A Framework for Educational Excellence

Introduction

Developed in consultation with staff and students, the University of Melbourne's *Framework for Educational Excellence* identifies seven critical dimensions of staff activity that contribute to an excellent educational experience.

The framework's dimensions and elements provide an agreed structure and vocabulary which may be used both for guiding teaching practice and for describing staff contributions for the purposes of award nominations, performance review, confirmation, and promotion.

The framework is not intended to be a prescriptive, 'one-size-fits-all' checklist of activities.

Instead, the framework highlights the diverse ways – both visible and hidden – in which academic and professional staff contribute to excellent educational outcomes. This includes the planning and design of learning materials, activities and assessments, as well as subject delivery, and the provision of feedback, support and encouragement to students.

The framework also recognises the significance of productive collaborative relationships, a scholarly mindset, a commitment to ongoing improvement, and a willingness to lead and share high quality educational experiences. Implicit in this framing is the recognition that education is a partnership, which cannot succeed without active engagement from both staff and students.

The framework exists alongside and intersects with other elements that seek to promote and value education, teaching, learning and the student experience at the University of Melbourne. These include the Academic Career Benchmarks and Indicators (ACBI), and professional development and improvement programs offered by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and the Learning Environments team.

The seven dimensions of the framework are

1. Well-designed and engaging learning experiences
2. Evidence-based and inclusive teaching practices
3. Effective assessment and feedback
4. Guidance and support inside and outside the classroom
5. Integration of scholarship and professional practice into teaching and learning
6. Continuous improvement and professional development
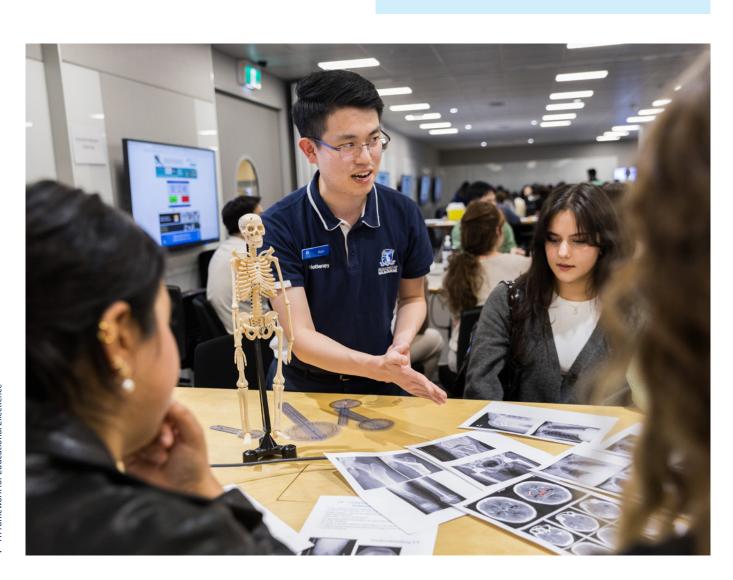7. Educational collaboration, leadership and commitment to dissemination

1. Well-designed and engaging learning experiences

Curriculum is core to the student educational experience and includes not just *what* is taught but *how* it is taught. A well-designed curriculum considers what learning activities students undertake and ensure they are aligned to clearly articulated learning objectives (*intended learning outcomes*).

Engaging and impactful learning experiences involve students as active participants in inquiry, allow them to explore, experiment and learn from their experiences, and give them opportunities to experience practical applications of their learning. In the process, students are intellectually challenged in ways that encourage the development of autonomy, reflection and evaluative judgement. This intellectual challenge includes engaging with Indigenous and global knowledge systems and under-represented voices. By undertaking collaborative learning, students develop workplace-relevant skills around communication, negotiation and collaboration.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Clear alignment between intended learning outcomes and learning activities
- Contemporary and relevant curricula taught by subject matter experts
- Curricula, assessment design, and course materials that ensure equity and accessibility
- Learning experiences that foster inquiry, experimentation, and practical application
- Ongoing opportunities for experiential learning through practice and consolidation
- Peer and self-directed learning activities that foster collaboration and teamwork skills
- Intellectual challenges that encourage autonomous learning, decision-making and reflection
- Effective use of educational technology for engagement and learning

2. Evidence-based and inclusive teaching practices

The practices of teachers have great impact in setting and maintaining a social environment and classroom culture that is intellectually vibrant and conducive to learning.

Effective educators create learning environments that are accessible for all students, free from discrimination or vilification, and inclusive of diverse perspectives. They have a strong appreciation of the science and art of learning and teaching. They are self-aware, and also deeply curious about the learner population with whom they are interacting and cognisant of the varied needs of those learners. In their teaching they model respectful academic debate and discourse, elicit active participation and input from all students, and listen and respond thoughtfully to alternative points of view. They make considered use of educational technology for diverse purposes with the goal of maximising and personalising learning opportunities.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Use of evidence-based delivery methods and teaching practices
- Clear communication of expectations and rationale for teaching approaches to students
- Teaching methods that engage, stimulate interest and inspire/motivate students to learn
- Clear and accessible explanation of complex ideas
- Creating a classroom environment that is respectful, inclusive and accessible for all learners
- Teaching approaches that promote social connection, foster belonging, and support wellbeing
- Demonstrating enthusiasm, relatability, empathy and self-awareness
- Facilitating active participation, questioning and interaction among staff and students
- Conveying openness and responsiveness to student feedback and perspectives

3. Effective assessment and feedback

Well-designed assessment schemes are important not only for valid measurement of how well students have achieved a subject's intended learning outcomes, but also for influencing student motivation, behaviour and approaches to learning. Effective assessment regimes achieve both goals and include diverse tasks that focus both on feedback for learning and assessment of learning. Assessment design choices consider not only learning outcomes but are mindful of workload, student diversity, and situational factors.

