



Renewing first year curricula for social sciences and humanities in the context of discipline threshold standards

Final report 2015

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Support for the production of this report has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.



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[2015]

ISBN 978-1-76028-571-5 [PRINT]
ISBN 978-1-76028-572-2 [PDF]
ISBN 978-1-76028-573-9 [DOCX]

Acknowledgements

The team would like to acknowledge the work of our evaluator, Associate Professor Michele Scoufis, who offered invaluable support and advice to the team throughout the project.

We owe a huge thank you to Julie Wilmot, the project officer, who provided research assistance and undertook a wide variety of tasks for the project including the unenviable task of arranging the workshops, catering, flights and accommodation for the participants. Her patience and her attention to detail is much appreciated.

We also had a team of discipline experts who worked with us to write the content of the website. We acknowledge and thank them for their contribution:

- Dr Ruth Bacchus, School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Charles Sturt University – English
- Dr Karina Luzia, International Governance and Performance (IGAP) Research Centre at Macquarie University – Geography
- Dr Nicholas Barry, College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce at La Trobe University and research assistant Bree Ahrens – Politics
- Dr Sue Rechter, School of Arts at Australian Catholic University – Sociology

Our reference group played an integral part in the project through offering us their discipline expertise and participating in the workshops:

- Professor Sean Brawley, Macquarie University – History
- Professor Iain Hay, Flinders University – Geography
- Professor Kevin Dunn, Western Sydney University – Geography
- Dr Kristin Natalier, Flinders University – Sociology
- Dr Sue Rechter, Australian Catholic University – Sociology
- Dr Nicholas Barry, La Trobe University – Politics
- Professor Adrian Little, The University of Melbourne – Politics
- Associate Professor Nicole Moore, The University of New South Wales – English
- Professor Anthony Uhlmann, Western Sydney University – English

In addition, we would like to acknowledge the many academics who attended the workshops and generously shared their ideas and resources with us.

We would like to thank the students who participated in the surveys and focus groups and helped us to understand their experiences as first years in the different disciplines.

Lastly, we would like to thank the Office for Learning and Teaching for the grant that made this project possible.

List of acronyms used

- ADLT: Associate Dean Learning and Teaching
- ALTC: Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd.
- APSA: Australian Political Studies Association
- AQF: Australian Qualifications Framework
- ASSH: Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities
- AUHE: Australian Universities Heads of English
- DASSH: Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities
- HERDSA: The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
- HERGA: Higher Education Research Group Adelaide
- LTAS: Learning and Teaching Academic Standards
- OLT: Office for Learning and Teaching
- TASA: The Australian Sociological Association
- TEQSA: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
- TLO: Threshold Learning Outcome

Executive summary

This project evolved out of the work of the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) network for Associate Deans Learning and Teaching (ADLT). As ADLTs, we wanted to better support and advise our colleagues on how to design first year curriculum in their own discipline. Our contexts were determined by Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) that were developed for the Humanities and Social Science disciplines initially through an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project (Hay, 2012). We wanted to identify, understand, refine and be able to advocate for teaching and assessment strategies that would set first year students on their way to achieving TLOs in their chosen discipline by the time they graduate.

The original aims of the project were to:

- i. determine the discipline-specific skills and standards that are required to be developed at the first year in order for students to achieve the TLOs and AQF standards prescribed for graduates in the selected disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities;
- ii. engage first year staff with first year pedagogy and curriculum renewal in the light of threshold standards; and
- iii. provide a toolkit with examples of discipline-specific assessments and activities that develop those skills in first year students.

The project drew upon three key curriculum and pedagogy literatures, namely first year curriculum principles, academic standards or TLOs, and signature discipline pedagogies to develop a coherent intellectual context for the project. We chose four disciplines that had nationally established TLOs: History, Politics, Geography and Sociology. We added the discipline of English, which did not have TLOs but was agreed by the team and our reference group to be a central discipline for Arts and Education students.

In order to listen to the student voice, surveys were conducted with first year students asking them questions about their understanding of discipline-specific issues, what they found difficult about studying in the discipline and what strategies their lecturers used that they found useful. We also undertook focus groups with a small group of students in third year to ask them about their first year experience.

Five discipline-based workshops were held with 137 lecturers from 30 universities participating. Most of these academics were teaching into the first year or curriculum designers for the discipline. Many of these academics had not had previous experience with the TLOs nor considered how they might introduce these in the first year. The scene was set in the workshops by holding a discussion of the TLOs within their disciplines and included the findings from the student surveys. The first four steps of the Decoding the Disciplines model designed by Middendorf and Pace (2004) were used to guide academics teaching first

year subjects through several steps of a clear pedagogical process. For each TLO, lecturers were asked to:

- reflect on the challenges and bottlenecks to first year students being able to develop the skills and knowledge needed for each TLO;
- think about how an expert practitioner of the discipline does these things;
- determine how they might model expert behaviour; and
- translate these expert practices into achievable classroom activities that allowed students to practice and receive feedback on the skills.

Conversation maps were used as a technique to allow the participants to analyse the TLOs and consider what skills and concepts needed to be developed at first year in order to set the students on the path to achieving the TLOs by the time they graduated, and how they might develop those skills. The last part of the workshop focused on the collection and sharing of ideas for teaching strategies and assessments that support the learning of the skills needed for the TLO.

One of the key outcomes of the project was the determination of the skills and concepts that need to be learnt at first year in order to meet the TLOs by graduation. An analysis of the workshop outputs and a literature study was undertaken to obtain ideas for each of the TLOs in each of the disciplines of:

- the concepts and skills that students need to learn at first year;
- the barriers to learning those skills and concepts; and
- the techniques that we might use to develop the skills.

To capture and sustain the findings beyond the life of the project, the team has developed a website that includes an account of the pedagogical contexts and frameworks in which we operated, ideas for each of the five disciplines and a resource bank with learning activities, assessment items and Good Practice Guides linked to each discipline. The website is available at www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au. The discipline pages were organised around the TLOs for the specific disciplines. Each TLO was divided into the skills that students need to know and do in first year, the barriers to students learning those skills, and the teaching strategies that might be used to help students develop them. Good Practice Guides were developed to be printable as booklets or posters to capture the same information in a different format.

Lastly, a framework was established for the development of first year curriculum and pedagogy within the context of the discipline. The framework is focused around four questions about our students and their learning in the discipline:

- Who are my students when they enter first year in my discipline?
- What do my first year students need to know and do in my discipline?
- What strategies can I use to help my students develop the knowledge and skills they require to be effective learners in my discipline?

- What will my students know and what will they be able to do at the completion of their first year in my discipline?

These questions are then expanded using three lenses of thinking of the student as a first year student, as a learner and practitioner in the discipline, and as a potential graduate of the discipline.

Participants were interviewed by our evaluator and reported changes to their teaching and assessment practices as a result of the workshops. They reported scaffolding students' learning in their discipline more specifically. The ideas from the workshops have been used to inform discipline reviews with review committees using the TLOs to determine what they want to achieve in their major, and to inform the design of the first year. This then helped them to develop their discipline from first through to third year. In one case, the participants formed a discipline committee, which meets regularly to design their curriculum as a team.

The workshops have not only stimulated productive discussion of teaching first year students, they have also increased understanding of the nature and importance of TLOs themselves. In the case of English, the project has materially assisted the work on establishing TLOs begun by the new peak body, the Australian Universities Heads of English. The draft TLOs were refined in the English workshop using a World Café method.

The framework, website and techniques that were developed have been used by curriculum developers and first year academics in designing first year curriculum and pedagogy. The project has been instrumental in challenging academics to consider the needs of their students in the context of the discipline and the outcomes they want them to achieve in the discipline by the time they graduate.

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Chapter 1 - Project Context

1.1 Background

This project grew out of the work of the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) network for Associate Deans Learning and Teaching (ADLTs). ADLTs work with a wide variety of disciplines to review curricula and ensure that students meet required standards. ADLTs wanted to understand how different disciplines might be taught in first year so that students become effective learners in their discipline and also meet discipline threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) by the time they graduate. ADLTs asked, “What skills and knowledge do students need to learn in their disciplines in first year in order to meet the TLOs in their final year?” ADLTs followed this question with two further questions: “What barriers might the students have in learning those skills?” and “What strategies can we use to develop the relevant skills and knowledge?”

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has indicated that universities should benchmark their courses and majors against published discipline standards, for example, the TLOs (TEQSA, 2013). In 2010, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) sponsored work to define threshold discipline standards for a variety of disciplines including History and Geography (OLT, 2012). Since that time various discipline standards have been created for a variety of disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences including Sociology and Politics (Hay, 2012). This project focused on four disciplines that had published TLOs, namely, History, Geography, Politics and Sociology and one that had not yet published any standards, English.

Lecturers need to understand the move from content-driven curricula to outcomes-driven curricula and are able to respond to it. Kift (2009, p.40) proposes that “the first year of university study is arguably the most crucial time for engaging students in their learning community and equipping them with the requisite skills, not only to persist, but to be successful and independent in their new learning throughout their undergraduate years and for a lifetime of professional practice...”. She suggests that the first year curriculum should be designed in a learner-focused way to cater for the diverse student populations. The first year should provide scaffolded learning activities and assessments that engage students and support the development of their competencies within the discipline.

The approach proposed in this project is based on an expectation that students learn and should be able to demonstrate, at a level appropriate to first year, knowledge and understanding of certain disciplinary concepts, methods, terminology etc., and the kinds of skills that enable them to apply or express this knowledge.

At the same time, the approach suggests that curriculum and assessment design, along with other aspects of pedagogical practice, are organised around the challenges of transition to university study, the diversity of students' backgrounds and prior learning, and the need to scaffold first year students in order to set them on their way to meeting the TLOs in their final year. The challenges are similarly both transitional and discipline specific, and are experienced differently by individual students.

Teaching strategies must also, therefore, involve both transitional and signature (or disciplinary) pedagogies. The educators need to design and teach in ways that will engage and motivate student learning. To cater for student diversity, creativity and agency, educators should make the disciplinary discourses accessible, design assessment that is challenging yet achievable, and make our criteria and standards explicit. It is important at first year to scaffold and support students, at the level of individual assessment items and, more broadly and in the longer term, to help them become efficacious and independent learners. The focus in curricula design should be on student learning rather than discipline content, making sure that at the end of their first year students are well equipped to continue their studies in the discipline and meet the TLOs at the end of their degrees.

1.2 Project aims

The original aims of the project were to:

- i. determine the discipline-specific skills and standards that are required to be developed at the first year in order for students to achieve the TLOs and AQF standards prescribed for graduates in the selected disciplines in the social sciences and humanities;
- ii. engage first year staff with first year pedagogy and curriculum renewal in the light of threshold standards; and
- iii. provide a toolkit with examples of discipline-specific assessments and activities that develop those skills in first year students.

