

PAPER

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## University course design

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Bob Dick, Alf Lizzio and Keithia Wilson (1995) *Course design: a Masters/PhD program in organisational psychology*. Nathan: Griffith University, School of applied psychology. A discussion paper.

One of a number of submissions to the planning committee designing a new postgraduate coursework course.

### **The overall conception**

The overall conception is of a course which uses structure, processes and staff and other resources to create a learning community of practitioner-scholars. The emphasis is on cooperative self-management and self-responsibility within a publicly-accountable system. The designed outcome is professionally relevant learning which serves the participants, the university, the discipline, and the wider community.

The learning outcomes pursued will be professional competencies as defined by the appropriate bodies and stakeholders: the Australian Psychological Society, the university, the profession, participants, academic staff, employers and clients.

Each participant, and each group of participants, will negotiate a set of learning outcomes and the means by which they will be achieved and documented. The learning outcomes will be defined as professional competencies and meta-competencies. These will include obligatory core competencies and meta-competencies, and a choice from a range of relevant elective competencies.

The methods used will be those appropriate to learning by adults. They will be consistent with current research on deep learning which integrates theory and practice. The program will draw on methods used in action learning, action research, and adult education.

In particular, use will be made of self-directed learning, learning through critical reflection on experience, field projects in professionally-relevant settings, mentoring by academic staff and practitioners, and peer coaching and review. The participants will function as professional practitioners, sharing responsibility for the learning of themselves and their colleagues with staff assistance.

To make the most effective use of demonstrably-effective learning methods within the available resources, creative course structures are required. The course will be structured to engage participants, individually and in teams, in learning activities which span scholarship, practice and service. Through these activities, the competencies will be developed.

Both the process and the content of the course will be designed to enhance learning. Content, much of it addressed through self-study, will consist of books, articles and other resource materials. The process will involve the participants in using professionally-relevant skills and theories to manage the community of learners, and their own learning.

### **The scientist-practitioner model**

The use of a “scientist-practitioner model” of professional education is reported to be very common in North America, and universal or almost universal in

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Britain and Australia. On the other hand, there is evidence that the intended research orientation on the part of graduates is poorly achieved. The program is designed to implement a version of the scientist-practitioner model which draws on the current theory and practice of adult learning methods to overcome the shortcomings of the model as usually implemented.

The chosen form of the scientist-practitioner model integrates theory and practice throughout. Participants engage in activity and critical reflection, drawing on relevant literature to strengthen both. The focus at all times is on theory which informs practice, and practice which informs theory. On graduation, participants will be well practised in learning from experience and in applying theories and concepts in their work.

### **The design process**

The eventual design process will be developed by the planning committee, with wider consultation where appropriate. Likely steps in this process are:

- The planning committee meets, and agrees on the overall process to be used and the stakeholders to be consulted.
- Preliminary consultation with stakeholders helps to define the appropriate competencies and meta-competencies, and to categorise them into core and elective components.
- The planning committee further develops the design for the program, to achieve development of these competencies.
- Stakeholders are asked to react to the design, and suggest changes and additions. In the light of this, the design is developed in more detail.

In parallel with this process, the necessary approval of relevant committees within the university will be sought.

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## Roles

In this preliminary proposal, we make the following assumptions:

The learning outcomes affect primarily the participants of the program, and their employers and clients. We presume therefore that the competencies which comprise the learning outcomes will be determined by the planning committee, representing the external stakeholders and the profession. The external stakeholders (including psychology practitioners, employers of psychology graduates, and intending participants in the program) will also be consulted. Also representing the profession, the APS will have influence on the competencies included, especially the core competencies and meta-competencies.

It is inevitably the responsibility of the academic staff team to deliver the defined outcomes within budget and staffing constraints and faculty and university policy. The academic staff team will therefore be responsible for devising and managing the delivery methods for achieving the defined outcomes. It will do this in consultation with the planning committee and the other stakeholders.

## Structure

In structure, the program is tentatively envisaged as three integrated strands: scholarship, practice, and service. Each of these strands is composed in turn of two components, relating to the wider community and profession (“external”), and to the program itself. We expect this preliminary description to change substantially in response to consultation with the various stakeholders.

