

Theory Into Practice Strategies: Teaching Offshore

When we teach offshore we take Newcastle University into the global education arena. How we teach represents the quality of a Newcastle education to the world. We are Newcastle when we're teaching offshore. If we can achieve a personalised approach to students and offer quality research-based teaching, our University can establish strong cultural, social and economic ties. Newcastle's international profile is essential to our domestic well-being. We need offshore students, just as they need our quality teaching. But intensive teaching demands much of teachers and students in a short time frame.

Teaching offshore is a rich experience but will challenge and confront us with different traditions, expectations, living conditions and our own ability to respond to the unexpected. Our taken-for-granted attitudes may be turned upside down in myriad ways. This tipsheet, and associated websites and workshops, are resources for support as we navigate the University's requirements, handle more layers of administration, and consider how we will handle teaching when offshore.



Working outside your comfort zone

Reflect on a time when...

- you had to leave your comfort zone
- you were severely challenged to think outside your own perspective
- you found it difficult to respect different ways of doing things
- you found you could not understand or be understood
- your capacity to listen and empathise was tested
- you had to be substantially self-sufficient in a foreign place
- you had to demonstrate flexibility and keeping your cool amidst change, and
- you had to teach semester-long courses in two weeks.

You will be challenged and changed!

Effective teaching and learning in offshore classrooms

The lectures we give at home are language-rich, dense, laced with metaphors and idioms and illustrated with Australian examples. Much of this is difficult to grasp for non-native speakers and those who have never lived in Australia or had exposure to Australian culture or people. There may be a great mismatch between students' level of English and what we expect them to read, hear and understand. Generally, international students at Newcastle take three months to just hear us clearly. Offshore, our students might have as little as four days or two weeks at most to tune in to our language and accent. There are many ways to build communication.

At the beginning... introductions

- Write your name on the board, say it clearly, tell students how they can address you
- Tell them a little about yourself, your family, your university, your travels, your research, your interests

- Hand out cards or folded over A4 paper; ask students to write their name and place it in front of them so you can see it
- Discover who your students are and their level of English by asking them to introduce themselves, pronouncing their names clearly
- Ask them where they come from; the work or study they do, where they hope their study will lead them
- Set a pattern of students speaking English in front of the class, and interacting with you
- Sometimes some of this can be done ahead of your face-to-face class using websites, email or Blackboard

During lectures and small groups... making yourself understood

- Take time: speak more slowly than usual – be aware of your speaking pace and tone of voice, what you say cannot be rushed
- Show that you are introducing a key point by tone of voice and indicating with your hands
- Keep sentences short and repeat key terms and points
- Be aware of terms that may be new to students: define them in writing, pronounce them clearly
- Use the board often to illustrate these terms
- Decide what is most important; be prepared to leave out the rest

Find different ways to get the point across

- Use examples – local examples wherever you can
- Ask students if they can give examples
- Use case studies
- Make illustrations, diagrams
- Hand out brief notes or summaries for students to follow in class and summarise after key points.



Issues with offshore teaching

- Working outside your comfort zone
- Effective teaching and learning in offshore classrooms
- Teaching with translators
- Small group teaching
- Academic integrity: appreciating and teaching its purpose
- Assessment
- Evaluation for quality teaching and learning
- Anticipating and planning before you go
- An offshore teaching checklist

Different cultures, different countries:

Can we teach the same way?

We bring to offshore students our own culture, language, and educational background. We bring our own discipline knowledge, course structures and teaching approaches. But we may know little about the local society and economy, the education system, student aspirations and language skills. We may not have the background to apply our knowledge to local examples, or to build on the prior knowledge of our students. Indeed, we may have no idea of their learning priorities. In some institutions (e.g. in China), we may be dependent on local translators who may have little knowledge of our discipline. Two things are certain: the students' language and educational experience are different from ours. We need to build bridges in both areas and learn from our students.

Critical questioning or transfer of knowledge?

Cultures and indeed disciplines put different values on these two poles of learning. Many of our offshore students are accustomed to reproduction of teachers' notes and texts. This can arise from working from scant resources or honouring knowledge of respected teachers and scholars.

We may want our students to problem-solve, question, evaluate, form their own opinions, weigh an argument, and give evidence for a conclusion. Students need time to learn new approaches. We need to provide models, opportunities for practice and constructive feedback to build their confidence and capacity to achieve these skills.

At the end

- summarise the whole picture verbally and visually
- relate content to specific text book chapters
- point to further resources if they are available
- encourage students to work together on specific concepts or problems

Teaching with translators

In some instances, especially in China, you will be dependent on translators. Much of your lecture time will be taken up by translation. Even if translators are not used, many students will be trying to translate what you say or write on the board. Much is lost in either case. Translators may be unfamiliar with some of your material, making it doubly difficult for students to understand the content.

