

ALTC LSES Environmental Scan

1. Institution

Victoria University

2. Contact Person (and contact details)

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3. Name of Program/Initiative

Initiating students into legal discourse and the embedding of legal academic skills into HE law subjects

3.1 URL:

3.2 **Start Date/Duration:** Various models have been trialled since 2009 and, with modifications, are continuing

4. Brief outline of program

Embedding academic language and learning skills has been an approach employed within the HE sector to provide all students with the skills they need in a discipline-specific context. In law subjects in Victoria University's Bachelor of Business and Bachelor of Laws, this discipline-specific approach has been adopted because law has a distinctive and complex language. As a law colleague once said, 'Law uses the language of the ruling class'. This makes it much more difficult for both local and international students to access subject content and understand the different genre requirements of assessment tasks.

Such an approach is underpinned by the belief that students need to be inducted into disciplines, because each discipline has its own discourse, with its own distinctive way of thinking, reading and writing. This is particularly so with law which, it could be argued, is an initiation into a particular linguistic tradition and set of social practices. Students need to understand and master the different writing genres and the purpose of these genres in the legal disciplinary community.

The implementation of discipline-specific programs has spanned key law subjects in the business degree, Business Law, Corporate Law and, to a limited extent, Taxation Law. Since the establishment of the VU Law School, the implementation of discipline-specific programs has also been extended to include key first-year, first-semester subjects in the law degree: Australian Legal Systems in Context (ALSIC), Contracts Law and Torts Law.

5. Purpose/Aims

- To develop specific academic skills for an identified cohort of students in a structured contextualised program.
- To assist students to:
 - master the conventions and social practices of the law
 - understand their positioning and identity in the different tasks, the place of the genres in the disciplinary community and why these genres are written the way they are.

- make the transition into university level studies particularly those who may be less prepared.
- To increase students' sense of efficacy and 'learner identity' by participation in a learning community that models a commitment to lifelong learning.

6. Breadth of program (is it in a particular subject, program, school, faculty, across the institution, campus, with a particular cohort, etc)

A number of modalities support students with their studies of law subjects in recognition of students' different learning needs. These include: large one - off targeted workshops on assignments and exam preparation, weekly classes, team teaching with subject staff in tutorials and lectures, online materials, the embedding of materials in tutorial programs and subject manuals, individual consultations, ELI law - specific preparatory programs and law – specific orientation programs.

7. Category (please select all that apply and provide explanation where necessary)

Category	Y?	Explanation
Policy	N	
Curriculum	Y	A structured language and learning skills program delivered both within the unit of study's timetable and as extra-curricular workshops.
Program	Y	
Other (please specify)		

8. Resources (optional – we are trying to determine what sort of resourcing is necessary to make the initiative work)

8.1 Start up budget:

8.2 Ongoing budget:

9. Outcomes

9.1 Uptake:

9.2 Evaluation(s) conducted to date –(Informal or formal) – and details of findings: Evaluations have focused on:

1. The student experience, with students reporting a high degree of satisfaction, confidence in their ability to access resources and to complete assessments, as well as having a better understanding of what is required of them.
2. Consistently high attendance at non-compulsory lectures, workshops and classes across a broad spectrum of law subjects, both in the business degree and the law degree.
3. Some initial mapping of attendance to student grades.
4. Staff feedback which has indicated that students have a much better understanding of the different genre requirements of their assessment tasks.

9.3 Evidence of success:

1. Many subject staff willingly collaborate on programs by contributing to the development of new teaching pedagogies and intervention initiatives.
2. Continuous requests from law staff to implement new support programs in both the business degree and law degree.

9.4 **Evaluation(s) planned (and dates for this/these):** As above – end 2012

9.5 **Major challenges:**

1. Time and budget- the teaching team need substantial amounts of time regularly allocated to meet, reflect and plan.
2. Evaluating each program's success for retention, efficacy and / or grades of cohort. The program is not an 'instant fix' and results may manifest in a variety of ways across time.
3. Developing trust and rapport with the discipline lecturers, particularly in terms of shared conceptual foundations.
4. Addressing student resistance to additional time demands.

9.6 **Other (Please specify):**

10. Publications/Reports (including links to those publicly available)

Murphy, Helen, Rodriguez, Juana Maria and Veljanovski, Angelo (2012) 'Cross – sectoral teaching and learning initiatives to support articulating students in Corporate Law at Victoria University' *Australian Journal of Corporate Law* 26, 318-327.

Crosling, Glenda and Murphy, Helen (2009). *How to Study Business Law - Reading, writing and exams* 4th ed., Lexis Nexis, Sydney.