

ASCILITE 2024

Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Instilling pedagogy through the Shepherding process

Mungo Jones, Susan Karpasitis

Melbourne Law School

Research on sessional teachers in legal education is underrepresented in the literature (Blackham, 2020). In law schools, sessional teachers are employed to develop and deliver bespoke intensive-based subjects at postgraduate level and are often classifiable as 'outside industry experts' (OIEs); this cohort has been described as atypical of sessional academics across the sector in many ways (Cowley, 2010). This poster presentation seeks to add to this area of knowledge, by presenting something of an auto-ethnographic snapshot of a 'shepherding process', implemented at MLS, from Educational Designers' point of view.

'Shepherding' is a collaborative initiative for new subjects proposed to be taught at the MLS, enhancing curriculum design outcomes and pedagogical capabilities of new subject coordinators (most of whom lack formal training in teaching), as well as facilitating connection to the wider teaching and learning community and support services. When a new subject is proposed, would-be lecturers are usually not yet employed by the school. Having pitched an idea for a subject with the school, they work with an Educational Designer to refine a new subject proposal to be reviewed by a curriculum committee. As such, the shepherding process and the final deliverable of the new subject proposal form also forms part of the candidature process for prospective subject coordinators. Grounded in co-design principles, shepherding facilitates the integration of instructional design theories, particularly constructive alignment and backwards design, into the subject development workflow from the outset.

The educational designer's role is central to shepherding and begins with the collaborative formulation of subject intended learning outcomes (SILOs), development of an assessment regime and comprehensive subject mapping, with the aim to establish constructive alignment. Additionally, the shepherding process includes guidance on designing course content within the LMS, providing a structured and accessible online environment for students. In helping guide a new subject through to acceptance and by being a singular point of contact with new lecturers, the educational designer forms an ongoing relationship which can also help with ensuing curriculum development.

Hitch et al. (2017) and Hattam et al. (2024) have both argued that sustainable and targeted professional development of sessional staff is a critical factor for increasing engagement and feelings of connection with their institution and to their roles, and that where this is lacking the consistency and quality of student educational experience can be undermined. Cowley (2010) argues for the creation of school-level programs of support for law schools, specifically aimed at OIEs, in lieu of one-size-fits-all programs at the institutional level. Because of the nature of the OIE cohort and subject delivery timelines, there is a limited window of opportunity to work towards 'acculturating casual staff to the new student-focused learning agendas' (Kift, 2003 cited in Cowley, 2010), towards improving student learning outcomes.

By providing targeted support for OIE teaching staff, the shepherding process has represented a significant advance in MLS's instructional design and curriculum development process, enhancing the alignment, consistency and quality of subject design. By aligning teaching practices with established instructional design theories, the process enhances the educational experience for both instructors and students.

ASCILITE 2024

Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Keywords: Constructive alignment, shepherding, co-design, sessional teachers, innovation, process, curriculum design, academic development, legal education.

References

- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill and Open University Press.
- Biggs, J. (2003). Aligning teaching and assessment to curriculum objectives. Imaginative Curriculum Project, LTSN Generic Centre.
- Blackham, A. (2020). Unpacking precarious academic work in legal education. *The Law Teacher*, 54(3), 426–442. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069400.2020.1714276>
- Cowley, J. (2010). Confronting the reality of casualisation in Australia: Valuing sessional staff in law schools. *QUT Law Review*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.5204/qutlr.v10i1.8>
- Hattam, S. K., & Weiler, T. (2024). Reframing the ‘illegitimate’ academic: The critical role of professional development for sessional staff. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(4), 1023-1041. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2022.2049743>
- Hitch, D., Mahoney, P., & Macfarlane, S. (2017). Professional development for sessional staff in higher education: a review of current evidence. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(2), 285–300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1360844>
- James, N. J. (2004). The good law teacher: The propagation of pedagogicalism in Australian legal education. *The University of New South Wales Law Journal*, 27(1), 147-169. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.116213248950559>
- McComb, V., Eather, N., & Imig, S. (2020). Casual academic staff experiences in higher education: insights for academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 26(1), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2020.1827259>
- McDonald, J. K., & West, R. E. (2020). *Design for learning*. EdTech Books. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-7322171-0-6>

Jones, M. & Karpasitis, S. (2024). Instilling pedagogy through the Shepherding process. In Cochrane, T., Narayan, V., Bone, E., Deneen, C., Saligari, M., Tregloan, K., & Vanderburg, R. (Eds.), *Navigating the Terrain: Emerging frontiers in learning spaces, pedagogies, and technologies*. Proceedings ASCILITE 2024. Melbourne (pp.18-19). <https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2024.1144>

Note: All published papers are refereed, having undergone a double-blind peer-review process. The author(s) assign a Creative Commons by attribution licence enabling others to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon their work, even commercially, as long as credit is given to the author(s) for the original creation.

© Jones, M. & Karpasitis, S. 2024