*Scholarship* consists of empirical, publishable, practitioner-relevant research. Done externally, for example, it might research aspects of practitioner practice, or situations relevant to practice. Internally, it might consist of research into the program itself, or its methods, or its components.

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*Practice* consists of experience relevant to professional practice as a psychologist. Done externally it consists of supervised field projects in appropriate professional settings; internally it might consist of facilitation of learning sets, and the like.

*Service* consists of activities designed to generate some outcome of benefit to the profession and/or the community (external) and to the program, the school and the university (internal).

The course content, and the basis for the negotiated learning outcomes, consists of a set of competencies. Some of these are defined as core competencies, either defined as necessary competencies by research, or required to comply with APS requirements. Others are elective competencies.

Each person enrolling in the program will negotiate a program to address the core competencies, and a selection of the elective competencies. These competencies are then developed through a combination of activities (including theoretical activities) and critical reflection spanning the three strands.

The competencies, and the means by which they will be addressed, are chosen by each person enrolled to achieve a weighting for each of thesis, content and practical experience within the limits specified by the APS.

Scholarship		Practice		Service	
External	Internal	External	Internal	External	Internal
Meta-competencies 1 to $n$					
Core competencies 1 to $n$					
Elective competencies 1 to $n$					

(Note: some competencies may not span all three components)

An emphasis of the program will be those competencies which people require to remain current in their professional understanding. It might include such matters as learning to learn, critical reflection, and the like.

## **Delivery**

The program as a whole — participants and staff — will be set up as a learning community of scholars, with the responsibility to aid each others' learning. Much of the learning will arise from practical activities, and from the documentation of this: see next section.

Within the overall community, participants will be organised into learning groups. These will function as action learning sets, with the responsibility of helping each other learn from their individual and collective experience.

Program participants will negotiate a set of activities, and a means of documenting their learning from those activities. The activities will be chosen to cover the core and chosen elective competencies, as well as the three components of scholarship, practice and service.

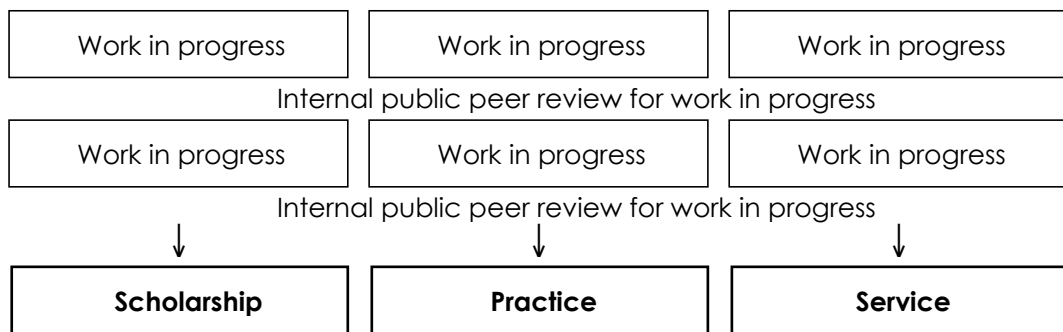
## **Negotiated learning outcomes**

The documentation of learning outcomes is an important learning vehicle within the program. Participants will prepare a number of reports which will serve to strengthen and document their learning at the same time.

We envisage three major pieces of documentation, relating to the three components of the program. In addition there will be a number of minor pieces, representing "work in progress".

Some work-in-progress documents will contribute to the final documentation, as shown. Other work in progress will document learning relevant to other negotiated learning outcomes.

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In keeping with the spirit of creating a community of practitioner-scholars, peer review of documentation will be widely used. To ensure accountability, all documentation, and the reviews of it, will be public. The responsibility for review of work in progress will reside primarily within the learning community. For final work (especially the thesis), outside reviewers will also be required.

Document review will be in accord with the contribution of the documentation to the learner, and to the program, the discipline, and the community. Documentation will be added to the program library; thus, the resources available to the learning community and beyond will grow over time.

### **The sequence of activities**

The sequence of activities is shown diagrammatically below.

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Induction:	To the program To the cohort To the learning set Individual and group negotiation of learning goals
	The program functions as a self-managed community with activities spanning the three program components
Final transition:	Documentation Final review Career and follow-up planning

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