supporting student learning at ANU using extracts from each candidate’s application for an award.

When you read the profiles you will see that the candidates have two things in common - a passion for their field of interest and a desire to share that passion with others. In addition, there is something else that they all share - a deep respect and concern for students as individuals.

Great teaching in higher education is not a matter of just following some particular formula or strategy, but comes from developing an approach to education that reflects one’s own values and interests and invites students to share one’s world of scholarly enquiry.

We can describe this approach to teaching as supporting ‘active learning’ or ‘authentic learning’ but it comes down to creating an environment where students have an opportunity to experience the excitement and joy of learning and discovery.

So as you read these profiles, we invite you to reflect on your own approach to teaching and how you could use and adapt some of the ideas developed by the award candidates in your own professional practice.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this booklet for being willing to share their ideas and approaches to teaching and learning with us. They are truly teachers inspiring learning.

Emeritus Professor John Dearn
Interim Director
CEDAM
Teachers inspiring learning

Some ideas and approaches to teaching and learning from candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards for Excellence in Education

Candidates for Supervision Awards

Assoc Prof Rajeev Goré

One size fits all … not

Student supervision is the highlight of my day-to-day activities. Yes, it is nice to publish a paper that has taken a number of years to crack. Yes, it is nice to see your name on the programme committees of various conferences. Yes, it is nice to be an invited speaker at an international conference. But nothing beats a student walking into your office clutching a doctorate certificate and beaming from ear to ear especially when the student has overcome personal demons to do so.

My driving philosophy in supervising students is that I must look after the interests of the student since those three or four years can shape the trajectory of your life, positively or negatively. If a student is really bright then I try to push her to the front line quickly, and then let her get on with it on her own. If a student is unsure, then I take it more slowly and use the first year to engender self-belief, typically by co-authoring a paper together. If a student appears disinterested, I offer the student to move to a different supervisor or a different topic. The important thing is to tell them what you are doing so that they understand why you are not treating them all in the same way.

I tailor my supervision individually to each student depending upon that student’s age, experience and research interests. For younger, less experienced students, I insist that they work in an area in which I am an expert. For older, more experienced students, I encourage them to find their own topic and ensure that I am able to guide them. A PhD should be driven by passion, not by prodding, so it is vital that students believe in the importance of their research.

School of Computer Science, ANU College of Engineering & Computer Science

Prof Quentin R. Grafton

From student to scholar: The role of the supervisor

As a supervisor I make it a priority to establish mutually acceptable expectations. I make it clear to my students that the thesis belongs to them and only has one author. Thus, ultimately they must be responsible for the final product. However, I tell them that research is not a completely independent process undertaken alone in a laboratory or office, but must be queried, discussed and debated with peers and mentors. I stress that as supervisor I am both a peer and mentor who will provide advice every step of the way, as required, along their learning journey. It is my experience that students differ greatly in their supervisory needs and also expectations. Thus, there is ‘no one size fits all’ in supervision. I strongly believe students should not fit themselves into what is dictated to them by supervisors. This is because of my deeply held view that the PhD is the training ground for students to develop themselves to become independent scholars. In this sense a supervisor’s role is to help in that journey from student to scholar.

Supervisors support students by giving them opportunities to make their own decisions. This is hindered by top-down-instructions. Until and unless students make their own mistakes, and learn from them, they cannot achieve their full potential as researchers. Finally, my goal is to instil two key insights about life and scholarly work. The first is patience in that high-quality research takes quality time, so that patience with others who support the research process is important (co-authors, reviewers, fellow students, professional staff and even their supervisory panel). The second is persistence - ideas must be tested by experiment, analysis and be judged by academic peers.

Crawford School of Economics and Government, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific

Dr Alastair Greig

We learn and teach others primarily through conversation

The students I have supervised have come from a variety of backgrounds dealing with a range of topics, from loyalty, virtual politics, liberation theology, expatriate communities, Trafalgar Square and industrial innovation. All intersect with my own research interests but, more importantly, I endeavour to link my students with each other. I have observed how a strong cohort of research students feed off and support each other and my proudest moments are when I witness cohort camaraderie at national sociology conferences.