Concentration is difficult for students whose attention switches between you and the translator, between one language and another. To maintain some continuity

- make your language simple and direct
- moderate your pace and tone
- establish communication with your translators before lectures
- help them to feel at ease with your material by going through it beforehand
- identify key terms and concepts and write on the board in both languages
- use examples, diagrams, case studies and applications to the local situation so that translators can communicate concepts more easily

Maximising learning in lectures with translators

- Plan to have half the usual time to get your points across
- Select and focus on the most essential material
- Use visual media such as black or white boards, OHT and Powerpoint to actively track through the key points
- Summarise regularly during the lecture
- Keep eye contact with your students while the translator is speaking
- Link your last point with your next, on the board, overhead or handout, to maintain continuity and energy
- Ensure students have access to content written in their own language through translated materials

Small group teaching

You can use groups to gain insight into students' level of understanding, and learn about relevant local examples. However, students who have had little experience of working in groups may be resistant until they experience the value. It is a big step from receiving information from an expert to listening to others critically and giving one's own opinion. Be clear about what students should achieve. See TIPS on Small Groups for details.

Structure groups by

- assigning and rotating roles such as leader, recorder, timekeeper, summariser and reporter
- establishing a timeline for tasks to be done
- checking at an early stage that each group is going well, addressing problems early
- clearly defining learning outcomes in terms of process – speaking, listening, responding, building on others' points, and content – articulating a point of view, arguing, giving evidence, making a case, reaching a conclusion.

Persevere! Many students have said they found working in groups difficult, but given time, they gained confidence in speaking up and handling the subject matter.



Academic integrity

Academic integrity is culturally loaded. In one culture, copying may equate to stealing or cheating; in another, copying may equate to reverence for given knowledge. Lack of resources such as books, computers, and libraries mean that many students have had very limited access to texts and cope with scarcity by copying and learning by rote.

Writing in another language is challenging and copying often stems from a lack of confidence to do so. Teach students how to reference their work to maintain our university's reputation for academic excellence. Provide models of how to reference, and time to learn the skills and adjust to the reasons for their importance.

Evaluation for quality teaching and learning

Quality means maintaining objectives and outcomes although the means of reaching them may differ in some offshore settings. Newcastle University policy requires conformity with the use of SETs. Choose formal SET questions that are quite clear in meaning. The best responses will come from open-ended short, clear questions such as

What is the most useful thing you have learned so far in this topic?

What is the least useful thing you have learned so far in this topic?

What advice can you give for the next time I teach this topic?

about the course presentation ...

about the reading materials...

about the assignments...

about the content...

about the activities...

What would make this a better topic for future students?

Before you go

Set up support

In some cases you may find yourself completely on your own – it may take time over a number of visits to establish local contacts. Before you go find someone, preferably in your own faculty, who has already been there, to keep in touch with. Together anticipate what the potential challenges and obstacles might be.

Respect

You are in a foreign country so be circumspect. You may readily be asked direct questions we regard as intrusive: how old are you, why aren't you married, how much do you earn, where are you going?

On the other hand, it is rude in many cultures to be direct and say 'No', so listen and watch for the alternatives like 'tomorrow', 'perhaps', and non-verbals - a smile but not a denial...

Business ethics are different; be respectful of difference; be polite but firm; co-operative and calm even when you don't know what the rules are.

Offshore administrative regimes are different; they may not be clear to you or your students; expect the unexpected! Be firm about your

deadlines, standards of attendance, turning off mobile phones, not smoking in class, and your academic expectations. If you feel unable to resolve an issue or you have to make a compromise, be guided by what is the essential issue. If in doubt, contact your support colleague. Keep your sense of humour – you may grimace but laugh as well!

Gift giving is a very important aspect of establishing relationships and may be more extravagant than we expect. Take small gifts such as Newcastle branded articles from the Union shop to give to key people.