These aims have been met in the following ways:

- i. The five discipline areas selected were English, Geography, History, Sociology and Politics. English was chosen as one of the most popular subjects in a BA and the others were chosen because they already had published TLOs. For each discipline the team determined what students needed to "know and do" in their first year in order to prepare them for meeting the TLOs by their third year. The team determined the concepts and skills that they need to learn, and the barriers that can prevent them from learning these concepts and skills. In addition, the team identified ideas for strategies that lecturers of first year subjects might use to develop the skills required.
- ii. Workshops were held with academics across the five disciplines to engage them with the TLOs and to determine what this meant for learning in first year.

- iii. The team developed a website with resources and examples for discipline-specific assessments and activities related to developing the skills in first year. The website is available at www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au.

In addition to achieving the original aims, the team also undertook the following:

- iv. Good Practice Guides were developed for each of the discipline areas. Each page of the Good Practice Guides is also available as a poster.
- v. A framework for designing first year discipline-specific curriculum was developed that can be used by curriculum developers and first year lecturers when thinking about the design of their majors and the activities that they might include.

These outcomes will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2 - Project Approach

2.1 Overview of approach used

The project followed an action research methodology built around three action research cycles. The first cycle centred on the History discipline, which had well-developed Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). The workshop for History took place in June 2013. The second cycle focused on Sociology and Politics (with workshops in November 2013) and the last cycle focused on English and Geography (with workshops in June 2014).

Each action research cycle had four stages:

- a. Planning and study of current literature of the discipline/s for the particular cycle. This included exploring the signature pedagogies for the specific discipline and any work that had been undertaken on the TLOs for the discipline.
- b. Implementation in two phases:
 - i. Surveys and focus groups with students in the discipline/s to understand what they find difficult and what experiences they felt helped them to learn in their first year (see Section 2.2);
 - ii. Workshop/s with academics teaching in the first year to develop a proposal of skills required for their disciplines and to share their assessment practices and activities (see Section 2.3).
- c. Analysis of the data collected from the workshop to identify the skills and knowledge that first year students need to develop in the context of the discipline, the barriers to learning those skills and the techniques the team might use in the first year. The workshop analysis was combined with a literature study to create the materials that have been made available through the website, Good Practice Guides and posters (See Section 2.4);
- d. Evaluation and reflection. At the conclusion of each workshop the team analysed the evaluations and adapted our workshops and plans for the following workshops. The lack of time was the most common response so the amount of time set aside for presentation was reduced and the time for discussion was increased with each cycle. The evaluator, Michele Scoufis, acted as critical friend and observer and provided advice throughout.

The methodology for English was modified to take account of the fact that no TLOs had been agreed upon. The project facilitated an additional workshop in February 2014 for the Australian University Heads of English (AUHE) who developed draft TLOs. The Project Team then restructured the workshop in June 2014 to collect feedback on the TLOs as well as use them to consider the requirements for the first year in English. This approach allowed the team to achieve the aims of this project and assist in the development of TLOs in English.

During a presentation at HERDSA 2014, the team was asked if it was going to create a framework that brought together the different aspects of the project. After the completion

of the final workshops the team developed a framework that provides guidance on the aspects to consider in designing discipline-specific first year curricula that will enable students to meet the learning outcomes required by the time they graduate (See Section 2.5).

2.2 Student surveys and focus groups

The surveys consisted of a range of statements about each discipline that were drawn from the TLOs for the discipline. The aim of the survey was to gauge the level of understanding of commencing students in the discipline at the end of their first semester or beginning of the second semester of study in the discipline. After the first cycle (History) the team added two open-ended questions to the survey. The questions were similar for each of the disciplines.

- “What did you find most difficult about studying <discipline> at university?”
- “What is the most significant experience you have had during your study of <discipline> so far? Why?”

Aspects that students found difficult in first year

Students from all disciplines had problems with terminology and theoretical concepts of their discipline

“The most difficult part would be in understanding the theories and also not to forget the sociological terms which must be used in writing essay. Sometimes the terms are quite similar with the term used in daily life, which leads to a little bit of confusion when applying those terms in essay.”

Sociology student

Some students complained that lecturers assumed that they had previous knowledge:

“Coming from a family background who have no interest whatsoever in Politics, it was hard for me to hit the ground running with academics who expect me to already know what some political things are as presumed knowledge. I came into this subject in my first year hoping to get an education in Politics that I haven’t previously (and I have), but some of the concepts were hard for me to grasp initially.”

Politics student

Students sometimes found a particular practice in their discipline difficult to master:

“Lecturers who assume students know how to do close reading and discuss literary features make it very hard”.

English student

Some students had preconceptions about their disciplines.

“I am used to reading for pleasure, so looking at texts and trying to analyse literary features and consider hidden meanings, and then writing essays about them, has been incredibly challenging”.

English student

“I aligned with natural or human Geography and therefore felt disappointed if the unit taught from the other perspective”.

Geography student

Table 1 provides the information on the number of students and the number of universities that participated in each of the surveys. The universities were drawn from the seven universities of the team members participating in the project.

Table 1: Surveys and focus groups by discipline

		History	Sociology	Politics	Geography	English
Student (first year) surveys	N	149	116	51	87	119
	Universities	7	4	4	4	5
Student (third year) focus groups	N	12	8	3	3	8
	Universities	3	2	1	1	2

Academics were given the opportunity to answer the same questions as the students to compare responses and highlight any differences in understanding.

The team also sought to collect qualitative data prior to the workshops by running focus groups with third year students in each discipline from a selection of the universities in the project team. The team had limited numbers in these focus groups as shown in Table 1. The focus group interviews sought insights into:

- why students had chosen to major in the discipline;
- what problems they encountered in the discipline when they entered first year;
- what skills they have now that they wished they had known about at first year; and
- what practices their first year lecturers followed that they found useful to their learning in the discipline.

Significant experiences of students in the first year

Across the disciplines they valued learning new skills

“Learning how to find evidence in a text instead of using personal opinion. I didn't know how to do prior. I found writing the essay difficult because it was such a new skill but I know it will be valuable.”

English student

They valued lecturers that scaffolded their learning.

“My first year lecturer did a fantastic job of presenting historical themes of the unit alongside key dates and historical events”.

History focus group student

Although some students found coping with differing views challenging others found it stimulating.

“I would think group discussions have been my most significant experiences in Sociology as I find discussion helps you to remember and learn in a topic, and it is interesting to find the multiple opinions about a topic.”

Sociology student

Some students mentioned a particularly event or activity as their significant experience

“The field trip which we undertook at Pymont, I have been there many times however that day it made me look beyond just what I normally perceive. Looking in deep, about the buildings, locations, gentrification, tourism, globalisation, post industrialisation city and the overall impacts of the environment was interesting. I have gained many insightful knowledge (sic) from the field trip. It made the subject more interesting.”

Geography student

2.3 Discipline workshops

The discipline workshops were targeted at academics teaching first year students and those involved in first year curriculum design. The team used the workshops to link current discipline-specific learning and teaching knowledge and developments in a meaningful way for staff who may have had limited exposure to one or all of the approaches. Each workshop took the participants through a structured way of exploring who their students were and what they needed to learn in their discipline in the first year.

I found the constellation of Politics teaching practitioners from different universities to be a real boon. The focus on practical output was also a very welcome feature.

Politics participant

The team used the Decoding the Disciplines methodology to think about the bottlenecks to their learning within the context of each discipline. It also used the principles of first year pedagogy to think about the strategies they could use within their discipline to develop the skills their students needed. The workshops provided a space whereby academics in the disciplines could share their positive and negative experiences, common concerns and ideas. In addition, the project team used the workshops to collect a database of learning activities and assessments in each discipline to be disseminated as resources on the website created for the project.

Table 2: Workshop Participants

	History	Sociology	Political Science	Geography	English	Total (distinct)
	June 2013	Nov 2013	Nov 2013	June 2014	June 2014	
Number of participants (including team)	40	36	27	29	41	147
Number of participants (without team)	33	29	21	21	33	137
Number of universities represented	13	14	14	14	16	30

Table 2 shows the number of participants at each of the workshops and the number of universities represented at each. There were a total of 30 universities represented across the five disciplines with 137 people attending the workshops (excluding the team members).

I will implement the wonderful teaching ideas; relate tasks to TLOS and think more seriously about tutorial activities
Sociology participant

A brief description of each part of the workshop is provided in Appendix B.2. The evaluations demonstrated the success of the workshop techniques and strategies. Such feedback shows that these could be used by others to run similar workshops.

2.4 Analysis of discipline-specific learning in the first year

The team worked with discipline experts to use the learnings from the workshops together with literature to determine what students need to be able to know and do in the first year, what barriers there were to their learning those skills and the techniques that we might use to develop the skills. The discipline experts were Ruth Bacchus – English; Karina Luzia – Geography; Nicholas Barry – Politics; and Sue Rechter – Sociology. Adrian Jones and Jennifer Clark were discipline experts in History and Joy Wallace also acted as discipline expert in English. This analysis is presented on the website and in the Good Practice Guides.

As an example, the TLO 4 *Demonstrate an ability to apply sociological theories, concepts and evidence to sociological questions*, was divided into two main concepts, namely *Sociological Questions* and *Applying Theories, Concepts and Evidence to Sociological Questions*. An extract from the *Sociological Questions* portion is provided in Figure 1. It shows what a first year Sociology student should learn about sociological questions, what barriers there might be to their learning these concepts, and the teaching strategies lecturers might use to help students develop their understanding of sociological questions.

TLO 4 Demonstrate an ability to apply sociological theories, concepts and evidence to sociological questions.

Sociological Questions

What students need to know and do

Understand the nature of, and engage with, sociological questions. In first year these could be those about issues of importance to young people.

Student barriers to learning

First year students may not understand the types of questions sociologists ask and how these differ in their starting point from other approaches. They also may not understand why these sorts of questions are important for society.

Our teaching strategies

Help students to understand the distinctness of the sociological imagination and to practice it. Engage students by starting with issues in their own lives. Take a contemporary issue such as obesity (Egger & Swinburne, 2010), gay marriage, mental illness, or (for something lighter) the interest in vampires in popular culture. Apply and contrast different approaches to each topic, for example: common sense, economic, medical, psychological, political and sociological.

Use Mills' work on sociological imagination to help students understand the way sociological questions probe connections between private, individual issues and social issues (Mills, 2000). Ask students to look at a recent event or issue in the media and determine the questions they might ask as a sociologist studying the event or issue.

Find intriguing and non-obvious patterns and events that can be explained or interpreted sociologically, such as Randall Collins' interpretation of social rituals (Collins, 1992). Show students how sociological questions have contributed to social policy questions and responses, using historical and contemporary examples from journals such as *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* and *Australian Journal of Social Issues*.

References

Collins, R. (1992). *Sociological insight, an introduction to non-obvious sociology*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Egger, G. & Swinburne, B. (2010). *Planet Obesity*, Allen and Unwin: Crows Nest, Australia.

Mills, C. (2000). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press: New York.

