Can Business Principles be Adapted to Higher Education to Improve the Provision of Study Support to Diverse Student Cohorts?

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Abstract: One of the most significant challenges facing universities today is developing effective, efficient and equitable approaches to support diverse student cohorts, resulting from the market mechanisms now driving the tertiary education sector. Traditional mechanistic structures using specialisation of skills meant that the responsibility for the integration of this cohort was given to specialist language and study support advisers and counsellors who sat on the periphery of the educational experience. This created ineffective, inefficient and inequitable deficit and compensatory models of student support. At La Trobe University (Australia), two Language and Academic Skills advisers proposed working collaboratively with an academic to consider a business approach which embedded support into a mainstream subject with the aim of developing greater efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the management and delivery of this support. This was done by adopting the principles of strategic management and organic, team based structures in order to address many of the issues faced by students and staff in the current business driven tertiary education environment. This paper explores the application of these business principles to the re-structuring of a core second year subject (with an extremely diverse cohort) and outlines the positive impacts on students and staff.

Keywords: Embedding Student Support, Mechanistic and Organic Structures, Student Diversity, Equity, Effectiveness and Efficiency, Business Principles, Strategic Management

Introduction

In 1967 La Trobe University opened its doors with 552 students. Today it caters to 26,000 students with the majority on the Melbourne (Bundoora) campus and the rest spread throughout six regional campuses (LaTrobe University Homepage 2008). The University has five faculties: Education, Health Sciences, Law and Management, Science, Technology and Engineering and Humanities and Social Sciences. Each Faculty has a Language and Academic Skills Unit (LASU). These units are similar to the Academic Student Support Centres in the UK and Writing Centres in the US and were created to assist all students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, to successfully complete their degrees. The LASU unit in the School of Management (in the Faculty of Law and Management) provides the focus for this paper.

These units have been greatly impacted on by the changes to the Higher Education system which have occurred over the last decade. Massification, internationalisation, globalisation and commercialisation have increased both the number and diversity of the students accessing Higher Education. This was particularly evident in the School of Management where by 2006 the LASU unit began to find itself unable to meet student demand for support. Just as
there were many changes, there were many reasons for this unprecedented increase in demand. Firstly, many of the students who attended LaTrobe were ‘first generation’ (i.e. the first child in their family to attend university) and as such lacked many of the academic support networks of students in more elite universities. Secondly, government policies encouraged the movement of students from Technical and Further Education by offering students subject credits when they articulated into university. Thirdly there was a university endorsed scheme allowing mid-year entry to some of the Management courses. It was noted that many of the students entering university mid-year had come from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges and having completed TAFE courses, they received subject credits and so automatically moved into second year units. Missing the core introductory subjects which are designed to provide the groundwork for their future studies also proved problematic. The School also had large numbers of International students often leading to problems if they were also articulating from a TAFE. Having undertaken their TAFE studies they could also bypass the normal IELTS (International English Language Testing System) entry requirements. It is assumed that studying a course delivered in English for 12 months provides students with the language competence to cope with university studies. In all, these students lacked the necessary grounding and mastery of academic skills (essay and report writing, critical thinking, referencing sources, etc), that would help them move from a performance based system to an academic one; had very few support networks in place; and they required more consistent and continuous support than other students. As stated, it was LASU’s role to support these students and others requiring assistance.

A LASU adviser would traditionally work one-on-one with students. They also worked ‘on the fringes’ of the Faculty, in that they did not play a role in subject and assessment design or delivery and there was little if any dialogue between LASU and other academic staff regarding student academic issues. However given the changes mentioned, such an approach was neither appropriate nor sustainable. Even though immediate managers like Heads of School could see the benefits of this work through higher retention numbers, improvements in academic achievement and high levels of student satisfaction, senior managers began to question the model on the grounds of access and equity. The university was in a state of great change and financial pressure. As such, individual tuition for students, no matter how effective, was a luxury the university could no longer afford. It was clear LASU had to radically change the way they functioned if they were to survive.

Despite discussions about whether the “commercialization” of universities was an appropriate path, LASU realised that it was a necessity. The focus now became how the LASU could best survive in this environment without compromising our commitment to the students. The major question faced by LASU team was whether it was possible to actually be a commercial entity and still maintain the traditional ideological focus of universities which could be “characterized by institutional autonomy and the search for truth, scholarship and learning for their own sake” (Marginson, 1993 p. 125). LASU believed that we could and this case study reveals how this was done and provides some insights into the methods that were used and can be adapted by others.

