

'Feedback from Partner'. In the negotiation exercise in Resolving Civil Disputes, students are videoed during their exercises and have a short meeting with an instructor/observer who provides some feedback. Students then write a report on the exercise which requires explicit self-reflection on their planning and their performance in the exercise. The reflective reports should evaluate their plans, the process and outcome of the interview or negotiation and consider any feedback from others as well as ideas from the assigned readings. Later year students review the video of their exercise as part of preparing the reflective report.

It had been expected that these structured self-reflective elements, especially when linked to written planning and reporting requirements as part of formal assessment, would make the goal of teaching students how to learn from their own experience more explicit, and create a direct link between the activity and the self-reflective learning objectives.

As part of developing and improving the program, surveys were conducted to learn more about the students' response to the focus on self-reflection. Two questionnaires were administered in Lawyering, one after the interviewing reflective report was submitted, and another after the negotiation report was submitted. In Resolving Disputes, one questionnaire was administered after the negotiation report.

Students were asked how helpful they found the video and writing a plan for their conduct of the actual interviewing or negotiation activity. Their responses indicated that they found preparing the written plan helpful, and somewhat more helpful for their performance of the task, in comparison to viewing a video. This positive response to the plan suggests that students' own experience confirms the link, discussed in the literature, between active planning, such as writing a plan, and skills learning.

Students were also asked specifically about the extent to which the video, writing a plan, and the readings helped them in the process of self-reflection. Their overall responses suggested that these elements were less helpful in self-reflection than in developing the specific skill itself. However, writing a plan was still seen as helpful for self-reflection by a very high proportion of students, especially first year students.

The students were asked about the helpfulness of various activities following the specific interview or negotiation task. The importance first year students put on feedback from their partner suggests that this could be emphasised more for the later year students. However, later year students may have been less attentive to giving and receiving feedback, as they knew an instructor/observer would comment.

The preference among first year students for feedback, even from peers, over self-reflective instruments, suggests that these students are still fairly dependent learners. The later year students appeared to find writing a self-reflective report more helpful than feedback from other sources, which would be consistent with the more independent learning style one would hope for in final year students, many of whom are already undertaking legal work.

The survey of students has identified some strengths in our current teaching strategies, underscored links between our approaches and the wider literature on reflective practice, and indicated some important areas where we can improve our approach to assisting students to develop the self-reflective skills necessary to become a life-long learner, especially one who exercises professional judgment in an unsupervised setting.

Strategies which students regard as especially effective in eliciting self-reflection include writing a report and, especially, requiring students to prepare and submit a plan for each exercise. First year students found peer feedback and preliminary readings especially valuable, while later year students found the video more valuable. The significance of a written plan and a written reflective report is shown by the large number of students at all levels who found these elements helpful.

In conclusion, although students, especially those in their first year, still desire direct instruction, guidance and evaluation from others, there was also good acceptance of self-reflection, even among the first year students. A significant proportion of students reported extending self-reflection to other activities. This suggests that once students grasp the concept and method of self-reflection, they are able to generalise it.

SKILLS

An integrated approach to information literacy in legal education

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One of the many essential skills of a lawyer is the ability to research the law. It has been recognised for some time that the skills required to research the law should be taught at law school. Greater emphasis in higher education on the importance of teaching generic skills has coincided with discussion of the need for skills education for lawyers generally. The increasing interest of universities in the development of the 'life long learner' has focused attention on methods of training students to be independent learners.

Information literacy is as much an attribute of the process of 'lawyering' as are discipline, knowledge and the ability to problem solve and engage in legal reasoning. Not surprisingly, it will be difficult at times to draw a line between the information skills involved in locating and knowing how to use the law (information literacy) and the mental skills involved in applying the law (discipline knowledge, problem solving and reasoning). A number of programs have been developed in Australian law schools that aim to improve information literacy of law students through integration of legal research skills teaching into the law curriculum.

Until 2000, University of Western Australia (UWA) law students received six hours of instruction in legal research methods by library staff during the first year of their course in the unit Legal Process. Many of the students in a LLB degree are enrolled in five-year combined degrees. This has a number of implications. First, the level of instruction they are able to absorb in first year is unlikely to equip them for the more demanding research expectations placed on them in later years of the degree. Second, there are limited opportunities for students to use all the areas of competency in the first and second year law units.

Indications that there was a wide range in the level of research skills of UWA LLB graduates, and the fact that some graduates apparently did not have essential research skills, prompted the law school to review the ability of the program to achieve an acceptable level of competency. The law school and university library obtained a grant to implement a collaborative strategy for improving information literacy through the integration of legal research skills instruction into law units at all levels of the LLB.

A Working Group comprised of the Research Skills Co-ordinator, the Law Librarian, two reference librarians and an Instructional Designer was formed to design and plan the project. It identified five key strategies to achieve the project objectives: (1) to determine the areas and levels of skill competency that students should acquire during the degree and an outcome statement of those skill levels; (2) to identify the year levels and compulsory units in which research skills might be taught; (3) to explore with co-ordinators of the compulsory units in which legal research skills would be taught the best ways to integrate that instruction into the unit.

The specific integration methods adopted were as follows: (1) Classes on using the library and specific research tools for citation, case law, legislation and secondary sources were conducted by the library staff. The classes aimed at giving students a basic level of competence in these areas in the subjects Criminal Law, Torts, Equity, Administrative Law, Constitutional Law, and in Procedure. (2) Teaching materials were generated for each law unit. (3) A Student Manual was created.

The key features of the program introduced at UWA are: legal research skills instruction is integrated into seven compulsory units at all year levels throughout the degree; the legal research skills instruction is provided by library staff in close collaboration with the academic staff responsible for the compulsory units; the Student Manual is a resource that reinforces the integral nature of the skills training and the incremental nature of learning.

The nature of the program is that it requires a considerable amount of coordination. There has been a minimum of eight academics involved in the program and two reference librarians. While these staff members are committed to the program, not all of them will be involved in teaching every year and heavily stylised activities may not suit the staff who replace them. Essentially, maintaining the impetus and enthusiasm for a program so that it outlives the people who put it together is a major challenge.

The demand on universities to produce graduates with generic research skills applicable to print and electronic resources, and the demand from the legal profession for graduates with the skills to be able to keep pace with new electronic information resources, have in combination prompted many law schools to review their legal research teaching methods and programs. Influenced by this demand for information literate graduates, equipped as life long learners, there has been a discernible shift of emphasis in library classes from the traditional bibliographic instruction method to skills training and recognition of research as a process. At the same time, there has been a movement in many law schools to integrate skills training into the curriculum. The UWA program aims to produce information literate law graduates through a program of research skills training that is integrated into all years of the curriculum and is taught collaboratively by library and academic staff. Early evaluation indicates that there will be positive outcomes from this program, but that there are many challenges to be met.