

WHY DON'T THEY LISTEN TO US? CREATING A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Following decades of higher education research, the pace of change in teaching science and mathematical sciences at universities has been slow despite the evidence of practice and research (Handelsman, Ebert-May, Beichner, Bruns, Chang, DeHaan, Gentile, Lauffer, Stewart, Tilghman, President, Wood, 2004), stimulating calls for national action in the US (Brewer & Smith, 2011) and Australia (Rice, Thomas, & O'Toole, 2009). The last decade in Australia has seen increasing emphasis on quality in learning and teaching through the Office for Learning and Teaching/ALTC and the establishment of a new regulatory body, TEQSA. The Australian Higher Education Standards Panel is currently working on new standards for learning and teaching that set graduate outcomes as the benchmark for Universities. However at the same time, funding is stretched, research outputs are emphasized in academic workload and universities are seeking "efficiency dividends".

How can academics passionate about teaching drive institutional investment in good practice? This complex problem demands multiple answers. Learning and teaching leaders can use formal roles (School Director of Learning and Teaching, funded project leader, course co-ordinator) or less formal contacts (participating in national projects/networks, involving peers in local projects, showcasing student achievement) to influence senior leaders. Groups of teaching-focussed academics can support each other and generate ideas. Teaching-focussed academics that provide solutions to University issues in quality, reputation and student progression will capture the attention of Deans, PVCs and DVCs. Teaching networks and collaborations are a powerful mechanism to drive change.

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