

Association for Academic Language and Learning Position Statement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This revised position statement, first conceptualised in 1999¹, outlines the perspectives of the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) on the range of knowledge, professional insights, and expertise requisite for academic language and learning educators in higher and further education. Aligned with and endorsed by the Association, it highlights the common roles, values, qualities, and objectives of academic language and learning (ALL) educators. In particular, it emphasises the academic role of our positions, and makes recommendations on the integration of our work into the learning and teaching structure of our institutions.

All Australian universities employ staff in centralised or faculty-based positions to provide academic language and learning development to both undergraduate and graduate students in degree programs². A number of universities have strong links with the vocational and further education sector and ALL educators employed in these institutions work to strengthen pathways for students across the sectors.

Many of us have also become increasingly involved in academic staff and curricula development, and the teaching of credit bearing subjects. We work cooperatively and collaboratively with colleagues in a wide range of disciplines, and play a valuable role for our students, colleagues and institutions in developing appropriate academic language and learning strategies. This role is an important one in higher and further education institutions, given the value attached to maintaining and developing excellence in learning and teaching, and given that there is good evidence that we contribute significantly to higher and further education students' success, retention and timely completion.

WHO ARE WE?

Academic Language and Learning (ALL) educators are part of a nationwide community of professional practice which has a well-established character in Australian higher and further education. ALL educators play a valuable role in their higher and further education institutions by providing research-informed teaching both inside and outside curricula to assist students in developing appropriate academic language and learning expertise; by collaborating with other higher and further education staff in the development of curricula so that they provide better learning opportunities for students' language and learning development; and by contributing to the development of policy in relation to academic language and learning. Our work is underpinned by strong theoretical understandings of language and learning pedagogy, and from this we make a crucial contribution to the quality and equity of student learning.

This role is an important one in today's higher and further education institutions, given the increasing pressures to maintain excellence in learning and teaching with diminishing resources and given that there is good evidence that ALL educators are indeed able to impact on students' development of learning strategies, and overall success and retention.

¹ A. Berghout-Vanderwal (U. Newcastle), M. Hicks (U. South Australia), U McGowan (U. Adelaide) and E. Carmichael (U. Western Sydney).

² Table of ALL centres/units, retrieved from: <http://www.aall.org.au/australian-all-centres>

We may be employed as academic, general, or professional staff, and are preferably integrated into the academic structure of the institution. We work with local and international students, onshore and offshore, pre-tertiary and tertiary, across levels and disciplines. From this we contribute to liaison with and advocacy for students, professional and curriculum development, teaching practice, and higher education policy. In 2008-2010, for example, AALL was represented on the Steering Committee for the 'Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities'.

It is our experience that effective work with students and staff requires that we are engaged in academic research, both to advance the theoretical basis of our field, and develop and maintain high standards of pedagogical practice and professional expertise.

VALUES

We share a common professional ethos, predicated on social justice, which is based on the following values:

1. equality of opportunity for all students to access the educational processes of higher and further education courses in Australia;
2. equality of opportunity for all students to achieve their full academic potential and to become lifelong learners;
3. cultural diversity in which all students are encouraged to contribute equally to, and benefit equally from, the knowledges and expertise available at the tertiary level.

PRINCIPLES

In our professional roles, we are guided by the following principles:

1. that students' academic language and learning needs are best addressed in an explicit and developmental manner, and the development of lifelong learning strategies is encouraged and supported;
2. that we collaborate with institutional colleagues on student learning goals, curricula, teaching and assessment, in order to improve the teaching and learning culture within higher and further education institutions;
3. that a variety of modes of teaching—including one-to-one consultations, group work, collaborative teaching, distance learning and open learning modes of delivery—are appropriate;
4. that we are appropriately and adequately resourced by our institutions for teaching, research and professional development in order to maintain and extend our high pedagogical standards and professional expertise;
5. that in our role we are integral to the process of improving the quality of learning and teaching in higher and further education institutions.

