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1. Executive summary

This report details the activities of the Academic Skills Program in 2006.

The ASP continued its work of providing literacy and study skills support to University of Canberra students through:

- Individual consultations
- In-discipline workshops
- Generic workshops
- On-line study skills support.

In comparison with 2005, a greater emphasis was placed on in-discipline work and increased research education than on individual consultations, although the number of students who accessed consultations increased slightly to 752 (8% of UC students). 3422 students attended ASP workshops, lectures or tutorials.

The number of UCC students accessing consultations declined slightly, while the number of Science and Design students increased markedly, reflecting an increased embedding of the work of the ASP in literacy development in courses such as Sports Coaching and Nursing. 35% students accessing consultations were international students, and 25% were postgraduate students.

Evaluations continue to show a high level of satisfaction with the program: 161 out 164 students (98%) surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they had learned new skills or improved their skills in ASP consultations. Similarly, 98.98% of students surveyed agreed that they had increased their confidence as a result of ASP workshops.

Future plans are:

- Maintain a level of excellence in learning/teaching through ASP workshops and consultations
- Increase in-discipline work and flexible delivery work to extend ASP services to a wider student body
- Extend the ASP opening hours to 8.30am - 6.30pm.
- Ensure students have reasonable expectations of the services of the ASP by careful promotion of the service and induction of new staff and students
- Improve networking with the Divisions, and with International Office, Dean of Students, Learning Resource Centres, Residences Academic Assistance Program, and Ngunnawal Centre, Health and Counselling Centre
- Continue rigorous evaluation of ASP services.
2. Introduction
This report covers the activities of the Academic Skills Program (ASP) for the period from January to December 2006.

The Program was moved from the Division of Communication and Education into the new Division of Learning and Teaching on January 1, 2006. This restructure is consistent with the mission of the Program in providing a university-wide service, and has had positive outcomes, including increased collaboration with the Library.

3. ASP Staff
In 2006, the ASP was staffed by:

Academic Staff

- Kate Wilson (Academic level C) Head of Program, (on OSP until 20 November, 2006)
- Garry Collins (Academic level B), Acting Head of Program
- Judy Couchman and Linda Li (Academic level A).
- Sue Prentice and Cheyne Morris (Academic level A) fixed term contracts during the two semesters to replace Kate Wilson.

Dr Li has been promoted to Level B, as from January 2007.

Administrative staff

The Administrative position, which is shared with the Disability Office (UC 3 Administrative Officer) has been shared by four people: Beverly Warnest, Kate Rolfe, Dannielle Hircock, and Maureen Mowle. Maureen Mowle has now been appointed on a continuing contract four days/week, with casual staff filling the fifth day.

4. Opening hours

The ASP is co-located with the Disabilities Program but has longer opening hours: Monday-Friday 8.30am – 12.30pm and 1.30pm – 6.30pm (Fri 1.30am – 5.30pm)..

Administrative support is only available during Disabilities’ opening hours: 9.00am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm; the Disabilities Office is closed for lunch. Some negative feedback has been received about the lunchtime closure of the ASP, and this will be addressed in 2007.

5. Individual consultations

The ASP continues to provide individual consultations to UC students. These are open to all students at the University, from UCC diploma students to doctoral candidates. Students can book sessions of up to one hour, but short ‘drop-in’ sessions of 15 – 20 minutes are also offered to students every day between 2.30 pm and 3.30 pm.
The number of individual consultations declined slightly from previous years: 3042 sessions as opposed to 3240 sessions in 2005 (see Figure 1). However, this is more a reflection of staff availability than of declining demand. The number of new students enrolling for consultations was considerably higher than in 2005: 546 as opposed to 468. Students had an average of four consultations each. Although students are generally discouraged from making regular consultations, some students with particular needs may be seen on a regular basis. The decision to make appointments of this nature is made collaboratively between the Disability Officer, the Academic Advisor and the student. In this way, the Program is able to provide equity to mainstream students while offering developmental work for students with special needs.

Student satisfaction with individual consultations remains high (see section X below).

**Figure 1: Individual student consultations 2000 – 2006**

![ASP Individual Consultations](chart)

Figure 2 shows more detailed information about the students attending individual consultations with the ASP over the past four years. International students remain a key client group of the ASP: 265 of the 752 students who had consultations in 2006. The largest proportion of new international students registering for consultations are from China (46) and Hong Kong (26), followed by Vietnam (16), Thailand (10), India (10) and Japan (10). As usual, the number of female students attending consultations greatly exceeded the number of male students: 536 females as opposed to 216 males. The number of University of Canberra College students attending consultations has declined slightly, due to lower enrolments in the College and to an increase in support provided in the College itself. As in previous years, a higher proportion of ASP clients are enrolled in the Division of Communication and Education; however, there has been a marked rise in the number of Science and Design students attending the ASP (see Figure 3), reflecting the increased embedding of literacy work in disciplines such as Sports Coaching and Nursing.
Figure 2: Individual consultations 2003 - 2006 (Source: ASP Database)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students enrolled for consultations with ASP</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New students enrolled with the ASP</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCC</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian students enrolled</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International students enrolled</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCC students</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CommEd</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man &amp; Tech</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science &amp; Design</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange students</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of consultations</td>
<td>2933</td>
<td>3141</td>
<td>3240</td>
<td>3042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of consultations/student</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female students enrolled</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male students enrolled</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: Students attending ASP consultations by Division