Figure 1: Extract of TLO from Sociology

This analysis was undertaken for the eight draft TLOs for English, eight TLOs for Geography, eight TLOs for History, eleven TLOs for Politics and seven TLOs for Sociology. The Project Team developed a website, Good Practice Guides and posters for each of the disciplines using the results from the analysis. All of these resources are available on the website and are described more fully in Chapter 3 with examples in Appendix B. A website example for

TLO2 from History is shown in Figure 5 in Appendix B.1 and a Good Practice Guide example from TLO5 for Geography is available in Figure 8 in Appendix B.3.

2.5 Development of a framework for designing first year discipline-specific curricula and pedagogy

The team had not planned in the initial project to develop a framework, but decided that it could be a useful resource following a presentation at the HERDSA 2014 conference where a question was asked about this. An extension to the project was obtained to enable the team to design the framework basing it on questions that can guide the design of first year curriculum and teaching in the context of the discipline. The framework is presented in Section 3.2 and a sample poster is available in Appendix B.4.

Chapter 3 - Outputs and findings

3.1 Literature review

The project started with a focus on the TLOs for each of the five disciplines, analysing these to identify the skills and concepts that need to be developed in first year in order to attain those outcomes by the time the students graduate. The project connected the TLOs with two other research/curriculum design strands: the signature discipline pedagogies, including the Decoding the Disciplines methodology, and the first year pedagogy. The nexus between the discipline-based TLOs, the signature discipline pedagogies and first year pedagogies has remained largely unexplored in the Australian context. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, they have all developed relatively recently and in divergent streams. Secondly, they each focus on different aspects of the student experience. The TLOs measure students' learning outcomes at the end of the program or degree while the discipline and first year pedagogies focus on the beginning of students' degrees. The discipline pedagogies analyse the concepts that students need to unpack to understand the discipline and the first year principles offer guidelines about how teachers might design curricula and assessment to maximise student engagement and learning outcomes. Thirdly, although all three are concerned with quality of curriculum design and assessment in Australia, only the TLOs will potentially be used for quality assurance.

This brief literature review gives the background to the three areas and the framework in Section 3.2 shows how we have brought the three areas together.

3.1.1 Threshold Learning Outcomes

In 2011 the AQF published its initial framework for higher education in Australia (AQF, 2013). This framework set the standards for qualifications at different levels. Of particular interest to this project were the learning outcomes defined for the three-year bachelor degree. At that time, TEQSA (2013) announced that universities would need to demonstrate that they met published discipline standards. This was particularly problematic for the Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines where there were no accreditation bodies or accreditation requirements to set discipline standards.

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) undertook the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards (LTAS) project in 2010 to define discipline standards for a number of discipline areas including History and Geography (OLT, 2012; Hay, 2012). Discipline scholars worked with academics, employers and their peak bodies to define the minimum standards for graduates from the different disciplines. These standards were termed Threshold Learning Outcomes (OLT, 2012). Shortly afterwards, discipline Threshold Learning Outcomes were developed for Political Science (APSA, 2011) and Sociology (TASA, 2012). A further OLT project "*After standards: engaging and embedding History standards using international*

best practice to inform curriculum renewal” (Brawley, et al., 2013) explored ways of assuring that History students had met the standards set by the time they graduated. It recommended that the skills and standards should be planned through the three years of studying History and that students should develop these skills from first year.

This project extends the “*After standards*” project by focusing on transition pedagogy and engaging first year lecturers in developing curricula and strategies that support the development of skills in first year to ensure that the threshold standards are met.

3.1.2 First Year Pedagogy

First year students come to university from diverse backgrounds with varied life experiences. This can be stressful and affects their ability to adapt and cope with university life both academically and socially (Cameron, George & Henley, 2012; Morosanu, Handley & Donovan, 2010). For this reason universities have focused attention on transition programs moving from the one-off orientation to taking long-term, whole-of-institution approaches (Gale & Parker, 2014). It is important that first year lecturers are able to help these students transition into university and into the study of their discipline (Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010).

Nelson (2014) in her keynote to the First Year in Higher Education Conference highlighted a number of lessons learnt over the past 30 years of research into first year learning and teaching. There are two lessons that she drew on that are of particular relevance to this study. The first lesson is that the team should “*focus on curriculum design, assessment, pedagogies and teaching practices that engage students in learning*” (Nelson, 2014, p. 9-10). She suggested the need to consider how first year students come to understand their discipline and see themselves within the discipline. The second lesson relevant to this study was that “*we need to move away from thinking about life and learning support as being adjunct to the curricula content and think about support for learning as an integral part of programs of study*” (Nelson, 2014, p.10). Managing transition should therefore be recognised as being part of the learning process. This echoes Tinto’s (2012) view that an effective classroom is one that engages the students individually and collaboratively and where students are given the skills and support they need to succeed.

This project focuses on the first year curriculum within a discipline-specific framework. For that reason Kift’s (2009) six curriculum principles - transitions, diversity, design, engagement, assessment and evaluation - were used to stimulate lecturers’ thinking about how they might apply these principles in the context of their discipline.

Gale and Parker (2014) posit three ways of looking at transition, namely transition as *induction*, transition as *development* and transition as *becoming*. This way of seeing transition fits well with the project’s approach in that the team conceptualised the student as a first year transitioning into university, developing and learning the skills they need as learners within the discipline and becoming the graduates we want them to be. The project thus applied these pedagogy principles to the disciplines by asking discipline scholars to

consider what they needed to do to facilitate students becoming learners and thinkers in their discipline and to prepare them to graduate with the skills required for their discipline.

3.1.3 Signature pedagogies and decoding the disciplines

The term “signature pedagogies” is used to describe the distinctive ways in which educators can teach to help students develop their skills and ways of thinking in a particular discipline (Chick, Haynie & Gurung, 2009). Key to addressing the project’s question “What do students need to learn in their disciplines in first year in order to help them meet the TLOs in their final year?” was the Decoding the Disciplines methodology developed by David Pace and Joan Middendorf at Indiana University. Combined with the idea of signature pedagogies, this proved to be a productive, structured way of allowing academics to focus on the “values, knowledge and way of thinking” (Calder, 2006) in their particular discipline.

As Middendorf and Pace (2004) point out, academics are often so “deeply ingrained” in their own discipline that they find it difficult to explain the key elements and concepts of that discipline without using the discourse of the discipline itself. If a student finds a concept difficult to master then it can be problematic for them to progress in the discipline. The knowledge and ways of thinking may be tacit and academics might have difficulty making these explicit to students. Furthermore, the specific disciplinary discourse may be difficult for a novice to comprehend and may create a barrier to further learning (Land, Cousin, Meyer, & Davies, 2005).

If we want to develop an understanding of the pedagogy of the subject we teach, we have to start somewhere and making sense of what seems central and often difficult to grasp by most learners, is a good place to begin our inquiry. A tendency among academic teachers is to stuff their curriculum with content, burdening themselves with the task of transmitting vast amounts of knowledge bulk and their students of absorbing and reproducing this bulk. In contrast, a focus on threshold concepts enables teachers to make refined decisions about what is fundamental to a grasp of the subject they are teaching. (Cousin, 2006).

The Decoding the Disciplines methodology (Middendorf & Pace, 2004) has the following steps in helping students learn within the context of their discipline:

1. What is a bottleneck to learning in class? (This could be a particular concept that they must master or a problem that might prevent them progressing.)
2. How does an expert do these things?
3. How can these tasks be explicitly modelled?
4. How will students practise these skills and get feedback?
5. What will motivate the students?
6. How well are the students mastering the tasks? (Assessment)
7. How can knowledge of learning be shared?

This literature formed a key role in the workshops, where the team asked participants to consider first year pedagogy in the light of their discipline area and to think about the bottlenecks to learning experienced by their first year students. The team used the first four steps of the ‘Decoding the Disciplines’ methodology to help participants identify the barriers

to learning for their discipline, think about how an expert would do those things, identify how they might be explicit in modelling them and then develop strategies for students to practise and get feedback. For the History discipline we had a set of already well-defined bottlenecks that had been developed by Indiana University (Diaz, Middendorf, Pace & Shopkow, 2008). For the other discipline areas we used ideas from the *Signature Pedagogies* series (Bernstein, 2012; Fujieda, 2009 Komoto, 2009) refined by the expertise of members of our reference group.

3.2 Designing first year discipline-specific curricula and pedagogy framework

As a concluding step the project team devised a framework to conceptualise the learnings of the project. The framework combines the insights provided by first year pedagogy, discipline-specific pedagogy and the consideration of the TLOs. The framework challenges designers of first year undergraduate curriculum and teachers of first year to consider a series of key questions. The framework is focused around four questions about students and their learning in a discipline:

- Who are my students when they enter first year in my discipline?
- What do my first year students need to know and do in my discipline?
- What strategies can I use to help my students develop the knowledge and skills they require to be effective learners in my discipline?
- What will my students know and what will they be able to do at the completion of their first year in my discipline?

These questions are then expanded using three lenses of thinking to think about students as first year students, as learners and practitioners in the discipline and as potential graduates of the discipline.

The framework can be used by curriculum developers in determining the content and skills that they need to include in the first year subjects in a discipline. It challenges them to consider the needs of their students in the context of the discipline and the outcomes they want the graduates to achieve. The framework can also assist lecturers in planning activities and assessments for their first year subjects. The questions challenge developers and lecturers to consider the needs of their diverse students, to be explicit in their teaching and to think of their subject in the context of the outcomes for the entire discipline.

Four posters related to each of the questions above and each of the lines of the framework has been developed for use in workshop activities. An example of one of the posters can be found in Appendix B.4.

Students And Their Learning	First Year Students	First Year Learners in my Discipline	Potential Graduates in my Discipline
<p>Who are my students when they enter first year in my discipline?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we design our curriculum to respond to the diversity of our students so that it is accessible to and inclusive of all? • How do I acknowledge and use students' previous experience in their learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are my students' knowledge and skill levels in my discipline on entry? • What diverse personal backgrounds do my students bring to their understanding of my discipline? • What are the bottlenecks to students' learning in my discipline? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I allow for diversity, agency and creativity in my students while still ensuring they achieve prescribed learning outcomes?
<p>What do my first year students need to know and do in my discipline?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I design my curriculum to be learning focussed? • How do I make the students' learning relevant to them? • How do I make my expectations of students clear, meaningful and explicit? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the concepts that first year students need to master in order to be effective learners, thinkers and practitioners in my discipline? • What skills do I need to develop in my students in order for them to be effective learners, thinkers and practitioners in my discipline? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What knowledge and skills do our students need to learn in first year in order to meet the learning outcomes and attributes we want our graduates to achieve?
<p>What strategies can I use to help my students develop the knowledge and skills they require to be effective learners in my discipline?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I scaffold and support students' learning? • How can I engage students actively in their learning? • How can I facilitate collaborative learning? • How should I assess students and provide them with regular formative feedback on their work? • How do I develop my students as independent learners? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can I support my students in developing the complex forms of thinking, reasoning and knowing that are central to grasping disciplinary ways of thinking? • Knowing the bottlenecks, how can I break down expert methodologies and explicitly model expert practice? • How will students practise and apply discipline-specific skills and get feedback? • How can I help students to locate themselves within the disciplinary community? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we design assessments and assessment criteria to meet required outcomes? • How might students collect and provide evidence of their learning?
<p>What do my students now know and what can they do at the completion of their first year in my discipline?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How am I evaluating my students' learning experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do my students have the skills to begin to think like a practitioner in the discipline? • Are my students prepared for their future study in the discipline? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we ensure that all students who pass meet the learning outcomes required for first year in the discipline?

