Title: Building a community of teaching academics

Abstract

There have always been academics whose passion has been education rather than research. The contribution and commitment of these faculty, while often valued within their own department, has largely gone unrecognized at an institutional level. However, this is slowly changing. More and more institutions are now appointing teaching academics with the same conditions and status as more 'traditional' academics including tenure, access to sabbaticals, and professional development opportunities. This workshop is aimed at extending our networks and building a community of teaching academics.

Keywords: teaching academics; advocacy; career management

Session format: Roundtable discussion

Length: 60 minutes

Introduction:

2020 has been an 'unprecedented' year. Little did we know when some of us gathered in Christchurch for the bi-annual international MOBTS conference in late January, to share our passion for education and learning with colleagues from across the globe, that less than 2 months later international borders would be closed, many of our students would be called back to their home institutions, and we would all be grappling with shifting our courses to be delivered online.   As the year has progressed the impact of the global pandemic has been plain for all to see; with the sharp decreases from student income resulting in budget cuts to capital works and operational budgets, job losses and research subsidies under threat. The attention the sector has received in the press has brought into sharp focus the imbalance of revenue generated by 'teaching' and the revenue invested into the teaching activities by universities (Patty 2020; Quester 2020; Ross 2020 a + b).

The impact of the pandemic is forcing university leaders to re-balance their mission, to focus on education – both to ensure they are supporting existing students to achieve educational outcomes in these disrupted learning environments, but also as a means to position themselves as 'leaders' to attract future students. All academics with teaching responsibilities have had a massive increase in work this year, as we have pivoted from F2F to online teaching at short notice, address the anxieties of our students as they have been caught up in a quickly changing learning environment, as well a deal with increased job insecurity and anxiety as rumors of financial difficulties and job losses have dominated the sector. For those of us who are 'education focused' or 'teaching scholars' (hereafter 'teaching academics') we have had the added burden of being expected to be at the forefront of this educational revolution while also having to pivot our courses, and deal with our own and our student's anxieties.

Over the past 10 years in the region the fastest growing academic role in universities has been 'teaching academic' positions who are employed on either long term contracts with the same employment benefits as 'standard' academics (Macfarlane 2011, Gehrke and Kezar 2015, Broadbent et al 2018). In some institutions teaching academics are tenured positions. However, having a 'non-standard' role in any organization can be challenging; having one in academia which has a veneer of tradition spanning centuries can make this extremely disconcerting (Geschwind and Brostrom 2015; Tight 2016; Nyamapfene 2018). Our round table workshop is designed to continue to build a community to provide support to teaching academics as well as to advocate and champion the invaluable work performed by these academics. In the next section we provide a more detailed examination of the development of these roles as well as a number of challenges teaching academics face both within their institution as well as within the academy more broadly.

Supporting the teaching academic

The stereotype of an academic is of a (slightly eccentric) world expert in a very narrow field. The academic hides away from the world engaging in deeply intellectual pursuits, producing research and publishing papers and books. The academic then imparts this intellectual wisdom to their students in large lecture halls.

While academics receive rigorous training in research, indeed a PhD is effectively an 'apprenticeship' in research, often followed by a post-doctoral appointment (yet further training in research), there is often little training given to an academic in the mechanics of teaching let alone specialized pedagogical training (Norton 2013; Probert 2013; Broadbent et al 2018). For many people in the wider community, tertiary institutions ARE places of education, their research mission and output are largely hidden, particularly for Business

Schools. Business School academics are not 'curing cancer' or doing 'real science' and therefore members of the wider community equate business school academics as teachers. However, we know this is not the case within the Business School. Research rankings and grant income contribute greatly to global league tables, which leads to institution reputation which then is used to attract students (and their revenue streams) (Khurana 2007, Thomas and Peters 2012). This complicated and interconnected relationship between research and teaching requires academics to perform highly in research output AND in teaching practice (usually measured by student satisfaction ratings).

For many years, there has been committed and dedicated educators who have often sacrificed the security of stable employment (for example sessional/ adjunct workforce), or who have chosen to forego the opportunity of promotion and / or tenure to have reduced research responsibilities and invest in the educational mission of the institution (May, Peetz and Strachan 2013; Broadbent et al 2018). However, tertiary institutions are realizing that to meet their strategic outcomes and provide students with an engaging learning environment, the institution needs to appoint faculty whose sole responsibility is the educational mission of their School, Faculty, and institution.

One of the benefits we have personally experienced with the introduction of teaching academic roles, is the development across the institution of a community of academics all committed to education. While many of these colleagues have also been employed at the institution for many years (like us), there had been no shared identify and few opportunities for us to engage formally. With formal recognition of the contribution we make to the institution, and investment in professional development activities and collaborative cross-faculty initiatives we are slowly building acceptance across the institution of our place in the strategic future of the institution.

In this workshop we propose to build a community of teaching academics across institutions. We can explore issues as well as share strategies and ideas on how to build a strong identity around the important contribution teaching academics make to the ongoing survival of our universities. In doing so, this workshop will provide a forum in which like-minded individuals can start to build a community of teaching academics (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder 2002, Webber 2016). The community will not compete with existing professional bodies or conferences, in that our focus is on the professional development and achievements of members, rather than on the day to day educational practices we engage in, nor on educational research and SoTL. MOBTS with it's central mission to celebrate and enhance the practice of teaching is a perfect partner for this community. Through the development of our community, we can benchmark best practice employment opportunities, provide support and mentoring for promotion and employment opportunities, and establish a network of like-minded individuals that will facilitate opportunities for study visits and sabbaticals.

Workshop Description:

This round table session is designed to initiate a global community among teaching academics. The session will provide an opportunity for participants to share their successes and the challenges (both along the way to this point, as well as into the future) in being seen as a 'real' academic among more 'traditional minded' colleagues and start building networks of similarly motivated colleagues at other institutions around the globe.

The workshop agenda:

Time	Activity	Lead
5 mins	Welcome and introductions.	Facilitators
10 mins	Uncovering our stories Participants will be invited to share their stories with others in breakout groups, looking for similarities in motivation etc., also challenges and issues they have/ are facing within these roles Aim: introduction and building networks	Participants
10 minutes	Debrief: sharing our stories	Facilitators
10 minutes	Changing higher educational landscape Discussion: the ways in which the educational landscape is changing and how this is driving the push for 'new' definitions of 'academic' and value creation within higher education.	All
10 minutes	A community of teaching academics Discussion (breakout rooms): what does the future hold for 'us' (teaching academics)? What would we like to achieve from a community? (eg 'mutual support', exchange of ideas and 'best practice', How might a global community operate? What goals or aims would we like to achieve?	Participants
15 minutes	Summarize outcomes from the workshop, discuss next steps and possible opportunities and farewells	All

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