I explain to students that the thesis does not simply ‘emerge’ in the writing of rough drafts. This emergence occurs most fruitfully in dialogue over the rough drafts between the supervisor and student.

Students appreciate this ability to discuss their own research and writing experience reflexively. I concur with the idea that that ‘we learn and teach others primarily through conversation’. I spend much time showing PhD and Honours students how the structure of their thought-process is progressing. Promoting this self-awareness in each individual student is as important as the advice I provide on thesis content. Students become familiar with the state of the dog-eared, red-penned, drafts and I put them at ease by showing them that my own writing receives the same attention to detail, reflection, self-criticism and self-commentary. However, I consider the outcome of a PhD candidature to involve far more than simply producing a successful thesis. The experience involves developing what has been described as ‘intellectual craftsmanship’. The challenge as a supervisor is to provide a holistic experience of this academic ‘calling’.

School of Sociology, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences
I aim to address my readers as apprentices in marketing, research and academia, who will not find themselves suddenly dropped into the unexpected (and unreasonable) levels of responsibility after the closing chapter of the book. I talk to the audience in terms of what they can expect to need to learn beyond the book, and to instill the foundations of a life long learning process. I have also been mindful of maintaining the currency of the texts, not just in terms of examples within the text, but also in terms of the education context the reader faces in their study.

Through my wide range of classroom teaching, I can interact with students at different levels of the education process, and draw upon their experience to inform the content, nature and style of my writing. I have developed an iterative process of introducing new concepts to improve the take up rate of key concepts within the short time frames of a semester. I introduce key ideas early in the text, and emphasize when they will recur again, so students can see an initial value in learning the models, ideas or concepts. Where the ideas recur, I cross reference other locations of the ideas within the book to illustrate where the concept was either first explained, or when further detail on the idea will be forthcoming. By addressing the interconnectivity of ideas within the book overtly, I have been able to illustrate to my readers how marketing is an iterative process, with the cyclical nature of the marketing in practice.

School of Management, Marketing and International Business, ANU College of Business & Economics

Citation: For the design of innovative and critically acclaimed marketing education textbooks marketing education based on marketing practice and research led curriculum content

Connect early, and connect often

Ms Dianne Dunne, Ms Maurette MacLeod, Ms Sue Farrow, Ms Rachel McGrath-Kerr

Enhancing the academic journey

Citation: For sustained commitment to personalised administrative support to postgraduate students, enhancing the overall student experience at the Crawford School and the ANU

The program managers are the constant presence throughout coursework students’ degrees and we expect to know every student. Our encouragement has helped some to persevere in the face of personal difficulties, hardship or homesickness. For many international students, coming to a new country and undertaking a degree can be a life changing experience. Similarly it is a challenge and career-enhancing experience for domestic students. We are usually the first person a prospective student will contact via e-mail or telephone. Some of us make regular overseas recruitment trips to collaborate with institutions, twinning programs, agencies and departments and to attend recruitment exhibitions and organise alumni functions. We are also keenly aware of how important word of mouth is in recruitment. Many students have told us that they heard of our graduate school from previous graduates who spoke of their good experience here and that was a key reason to come to this university and particularly to this graduate school. Many students face academic challenges in our graduate programs and we spend much time counselling and advising students who have problems or failures with their studies. As well as advising course selection, we organise extra tutorial assistance when necessary and generally keep a close eye on their academic journey to help them achieve to their potential.

Crawford School of Economics and Government, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific

Citation: For the design of innovative and critically acclaimed marketing education textbooks marketing education based on marketing practice and research led curriculum content

Teaching Australian migration law online

Citation: For exceptional contribution to students’ learning through online teaching in the Graduate Certificate in Migration Law program

I develop materials that are challenging, but not impossible for students to work with if they do the background work. My development of materials reflects:

• A good stock of “stories” ranging from the inspiring, to the disturbing to the almost comic. Students almost always respond well to first-hand immigration stories, from other students as well as myself.

