Which First Year and Whose Transition?

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University of Wollongong, 26 October 2010
What is it like to be a first year?
And what clues are students sending us?

- 42% of first year students aren’t sure that at least one of their teachers knows them by name
- 31% of students believe that they are learning about research undertaken in their university
- 98% utilise learning technologies

The First Year Experience Survey 2009
• 80% of students in 1 faculty have a unique timetable
• Are you saving your best until last?
SO WHERE
THE BLOODY HELL
ARE YOU?
LTAS: Historical Thinking in Higher Education

we haven’t studied this yet
So where have you been?

Average all/extension/1st/later

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SO WHERE
THE BLOODY HELL
ARE YOU?
### LTAS: History

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<th>Objective</th>
<th>Ability to read and interpret historical texts or original documents in one's own language; to summarise or transcribe and catalogue information as appropriate.</th>
<th>Understanding of the fact that historical debate and research is permanently developing.</th>
<th>Knowledge of methods and problems of the different branches of historical research (economic, social, political, gender-related, etc.)</th>
<th>Critical knowledge of different historiographic perspectives from different periods and contexts, including current debates.</th>
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<td>6. Knowledge of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing and interpreting the past</td>
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<td>7. Understanding of how historical phenomena—-and historians—inform the present</td>
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<td>Communication skills to present a lucid and ordered exposition of knowledge and ideas</td>
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<td>Historiographical writing</td>
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How did you get there?
F, A, S, T

Face
Does the face look uneven? Ask them to smile.

Arm
Does one arm drift down? Ask them to raise both arms.

Speech
Does their speech sound strange? Ask them to repeat a phrase.

Time
Every second brain cells die. Call 9-1-1 at any sign of stroke.

Is it a stroke? Check these signs FAST!

Call 9-1-1 at any sign of stroke.
'I found myself at the altar of transcendentalism. There a great light dazzled me when I realised that relation was integral in being. ... The Kantian brands which separated knowledge and reality were transcended. Self-critical reason called for adoration. The shackles of empiricism were broken for ever. The ecstasy of this experience was too much for my daily sound. The heightened tension of the nerves brought an unfortunate physical reaction.'

E Morris Miller, ‘Notes for an Autobiography’, Ms Miller SL MMPQ 820A MIL C10851, State Library of Tasmania, 73a
I think the biggest [opportunity for learning] is the kind of aha moment that comes usually when one student, and it was always in the medical history course, when looking at these ideas for hysteria for example, will say ‘these ideas were outmoded, doesn’t that mean that in a hundred years from now someone will see that our ideas are outmoded’ and so as far as I am concerned that moment crystallizes the whole meaning of what history thinking is. It is to be able to see a moment in the present as a moment that will become somebody else’s idea of history, so we mustn’t think of ourselves as dinosaurs but a lot of people ahead of us are going to.
• [My course] raises all sort of epistemological questions on history. When I start the class I always pose the question to students: What is History? Is there such a thing as a recoverable past? Can it be said that the past exists? What are we doing as historians are we trying to rediscover or discover what happened? Or are we fashioning a kind of a notion of a past for our own presentist purposes? And these type of things

• [Y]ou are always there wanting them to argue and to think about history at that level of argument, to see it as being always under contest. And I think different students get there at different times.
• isolation
• self doubt
• lack confidence
• want to drop out
• Need mentoring
Who are your first-year teachers?

- Teaching and Research academics
- Education Focused or Teaching Intensive
- PhD students
- Sessional staff
- Learning skills advisors
- Indigenous mentors
- Clinical educators
- Research intensive
• I guess I learnt how to supervise by how badly I was supervised. You do have to listen to the student. You do have to be there to support and guide, to know guidelines and deadlines. To be a mentor and a supporter, and to work them through that spiral of learning, through the unconscious. … and he didn’t have the skills or resources to take me through that. But in terms of his stimulation to do history, in different ways, to do things from different disciplines, that was exceptional and transformative. He was a mixed memory for me.
When I went to graduate school, I was like these students coming into the honours course, ‘oh well it is just a question of researching and compiling your empirical evidence’ and that’s what history is and all of a sudden and I get thrown into a sea of theory and interpretation and I was drowning for a little while and then I rose to the occasion I suppose.
• The workload is very high at the moment. I haven’t had the chance to actually write anything for quite some time. It is rather frustrating [and] there is an expectation, supposedly one third of my job is actually doing something like writing an article and it can’t be done. I can’t do it. I just do not have the time.

• The irony is that this is my area of expertise and in the last couple of years I think I have taught almost every historical area except that one. (laughs) Well that’s not so unusual these days, talking to early career lecturers. Being thrown into different fields
• I would like to do more, to get them doing more things in groups conversing in groups and breaking down their isolation, because I think humanities students are too isolated.

• I tried to increase the amount of interactive teaching and first I did that by having one lecture and a two hour tutorial it was a disaster, because it meant my classroom hours more than doubled. That was the year when I spent something like 25 hours in the classroom per week which was a bit silly. So I stopped doing that
it is not really a model that lends itself to teaching history. Larger classes of 200 are fine, you double that, it is unbelievable. So that has been a challenge for us, as to how to do it, how to teach it well, how to lecture to 500 students is different, completely different environment, of interaction with the student and actually devising a subject where you keep the attention of the students is quite a challenge.
How do we respond?

• The ground is shifting in many ways:
  – ‘Advanced’ doctoral models (Wellcome Trust, Cranfield, conjoined MBA/PhD, Teacher education/PhD programs
  – Doctoral Training Centres
  – Approaches to teaching…

• reading groups
• Peermentoring
• The virtual MPhil
But there remain three issues:

- Scalability
- Significance
- Confidence

Two examples
GCHE takes in PhD ‘training’

- Focus is traditionally on models of good supervision
  - Now takes in models of doctoral program
  - Assessment provides an opportunity to cross ‘first year’
‘Crowdsourcing’: Peers at Monash

• 1 topic: multiple projects and voices
• 4 fellows (curriculum peers)
• 1 large project (peer review)
• 1 co-curriculum project (PASS)
• 1 ALTC Fellowship: Peer Assisted Teaching