OBJECTIVES

In our professional roles, our core objectives align with those of the Association for Academic Language and Learning, that is to:

1. work towards an institutional environment which provides access to the highest quality of learning and teaching experiences for all students and staff;
2. support the development of core, disciplinary academic and professional language and learning strategies and attributes in all higher education students, such that they become independent learners;
3. strengthen the capacity of institutional courses and programs to explicitly identify and address students' academic language and learning needs;

4. foster the recognition of the academic nature of the work of language and learning development through individual and collaborative research within and across higher education institutions nationally and internationally;
5. promote quality, diversity, internationalisation and flexibility in language and learning development;
6. use publications and conferences to inform the wider academic community about the pedagogies and practices of language and learning development in higher and further education; and
7. demonstrate professional leadership in using innovative pedagogical theory and practice and emerging technologies.

As Aitchison and Lee observe: 'the particular nature and focus of our work, whether learning, literacy, language, numeracy or e-learning, reflects the variations of theoretical, historical, cultural and pragmatic conditions of local institutional environments and diverse informing disciplines such as linguistics, education, anthropology, and discourse theory.'³ Equally, our institutional contexts are diverse and this diversity informs our professional qualities, qualifications, experience and research.

QUALITIES

Within our diversity, the following qualities are essential to our profession:

1. a willingness and ability to identify and address the changing needs of higher and further education students and staff in relation to the development of students' academic language and learning, and to utilise a range of teaching modes to address those needs;
2. effective communication and interpersonal skills; and
3. an understanding of a wide range of issues related to adult learning in higher and further education contexts.

QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE AND RESEARCH

For us to fulfil our role, across disciplines and levels, it is appropriate that we have:

1. graduate qualifications or progression towards a higher degree in a discipline with a strong relevance to academic language and learning work;
2. appropriate other qualifications commensurate with the academic nature of academic language and learning practice and pedagogy;
3. an understanding of appropriate strategies for analysing discipline-specific discourses and information literacies;
4. proven experience in teaching others to develop the strategies needed to engage effectively in academic discourses and literacies, at a higher or further education level;
5. proven interest in undertaking and publishing research relevant to the position; and
6. access to pre-employment training and continuing professional development opportunities.

Qualifications:

1. graduate qualifications or progression towards a higher degree in an informing discipline; and
2. appropriate other qualifications in relation to local institutional role, e.g., a TESOL qualification in institutions with large number of English as an additional language (EAL) students.

³ C. Aitchison and A. Lee 2006. 'Research writing: problems and pedagogies,' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(3): p.267.

Attributes:

1. demonstrated capacity to operate in a challenging environment and to respond flexibly to rapidly changing educational situations; and
2. ability to relate to students of widely differing backgrounds and levels of competence in English across a range of disciplines.

Knowledge of:

1. issues regarding the development of higher and further education students' academic language and learning; and
2. language learning principles and teaching methods as they apply to the development of higher and further education students' discipline-specific discourses and literacies.

Experience required:

1. teaching both Australian residents and overseas higher and further education students;
2. developing, delivering and evaluating educational programs, preferably language and learning programs, aimed at students across a range of disciplines/fields; and
3. research interest(s), and preferably experience, relevant to the ALL educator's institutional context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Academic Language and Learning professionals to be able to fulfil our role adequately and to provide ongoing educational programs for higher and further education students and staff, it is recommended that:

1. our teaching and research in academic language and learning be established as an integral and on-going part of the institution's environment;
2. each institution provide a secure funding basis for academic language and learning appropriate for the student population, and that appropriate attempts are made by the institution to increase this funding in line with student population growth, monitoring requirements on an annual to triennial basis;
3. institutions recognise the academic nature of the position of academic language and learning educators;
4. institutions encourage academic language and learning educators to engage in active research in relation to all aspects of academic language and learning in higher education;
5. institutions develop appropriate appointment and professional development strategies for academic language and learning educators that reflect the unique nature of the work in both centralised academic language and learning units/centres, and within departments or faculties.

Revised and updated by Alex Barthel, UTS and Annie Bartlett, ANU

Endorsed by the AALL Executive Committee after consultation with the AALL membership

© 2010, Association for Academic Language and Learning

contact: Alex Barthel, lexybar@gmail.com