The goals of this paper include an examination of how the unit faced this challenge. There were three objectives in producing this paper: To demonstrate how the business and strategic management tools which are more traditionally used with business organisations can actually effect great improvement in the educational experience per se; to show how such tools can improve an educational unit’s efficiency whilst not compromising its effectiveness; and to
use the LAS unit experience as a case study which, though by no means prescriptive, demonstrates just how the adaptation of strategic management tools could be applied in an educational setting.

**Literature Review**

It is now almost a cliché to state that the higher education sector has undergone significant change over the last three decades. It also seems futile to argue whether universities should accept their newly developed “commercial” and/or “privatized” status. For many years now there have been prolific discussions about changes in Higher Education (Marginson and Considine 2000; Frew 2006; Randall and Coakley 2006; Schubert 2004; Gumport 2000; Tierney 1998; Nixon 1996; Goedebebuure and Meek 1991; Marginson 1993, 1997).

In Australia the latest changes to higher education have been espoused in what has come to be known as “The Bradley Review” (2008); the final report resulting from the Australian government’s latest review of Higher Education. It follows other milestone reviews including what was known as “The Dawkins’ Report” (1988) and “Backing Australia’s future” (2003). Such policy documents were instrumental in steadily moving Australia’s Higher Education system to the commercialized, privatized and internationalized system it is today.

Australia now has 37 public universities, 2 private and 150 or so other providers of higher education (Review of Australia’s Higher Education Final Report 2008). This compares to 1991 when there were, “29 public higher education institutions and four, small private institutions awarding degrees and diplomas at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels” (Marginson 1993 p.6). The increase in private institutions reflects many more players were entering this market and obviously creating greater competition.

There is now no escaping an education discourse which discusses education in marketing vernacular as a “true commodity” (Marginson 1997). This can be seen quite clearly in the Review of Australia’s Higher Education Final Report (2008 p. xii) which now states “Our educational institutions and, in particular, our universities have built Australia’s third-largest export industry”. However, whether the discussions are global or national, the urgency of addressing the issues which many saw arising from the changes outlined above is undeniable. Many of these discussions presented dire warnings of the inevitable destruction of higher education which would result from its commercialization (Gumport 2000; Nixon 1996). Whilst Gumport (2000 p.69) notes some benefits, she states quite strongly that this is

…troubling because of the potential damage to public higher education as an intellectual enterprise, the further erosion of knowledge as an end in itself and the narrowing of academic offerings for different segments of student populations.

The warnings by Shubert (2004 para. 11) being some of the most dramatic;

Treating education as a commodity is much more complex-and dangerous- than it appears at first glance and we must not let ourselves be blinded by the flash of dollar signs.

However, blaming Government policy alone for this has been disputed. This clearly showed that often, especially in Australia, universities not only welcomed the moves towards creating education markets but did so with an unexpected zeal. They point to the “old and respectable”
universities like Sydney and Melbourne which did not need to merge etc. to maintain their competitive positions but actually did so with an amazing ferocity. Marginson (1997p. 250) pointed out that:

Institutions did not begin as equals. And intensified competition favored those with the best capacity to compete…The 1996 policy changes promised to further strengthen the position of the elite universities, which were best placed to withstand the reduction in Commonwealth operating funds and secure revenue from fee-based undergraduate and post-graduate places.

Given the strong position of these elitist universities, it seems the temptation to increase their competitive position may have been strengthened when Marginson and Considine’s research in “The Enterprise University (2000) is considered. This text provides one of the most extensive studies of Vice Chancellors in Australia. They point to what they call the “new breed” of Vice Chancellors who because of new organisational structures, were able to obtain and wield more power than their positions had ever had in the past.

Shubert (2004) also points out how “zealous” Australian universities have been in their “marketing” pursuits especially in the area of international education. “…between a quarter and a third of students at Australian universities are international, and some institutions derive 25 percent of their operating revenue from this source,” (Shubert 2004 para. 8). Frew (2006 p.25) extends the focus on the economic advantages of taking on international students:

Between 1998 and 2002 revenue from full fee paying overseas students rose from 701 million to 1423 million. Between 2003 and 2004 the number of international students in Australian universities increased by 6% putting further emphasis on the contribution of fees and charges to total revenue.