• A keen sense of the kinds of facts that might decide an application for a visa one way or the other. For example, valid assessment tasks must not be too straightforward (there should be one or two little “quirks” in each factual scenario, so that students can demonstrate their own understanding of the legislation), but not so complex that students would be unable to complete the task.

• A keen sense of students’ capabilities. For example, a written assessment can and should be more complex than a three-hour exam question, where students will simply not have time to consult every possible resource.

• High expectations of students. Students, in my experience, perform best when plenty is expected from them, provided that they have my online support in doing so.

• Encouraging discussion amongst students. Students don’t want to hear just my perspective on things, they want a range of views and the ability to decide what is right, wrong or indifferent on many issues for themselves.

Law School, ANU College of Law

Candidates for Citation Awards

Dr Stephen Dann

Ms Sue Farrow, Ms Rachel McGrath-Kerr

Mr Alan Freckleton

Citation: For sustained commitment to personalised administrative support to postgraduate students, enhancing the overall student experience at the Crawford School and the ANU

Citation: For exceptional contribution to students’ learning through online teaching in the Graduate Certificate in Migration Law program

Citation: For the design of innovative and critically acclaimed marketing education textbooks marketing education based on marketing practice and research led curriculum content

Connect early, and connect often

Enhancing the academic journey

Teaching Australian migration law online

Teachers inspiring learning

Some ideas and approaches to teaching and learning from candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards for Excellence in Education

Citation: For the design of innovative and critically acclaimed marketing education textbooks marketing education based on marketing practice and research led curriculum content
Graduate Study & Professional Development Short Course Program in Heritage and the Arts

In 2010, two advanced heritage courses were offered at Port Arthur in Tasmania to allow students to learn about heritage management at a World Heritage site and facilitate exchange between ANU graduate students and practicing heritage professionals. The courses provided unprecedented access for graduate students to some of the most outstanding heritage sites in Australia, as well as access to leading heritage experts from around Australia. Through undertaking courses, students gain a realistic understanding of future job prospects, alternative career paths and skills levels required. These courses were developed in collaboration with the Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts (IPPHA), an ANU centre aimed at developing programs that foster professional development and excellence in professional practice in the heritage and arts sectors. IPPHA allows non-enrolled professionals to take the courses as one-off programs alongside of graduate students. Graduates are, therefore, also able to network with early and mid-career government and industry professionals also undertaking the advanced short courses. Feedback from participants has indicated that this aspect of the learning experience was highly valued and that many students benefited from ongoing mentoring relationships formed during the courses. It also demonstrates that graduate students value the opportunity to work on-site in a practical setting which is both different from, and complementary to, the university campus learning environment.

Centre for Educational Development & Academic Methods, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences, and Research Student Development Centre, Division of Registrar & Student Services

School of Archaeology & Anthropology and the Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts (IPPHA), ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences
Teachers inspiring learning

Some ideas and approaches to teaching and learning from candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards for Excellence in Education

Candidates for Teaching Awards

Dr Chunlai Chen

**Linking theory to practice**

I love to teach and I especially love inspiring students to learn how to apply economic theories and principles in policy analysis and policy making. My research and publications have always been an integral part of my teaching and the integration of my research results into the courses provides students with the chance not only to learn economic theories and policies presented in the class, but also to understand how economic theories and policies are applied in policy decision making. I have developed the following teaching approaches to motivate and inspire students to learn:

- designing an inspiring and innovative class pattern which includes lecturing, interactive in-class discussion, group discussion and students presentation;
- maintaining an energetic and passionate style of teaching to stimulate students’ interest and involvement in class;
- producing and presenting detailed lecture notes to facilitate student learning;
- designing case studies to make academic theories and methodologies easily understood and used in analysing real policy issues;
- providing up-to-date information to broaden students’ vision and stimulate students’ curiosity in learning;
- designing scholarly challenging and policy oriented topics for course assignments and research papers to foster the development of students’ critical thinking skills, analytical skills and scholarly values
- a sense of humour is also helpful in creating a comfortable environment for class learning.