Figure 2: Designing first year discipline-specific curriculum and pedagogy

3.3 The website

The project website can be found at www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au

The website gives an overview of the project and how the workshops were run. The framework and posters for using the framework can also be found on the website.

The main part of the website is related to the five disciplines covered by the project: English, History, Geography, Politics and Sociology. The website includes the results of our analysis of each the TLOs for the five disciplines expanded to look at what a first year student needs to know and do, what the barriers might be to them learning the skills required, and the techniques that might be used to develop the students' knowledge and skills. Each discipline also links to a bibliography, Good Practice Guide, posters and the resources for that discipline.

The curriculum framework pages have links to the framework and to individual posters that can be used in workshops to facilitate navigation through the framework.

The website includes a database of resources collected from the participants at the workshop as well as the Good Practice Guides and posters for each discipline. Samples of webpages can be found in Appendix B.1.

3.4 Good Practice Guides and posters

Five Good Practice Guides, one for each of the disciplines, were developed. These guides integrate a subset of the material on the website but also highlight some of the interesting ways the TLOs might be developed at the first year level.

Each page of the Good Practice Guides is also available as a poster.

A sample of one of the pages of the Good Practice Guide for Geography can be found in Appendix B.3. The guides and posters are available from the website.

3.5 Success factors analysis

The team and the way in which the team worked together to integrate the knowledge and expertise of the team members was an important success factor in the project. Most of the team members were Associate Deans Learning and Teaching and each brought his/her own learning and teaching experience, expertise and background to the project. Some of the team members had particular discipline expertise, some expertise in first year pedagogy, others curriculum design and the Decoding the Disciplines methodology. By sharing the collective expertise early in the project, the team was able to situate the activities within the scope of the 'Decoding the Disciplines' framework integrated with the First Year Transition Pedagogy in order to explore how TLOs could be progressed from the first year. This decision not only informed the essence of the project but also allowed the team to operate with a consistent intellectual approach for the duration of the project.

A further success factor was the communication strategy which was adopted. The team met face-to-face on at least four occasions during the year, twice a year for project team meetings and then at the workshops. The team met every month by teleconference. This ongoing communication helped to keep the project on track and facilitated the work as a well-performing team producing quality outcomes.

An additional success factor emerged from the teamwork and problem-solving modus operandi which the team embraced. The work was divided into smaller, more manageable tasks and then distributed among the team members. The team worked in groups of two with each person being the “critical friend” for the other. This method helped to use all of the team and work effectively. For example, the team had two members who were History experts and acted as critical friends to each other. These two members were pivotal to presenting the materials on the website and formed the template for the other disciplines.

The team’s acceptance of feedback constituted a further success factor. The evaluator, Michele Scoufis, became like a member of the team. She provided valuable feedback throughout the project enabling the team to see what it was doing with fresh eyes. This was an important feature of the project as the methodology and workshops were adapted after each cycle.

The timeliness of the project was another feature that contributed to its success and impact. The threshold learning outcomes, shepherded through an ALTC project and the “After Standards” project in History highlighted the need to consider TLOs from first year to third year. The team’s work coincided with recognition of the pivotal role played by the burgeoning need for a whole-of-program approach in Australian higher education; one galvanised by the focus on threshold concepts, employability skills, capstone courses and portfolios. The project’s approach provided a way of ensuring how such a whole-of-program approach could be introduced. This includes an important way of rethinking course accreditations and program reviews. Thus individual members were able to feed the learnings of the project directly into the local accreditation and review processes.

Moreover, the team made crucial decisions about intellectual position of the project, methodology, communication practices and operational activities early on in the project so it was able to maximise our time without any lack of clarity or surety about the purpose or direction.

Another factor for success was the reference group as well as the networks to which the team belonged and were able to inform. After the first iteration with History where the team had asked Professor Sean Brawly to comment on the ideas, the team decided to include reference group members in the workshops and thus were beneficiaries of their expertise in the workshops. This also meant that it was able to influence and enrich the thinking of the disciplines, as well as discipline staff, about their approach to the TLOs, who in turn were able to provide advice to each of their departments. The Associate Deans

Learning and Teaching Network for Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities was another group that was instrumental in the success, as the team used that group to identify participants for the workshops and to gather feedback on the implementation. Presentations to this group also disseminated the team's approach across Australia and New Zealand.

The team's flexibility was an additional success factor. Flexibility was the key to adjusting each of the workshops and methods to suit the particular audience. The team itself had expertise in History and English but did not have expertise in the other disciplines. Bringing in the expertise at the appropriate time, while still having team oversight, enabled the team to complete the project for all five disciplines.

3.6 Linkages

The project focuses on the discipline standards developed through the ALTC discipline standards project in Geography and History and subsequent work in Sociology and Politics (APSA, 2011; Hay, 2012; TASA, 2012). A subsequent project *After standards: engaging and embedding history standards using international best practice to inform curriculum renewal* (Brawley, et al., 2010) provided a comprehensive foundation for work the team undertook in History. The project extended the *After standards* project by focusing on transition pedagogy for History and engaging first year lecturers in understanding their part in ensuring the threshold standards are met.

The team also used the work of Sally Kift's fellowship (Kift, 2009) extensively in showing how her model for transition pedagogy could be implemented in each of the discipline areas.

The team has established links with the International Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISOTL) community for History. Adrian Jones and Jennifer Clark participated in a seminar on the implementation of the Decoding the Disciplines methodology, organised by one of its founders, David Pace, at the ISSOTL conference in 2015.

As there were no existing TLOs for English, Joy Wallace organised to bring the Australian University Heads of English (AUHE) together to develop draft TLOs. These draft TLOS were then further refined during our workshop on English.

Connections were made between discipline academics across the universities and as a result project team members and academics that attended the workshops have been asked to be on review panels, moderation panels and engage in sessional lecturing at other universities.

Chapter 4 - Dissemination, impact and evaluation

4.1 Dissemination activities and publications

The stakeholders and users identified were:

- First year lecturers in the disciplines chosen in the Social Sciences and Humanities who were engaged through the project discipline workshops;
- First year and final year students in selected disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities engaged through the surveys and focus groups; and
- ADLTs in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities through the DASSH Learning and Teaching network engaged through events at the DASSH network meetings.

4.1.1 Project Discipline Workshops

First year lecturers and the reference group were engaged through the workshops themselves. The workshops have already been discussed in Section 2.3 and a description of how they were run is available in Appendix B.2.

Table 3: Discipline workshops

Date	Title and Location
5 Jun 2013	History Workshop, Melbourne
30 Oct 2013	Sociology Workshop, North Sydney
1 Nov 2013	Political Science Workshop, Melbourne
4 Jun 2014	Geography Workshop, Sydney
11 Jun 2014	English Workshop, Melbourne

4.1.2 ADLT Events

ADLTs were an important conduit for the team in inviting appropriate first year lecturers to the workshops. They provided access to the staff members in their institutions and were consulted and engaged on three occasions during the project. All of the events took place at the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Associate Deans Learning and Teaching Network (DASSH ADLT Network).

Table 4: ADLT events

Event Date	Event title, Location	Brief description
8 Mar 2013	DASSH ADLT Network, Stradbroke Island	Initial discussions with the ADLTs as stakeholders in the project
19 Sep 2013	DASSH ADLT network, Sydney	Discussion of History workshop and outcomes. Get input on how and what ADLTs would like on the website.

Event Date	Event title, Location	Brief description
17 Sep 2014	DASSH ADLT network	Engaged ADLTs with how they might use the resources of the project and the techniques we had used in the workshops.

4.1.3 Learning and teaching workshops and seminars

The HERDSA Vic, HERGA, UNISTARS and HERDSA workshops allowed the team to reach a further 74 academics who had not been involved in the initial workshops. Many of the participants came from universities that were not included in the 30 universities that attended the project workshops and included academics from New Zealand and Chile.

Date	Title and Location	Brief description
21 Nov 2013	HERDSA Vic Seminar, Melbourne	HERDSA seminar on the project and applying for OLT grants
28 -29 May 2014	Australian University Heads of English (AUHE) Sydney	AUHE Workshop to draft TLOs for English
17 Jul 2014	Higher Education Research Group of (HERGA) Adelaide	Seminar: Engaging first year students with learning in the discipline
4 Jul 2015	UNISTARS conference in Melbourne	Workshop: Understanding learning skills as a threshold concept: Designing learning experiences to facilitate first year students' success
6 Jul 2015	HERDSA conference in Melbourne	Pre-conference workshop: Revitalising first year curriculum: Preparing students in first year as thinkers and practitioners in your discipline.

4.1.4 Publications and presentations

Conference Publications

Thomas, T., Wallace, J., Allen, P., Clark, J., Cole, B., Jones, A., Lawrence, J., & Sheridan Burns, L. (2014). Engaging first year lecturers with threshold learning outcomes and concepts in their disciplines. Proceedings of the First Year in Higher Education Conference, Darwin, July 2014. Available from URL: http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers14/08A.pdf

Conference Presentations

Clark, J., Jones, A., Thomas, T., Cole, B., Sheridan Burns, L., Lawrence, J., Allen, P. & Wallace, J. (2014). *Global and national comparability in teaching and learning in the first year as informed by explicit discipline standards: An emerging Australian example in the discipline of history*. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) Conference, July 2014, Hong Kong.

Cole, B., Sheridan Burns, L., & Wilmot, J. (2014). *Ensuring social studies teachers' knowledge, skills and professional capabilities from the get-go*. International Assembly of the National Council for the Social Sciences (NCSS) Annual Meeting 2014, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

Lawrence, J., Allen, P., Thomas, T., Wallace, J., Jones, A., Clark, J., Sheridan Burns, L. & Cole, B. (2014). *Intersecting threshold learning outcomes and first year pedagogy principles: challenges and opportunities*. Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) Conference, July 2014, Hong Kong.

Thomas, T., Wallace, J., Allen, P., Clark, J., Cole, B., Jones, A., Lawrence, J. & Sheridan Burns, L. (2015 Accepted). *Using conversation maps to collect SOTL data and engage lecturers*. International Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (ISOTL) Conference, October 2015, Melbourne.

Clark, J., Jones, A., Allen, P., Cole, B., Lawrence, J., Sheridan Burns, L., Thomas, T. & Wallace, J. (2015 Accepted). *Teaching First Year History in a Standards Environment*. International Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (ISOTL) Conference, October 2015, Melbourne.