A similar chart in previous reports has shown statistics based on the number of new enrolments for ASP consultations rather than the number of students attending consultations in that year.
6. Workshops

ASP staff continue to provide generic skills workshops, discipline specific workshops, and orientation sessions. The number of hours spent teaching in workshops increased substantially during 2006 (see Figure 4 below), although the number of students attending these workshops declined slightly. Some sessions were attended by only small numbers of students, in particular the evening workshops in semester 2, the ‘Speak Up’ workshop designed to give international students more confidence in speaking in tutorials, and the ‘Trouble shooting’ sessions in the Library. However, these workshops fulfil particular needs in the University community: for example, evening workshops are a valuable service for part-time students.

Figure 4: Workshops - Number of students and staff teaching hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Teaching Hours</th>
<th>Student Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>3249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>3785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>5183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>5576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>4165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>3469</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Workshops of particular note were:

a. Grammar and Writing Workshop
   The Grammar and Writing workshop was offered in January (21 participants) and again in July (27 participants). This workshop serves an important function in helping students of any discipline develop their academic literacy skills, and continues to have excellent evaluations.

b. Thesis writing workshop
   Dr Linda Li has built up an excellent reputation across the University for these collaborative thesis writing workshops. Working closely with Joelle Vandermensbrugghe of the Research Office, Dr Li has been particularly helpful to international research students.

c. International Students’ Orientation
   The international students’ orientation has been an important offering of the ASP for the last ten years. However, the number of international students attending orientation has declined over the years, and it has been decided that in 2007 the academic orientation for international students will be integrated with the mainstream orientation, with only short sessions specifically for international students. This development will need careful monitoring.

d. Other orientation programs
   The ASP also participated in orientation programs for CIT articulation students, mature age students, research students and new UC staff.

e. In-discipline workshops
   The ASP collaborated with staff in the disciplines to run in-discipline literacy and study skills workshops in the following subjects/courses:
      Introduction to Management (UCC and UC)
f. Generic skills workshops
   As in past years, the ASP ran a series of generic skills workshops both in semester one and semester two. Attendance was good in first semester, but dropped off as usual in second semester, especially in the evening sessions.

g. The Library ‘Drop-In’ sessions and training workshops
   The ASP collaborated with the Library in a new project to support students’ development of information literacy, by offering drop-in sessions to assist students with academic writing. Although numbers at these drop-in sessions were small (an average of 3.27 students over 15 2-hour sessions), this is a useful strategy to reach students who might otherwise not receive the assistance they need. This program has been nominated for a VC’s award. In 2007, the program will be extended to offering workshop sessions in the Library on using references.

Presentations have also been made to UC staff in the Women’s Mentoring Program and through CELTS, for example in the Beginning Postgraduate Supervision workshop.

7. Materials Development
   The ASP staff have been collaborating with TEDS to publish the ‘Write On’ video and booklet on DVD. These materials, published by ASP staff in 2002 as the result of a teaching grant, are still widely used particularly in UCC and in TESOL. Publishing the material on DVD would make it more accessible to students studying in flexible modes.

‘The Guide to Writing in the Biomedical Sciences’, co-authored by Vicki Deakin, Elzbieta Narkiewicz, Kate Wilson and Ann Duffy, was republished for second semester.

Judy Couchman has developed and updated the ASP’s grammar teaching materials into a booklet form.

8. Research
   Kate Wilson, who was on OSP for most of 2006, used this time to complete the data collection and initial data analysis phases of her doctorate. Kate is also team leader for a collaborative research project funded with a grant of $3000 entitled ‘Curriculum Renewal in the MA TESOL in Vietnam’.