*Crawford School of Economics and Government, ANU College of Asia & the Pacific*

Prof Tom Gedeon

**Enthusiasm + evidence + engagement → fun + learning**

I am passionate about my teaching, and enjoy immensely when I can see that something has clicked for a student and they understand how to do something new. As a researcher, I want to know why my students want to learn, how they learn, how I can measure their learning, and how this can be used to improve their learning. This is a necessary platform for my teaching style and philosophy, and supports my own opinions and resonates with student preferences.

My approach to teaching students is based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. For me, it answers the fundamental question of “Why do students want to learn?” I believe that the literature has not yet caught up with the way I observe many of our students behaving, in that they treat their studies as a job, in parallel with a part time paying job, so both work and study factors are relevant: work factors include esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization while study factors include motivation, self-efficacy and value-expectancy.

I encourage student engagement and inspire and motivate students by my own real enthusiasm for my teaching as well as research. I engage the students as first years with my PhD students’ research, by my construction of the course components, assessments and feedback to directly motivate learning, reflecting a meld of the best practice from the literature and my own experience to produce a course which is fun for students and delivers the learning opportunity in a way that they will seize. My passion communicates.

*School of Computer Science, ANU College of Engineering & Computer Science*

Dr Darren Goossens

**Communication, content and cartoons**

The best way to get students to engage with a course is to give them a chance to create it. An example of this is the ‘open assignment’ in which students set their own task. They choose a topic and importantly a form of presentation (these have included cartoons, talks, posters, board games, poems, computer simulations, videos and demonstrations).

The presentation is as important as the content, as this develops communication skills, including thinking about how to make a presentation appropriate to a given audience. I see development of the ability to communicate the science being learned to a range of audiences as important as the students get to third year. The students take steps towards becoming teachers, which is one of the goals of education. By explaining to their classmates, and answering any questions that arise, they test their own understanding and so reinforce it, or expose the gaps.

The open assignments are always surprising, entertaining, often very creative, and often useful resources for future students, such as the “Cartoon Guide to Magnetism” and “The Man from Snowy River and the Perils of Condensed Matter Physics: A Ballad”. The effort put in and the creativity on show speak for themselves and indicate the degree to which students are inspired by this structured freedom to do work not normally found within a lecture course. The students are engaged and interested, coming up with their own topics and forms of presentation, and working hard to bring these visions alive. Once engaged, students will virtually teach themselves, and each other, given the opportunity.

*Research School of Physics & Engineering and Research School of Chemistry, ANU College of Physical & Mathematical Sciences*
Teachers inspiring learning
Some ideas and approaches to teaching and learning from candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards for Excellence in Education

Candidates for Teaching Awards

Assoc Prof Joseph Hope

How is an excellent lecture different from reading an excellent text, or watching an excellent YouTube video? My goal is to make the learning process more personal, and make potentially abstract topics seem real and relevant, and also to address ‘hot-off-the-press’ topics. My experience has been that students make the most leaps in understanding when working in small groups.

I first noticed this by observing non-English speakers in huge lectures, but I have become increasingly aware that it is a far more general phenomenon. This has shaped my approach to teaching. I now use lectures as a first exposure to course material, and attempt to interest and inspire the students. Importantly, I also try to generate a class atmosphere where we use names and personal examples. An important element of generating a personal dialogue with the students is to be provocative. I ask a lot of questions in class, and take great care never to answer them myself. Once this culture is established, it becomes self-supporting, and each student becomes more likely to contribute in a given session once they have begun talking.