Conference Symposium

Jennifer Clark and Adrian Jones participated in a symposium at the ISSOTL conference in October organised by Emeritus Professor David Pace.

Pace, D., Miller-Young, J., Yeo, M., Moolman, M., Wilkinson, A., Jones, A. & Clark, J. (2015 accepted). *Communities of Decoding: Using the Decoding the Disciplines paradigm to create faculty learning communities on three continents*. International Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (ISOTL) Conference, October 2015, Melbourne.

4.1.5 Website

The website www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au will be a major part of the team's ongoing dissemination for the project. Information about the website has been disseminated through the workshop participants, reference group, academics at the lead and partner institutions and the DASSH Associate Deans Network. The team will continue to seek other ways of disseminating the information both locally and internationally through discipline groups, international conferences, journal articles and list serves.

4.2 Impact of the project

The project was able to synthesise three major approaches to learning in a way that staff teaching first year students would find useful. The framework drew together Decoding the Disciplines, First Year Pedagogy and TLOs so that they were no longer compartmentalised concepts, but rather combined to provide a systematic and sensible approach to teaching discipline skills and knowledge to first year students. In this way, one of the prime successes of the project was to link current knowledge and developments in learning and teaching in a meaningful way for staff who may have had limited exposure to one or all of the approaches.

The team acknowledged the differences in the ways of thinking and learning in different disciplines and felt it important to provide the opportunity for discussion of learning and teaching issues from a discipline perspective. The Decoding the Disciplines methodology allowed workshop participants to consider their discipline from the perspective of the student and the bottlenecks those students might have to learning in their discipline. This coupled with the idea of making sure that the team started developing the TLOs for the disciplines from first year provides a structure and theoretical underpinning to curriculum development. This has been made explicit in the framework that the team has developed as part of the project and provides a way for Associate Deans or curriculum advisors to engage staff with learning and teaching in the context of their discipline.

4.2.1 Impact on participants in workshops

As mentioned previously, during the project the team had 137 participants from 30 universities participate in the five discipline workshops. Another 74 academics participated in the seminars and workshops at HERDSA Vic 2014, HERDSA 2015, UNISTARS 2015 and HERGA in 2014. Many of these academics came from universities that had not participated in the original workshops, including some from New Zealand and Chile. The workshops enabled the team to link current knowledge and developments in learning and teaching in a

I will “use a broader list of teaching techniques with the intention to get my students past bottlenecks; and use thinking out loud activities to get my students to better engage with the literature”

Politics participant

meaningful way for staff who may have had limited exposure to one or all of the approaches.

The workshops have been very effective within the seven institutions that participated directly in the project with all of the universities reporting that they have led to increased formal and informal conversations regarding the redesign of teaching and learning within the disciplines. The workshops

made the academics more open to considering the needs of the first year student and the barriers to their learning as well as recognising their responsibility to help students learn to overcome those barriers.

In some cases the workshops have fed directly into the formal course review processes or reviews of disciplines within the Bachelor of Arts. Participants are more inclined to see their discipline as a whole and look at how they can develop students' skills from first to final year rather than only looking at the content of their subjects. The ADLTs on the project team report that there has also been an improvement in the diversity of assessments that are being used to match the learning outcomes and scaffold students' learning in the first year. Participants often mentioned changing their assessment strategies as one of the things that they would do as a result of the workshop.

Participants at the workshops reported that they benefited from the opportunity to discuss common issues with their colleagues. Some lecturers reported on personal development and growth as a result of the workshops. The evaluator interviews show that at least in one case this has led to a whole-of-discipline group, which meets regularly to plan the learning and teaching in the discipline.

I will "develop less complex tasks for first years so that they can practice and I can assess the growth of specific skills"

English participant

Many of the techniques which were used in the workshops can be used with lecturers to help them to consider their discipline. Those team members who are ADLTs have been able to work more effectively at the discipline level within their faculties and have used some of the methodologies used in the workshops (Decoding the Disciplines, conversations maps and World Café) in the professional development of their staff. These techniques are explained more fully in Section 4.1 of this report and are available on the website.

Peta Cook from the University of Tasmania started a Teaching Sociology thematic group that met for the first time on 27 June 2014. She notes: "The idea for this event was first raised from an OLT workshop 'In the Beginning: Revitalising the First Year Curriculum in Sociology', which was held at the Australian Catholic University (Sydney) on 30 October 2013. At that

"Just great - good vibe, willingness to share and meet new people in the discipline. It would be great to share more/longer."

Sociology participant

time, it was identified by some attendees that there were few opportunities for face-to-face and cross-university collaboration to explore teaching and learning matters in Sociology. Following this, a proposed teaching and learning research workshop was suggested to members of the Teaching Sociology thematic group meeting at the 2013 TASA conference, and was followed up by an email to the group in

December 2013. From the feedback received, there was strong interest in an activity that would support the development of teaching and learning publications." She says that their one-day event has resulted in many fruitful collaborations and outcomes that will continue going forward.

4.2.2 Impact on focus on understanding of TLOs and requirements at first year

A further impact of the project related to the team's role in focusing attention on the TLOs themselves. Four of the five disciplines had TLOs already developed, but there was a wide variance in the participants' knowledge and engagement with the TLOs. Most of the participants in History and Geography knew about the TLOs and had accepted the idea. This was not necessarily true for the other disciplines.

The English discipline did not have any TLOs so the project first had to facilitate the Australian University Heads of English meeting to develop draft TLOs. The team then had to allocate time during the workshop for a World Café style activity to engage the participants with the draft TLOs and ask for their comments. This led to the revised draft TLOs for English that the team has used on the website. Joy Wallace has been asked to take on the leadership of the Learning and Teaching Committee for the AUHE and to continue with the development of these TLOs. The team hopes that this will lead to published TLOs for English in the future.

The project has taken the TLOs from each of the five disciplines and analysed them to identify the threshold concepts and skills that first year students need to know and do, the barriers to students learning those concepts and skills, and the strategies we might use to help students develop the skills and understanding. This analysis is available on the website, Good Practice Guides and posters.

The team had future opportunities to share with the ISSOTL community at their conference in October 2015 where team members had two presentations and representation on a panel.

4.2.3 Impact of project artefacts

The project has provided the five discipline communities with tools and resources to improve the quality of their first year curricula to ensure that students can progress towards meeting the threshold standards in their academic programs. All of the artefacts of the project are available through the website and are accessible to anyone. They can be promoted through suitable discipline-based conferences, workshops and networks.

Although the project focused on five disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities, many of the lessons learnt through the project and the outcomes achieved are applicable to a wide variety of disciplines.

The recommendations below are couched in terms of the opportunities to be gained for various stakeholders in engaging with the published artefacts of the project.

Use of project outcomes for academics teaching in the first year in English, History, Geography, Politics and Sociology

The project website provides guidance for staff in History, Geography, English, Sociology and Politics to engage with the TLOs for their relevant discipline area, but in such a way as to highlight the importance of the starting points for students in order for them to reach the TLOs by the end of their major. For TLOs to be achieved by students they must be taught incrementally and appropriately across the curriculum beginning in the first year.

The Good Practice Guides will help teaching staff in each of the five disciplines approach teaching first year more effectively by providing pedagogically contextualised examples of practical teaching ideas.

The resource bank enables lecturers to search for examples of activities and assessments that they can use to teach first year students in their disciplines.

Use of project outcomes for academics teaching in the first year in any discipline

The resource bank can be used by academic staff from any discipline to generate ideas for teaching first year students within their own discipline area. Although the bank can be searched by discipline, it can also be searched by topic or method, so somebody wanting to improve their students' skills in analysis, for example, can find ideas as to how they might do that across the disciplines.

The framework provides a way of considering the needs of the student within the first year and takes the focus away from content to seeing the student as a first year learner within the discipline. Using the framework and the associated posters can prompt first year lecturers to think about their subject in a more holistic way.

The project showed how first year lecturers could engage with the Decoding the Discipline system, which helps staff to unpack their discipline for students by identifying bottlenecks to learning and strategising ways to demystify the discipline.

Use of project outcomes for curriculum development in any discipline

Curriculum designers should consider the TLOs, graduate attributes and/or accreditation requirements for their course as the starting point for curriculum design. This project has shown how these can then be broken down to identify the skills and knowledge needed in first year in order to achieve the results desired by the final year.

The project offers an opportunity to engage with three systems of understanding current teaching and learning practice so as to de-compartmentalise ways of constructing curricula. The framework has been developed so that it can be used with any discipline and helps curriculum developers to triangulate these three systems into one way of thinking about the first year. Users are taken through a series of questions that structure how they think about their students and their discipline and what they want to achieve. While the team has

focused on the TLOs that have been defined in Australia for the five subjects, there is no reason that someone in another country with their own quality assurance processes cannot use other outcomes. The Framework can also be used using accreditation standards instead of TLOs so is adaptable to different discipline areas.

Use of project outcomes for ADLTs

The project website shows how the team has engaged with five discipline areas taught in the BA where first year teaching is unpacked and explored using a triangulated approach to three ways of thinking. This provides a model for ADLTs to open up discussions around other disciplines not covered by this project. The project offers a tried and proven method of engagement as well as providing templates for the development of support materials.

The framework and the associated posters can be used to encourage academic staff to think about teaching and learning in the first year of their discipline in more explicit ways. The workshop methods are provided on the website and in Appendix B.2 and can be used by ADLTs in their dealings with discipline academics.

4.3 Evaluation overview

Associate Professor Michelle Scoufis was the evaluator for the project. She was involved from the start when the first workshop in History was prepared. She gave us some interesting ideas for making the workshops as interactive as possible.

She analysed the evaluations from the workshops and also attended the Sociology, Politics and Geography workshops. She was able to provide input from these evaluations and her observations helped the team improve the succeeding workshops.

Table 5 provides an overview of the feedback from the five workshops. Each statement is based on a five-point Likert Scale with 1 being Definitely Not and 5 Being Definitely.

Table 5: Workshop evaluations by discipline

Evaluation statement	History (n=28)	Sociology (n=21)	Politics (n=15)	Geography (n=15)	English (n=30)
I was able to contribute to this workshop.	4.64	4.62	4.33	4.67	4.50
I felt engaged by the activities undertaken in this workshop.	4.50	4.33	4.00	4.67	4.43
The workshop has stimulated my thinking about TLOs in first year.	4.57	4.52	4.00	4.53	4.40
The workshop provided ideas that I can implement in my own practice.	4.54	4.52	4.20	4.53	4.28
I was able to understand the intended outcomes of the workshop.	4.43	4.24	3.86	4.20	4.24

This workshop was an effective use of my time.	4.43	4.30	3.79	4.33	4.23
--	------	------	------	------	------

1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral/unsure; 4=agree; 5= strongly agree

Associate Professor Scoufis also evaluated and gave positive feedback on how the project team was working. Her contribution was important in improving the team’s approach as it went through the three cycles of action research.

She lastly evaluated the impact of the workshops on participants by interviewing a selection of participants from the project team universities and other universities. Her report can be found in Appendix C.