The fact that Shubert (2004) refers to this as “a dangerous addiction” and considering the aforementioned, it could be assumed that one of the major problems many Australian universities may have faced is not that they were commercialised per se, but that the critical decisions which any business must make, were not informed, well considered nor rational. In fact, Fahey (2007) discusses the dangers of such funding pointing out the increasing instability of the international student market. Her discussion of the great investment in Education within China, Singapore and India stresses the intense increase in competition which is now arising. The overdependence on any one form of income is always a danger in any business. This is not a shortcoming of commercialization itself but decisions made by those managing any business.

The criticism of the management of higher education goes further when Anderson, Johnson and Milligan (1999 p. 26) suggest:

… leadership by the vice-chancellor is essential … However, there is no question that in the diverse set of disparate colleges, institutes, faculties, divisions, schools, centres, departments, programs, projects, groups, branches and units which go to make up the ‘multiversity’ any sensible planning must encourage a significant contribution from the operational level, the grass roots …
Management theory stresses the need for integration of all organisational areas. Consequently, the failure to attend to even one, limits the effectiveness of the others. Given the ‘new breed’ of VC’s which Marginson and Considine (2000) identify, the loss of the participation at the ‘grass roots’ level is quite problematic as it impacts on the effectiveness of any changes. Randall and Coakley (2006 p.326) point out the dangers in the way leaders have adapted to the need for change in universities. They note the leaders’ focus on “competencies, behaviours and situational contingencies of individual university leaders…[when] the changes needed for the institution to flourish in today’s environment have greater potential for success if decision makers view leadership as a ‘process’ that requires innovation and input from all relevant stakeholders.”

So, whilst White papers and Green papers, meetings and blogs are developed and widely distributed, there is a perception that final decisions come and remain with higher levels of management. Marginson and Considine (2000) have noted that the University Executive now has more power than it has ever had in the past. Therein lies the problem; the discordance between the decision makers and academics and general staff perception of democratic decision making processes, the latter then becoming an important factor in the resistance to change. These issues have been identified quite extensively. (Randall and Coakley 2006; Gumport 2000; Nixon 1996).

The paper provides an analysis of a five year process whereby two Language and Academic Skills support advisers from the School of Management at La Trobe University in Melbourne used the principle of strategic management to move from delivering their service from one entrenched in mechanistic, hierarchical decision making structures to an organic, team based structure where the major stakeholders were actively involved in the decision making process. The delivery moved away from operating in the traditional reactive manner, into a proactive, systematic one. The major point to be made here is that not only were the staff’s needs met but so were the needs of many stakeholders.

Development of Strategy

Tourism Leisure Analysis (TLA), a core second year subject, with around 300 students, had a reputation as an unpopular second year unit with difficult, dry content (introductory research methods). A large number of international and TAFE transfer students made up the cohort, with many doing this second year subject despite being in their first semester at university. Disproportionate numbers of students from the subject were seeking extra support from LASU prompting LASU to consider a more strategic approach to meeting student demand. To do this we utilised a variety of business tools were used to develop a strategic plan.

Environmental Analysis

The analysis of our internal and external environments was particularly important because it was clear on the most superficial level that “The expansion of higher education student numbers [external environment] has not been evenly matched by growth in resources for staffing [internal environment]” (Coaldrake and Stedman 1999, p.4) and so by examining the internal and external environments much more carefully other factors could be identified and solutions found.
External Environment Analysis

As discussed, over the past decade many changes had occurred in the tertiary education sector in terms of government funding and regulations and the types of students entering the tertiary sector. Despite this, we (as LAS advisers) were still operating in very much the same ways as we always had: one-on-one appointments, some small group sessions and the occasional invitation to lectures to deliver generic information on academic skills etc. This approach had been manageable but suddenly student demand increased while supply (two LAS advisers) remained constant. Our decision to examine the external environment would allow us to identify the critical factors that were impacting on us.

Our analysis looked closely at the political and demographic conditions that were out of our immediate control. A variety of government and university policies had changed our environment, including increased funding pressure on universities, the drive to become more inclusive in terms of Access and Equity policy and pressures through the ESOS (Education Services for Overseas Students) Act to provide adequate support for International Students.

The major demographic condition impacting on us was linked to changes in government legislation and university policy and was the push for universities to enrol more international students. While we had expected the increase in numbers, what we had not expected were the low English levels and lack of academic skills. Our demographic analysis revealed that the School of Management had significant numbers of international students. Many of these students had enrolled in our courses via TAFE pathways by studying diplomas and advanced diplomas and so by studying in Australia for a minimum of twelve months they were not required to provide evidence of their language levels, such as through an IELTS or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). In Australia, because TAFE colleges assess students using a competency approach students’ language abilities are not always a relevant factor in their successful completion of a TAFE course. Consequently, they can articulate from TAFE to university with very poor English language skills. It was evident that Coaldrake and Stedman’s (1999) observations that academics are not only confronted with culturally diverse groups, but also with an even broader range of educational backgrounds and academic experiences were accurate. Our external analysis had allowed the identification of this in part and why this may have been the case.