The ASP staff had a number of refereed papers accepted for publication:


In addition to the conference papers above, ASP gave the following presentations:

- Wilson, K. ‘Scaffolded reading tasks in EAP’ EA Conference, Perth September 2006
- Wilson, K and Buranapatana, M. ‘Talk, read, write: igniting critical thinking’ AARE Conference, Melbourne, November 2006
- Wilson, K. ‘Effective learning environments in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) reading classes’ UTS Research students conference, 17 March 2006
- Wilson, K. ‘Teaching the unteachable? A quest for teaching practices that boost international students’ academic reading skills and dispositions’ UC, April 5, 2006
- Wilson, K. ‘Teaching the unteachable? A quest for teaching practices that boost international students’ academic reading skills and dispositions’ UTS, April 7, 2006
- Prentice, S. ‘Challenge and response: Academic writing in the TESOL Program at the University of Canberra.’ 12th IALS Symposium for Language Teacher Educators, Edinburgh, November 2006

9. Professional development

The ASP staff continue to meet regularly with the Academic Skills and Learning Advisers (ASLA) ACT group. One of these meetings was held at UC on November 8 at which Garry Collins and Judy Couchman presented a short paper, Options for Offshore Students, which highlighted the development of the Write On! DVD. ASP staff also take an active role in other professional bodies:

- Garry Collins continued as Treasurer of the ACT branch of ISANA (International Students Advisers Network of Australasia)
- Cheyne Morris serves on the AALL (Association for Academic Language and Learning) Committee

Linda Li completed a Masters of Counseling Course by distance
Judy Couchman has been studying towards the Graduate Diploma in TESOL,
Kate Wilson is working on a doctorate in the field of international students’ academic literacy development.
10. University Service
The ASP has continued to make a significant contribution to the University of Canberra and the academic community.

Linda Li
COMED Divisional Research Degrees Committee.

Judy Couchman
UC Case Management Group

Garry Collins
Acting Head of ASP
Learning and Teaching Committee
Orientation Steering Committee,
Divisional Executive Committee
First aid officer and fire warden

Cheyne Morris
Women’s Mentoring Program facilitator

ASP staff have also participated in the Careers Market, Open Day, and the Suicide Intervention Program.

11. Public Relations
The ASP continued to keep the staff and students informed of the activities of the Program through:

- Maintaining the ASP Study Skills Online website
- Encouraging teaching staff to link their WebCT pages to the ASP Study Skills Online website
- Advertising ASP services through O Week bags, Monitor, divisional newsletters, on posters and via all staff email
- Running a stall during O Week and Harmony Week
- Advertising ‘What’s on in ASP’ through a noticeboard outside the centre, and on a sandwich board on the concourse

An area which needs further development is the links between the ASP, the Learning Resource Centres, and the Ngunnawal Centre.

12. Evaluation
Evaluations of individual consultations and workshops carried out by the ASP continue to show positive results. 164 students completed evaluations of individual consultations. 90 of these strongly agreed, and 71 agreed that they had learnt new skills or improved existing skills as a result of the consultation. Only three students disagreed (See Figure 5) In response to the question ‘Did the consultation help to build your confidence?’ 103 strongly agreed, 57 agreed and 6 students disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 6).
Figure 5: ASP students’ perceptions of skills development in ASP consultations

![Figure 5: ASP students’ perceptions of skills development in ASP consultations](chart1)

Figure 6: ASP students’ perceptions of confidence building in ASP consultations

![Figure 6: ASP students’ perceptions of confidence building in ASP consultations](chart2)

Some comments included:

- Great to talk to someone who asked my concerns about the assignment.
- Should have people with this attitude as a model for staff recruiting.
- Appreciate the Uni having ASP for students to access.

The First Year Experience Report for 2005, published in September 2006, reveals that awareness of the Program has remained at a steady 74% for several years. It is anticipated that improvements to the UC webpage, on which the ASP is now highlighted on the Current Students page on a rotational basis with other key services, may lift this level of awareness. However, the report also reveals an increase in students’ dissatisfaction with the Program. From a rate of 4.2% of negative responses in 2002, the level rose to 13.7% in 2005. This negative result is of serious concern to the ASP. It reflects two possible problems:

- A high level of staff casualisation in 2005
Inaccurate expectations of students (ie. expecting their essays ‘to be fixed’, rather than expecting to develop their skills and knowledge)
In 2007, these issues will be vigorously addressed.

Workshop evaluations also showed a high level of satisfaction. In answer to the question ‘Did you learn new skills or improve existing ones?’ 54.88 students (n=90) strongly agreed; 43.2 (n= 71) agreed and 3 disagreed (n= 3). In response to the question ‘Did you gain more confidence?’ 54.98% strongly agreed, 43.2% agreed and 0.02% disagreed.

13. Future plans

- Maintain a level of excellence in learning/teaching through ASP workshops and consultations
- Increase in-discipline work and flexible delivery work to extend ASP services to a wider student body
- Extend the ASP opening hours to include lunchtime.
- Ensure students have reasonable expectations of the services of the ASP by careful promotion of the service and induction of new staff and students
- Monitor integration of international students’ academic orientation into mainstream orientation
- Finalise publication of Write On DVD
- Improve networking with the Divisions, and with International Office, Dean of Students, Learning Resource Centres, Residences Academic Assistance Program, and Ngunnawal Centre, Health and Counselling Centre
- Continue rigorous evaluation of ASP services.