4.4 Ideas for extending the work of this project

This work has focused on the five Social Science and Humanities disciplines of English, Geography, History, Politics and Sociology. It would be interesting to trial the methodology use outside of the Social Sciences and Humanities, perhaps with a discipline that had accreditation requirements instead of TLOs.

The team has trialled some of the material in generic discipline workshops (at UNISTARS, HERGA and HERDSA) but found that the methodology works best within the discipline context. As it is not always possible to work exclusively within discipline context, a further project might look at how to run a more generic workshop.

Finally, the project provided a catalyst for whole-of-discipline discussion and how to build skills from first year through to the final year of the course. Currently, mapping exercises are often used as a means of demonstrating where different graduate attributes, accreditation requirements or TLOs are developed. This project could be extended to look at using these methods to facilitate academic involvement in embedding and developing the skills from first to final year with appropriate assessment to measure the desired learning outcomes in the final year.

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Appendix A

Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (or equivalent)

I certify that all parts of the final report for this OLT grant/fellowship (remove as appropriate) provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Name: ...Professor Anne Cummins.....Date:27 July 2015.....

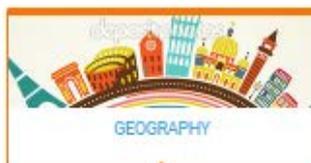
Appendix B – Samples of resources

B.1 Sample of website

The website is available at www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au .



FIRST YEAR CURRICULUM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF DISCIPLINE THRESHOLD STANDARDS



Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this project do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

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Figure 3: Website Home Page

HISTORY

"History is the study of the past and its interpretation in the present. Historians make sense of the past using evidence from a wide range of written, oral, visual, digital and material sources. Using a range of approaches, they examine past events, processes and relationships, interpreting their origins, significance and consequences. History is used to enrich our contemporary understanding by considering continuity and change, and by clarifying context and contingency, in societies from the earliest times to the present. Good History is forensic, able to cut through mythologies and shape understandings of a complex world. History provides a perspective on change over time that can inform current decision-making and shape policy frameworks." (Hay, 2010, p.8)

The project investigated how we can develop the necessary skills and knowledge of our first year students in history in order to set them on the path to graduating with the threshold learning outcomes required by the time they graduate with a history major. The project included a workshop attended by 40 history academics from 13 universities. The resources on this website were developed using the outputs from these workshops together with literature on the teaching of history.

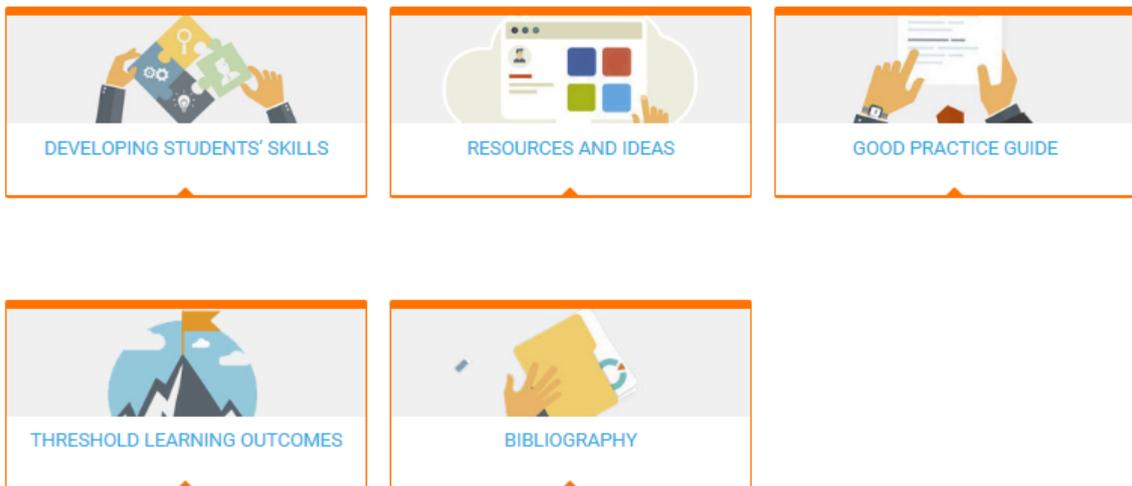


Figure 4: Example of landing page for History discipline

Each discipline has a link to the developing students' skills that looks at each TLO and the skills to be developed (see Figure 5), the barriers to learning those skills and the strategies we might implement. There are also links to the resources and ideas submitted by the participants at the workshops and the Good Practice guides we developed. Lastly, there are links to the original Threshold Learning Outcomes and a bibliography.

TLO 2 DEMONSTRATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF A VARIETY OF CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING THE PAST

HISTORY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Developing students' skills> Threshold Learning Outcomes> Good Practice Guide> Resources and Ideas> Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Conceptual approaches to History> Interpretation <p>What students need to know and do</p> <p>Students need to appreciate the importance of the different second-order concepts they can apply to their first-order factual knowledge of the past. Second-order concepts are essential tools in helping historians interpret periods and cultures of the past. They also help generate different historical perspectives on the same period (Limón, 2002; Lowenthal, 2000; VanSledright, & Limón, 2006; Wineburg, 2001).</p> <p>Student Barriers to Learning</p> <p>Students can also have trouble understanding 'the bigger picture(s)' in a study of an historical period. They tend to over-emphasise the personal and account for events by privileging 'Great Men', whether heroes or villains. It is more difficult to think in the abstract, or to think about the effects of context. These impersonal perspectives require capacities not only to comprehend, but to relativise, the source at hand. Second-order concepts need to be explicitly taught and wider reading emphasised to stimulate students' capacities to put things in context and enrich their reading of historical sources (Holt, 1990; Douglas & Lynn 1998).</p> <p>Our teaching strategies</p> <p>We should explicitly model how historians use concepts to help construct meaning about the past. To do this, students must be first be explicitly taught how to access the vocabulary of the terms used by historians. Historians in academe often forget to impart the discipline's secret codes (like the clever conceptual "isms" and the footnote fetishes): things so familiar they've long been taken-for-granted by these experts, and yet they're still so baffling to novices (Critical Thinking Community, 2013; Greene, 1994; Rovillos, 2012; Wineburg & Paxton, 2000; Wilson & Wineburg, 1993).</p> <p>References</p> <p>Critical Thinking Community (2013) <i>Strategy list: 35 dimensions of critical thought</i>. Retrieved from http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/strategy-list-35-dimensions-of-critical-thought</p> <p>Douglas P. & Newton, L.D. (1998). Enculturation and understanding: Some differences between sixth formers' and graduates' conceptions of understanding in History and Science, <i>Teaching in Higher</i></p>
TLO	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> TLO1 Period> TLO2 Interpretation> TLO3 Shape future> TLO4 Sources> TLO5 Research> TLO6 Analysis> TLO7 Argument> TLO8 Reflection	

Figure 5: Example of expanded TLO 2 from History

Each of the discipline TLOs was split into sub-skills. Each sub-skill was then considered under the headings of "What students need to know and do", "Student barriers to learning" and "Our teaching strategies". The references usually refer to articles where examples can be found.

LEARNING RESOURCES BANK

The team acknowledges the contributions of the discipline scholars who attended our workshops to this resource bank. The resources are intended to give you ideas about what you might do to develop first year students' skills and knowledge in your discipline. We leave it to you as a reader to determine whether a particular idea is good practice for your particular situation. Feel free to browse within your discipline or across disciplines.

POLITICS(32)

Search...

List ▾

All Downloads (156)	Assessment (10)	Class/Lecture (1)
Class/Online (5)	Class/Tutorial (15)	Field/Experience (0)
Good Practice Guide (9)	TLO1 Significance (2)	TLO10 Communication (9)
TLO11 Ethics (5)	TLO2 Political Systems (2)	TLO3 Apply theories (2)
TLO4 Critical evaluation (9)	TLO5 Research Methods (2)	TLO8 Research Application (2)
TLO7 Argument (7)	TLO8 Evidence (4)	TLO9 Problem Solving (2)

Showing 1-10 of 32

Analysing public debates in political science	Politics	Info ▶
Constitutional Convention Simulation	Politics	Info ▶
Constructing arguments and evidence for debate	Politics	Info ▶
Critical reading summary	Politics	Info ▶
Demonstrating political perspectives through written dialogue	Politics	Info ▶
Detecting the politics around us: An excursion outside the lecture theatre	Politics	Info ▶

Figure 6: Resources page for Politics

The resource bank can be searched by keyword or discipline. Within each discipline one can further refine the resources by Good Practice Guide, their type (assessment, lecture, tutorial, field experience, online) or the TLO that the resource develops.

B.2 Workshop techniques

This appendix provides an overview of some of the techniques and methods that were used to run the six-hour workshops for the different disciplines. These are provided here to help anyone who would like to run a similar type of workshop.

Introductory activities

For an icebreaker, participants were asked to think back to their first year and to their experiences of first year in their discipline. They were asked to choose their most memorable moment and think about what inspired them to continue studying in the discipline. They then discussed this in groups.

A short introduction helped participants to understand the current higher education scene and the part TLOs play in the Higher Education Standards agenda.

Discussion of discipline threshold learning outcomes (TLOs)

The reference group members who had been involved with the development of the TLOs provided insight into the TLOs for their particular discipline and how they were developed. Participants were able to discuss the TLOs and ask questions of the developers. This was followed with a session conducted by one of the team members, Jennifer Clark, on lessons learnt about assessing standards from the “After Standards” History project (Brawley, Clark, Dixon, Ford, Ross, Upton & Nielsen, 2013).

The student voice

The team reported on the results of the surveys and focus groups with students and compared the thoughts of the academics to those of the students. This helped to set the scene for identifying what students felt they needed in first year and any misconceptions that they might have, as well as making lecturers aware of the perceived issues of their first year students.

First year pedagogy

Participants were asked to consider the six principles of first year pedagogy (Kift, 2009) and each group was asked to think about how they might apply those phases within the specific discipline. In the last two workshops this activity was integrated into the Decoding the Disciplines session between the first and second stages in order to help people think about the techniques that they might use in the first year classroom. The tables reported back with ideas to the main group.

Decoding the Disciplines

The team used the Decoding the Disciplines methodology (Middendorf & Pace, 2004). Participants were asked to identify the bottlenecks to students learning in their discipline. These were the essential skills that students find difficult about learning in their discipline. Participants were asked to write down up to three bottlenecks on post-it pages. They were then asked to discuss and organise their thoughts. Poster pages were put around the classroom and they were asked to put their post-it notes under the pre-determined barriers or under a catchall for OTHER.

The second part of the exercise asked each group to apply the second, third and fourth steps of the Decoding the Disciplines methodology to one particular set of bottlenecks identified. These steps were identifying what an expert would do, determining how to explicitly model the skills and then determining strategies that the team can use to allow students to practice the skills and get feedback on them. In the final two workshops the team embedded the first year pedagogy prior to the second part to focus the participants' attention on the principles that they might want to consider in their suggestions.

