

CASE STORY

PEER ASSISTED COURSE ENHANCEMENT (PACE): *PROMOTING EVIDENCE-BASED TEACHING AND SCHOLARSHIP WITHIN TEACHING TEAMS*



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SCHOLARSHIP OF
LEARNING AND TEACHING

- Priority Focus and explanation of PATS variation

The focus was quality enhancement from a 'whole of curriculum' perspective. The PATS variation, Peer Assisted Course Enhancement (PACE), provides a systematic approach to embedding evaluation and research into curriculum design and delivery. This case reports on three teaching teams were employed to design and deliver three curricula: Bachelor of Dementia Care (award degree course), Global Perspectives Program (2 or 4 week curriculum design that is embedded within an undergraduate unit) and the *Understanding Dementia* MOOC (free online course that articulates with the Bachelor Dementia Care).

With PACE, teaching teams agree to work together develop a research plan that has ethics approval to collect and analyse data for evaluation and research purposes. The underlying principle is that routine collection of standard data sets, each delivery of each unit of study, provides a longitudinal data set of student data (feedback and assessment items) and peer data (team meetings, peer observation, curriculum review) that can be used for evaluation and scholarship. The data can inform quality improvement (QI) interventions; is also usable as evidence for quality assurance (QA) and, longer-term, can be analysed using various theoretical lenses for collective Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) outcomes. PACE employs a shared leadership model (Pearce 2004) in which responsibility to drive different kinds of quality activities are allocated according to skills, knowledge, time and motivation of team members.

PACE professional development workshops focus on organisational issues of setting up and maintaining a scholarly approach to curriculum, developing a culture of peer engagement and facilitating shared leadership. PACE also provides a generic research plan and ethics application resource as the starting point for a team to develop their curriculum-specific approach.

Why

The objective is to ensure that curriculum delivery in the Faculty of Health is underpinned by a range of activities designed to achieve quality improvement, quality assurance and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) outcomes. PATS was selected because it is a professional



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development program that facilitates a collegial approach to remediating or reinvigorating units and providing targeted support for teachers (quality improvement focus). The PACE variation was developed within the Faculty of Health to facilitate a 'whole of curriculum' perspective with collective 'teaching team' responsibility for all aspects of quality.

Staff members normally focus on the specific components of the curriculum they teach; they do not routinely check potential impacts of unit-level changes on course learning outcomes or student experience. This is problematic as institutional reporting expectations, for example the Australian Qualifications Framework, and accreditation standards required of professional award degrees are described at the level of a course.

PACE is a deliberate strategy by the Faculty of Health to encourage staff to appreciate the horizontal and vertical relationships between units and the collective impact on overall student learning outcomes and experience. An additional driver for a teaching team/course based approach is the University of Tasmania's institutional "Teaching Performance Expectations" which are explicitly tied to performance management and career advancement. Staff members are expected to participate in, and demonstrate leadership in relation to, curriculum quality activities and also a scholarly approach to their teaching. Through PACE, a course coordinator can lead team-based peer engagement and organise mentoring to improve individual teaching practice and units, while ensuring the integrity of the course curriculum is maintained.

People

PACE expands and extends PATS to include all staff members delivering a curriculum (including academic administration staff) in a planned approach to quality enhancement of team-taught curricula.

All peer partnership models identified by the PATS program are potentially suitable for adoption by a teaching team, depending on the situation, including mentor/mentee and sharing expertise within the teaching team via peer partnerships. PACE can be used to provide novice or casual staff with tailored peer support. It is also possible to use external peer review (benchmarking) and participate in the University of Tasmania's centrally provided professional development workshops. Any mode of teaching team interaction (face-to-face, phone conferencing and multi-campus or off-campus video-links) can be adopted for PACE.

Timeframe

PACE is designed as an ongoing program for the duration of a curriculum. In the case of an award degree, an evaluation-research program is aligned to the life cycle of a course from initial design when a new course proposal is submitted and throughout delivery, until a decision is made to remove the course from the University's schedule. Established courses can set up an evaluation-research program at any point and start collecting data for analysis once ethics approval is obtained.

Scope: teaching team

A teaching team can include teaching staff from all categories of employment (casual, contract, permanent) and academic administration or support staff members.

- Key Outcomes



PATS variation – outputs and outcomes

In 2013-2014, three teaching teams set up a plan for evaluation-research and collectively used the student and other data generated about the course for QI, QA and scholarly (SOTL) outputs.

1. QI: student assessment data and feedback data (e.g. survey responses) informed improvements to curriculum and delivery design.
2. QA: Teams were able to access data and analyse it to provide evidence for course review reports (e.g. AQF compliance). In 2014, each team received an institutional learning and teaching award based on evidence of impact on student learning and enhanced experience (two Vice-Chancellor's citations for contributions to student learning and a third award for 'programs that enhance learning').
3. SOTL and community recognition: the three teaching teams produced eight peer-reviewed publications (journal articles and conference presentations). The *Understanding Dementia* team won the Australian Computing Society Tasmanian State Community Service Award.