Personal connections are highly motivating for students, and having instant feedback during tasks is also the most efficient use of their time. I also follow the practice of frequently breaking my lectures up into working parties to focus on particular questions, effectively making lectures more like tutorials. Other techniques that I have employed towards improving student networks and engagement with the students include: research-led teaching, peer assessment, peer feedback before assessment, student seminars, an open-door policy, assessed group work and non-assessed group activities.

Research School of Physics and Engineering, ANU College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences

Dr Kim Huynh

I unabashedly celebrate the life of the mind. Often this principle is not as simple and easy to live up to as it first seems. Our society is in many ways geared towards material wellbeing and social status rather than the pursuit of intellectual reward. Furthermore, many students who have recently left high school believe that it is not cool to be bookish and passionate about learning. Those who study hard to find out about the world, others and themselves must too often do so secretly in order to fit in or get by.

My mission is to make school cool. Good teaching is inherently value-laden. Teachers do more than transfer data and skills. Ideally, they channel knowledge towards self-awareness, virtue and wisdom. This does not equate to moral or ideological indoctrination. On the contrary, scholarly values incorporate the sort of humility and work ethic that ensures we do not become fixed in our impressions or full of ourselves.

For me, it is also important to promote a duty of care towards the planet and its people. While I first noticed this by observing non-English speakers in huge lectures, but I have become increasingly aware that it is a far more general phenomenon. This has shaped my approach to teaching. I now use lectures as a first exposure to course material, and attempt to interest and inspire the students. Importantly, I also try to generate a class atmosphere where we use names and personal examples. An important element of generating a personal dialogue with the students is to be provocative. I ask a lot of questions in class, and take great care never to answer them myself. Once this culture is established, it becomes self-supporting, and each student becomes more likely to contribute in a given session once they have begun talking.

Personal connections are highly motivating for students, and having instant feedback during tasks is also the most efficient use of their time. I also follow the practice of frequently breaking my lectures up into working parties to focus on particular questions, effectively making lectures more like tutorials. Other techniques that I have employed towards improving student networks and engagement with the students include: research-led teaching, peer assessment, peer feedback before assessment, student seminars, an open-door policy, assessed group work and non-assessed group activities.

Research School of Physics and Engineering, ANU College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences

Dr John Minns

My view is that learning works best when the student is both enthused with the subject and actively participating in a process of discovery. So I have designed my courses with the aim of encouraging students to pursue learning paths within the broad area but beyond the material presented in lectures and required readings. In every case, a core of readings enables students to begin the investigation. Further readings encourage further research and “spin-off” questions. The aim is to give confidence to students to pursue their own investigation and to engage in polemics intelligently. I recognise that young lives are packed with exciting visual and auditory experiences, drama and fun, with which teaching delivery must compete. I aim for my presentation to be equally as exciting and engaging through means such as film, music, graphics and crosswords as well as through my own enthusiasm for the subject. A drab presentation will not hold students’ attention for long. Accordingly, I use many graphic images in my PowerPoint presentation in each lecture, as well as music, crosswords and film clips. I start from a position of respect for my students, for their existing abilities and for what they aspire to become, for their aims intellectually and in life generally. And, as in other relationships, I find that students usually repay to teachers the respect which we give to them. Looking back on my own student life, a few teachers stand out. The best of them took me seriously when it would have been easy not to do so, were free of condescension and genuinely cared about the future of their students. I provide opportunities for informal interaction with students and host a lunch for my students. As well as getting feedback on classes, these create a pleasant environment which encourages students to talk to each other and to me.

School of Politics and International Relations, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Education is a moral pursuit

School of Politics and International Relations, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Passionate teaching ignites a passion for learning

School of Politics and International Relations, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Learning and caring are contagious

School of Politics and International Relations, ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences
Tutoring plays a vital role in a student’s educational experience. Where lectures provide an overview of the course material, and an introduction of each topic, in tutorials students are able to practice applying that material and, in doing so, deepen their understanding of the topics the lectures introduce. The small group teaching also provides a more personal environment in which to overcome difficulties students have with course material.