Critical reading was identified a bottleneck for English. Ideas submitted by the group included:

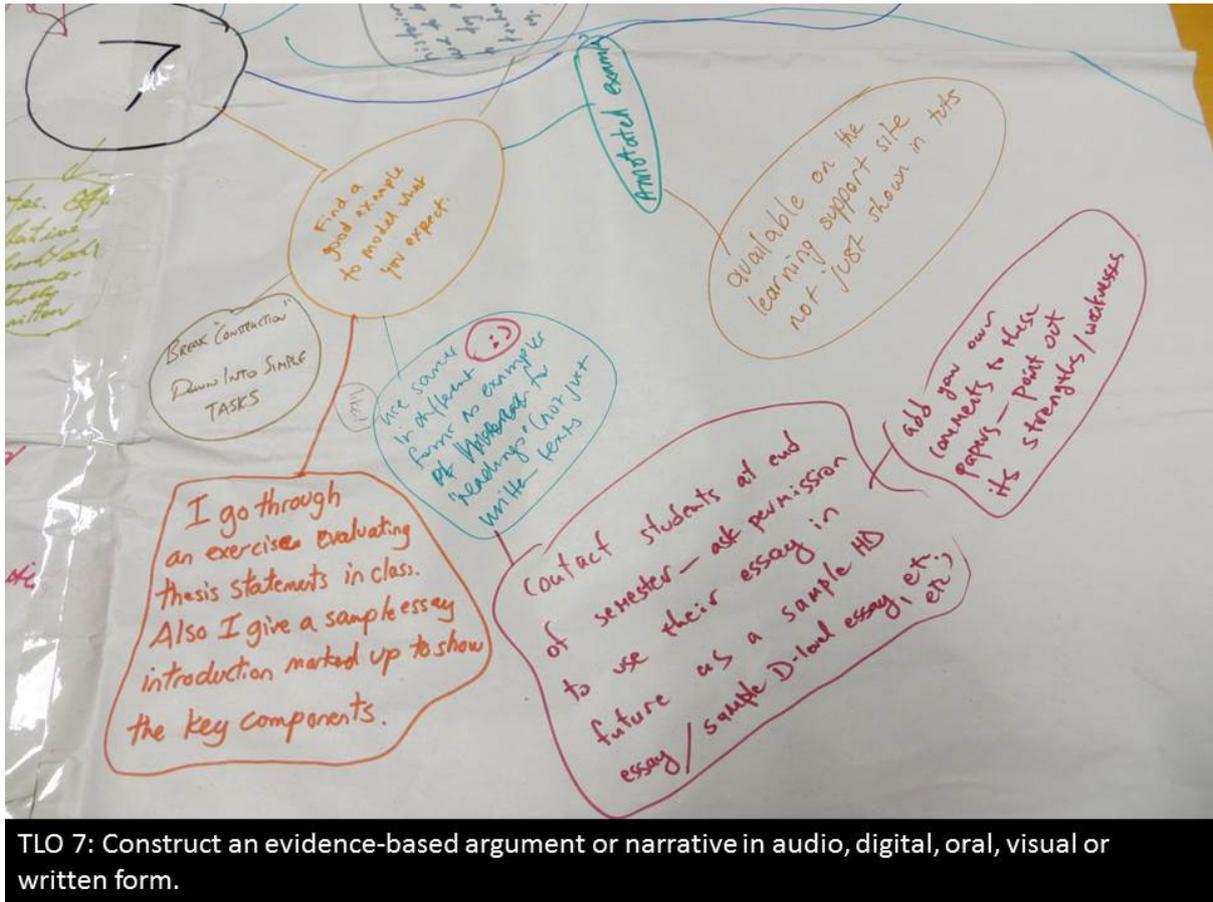
- Define what it means to do a critical reading, i.e. distinguish the “how” from the “what”
- Model critical reading of texts by focussing on an excerpt
 - Signpost the process
 - Contextualise the approach
- Give students regular readings with targeted questions that guide or prompt analysis

World Café – used in the literature workshop only

The Literature Workshop used draft TLOs that had been developed by the Australian University Heads of English (AUHE). The World Café method allowed participants to provide feedback on the draft TLOs. Participants were divided into groups and each group had one TLO, a facilitator and a scribe who stayed at the table throughout. Participants commented on the TLO at their table. After five minutes they moved to the next table. The facilitator would sum up what had gone before and then continue the discussion with the new participants. After five minutes they would move on to the following table. The scribe kept notes on the discussions, and these were fed back to the AUHE group, who are developing the final TLOs. The revised TLOs are available on the project website. More information on World Cafés can be found at the World Café Community website <http://www.theworldcafe.com/index.html>

Discipline-specific skills and experiences – using a conversation map

A conversation map (McKenzie, 2010) was used to help participants think about the skills and experiences that they could give their students in first year in order for them to reach the TLOs for their discipline by third year. A large piece of paper with each of the TLOs written in the centre was placed on a table. Participants were asked to read what was already on the page and add to the “conversation” with their own ideas, questions or comments in linked bubbles. The diagram below provides part of the conversation about the History TLO7: Construct an evidence-based argument or narrative in audio, digital, oral, visual or written form. This part of the “conversation” relates to the use of exemplars. One can see how each person added to the conversation or put smiley faces or the word “like” to show their approval.



TLO 7: Construct an evidence-based argument or narrative in audio, digital, oral, visual or written form.

Figure 7: Example of conversation map for History TLO 7

Resources

Participants then shared their ideas for learning activities that they felt worked effectively in developing the skills for a particular TLO with first year students. These resources were collected and are available on the project's website in the resource bank. Participants were given time to discuss their ideas with one another. These resources are available on the website at www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au

B.3 Sample from Good Practice Guide

There are five Good Practice Guides for each of the five disciplines that the team investigated. Each of the Good Practice Guides includes a series of posters that take each of the TLOs for the discipline and breaks it down into the three questions:

1. What do first year **students need to know and do** in order to set them on their way to meet the TLOs by the time they graduate?
2. What are the **student barriers to learning**?
3. What **teaching strategies** can we use?

A small selection of examples of strategies is also provided for each TLO. An example of a page from the Geography Good Practice Guide is given in Figure 8. Each page is also available as a poster.

ANSWERING GEOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONS BY ETHICAL MEANS

What students need to know and do

Students need to be able to think about their own ethical values with regard to specific social and environmental issues and also have the skills to recognise ethical issues in and across a variety of contexts. They need to be able to think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to geographical questions and consider the ramifications of alternative actions.

"Developing ... ethical thinking [is] central to the geographer's art... for a discipline whose concerns range across such contentious issues as climate change, sustainable development, poverty and inequality, ... developing an ethical behaviour ... is central to the maintenance of geography's reputation as both natural and social science. Not only does it help reinforce the reliability and validity of what we 'do' and what we 'know'; but it attunes us to the particularities of place and to the impact our agency as geographers can have on place."
(Whalley et al., 2011, 386)

EVALUATING DATA AND EVIDENCE

What students need to know and do

Students need to be able to make judgments about what data is necessary, available and reliable. They also need to be able to draw appropriate conclusions using data from relevant, credible and defensible sources and identify any limitations in data and conclusions.

Student barriers to learning

Students may not be fully equipped with the mathematical, mapping, digital technology and other skills needed to evaluate which data is relevant nor to interpret different types of geographical data. A lack of awareness of available data sources or lack of skill in using data may cloud students' ability to be aware of the limitations of conclusions.

Our teaching strategies

Introduce first-year students to the concepts and skills of research, research methods and data collection. We can show them how and where to access or collect appropriate data as a basis for problem solving. We can provide them with skills for evaluating the relevance of data.

Small group activities can be used to collect 'real' data to analyse and discuss in class. This could be linked to field-based practice and research or the use of geographical databases. They could be asked to build on a continuing project where each class group adds to the data collected in previous semesters.

<http://www.firstyearlearningthresholds.edu.au>

Student barriers to learning

Students often experience difficulties in understanding the scope, range and import of ethical issues in Geography and in conducting geographical research.

Our teaching strategies

First-year students can be guided to reflect, think and talk about their own behaviours and practices in relation to ethical questions and issues. They can be introduced to examples of good ethical practice in geographic research and be asked to answer questions about ethical issues in case studies, assessments or tutorials.

Whalley, W. B., Saunders, A., Lewis, R. A., Buenemann, M. & Sutton, P. C. (2011). Curriculum development: Producing geographers for the 21st century. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 35(3), 379-393.

Example 1: Environmental debate

Students watch a video or are given a presentation on a particular issue, for example, the status of African elephant population numbers and their impact of the environment. Discuss issue: Too many elephants in relation to carrying capacity leads to loss of vegetation and ultimately deforestation.

Students then debate (two groups)

- Should we protect elephants?

Further ethical question: Should we use ivory from the culling of elephants to sell, which is contrary to CITES criteria but will make money to continue protecting the elephants?

Example 2: Analysis and argument using data as evidence

Students work in small groups and engage with readings and census data to establish demographic trends. They then debate a particular topic about Australia's population future and its likely distribution. At the end of class they are asked to present a 500 word summary opinion paper.

Example 3: Field work vs Census data

In a lecture, introduce a suburb or local government area that is in the popular imagination. Produce, for the students, a transect, north to south, of that suburb, plot census data (e.g. birthplace). Provide students with a form that guides them to look at the landscape as a geographer and record their observations (manifestations of culture).

After the field trip, have them share their observations in small groups. For example, they could discuss the birthplace groups that were present in the data that were not observable in the field and vice versa?

Question the students about why the two techniques (mapping and observations) provide different data?

Reflect on this learning and how it may be applied to other areas.

Figure 8: Sample from Geography Good Practice Guide

B.4 Designing first year discipline-specific curricula and pedagogy framework posters

The following is a sample of one of the posters showing how someone might navigate the second row of the framework.