An offshore teaching checklist

Before you go

1. Ensure you are familiar with the UoN travel policy and procedure.
2. Check with DFAT website for any travel advisories or warnings that may apply to intended destinations. DFAT website www.smartraveller.gov.au/
3. Obtain pre-approval by Spendvision international travel approval process. Refer Note 1.
4. Arrange for all teaching, examining and administrative duties during the offshore period to be covered.
5. Prepare and post or e-mail course materials ahead; allow 4-6 weeks.
6. Obtain confirmation that materials have arrived.
7. If you do not have a purchasing card, arrange for one. Refer Note 1.
8. Check if you are travelling to a country that has limited purchasing card acceptance. If so, arrange for others means for payment. Refer Note 1.
9. Ensure passport is valid for at least six months.
10. Make travel and accommodation arrangements through the approved travel consultant company (STA Travel)
11. Make any necessary visa applications.
12. If accommodation is not booked through approved travel consultant; inform them where you are staying so your accommodation details can be included in their 'Where are they?' reports.
13. Copy all important documents such as passport, visas, accommodation and flight information, etc. and place in a different bag from the originals.
14. Know your travel insurance
15. Change messages on your telephone and e-mail to indicate you are away and when you will return.
16. Get a travel diary, if travel is greater than five days duration.
17. Remember to change your mobile phone for international calling.
18. Notify supervisor, colleagues at Newcastle University of missed meetings.
19. Provide supervisor with a copy on your itinerary.
20. Notify host of arrival time, your schedule and any other special needs.

Note 1–

www.newcastle.edu.au/services/purchasing/spendvision.html

While you are away

1. Know how you will manage the currency and payments.
2. Keep all receipts, tickets and boarding passes, etc. to acquit for all your business related expenses in Spendvision.
3. Airport departure tax needs to be paid in local currency – keep receipts.
4. A purchasing card is often required by the hotel front desk when checking in to your accommodation.
5. Watch your purchasing card to prevent skimming.
6. Keep your travel diary up-to-date.

On your return

1. Acquit all purchasing card expenses for your travel in Spendvision.
2. Organise all your ticket stubs, boarding passes and receipts.
3. Apply through Spendvision for any required reimbursements (excluding airfares). Ensure supporting documentation is with all claims. Note 1
4. Remove international calling on your mobile phone.
5. Check and complete your travel diary.
6. Obtain confirmation of number of actual teaching days.
7. Report as necessary.

Note 1 – www.newcastle.edu.au/services/purchasing/spendvision.html

Teaching academic integrity

In lectures make a point of highlighting

- how the ideas you have constructed come from the work of others
- how you use and acknowledge the work of others
- how you construct your argument by combining the views of a number of authors on an issue

In tutorials teach students

- how to paraphrase in short exercises
- the level of paraphrasing required to acceptably alter the original words
- the distinction between 'common knowledge' and information that needs to be referenced
- how to use an efficient note-taking system to distinguish between the student's own words and those of others
- how to find and extract short statements or ideas to support an argument.

In assignments

- give practice assignments to develop these skills
- use marking schemes that include feedback on referencing.

Assessment

Intensive teaching imposes a different time frame on assessment than semester-long teaching, but the principles are the same.

- Keep your focus on learning objectives
- Know exactly what you want your students to be able to demonstrate before designing your assessments
- Show them what you want
- Assess more frequently and briefly in order to see what your students are understanding and to give feedback
- Design questions that seek evidence for the essential understandings and skills
- Use structured responses and tables
- Give regular in-class tests
- Reduce language-rich questions

- Use short writing exercises at first and avoid long, open-ended essays
- Make questions crystal clear; prepositions and clauses are easily misunderstood
- Use clear, transparent marking schemes

In some courses, assessments are written in the local language and marked by local tutors. Structured short responses will reduce problems.

Before you go - International communications

Think about initial organisation and administration

- Be familiar with your Faculty's information for staff teaching offshore
- Double-check your student enrolment information - correct class lists can be hard to get before you leave
- Ensure you have a list of students
- Keep attendance records
- Keep transparent records of all assessments
- Be very clear about Newcastle University rules relating to enrolment, assessment, load, changing courses
- Check out beforehand the appropriateness of local university accommodation before you accept it
- If possible budget in a night after your teaching to recover before returning.

Health

- Check health warnings on the DFAT website
- Go to a travel doctor for updated requirements for immunisation - University pays; check MSG tolerance
- Ask your doctor to list all your medications for immigration checks
- Take a First Aid Kit including antibiotics and medications for stomach pain, indigestion, diarrhoea; gastrolyte; betadine ready to use gargle
- Be prepared for minor infections such as gastro and colds
- Allow for widespread smoking including confined areas
- Standards of health and hygiene are different from yours
- Exercise regularly on the plane!

References and further reading

1. CDIP Toolkit Theory Into Practice Strategies Teaching Small Groups
 2. Carroll, J., 'Six Things I did not Know Four Years Ago about Dealing with Plagiarism', in Marsden, H. and Hicks, M., Eds., *Educational Integrity: Plagiarism and Other Perplexities*, Proc. Inaugural Educational Integrity Conf., Uni. South Aust., Adelaide, November 2003.
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- Cultural Sensitivity Booklet. The University of Newcastle. http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/equity/documents/cultural_sensitivity_book.pdf
- University of Newcastle Inclusive Teaching and Learning Guideline <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000750.html>
- University of Newcastle Inclusive Language Guidelines <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000797.html>