System level impacts

Within the Faculty of Health, the PACE program has achieved impact at IMPEL levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

1. **Team members:** team members from the Bachelor Dementia Care, Global Perspectives Program and Understanding Dementia MOOC were recipients of institutional awards.
2. **Immediate students:** students consistently report high levels of satisfaction via centrally administered student evaluation surveys and through formative feedback mechanisms (for example designated discussion boards). Students demonstrate high levels of engagement in providing feedback on curriculum delivery (including response rates above the institutional average).
3. **Spreading the word:** dissemination has been through publications about the Bachelor Dementia Care, Global Perspectives Program and Understanding Dementia MOOC and when all three teams were recipients of institutional awards. Information about how to engage with PACE is provided via a Faculty of Health, staff-specific, section on the University's Learning Management System (called MyLO). The PACE teaching team approach to quality enhancement of courses was presented to the University of Tasmania's Associate Deans, Learning and Teaching Advisory Group in 2015. Also, a half-day workshop on "Embedding Research into Course Design" was facilitated during the University's "Research Week" with 21 staff members expressing interest in the approach and using the resources developed.
4. **Narrow opportunistic adoption:** Momentum for teaching teams to organise a systematic and scholarly approach to course quality is growing within the Faculty. Course coordinators of new courses, or courses undergoing review, are supported to concurrently plan for ongoing evaluation of the new course design with their teaching team.
5. **Narrow systemic adoption:** PATS and PACE are embedded in the Faculty of Health's Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan. Unit coordinators whose units are flagged as 'low satisfaction' by student evaluations are offered a PATS program to address identified issues. Course coordinator's roles and responsibility to lead in curriculum quality assurance is being built into performance management with PACE as a key enabler. In 2015, a "Projects of Institutional Significance Grant" is underway to produce and disseminate the concept of PACE and supporting resources to other Faculties in the University of Tasmania.

- Learning

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1. Barriers and opportunities

A barrier to uptake of PACE is competing priorities in a context of high workload and time constraints on teachers, particularly course coordinators. Additionally, course coordinators are not required to have educational training; there is variable motivation and capability to demonstrating a scholarly approach to quality improvement and quality assurance of curriculum and teaching.

The Faculty has identified the need to ensure course coordinator expectations are consistently defined across the Faculty and include responsibility for quality assuring the curriculum and leading the teaching-team to engage in the full spectrum of evidence-based improvements. This expectation needs to be formalised in individual performance management and recognized in workload models. Training and resources need to be provided to support a teaching team to build a culture of collaborative engagement.

2. What worked well

The three teaching teams from the Bachelor of Dementia Care, Global Perspectives Program and Understanding Dementia MOOC were institutionally recognised and rewarded in 2014. This increased the credibility of PACE as a positive approach to ensuring requirements for course delivery are met as well as rewarding time and effort put into ensuring learning and teaching is evidence-based and scholarly. The PACE teaching teams are highly motivated to continue with PACE to produce quality improvement, quality assurance reporting and scholarly outputs.

The three teaching teams piloted and helped develop three key resources that can be used by any course/teaching team: generic ethics; online consent mechanism and a workshop for course coordinators on how to use them.

The uptake of PACE has been slow, however a course by course approach, starting with motivated course coordinators and teaching teams, has resulted in a suite of resources that are thoroughly tested and demonstrated as useful, producing good outcomes for students and rewards for teachers. It has also given time to develop supporting organisational structures and processes that recognise and reward staff engagement. In 2015, the momentum has built for greater uptake and course coordinators across the Faculty are generally very receptive to the idea of adopting PACE for their teaching team.

3. What didn't work well

It has proved difficult to increase the number of course teaching teams fully adopting PACE beyond the very successful teaching teams from the Bachelor of Dementia Care, Global Perspectives Program and Understanding Dementia MOOC.

The method of engagement is time and resource intensive and dependent on course coordinator motivation and willingness of teaching team members to add PACE activities to their workload. Some coordinators with 'in principle' interest are not able to find time to invest in developing an evaluation-research plan for their course, even with the resources and support from Faculty staff.

The perception that 'discipline' research outcomes are more highly valued than teaching outcomes for performance review and promotion also affects academics' priorities and ability to put the necessary time and effort into planning and setting up routine data collection for analysis of their teaching, students' learning experiences and outcomes and the curriculum design.

The Faculty of Health has over 90 courses with course coordinators. It has taken time to negotiate and put in place structures and processes, with supporting resources, to ensure this PATS

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variation is embedded in performance expectations of the Faculty and aligns with reporting expectations of the Faculty and the institution.

4. What was learnt

Top-down leadership and support is essential for establishing a course/teaching team approach via PACE across the Faculty. PATS and PACE are initiatives in the Faculty Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan. The Quality Evaluation Learning and Teaching (QELT) unit has provided human resource to mentor individual course coordinators and their teaching team, develop the supporting resources and designing structures and processes to align participation in PACE with Faculty performance management and quality assurance reporting requirements. This is critical to enabling PACE to be embedded as 'normal' practice in the Faculty, rather than a successful project that enabled capable and motivated staff to systematically improve curriculum and teaching. The goal is to shift from high-intensity personal support for increased course coordinator capability to providing online resources and monitoring to identify units that need targeted intervention via PATS. The support role will thus narrow in scope to PATS for individual teachers/units where external mentoring and professional development helpful.

5. National System Impact

IMPEL Level 3: Contributions to knowledge in the field; growth or spread of disseminated ideas; serendipitous adoption/adaptation by people beyond the project's intended reach.