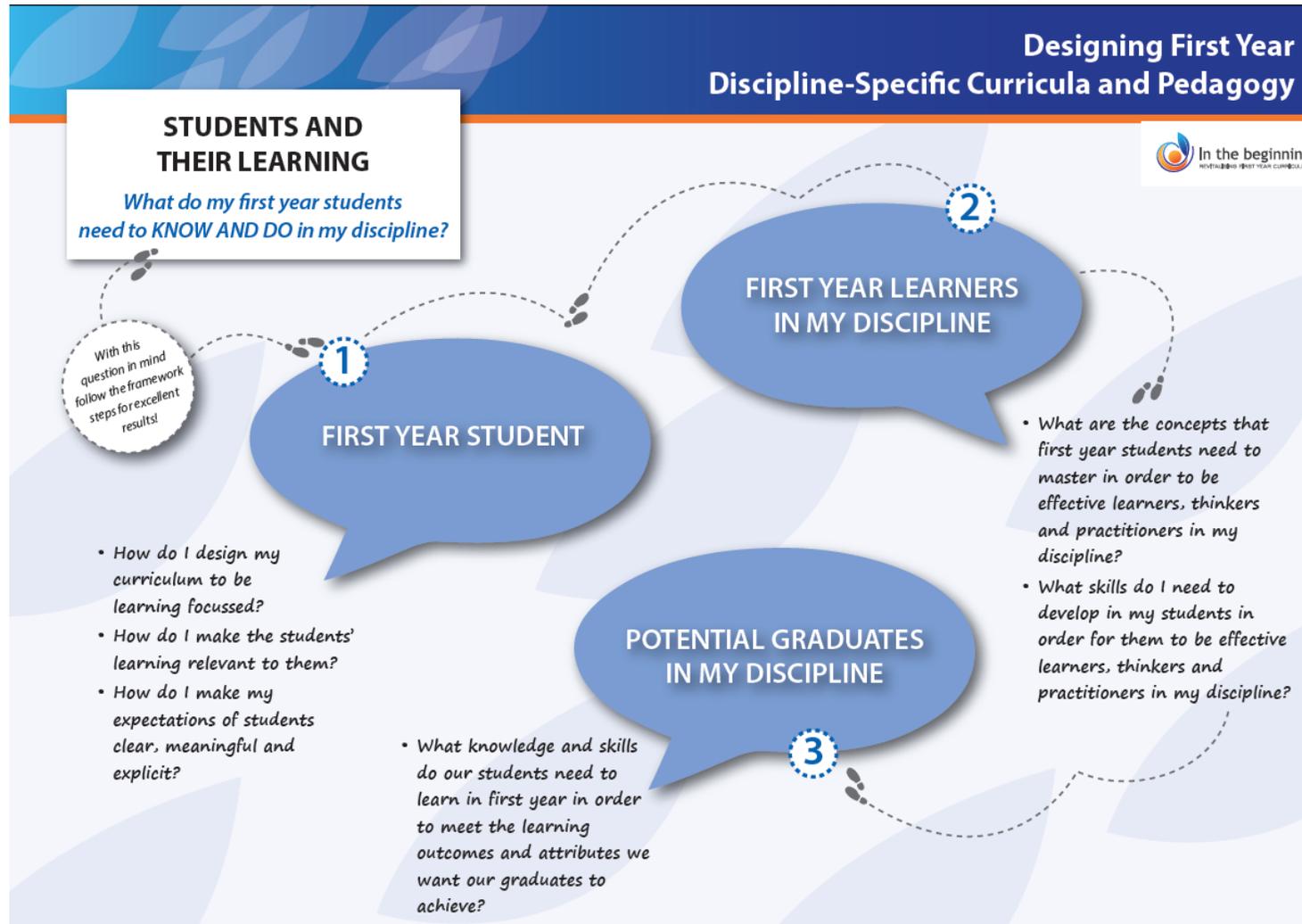


Figure 9: Sample poster for curriculum and pedagogy framework

Appendix C – External evaluator report

“The project (In the Beginning Revitalising First Year) came at a good time for us. We were just about to do the curriculum review of arts starting with History. As a team we started by particularly focusing on learning outcomes at the final year level. We then worked backwards by year to work out the learning outcomes for that year. Curriculum review led to us introducing an Australian Indigenous studies first year unit, which incorporated skill development in the context of learning about Indigenous content. Second year explicitly builds on the first year unit, incorporating and explicitly building on skill development from first year.

The OLT project was very relevant as it started with the assumption that each discipline is different in how it approaches knowledge and the development and revision of knowledge and hence the skills and understandings that students need to develop” (Stakeholder interview 2015).

As this quote suggests, both intended project outcomes and further emergent and unplanned outcomes were achieved in this project.

This evaluation report considers:

1. The key content and process enablers for project success
2. The outputs for the project team itself
3. The outputs for project stakeholders in each discipline in terms of worth and merit
4. The explicit strategy for dissemination and further suggestions for further generating impact

1. Key content and process enablers

Project success can partly be attributed to group team members’ thorough knowledge of the extensive literature on threshold learning outcomes, transition and first year curricula and threshold concepts in first year. In addition, the project drew upon previous work including the “After Standards Project in History”. Active engagement with reference group members both contributed to the foundations of the discipline-specific workshops and also formed part of the dissemination process (see section 4 below).

Success factors for the project included the skills and huge commitment of the project team, the timeliness of the project in terms of the national threshold learning project in the disciplines and the fundamental premise that learning and teaching enhancement is most likely when colleagues are considering learning in their disciplinary context.

“This project came along at a good moment when the discipline was being reviewed, so the chance to think thoroughly about the pedagogic aspects of our units within the 3 year framework, based on the first year foundation, and on the discipline TLOS was extremely useful - and required in our course review document. The involvement with the project was very useful in assisting me to contribute to that process” (Interview with stakeholder, 2015).

Successful implementation of change initiatives depends upon whether a project is founded on the belief that change and enhancement of learning and teaching practice must engage

with the day-to-day educational practice of those teaching in their various disciplines. This is key to adaptation of project outcomes and was central to project design.

"Those teaching in the English major, including the honours program, formally meet once a month. This has occurred because of <name withheld> leadership. There is ongoing discussion about how to build upon the contextualised skills developed in first year in later years so that learning was scaffolded. <Name withheld> tried to make sure that all academic staff in the major had some role teaching into first year. In first year, previously there was one "module" or one week where "essay writing skills were taught." Now skills are developed throughout the two first year English units."

A further key enabler for the project's success was the project team itself. Using members of the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Associate Deans Learning and Teaching network meant that the project team was made up of people who themselves had leadership of curriculum change initiatives in a variety of disciplines and who were deeply engaged in learning and teaching change.

The project team should be congratulated for its collaborative approach throughout the project such that the resources of all members were respected and drawn upon. Whilst all members of the project contributed equally, the level of team member engagement was strongly impacted upon by Theda's inclusive and adaptive leadership approach rather than simplistic project management skills focused approach. By way of example, the strategy of asking team members to work as critical friends in pairs to develop resource material helped develop interpersonal relations within the group and built group cohesion.

A critical success factor for the project was the quality of individual team member group facilitation skills as demonstrated in the workshops where each team member contributed to facilitating at least one session in each workshop.

The support provided by the project officer ensured that actions decided in meetings and agreed responsibilities amongst members were achieved. "It has been impossible to let the project move to the backburner" (Interview with a member of the project team). Theda, as project leader, ensured ongoing engagement by using multiple forms of media (phone, teleconferences, emails and face-to-face meetings) to ensure that milestones were achieved and by herself working tirelessly on the project.

Wide stakeholder engagement from peak bodies, leadership within the disciplines concerned and teachers of first year students was achieved through pre-existing networks and initiatives of project team members. Whilst students were surveyed in relation to the challenges they experienced in first year in their discipline, the project focused more on what teachers can do to facilitate successful student transition to the discipline.

2. Outcomes for the project team

The project itself provided team members with a deep induction to the pedagogy of first year teaching and learning in the discipline. All members concurred that

“The project really helped me to understand the disciplines better and to understand the specific challenges in relation to the discipline and the pedagogically common issues.”

“The project meant I learned the nitty gritty of curriculum; not just skating on the surface - fantastic professional development to understand the disciplines in the project.”

Members of the project team reported that the project enabled

“...me, as Associate Dean Learning and Teaching to gain a knowledge base in relation to disciplinary approaches to skills and knowledges outside my own discipline. I was confident to engage at the discipline level in curriculum review outside my own discipline. The curriculum framework for first year starting from what we want our students to demonstrate at the end of their major and then what they needed to be introduced to and supported in learning in first year, provides a great foundation for curriculum review” (*Project team member interview, 2015*).

The project further provided opportunities for leadership capacity building amongst project team members through further development of facilitation skills in the workshops and knowledge and skills development in relation to first year curriculum in the discipline.

3. Outcomes for stakeholders

Outcomes for stakeholders included identification of threshold learning concepts for first year students in their discipline, explicit skills development relevant to the disciplines in part through assessment design and the development of threshold outcome skills and approaches to knowledge.

“Those who attended such sessions (the workshops) went back to their institutions having thought about and engaged with relevant curriculum practices and ready to share these” (Stakeholder interview, 2015).

Some reported leading curriculum integration of relevant disciplinary skills adapted for use in stakeholder and team member’s own teaching practice

A further outcome for some stakeholders was the emergence of a community of practice, initiated through the workshops themselves.

“The most beneficial aspects were the academic sociability occasioned by the workshops. Discussing common problems with colleagues across the sector helped to create a common language that encouraged generally more hesitant colleagues to engage constructively with the process of renewal” (Stakeholder interview, 2015).

4. Dissemination

The DCubed Guide suggests that dissemination is *“the planned process of understanding potential adopters and engaging with them throughout the life of the project, to facilitate commitment to sustained change.”*

The approach to dissemination in this project began with the first workshop and continues on past the formal ending of the project. Dissemination has been in the form of strategies for awareness raising (workshops, conferences, engagement of key stakeholders in the

workshops), strategies for understanding and strategies for action (strategy sharing in workshop; the website as a discipline-based resource). In this way dissemination has been built into the project from the beginning.

Critical to the approach to effective dissemination was the participation of key members of the discipline community so that there was a real sense of ownership and responsibility for the outcomes and the adaptation of these to their own leadership and practice.

The website itself, drawing upon resources shared through the workshops, provides an opportunity for dissemination of the practical framework and curriculum resources from the project. In order to ensure greater awareness and use of the website materials, it is suggested that key discipline peak bodies be asked to link to the project and that relevant first year experience websites similarly link to the website. Workshops have been very well received and future presentations and workshops will further embed the outcomes of the project.

The website provides resources that are readily accessible, which will help those teaching to “do good things with their first year classes easily and without taking up a lot of time. That is the reality of teaching now” (Stakeholder interview, 2015).

Conclusion

Institutional change in processes, workload and reward structures and curriculum constraints can act to limit the systemic impact of any learning and teaching project. As one project stakeholder commented,

“The initial momentum from the workshops dissipated relatively quickly when faced with internal university processes and procedures for renewal. Internal supports were supportive, but the process became an administrative one framed in non-discipline-specific language. The result was a rapid decline in enthusiasm among colleagues. I have initiated changes in my assessment as a result of the workshop, but this has been at an individual course-level, rather than whole-of-program” (Interview with stakeholder, 2015).

However, evidence from the workshops and interviews strongly reinforce both the merit and worth of the project. First year curriculum including teaching practices are changing in intended and positive ways and stakeholders interviewed unanimously report the value of the project to first year discipline curriculum review initiatives. Associated with the project, there is evidence from the interviews that leadership capacity in curriculum design, implementation and review is occurring.

In summary, this project was highly ambitious given the number of disciplines considered and was strongly based on previous OLT and other first year experience projects and on Threshold Learning Outcomes in the specific disciplines included. Throughout, each aspect of the project was intellectually rigorous in its approach and implementation. Outcomes had both merit and worth and the project team, under the leadership of Theda, should be congratulated for their process and the successful achievement of project goals. The significance of this project in terms of its impact on curriculum and teaching is significant.