Supporting Large First Year Cohorts through
Selection and Skilling
of
Sessional Tutors

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- Social Sciences - first year foundational courses (subjects):
  - Sociology, Politics, Social Economics, Sustainability, Social History of Ideas, Social Psychology
- Large Courses (350 - 600 students)
- Core for many diverse degree programs (e.g. Youth Work, Environment, Planning, Policy, Legal Studies, Psychology)
- Heavy reliance on sessional teams (often 7 - 10)
- High equity intakes.

Our particular role

There are three Associate Lecturers with the broad responsibility for these common courses to ensure that students have a good first year experience.

We focus on:

- good T&L
- Curriculum design
- Imbed academic skills in course assessment & content
- supporting sessionals
- Running Oweek for our School
- Administration (e.g. some timetabling)

Between us, we teach into all the courses.

What qualities do we ideally desire for good first year teachers?

In pairs or trios, brainstorm qualities that you think are important for first year teachers.

(3 mins only!!)

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What current practices are being widely used in the Higher Ed sector for appointment of sessionals?

(not necessarily *your* practices, but

common processes that you know are

happening).

(3 mins only!!!)

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Are these appointment strategies ensuring that first year sessionals have the qualities we identified as being important??

Our principles for our selection process

- For the owning degree programs:
  - Accountability
  - Openness
  - Transparency
- For the students:
  - Alignment for first year: selecting for good T&L
- For the (potential) sessionals:
  - Accessibility (casting a wide net/ being encouraging)
  - Clarity (what we value)
  - Clear expectations
- For us
  - Taking Responsibility (to have good T&L for all students)

- Call widely for expressions of interest (EoI + CV), explaining our process
- Send out support materials for preparation of their teaching demonstration & follow up support (as requested). This includes the criteria that we use to assess them in the demonstration.

- Organise 20 minute teaching demonstrations for all interested (potential) sessionals to 'class' of 6 - 10 'students'
  - Actual first year students in the 'class' (paid with book voucher for their time)
  - Target a range of students
  - All involved faculty are welcome to be part of 'class'
  - We are also 'students'

Part III: Afterwards…

- After *each* demonstration, all members of the 'class' participate in evaluating the potential sessional, going through each criterion, determining whether employable or not, suitability for particular subjects/cohorts

- We prioritise hearing from the students, and from their experience. We encourage a diversity of opinions.

- After *all* demonstrations, rank all potential sessionals

Later:

- Feedback to each potential sessional

- Modify the sessional induction program to include skill development in specific areas that new sessionals require

Issues with this process

- Some resentment of the process - old power has been taken away (some course coordinators initially & other individual faculty members (ongoing))

- Some unsuccessful potential sessionals now hate us (people who assumed they deserved teaching work have made it personal)

- More transparency, paradoxically, *can* make you more of a target internally

- We found it better to be: as inclusive as possible, as clear about the process as possible.

Despite the clear selection criteria, students often seem to rate more highly potential sessionals who are:

- Attractive
- Charismatic
- Fashionable
- Younger
- Charming

Sessional Teaching evaluation worksheet

The mock tutorial model of sessional teacher assessment is designed to offer insight into the skills and aptitudes of staff to run first year tutorials in the common first year courses (CCA).
The purpose of this sheet is to encourage you to reflect on how you feel in the teaching space created by a tutor, both in terms of your own learning but also in relation to the diversity of the cohorts in our School.

Question/category	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Did the tutor create a warm and welcoming environment?			✓
Was the tutor pleased to be there?		✓	
Did you feel you could speak up and be heard?			✓
Did you feel your learning was supported?		good examples	
Did the tutor respond to your questions?			✓
Was it clear what you were expected to do?		✓	
Was it clear why you were doing the tasks?			✓
Did you clearly understand the material?			✓
At the end, could you see that you learnt something?			✓
Did you enjoy the tutorial?			✓
Think of some classes you've been in. Would a wide range of diverse students benefit from this tutor?		✓	

Comments and notes. - engaging

- better to ask for volunteers than to ask someone to read.

- too much of a conversation rather than activities. Not quite enough time to do activity at the end.

- student centred in material choice

- employable ✓

Induction Session

We have a one day paid induction session for *all* sessionals teaching with us (both new and experienced).

We vary it semester to semester

More details in your handout

Both processes (demonstrations & induction session) are constantly evolving; we move on to new challenges, & continually refine the processes to improve across the board.

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