While tutoring has many dimensions, I believe that excellence in tutoring requires particular attention to five themes. First, a tutor must ensure that knowledge is easily accessible, using clear and understandable terms and taking time, both within and outside of tutorials, to provide extra guidance where needed. Second, a tutor must add value by developing and providing additional teaching resources, by drawing attention to links with other parts of the course and related disciplines, and by illustrating concepts using real life examples. Third, it is essential to teach and provide feedback in a way that encourages the critical thinking and independent learning that is not only fundamental to true understanding but also essential for the future development of knowledge and the application of that knowledge. Fourth, it is important to pass on a strong motivation and enthusiasm for learning itself, and to have an interest in the educational development and wellbeing of each student. Finally, an excellent tutor must enjoy the teaching experience and value continuous self-improvement, both to deepen personal understanding, as well as to enhance the ability to develop the knowledge and understanding of students.

School of Finance, Actuarial Studies and Applied Statistics, ANU College of Business & Economics

Making learning accessible and enjoyable

I do love teaching. Interacting with students on contemporary issues, with their eager enthusiasm to engage and address the ‘intractable’ problems of our society, is incredibly energising. It keeps me ‘fresh’, active, engaged, attentive and on my toes and is a source of stimulation for my research interests through the critique of my research which in turn can motivate students to examine matters in more depth and directly to influence teaching materials and methods. I realise that teaching is a multi-faceted process. Discussion and regularly revisiting problems and teaching materials is crucial. I do this by asking experienced colleagues to audit my classes, usually when teaching a course for the first time and followed up again after a couple of semesters. I try to use a variety of techniques to address a range of student learning styles and is a strategy I try to adopt consciously and consistently. The material we present in our law courses is complex and difficult. I use cartoons and caricatures to convey information, in a visual form for the benefit of those who predominantly learn this way, in addition to the verbal and written material. I also try to use humour so that difficult material can be assimilated and understood more easily. I also encourage students to participate in group classes and seminars cognisant that some are much less extroverted than others.

Thus I intentionally create ‘space’ by explicitly providing an opportunity for their input by regularly inviting the quieter, more reticent students to speak. I also use examples from my own personal experience to highlight relevant aspects of the law and how it can empower people.

Law School, ANU College of Law

Walking the mile with my students

I do love teaching. Interacting with students on contemporary issues, with their eager enthusiasm to engage and address the ‘intractable’ problems of our society, is incredibly energising. It keeps me ‘fresh’, active, engaged, attentive and on my toes and is a source of stimulation for my research interests through the critique of my research which in turn can motivate students to examine matters in more depth and directly to influence teaching materials and methods. I realise that teaching is a multi-faceted process. Discussion and regularly revisiting problems and teaching materials is crucial. I do this by asking experienced colleagues to audit my classes, usually when teaching a course for the first time and followed up again after a couple of semesters. I try to use a variety of techniques to address a range of student learning styles and is a strategy I try to adopt consciously and consistently. The material we present in our law courses is complex and difficult. I use cartoons and caricatures to convey information, in a visual form for the benefit of those who predominantly learn this way, in addition to the verbal and written material. I also try to use humour so that difficult material can be assimilated and understood more easily. I also encourage students to participate in group classes and seminars cognisant that some are much less extroverted than others.

Thus I intentionally create ‘space’ by explicitly providing an opportunity for their input by regularly inviting the quieter, more reticent students to speak. I also use examples from my own personal experience to highlight relevant aspects of the law and how it can empower people.

Law School, ANU College of Law
Teachers inspiring learning

Some ideas and approaches to teaching and learning from candidates for the 2010 Vice-Chancellor’s Awards for Excellence in Education

Front cover: Dr Jennifer Henriks accepts her Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Teaching Excellence 2009 from ANU Chancellor Professor Gareth Evans