SWOT Analysis

Another business tool that we believed would be useful was a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis (see Appendix 1). Our main strengths, were our combined sixty years of teaching experience in secondary, TAFE and tertiary educational settings (much of this in Schools of Business), our experience working with international students, our ability to work co-operatively and our flexibility. Our main weakness was one of equity because our service was being predominantly used by international students, with domestic students having problems accessing our support.

When we looked at our SWOT it was clear to us that the threat of the increasing numbers of international students was driving our LAS delivery with most students seeking help being international. This was unlikely to change given the identified threat of government policy forcing universities to increase their income resulting in the ‘massification of education’ (James, 2007). The major threat that was identified was large numbers of international students...
enrolling from either overseas or from TAFE colleges, with limited academic skills placing increasing demand on us as LAS advisers. It was also evident that another threat was that it was unlikely that there would be any increased resources granted to us to address this. The other threat that could have prevented us from finding a solution to the problem was that there was considerable resistance from academic staff who believed that these students did not deserve any support.

Our SWOT also highlighted the weakness of our position within the School where we sat on the periphery of the mainstream educational experience which limited our ability to contribute meaningfully or significantly to any discussions on the identified threats. The main opportunity that emerged however, was that we had the unwavering support of the Head of School and one other academic. This, when combined with our strengths seemed to suggest that we could create solutions but given the lack of resources we would need to be innovative. Duke (2002, p.7) argues that universities must “learn to change and to do new things in new ways” and we were faced with the prospect of looking at our ‘traditional’ modes of delivery and changing them to meet the changing environment.

The challenges of meeting the needs of the changing student cohort when resources were limited required a strategic approach that was flexible, adaptable and sustainable. A major identified threat was that we were constrained by our lack of resources (only two LAS advisers) but our qualities (experience, teaching skills, flexibility etc) as LAS advisers were part of our identified strengths. As we had no control over the threat we had to use identified strengths to create a solution. Consequently, our solution would need to be resource driven. In fact, in terms of strategic management this is considered leveraging or using resources more innovatively (Hannagan 2002) and this is how we approached the challenge.

**Strategic Plan**

As LAS advisers we were in a situation where we understood many of the difficulties the students were facing in their classes, as this was often the catalyst that led them to seek help from LAS. As discussed earlier, many students lacked support; did not understand academic expectations and could not always process the advice that was given to them. This understanding of the student situation was coupled with an awareness of the problems academics were facing when teaching these students. We were like Mintzberg’s (1996) salesperson who has the most strategic piece of information in the organisation in terms of the unmet needs of customers. Unless the information is used to create a strategy then it is useless. Fortunately this was not the case with us and our insights allowed us to consider various possibilities that would allow our final strategic plan to address some of the issues faced by academics while at the same time meeting the needs of the students, as well as aligning ourselves with the university’s strategy to improve the quality of teaching.

The major strategic objective was to provide more equity and access to language and academic support. After much discussion about the most efficient and effective use of resources and the various approaches available to us to reach the most students it was decided to embed the LASU staff into a core second year subject. Allan and Clarke (2007 p. 66) suggest that there is a continuum of embedding which ranges from:
a reductionist-oriented pole, where study skills are taught in free standing modules, to an embedded-oriented pole where learning is fully integrated, supported and fully permeates a program of study.

Our version of embedding permeated a program of study and involved moving into a team based structure where academic staff and the staff of the Language and Academic Skills Unit (LASU) work closely together to not only teach the subject but incorporate the teaching of academic skills such as essay and report writing and referencing styles. This approach would see us becoming an integral part of the decision making processes in relation to learning and teaching. It is argued that by taking a strategic management approach to addressing our problems, the subsequent development of the team based structure which is at the heart of this new approach, made a significant contribution to dealing with the various issues mentioned, developing synergies that assisted us in coming to terms with the challenging and frequently changing university environment.

**Restructuring**

The implementation of our plan demanded a restructure of the traditional models of delivery. The process was aided by finding an academic “champion” who was willing to introduce the new model into her teaching subject.