Expectations in relation to assessment are communicated clearly, and students are provided with regular opportunities to practice and consolidate their knowledge and skills and receive timely, actionable feedback. Students perceive assessments to be authentic, fair and relevant, and are motivated and supported to perform well. Marking and grading processes are transparent and equitable.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Clear alignment between assessments and intended learning outcomes
- Variety and choice in assessment tasks and evidencing of learning
- Assessment and grading practices that are secure, reliable, transparent, fair and scalable
- Authentic forms of assessment that are relevant to students' current and future goals
- Assessments that encourage the development of critical thinking and evaluative judgement
- Staged assessments that build learning through cycles of feedback and iterative improvement
- Provision of constructive and timely feedback
- Helping students to develop skills in giving, receiving and responding to feedback
- Modelling reciprocal feedback by soliciting and using feedback from learners

4. Guidance and support inside and outside the classroom

Students look to educators not only as knowledgeable experts, but also as sources of inspiration, guidance, encouragement and support. Educators provide support for students and their learning in many different ways, both formal and informal. In the course of teaching practice this support includes explicit recognition of diverse student needs in terms of subject design and delivery, availability for consultation and advice outside class, accommodations in relation to student disadvantage or disability, and proactive identification and support of students at risk.

Outside the formal teaching context, academic and professional staff recognise they have an important role to play in helping to connect students with university support systems and participating in student advising and mentoring programs. They use their professional networks to connect students with co-curricular opportunities, individuals or organisations that may help them with their learning and professional development.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Providing consultation and advice
- Helping students to connect with appropriate support services
- Participating in student advising or mentoring programs
- Identifying and communicating opportunities for co-curricular learning
- Leveraging networks to connect students with co-curricular opportunities
- Identifying and reaching out to students in need of support

5. Integration of scholarship and professional practice into teaching and learning

The hallmark of a research-intensive university is that a scholarly mindset and culture of inquiry infuse every aspect of teaching and learning. Scholarly enquiry informs teaching at many levels: providing evidence to support decisions about what is taught and how; enriching students' appreciation of an academic discipline; demonstrating the subject matter expertise of the teacher; and inspiring students through engagement with relevant and impactful research.

Students have opportunities to participate in original research during their learning journey, experiencing the thrill of discovery, enjoying access to the University's considerable research infrastructure and capability, and benefiting from its ability to draw on established linkages with professional and community networks to create learning opportunities. In the process, they develop research-oriented skills and competencies such as analysis, problem-solving, and critical thinking which have broad utility and value for professional practice.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Incorporation of educational scholarship into teaching practice
- Ability to connect subject matter to contemporary research/industry/professions/life and society
- Learning that encourages the development of research, civic and/or professional skills
- Conducting discipline-based educational research as a part of teaching
- Providing students with opportunities to conduct research and inquiry
- Incorporating professional, industry and community experiences into the curriculum
- Designing and implementing innovations in teaching practice that enhance student learning

6. Continuous improvement and professional development

Contemporary understanding of best practice in teaching and learning, like disciplinary knowledge, is constantly evolving and requires dedicated effort to maintain currency and skill. Exemplary educators consider education to be a vital part of their academic role and are committed to continuous improvement of learning experiences for students.

They consult the educational literature and seek formal and informal input and feedback on their teaching from a variety of sources, including students and academic peers. They dedicate time to improving their expertise, teaching ability, and subjects, and are receptive to coaching and opportunities for professional development in relation to teaching.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Participating in professional development activities related to teaching and learning needs
- Engaging in scholarly inquiry in relation to one's own practice
- Improving curriculum, subject design, or teaching practice as a result of literature research, learning analytics, self-, student-, or peer evaluation
- Contributing to teaching-related workshops, seminars and conferences
- Contributing to informal and formal peer review of teaching and scholarly research
- Membership of internal or external teaching networks or communities of practice

7. Educational collaboration, leadership and commitment to dissemination

A successful educational experience for students is the outcome of planning and input from many contributors, including academic staff, professional staff with expertise in domains such as learning design and educational technology, professional staff who provide academic and student support, and in some cases external partners.

Exemplary educators recognise that a high-functioning teaching and learning community depends on constructive and collaborative relationships among all staff who contribute to teaching, and a willingness to show leadership. They are open to new forms of collaboration and ways of working. They also appreciate that creating a vibrant culture around teaching and learning requires commitment to collegial sharing of teaching-related learnings (both successful and unsuccessful), willingness to mentor and support peers, and preparedness to contribute to administrative processes important to teaching and learning, in the pursuit of improved outcomes for both students and staff involved in teaching.

Important aspects of practice in relation to this dimension

- Building constructive professional relationships around teaching, including across disciplines
- A culture of sharing teaching-related learnings at internal and external forums
- Positive and constructive contributions to teaching-related committees and teams
- Mentoring and support of colleagues related to teaching
- Effective and collegial leadership of teaching teams
- Contributions to teaching-related policies and processes
- Ethical practice in all aspects of teaching

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