The most significant feature of the new strategy, described in this paper, was that it moved the teaching of the subject away from the traditional, mechanistic, top-down decision making structures, which tended to focus on content being dictated and delivered only by the lecturer as the expert. It also eradicated the use of deficit models, where LAS advice was limited to “the context of remedial English teaching and ad hoc ‘fix it’ approaches” (Bartlett 2000, p.37) with individual students either self-referring or being referred by lecturers/tutors. This deficit model saw LAS operating on the periphery of the educational experience of students, removed from mainstream teaching. With the changing nature of the student cohort and increasing demand on the service, this structure was highly inefficient and ineffective. Our environment had become highly dynamic and the traditional top-down method of management had seen us waiting for weeks to gain approval to make small decisions that would ease the demands being placed on us by students. By the time the decisions had been made by management, the immediate problem had abated (but would resurface later, where it would be re-assessed again by management). By adopting a new organic, flatter, team based model that no longer operated in isolation but was embedded into mainstream teaching, it was argued that the we would be more responsive to the needs of students.

The Team was made up of the unit coordinator, two specialist LASU staff who also took on the role of tutors in the subject and one other tutor, all of whom were experienced and skilled in a variety of areas including working in teams. As the four academics were already employed by the university, the proposed change was considered ‘budget negative’ and so it had appeal for upper management. The two LASU staff had extensive teaching experience, including the teaching of international and TAFE students. Few academic staff at university has experience with the latter group. The unit coordinator, having taught in the School for a number of years, brought a great deal of knowledge about students’ experiences and a high level of enthusiasm and commitment to the job. The tutor was sessional with little if any access to training and support yet was keen to develop his teaching skills within the team.
Decentralisation

The bottom-up, flatter structure created by the establishment of a co-ordinator/tutor team was based on clearly defined roles for each team member, with each member contributing in various ways to the development of the subject objectives, content and assessment. The unit coordinator had made a radical shift from centralised decision making to empowering team members (tutors). When power shifts in this way, through shared decision making and responsibility, empowerment occurs. In our case this incorporated, ‘employee involvement in self-managed work teams and problem-solving groups’ (Gilbert and Nelson 1991, p.14). So for example, while the subject content was largely established by the co-ordinator (whose role was one of ‘content expert’), she then relied on the teaching team to decide on the most appropriate ways to deliver that content, based on their teaching expertise. She also sought ongoing feedback from the team regarding difficulties students were having and the team discussed this allowing for constant monitoring and evaluation of the content and assessments. Hence, the co-ordinator had decentralised the decision making process, recognising that the LASU staff and tutors, by virtue of their specialised skills have significant influence over the way in which the subject material is taught and learnt.

Team Based Structure

The effectiveness of the team to achieve its goals was based on a number of factors that were fully discussed prior to the implementation of the strategy. Most importantly the team decided on objectives or shared goals – in this case to provide equity and access in providing academic support to all students in TLA not just to internationals; to provide consistency in the material that was taught; to provide consistency in our expectations in the assessment tasks and importantly in the way we assessed those tasks. These were based on our shared value that the students deserved a carefully planned subject, delivered by committed academics who were consistent in their expectations of students and in the material presented to them and extra support for students who had enrolled mid-year. These objectives involved implementing a variety of measures which are discussed below.

Tutorial Allocation

Extra support was offered through the creation of a number of special tutorials for TAFE transfers who were invited to enrol in them. (LASU staff, being actively involved in mid-year Orientation program, were able to explain the benefits of entering these groups). Very few of the TAFE students refused the invitation.

The benefits of this system were that new students could be given additional information (about the university and basic academic skills) during tutorials, without taking up the time of continuing students, and that new students were not made to feel uncomfortable and/or intimidated by being in classes with continuing students. The allocation of all students to tutorials was carefully monitored during the early sessions. Based on discussions during the weekly tutors’ meetings, some students were reallocated to new tutorial groups to better suit their needs.
Student Support Structures

One of the most important teaching tools was the first assignment (a 300 word essay which was worth ten percent of the total grade), due in week 3. The papers were rigorously marked by all four members of the Team and detailed feedback given to students. The aims were to: get students started in the unit as soon as possible; provide a teaching tool for referencing and writing styles on the required university standards; provide the opportunity for students to learn academic standards without severe penalty. As the paper was worth only 10%, a low grade would not unduly impede their success in the subject but it would give a clear signal of the implications of poor performance; and provide a tool to assess consistency of the tutors’ marking.

Support for the development of students’ academic skills (such as essay and report writing, referencing, critical thinking and so on) was carefully interwoven into weekly tutorials. This was done through a range of teaching tasks conducted both prior to and following assessment. For example, prior to assessment tasks information on referencing, extra curricula referencing workshops, and help with planning and note-taking were provided. Students who were seen to be at risk were encouraged to seek additional help from LAS advisers. After assessment tasks, discussions occurred within tutorials about the problems in the first assessment task and how to avoid similar problems in the following assessment tasks. A grade of 50 per cent or below was the starting point for alerting both staff and students to potential problems with academic skills. In addition, in week nine, emails were sent to students who had not submitted the first assignment and to those who had poor attendance and had failed the first assignment. This provided an opportunity for students seemingly at risk to meet with the subject coordinator to discuss their problems and for the coordinator to suggest appropriate courses of action.

Consistency in Marking

Rigid moderation processes were instigated to ensure that, as much as possible, all teaching and assessment was consistent. Team meetings were held to discuss what was expected in the assessments and ranges of marks were agreed upon. Sample papers were also cross marked by the co-ordinator and another meeting was held to discuss any discrepancies in tutors’ marking. This also reassured students (especially those with low marks) of the credibility of their marks. The success of this process was reflected in the low numbers of queries about assignment marks, and the small differences in final grades between the teaching team members (less than 2 percent).

Team Communication

In order to provide the best customer service for students, team communication was considered crucial to the achievement of the team’s objectives. Consequently ongoing and clear communication between all team members was absolutely critical to successful performance of the team and outcomes for students. The Unit Guide, and in particular, instructions to students about assessment items were carefully planned. From the start of the semester, the staff held weekly meetings which ensured team members delivered consistent information to all students, helped mentor the younger tutor, identified specific difficulties experienced by students and focussed on addressing solutions in the tutorials. After tutorials, the team debriefed
through informal chats. This was a simple exercise, but it proved integral to identifying and addressing issues before they developed into problems. Through these regular meetings, ‘corridor meetings’ and emails, the teaching team members ensured open communication.

The subject was also supported by the university’s on-line teaching facility (Web CT) which provided an additional communication tool that was not confined by time and space limitations of classroom-based and face-to-face methods.

**Conclusion**

As academics we continue to fight our way through the mire of changes to the “university”. It is also quite clear that as countries like India and China enter this market, competition for the ‘education dollar’ will become even more intense. There is no escaping the fact that to cope in this dynamic environment, universities must learn the messages which management theory has taught. We must all become familiar with concepts like strategic management, quality and competitive advantage. The question is now how can these changes be embraced without compromising academic principles and practises. The approach outlined above wherein we integrated strategic management principles which allowed us to not only identify what was going on around us in our external environment but to also find solutions to deal with some of those identified threats did not destroy our teaching and the students’ learning but enhanced it. As such, it also provided valuable insight and avenues for more scholarly teaching. Through the SWOT analysis, strengths were identified that been taken for granted but once clearly identified and articulated led us to developing innovative ways to present a core unit which equitably supported the diverse student cohort in developing academic skills. Because the approach reached all students it was much more equitable than previous methods of academic support.

The use of strategic management principles enabled us to look at our problems objectively and find solutions that met the needs of the students, the faculty, the university and the academics. Whilst we are aware that there is still substantial resistance to integrating management principles into Higher Education as it is felt too much is compromised, it is hoped that this case study has shown that this is not necessarily the case.

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Appendix 1

School of Management Language and Academic Skills Unit SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

- Over 60 years combined teaching experience in various educational settings
- Extensive research into student needs and expectations
- Extensive experience in working with international students
- Team based approach to teaching
- Flexibility – being able to respond immediately to change
- Strong culture of review and reflection of practice
- Over 10 years each of teaching business management students
- Advanced teaching qualifications

Weaknesses:

- LASU becoming reactive because demands on our time had limited review and reflection of practice
- Reluctance to use business approaches in our educational context
- Lack of succession planning
- Battered professional syndrome
- Failure to monitor and control numbers of international TAFE transfers accessing LASU services at the expense of domestic students
- Lack of access to decision making processes

Opportunities:

- Develop strategic plans, operational plans and cost benefit analysis to illustrate value adding to the SOM and thus appeal to upper management
- Support of Heads of School and/or other academic staff
- Employ more LASU staff
- Presenting ideas at conferences and/or academic journals
- Educate academic staff and management in relation to role of LASU

Threats:

- Various government policies relating to increasing international student intakes, articulation pathways from TAFE colleges, etc
- Loss of energy, confidence and enthusiasm for teaching
- Mainstream academic resistance to adopting less traditional, more co-operative approaches to teaching of core subjects
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