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Apprenticing students to academic discourse: Using student and teacher feedback to analyse the extent to which a discipline-specific academic literacies program works

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Concerns among staff in the Linguistics Department at Macquarie University regarding the disparate and at times unsatisfactory level of academic literacy skills of commencing postgraduate applied linguistics students have been increasing. Since staff agreed that students with English as their L1 or as an additional language might benefit from early intervention, an academic literacies course was developed for and made available to those students. The course consisted of a one-week intensive discipline-specific program followed by a 12 week program. The one-week program was offered as a full-time intensive course and the 12 week program was offered on a part-time basis. Attendance in both phases was non-compulsory. This paper reports on the rationale for the choice of key content areas for both phases of the program. The relevance and effectiveness of choices made becomes evident when students' and teachers' evaluations of both phases are reviewed. Some of the challenges encountered during the delivery of both phases are discussed. Recommendations regarding changes that could be implemented in the delivery of such programs are also put forward.

Key Words: academic literacies, academic writing course, graduate student writing, diagnostic tool, syllabus design, discourse communities

1. Introduction

The design, implementation and delivery of a relevant and effective post-enrolment discipline-specific academic literacies program for tertiary students presents many challenges. The development of an effective tool to diagnose students' needs is the initial challenge. Once these needs are identified, the next challenge when designing the syllabus is not only to address those needs but also to consider the demands posed by the specific academic literacy practices and expectations embedded in the discourse community to which students are being apprenticed (Gee, 2008). While this involves building into the syllabus opportunities to scaffold students in their approach to discipline-specific genres, text types (Paltridge, 2006) and assessments they will encounter, it also involves reflecting teachers' expectations about students' academic literacy needs as well as recognising students' own perceptions about those needs. An academic literacies course must meet these challenges while negotiating students' workload and other issues that can sometimes constrain students' availability and willingness to attend such courses (see Lizzio, Wilson, & Simons, 2002 for an overview of such constraints).

The wide-range of academic literacy courses on offer at Australian universities and the impetus behind the *Good Practice Principles* (2008) attest to the reasoning behind the development of such courses for international students. Recent studies (Abasi, 2008; Lebcir, 2008; Johnson, 2008) highlight some of the challenges faced by academic literacy professionals when embarking on such development.

Although program developers designing the academic literacies program described in this paper certainly experienced some of these challenges, they hope that an outline of the means by which the challenges were overcome may be useful to other academic literacy specialists when they embark on the design and delivery of similar programs in the future. Therefore, the program developers report in this paper on the rationale for the choice of a diagnostic assessment tool, and for the choice of key content areas for both phases of the academic literacies program. They also report on students' and teachers' evaluations of both phases and consider strategies that could be implemented in the delivery of similar academic literacies programs in order to negotiate some of the challenges such programs pose.

The program, conceived of as a two-phased academic literacies program, was developed for students new to Masters by coursework studies in applied linguistics at Macquarie University. The first phase involved an intensive one-week induction program delivered in the first week of semester. Beginning with a diagnosis of students' academic literacy needs, the program was designed to introduce students to aspects of academic literacy within their discipline while building their awareness of faculty expectations and assessment practices. The second phase, following immediately after the first one, was a 12 week discipline-specific academic literacies program which consisted of individual consultations and group workshops catering to students' needs as identified from students' self-assessment at the end of the one-week program, and also driven by students' requests as further needs emerged during the semester. An analysis of teacher and student feedback collected at the end of both phases shows that the delivery mode adopted resulted in the successful negotiation of the challenges mentioned above. This led to students' perception of the program as being relevant to their needs and therefore effective.

2. Context

Problems related to international students' English language proficiency levels were highlighted by Birrell, Hawthorne, and Richardson (2006) in the *Evaluation of the General Skilled Migration Categories Report*. Serious concerns were raised in this report regarding not only international students' language standards at entry to Australian tertiary institutions, but also upon graduation. These findings prompted media coverage and public debate which acted as a catalyst for the organisation of a National Symposium on the English Language Competence of International Students (National Symposium). This symposium was organised by Australian Education International and the International Education Association of Australia and was held in Sydney on 14 August 2007.

Soon after the National Symposium was held, English Australia (EA) commissioned a group of expert TESOL practitioners to develop a set of guidelines for its members. These practitioners then produced a document, released by EA in April 2008, entitled, *Best Practice in English Language Programs with Direct Entry to High School, Vocational Training and Higher Education Study.*

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) is another stakeholder which became increasingly aware of the difficulties that international students must overcome due to their English language proficiency levels. Therefore, DEEWR commissioned the production of the *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency of International Students in Australian Universities* (Good Practice Principles Report). The report, produced by a steering committee convened by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), defines students' English language proficiency as "the ability to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written

contexts while completing their university studies" (DEEWR, 2009). The report comprises a set of guidelines to be implemented as quality enhancement activities for the Australian university sector in the area of English Language Proficiency. It also includes a submission prepared by the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) between April and June 2008 regarding the academic language support available in 39 Australian universities. This submission has recently been updated (2010) on the AALL website (http://www.aall.org.au/).

In 2009, building on the 2007 AALL funded project, *Towards Benchmarking AALL Practices*, the Learning Development Unit at the University of Wollongong started the development of a searchable database of current academic language and learning (ALL) practices within Australian universities through an AALL funded research project entitled, *Promoting on-going cross institutional AALL collegiality and professionalism*. While we await the launch of this database, it can be gauged from the *Table of ALL activities/service provision by university* (Barthel, 2010) that professional academic literacy practices take different forms across the Australian university sector. Some universities provide centralised ALL services to students while others offer decentralised services. Both credit bearing and non-credit bearing courses are offered. Of the 33 credit bearing courses on offer, 19 are integrated courses and 14 are generic courses. The non-credit bearing courses total 70, with 33 of these offered as integrated courses and 37 as generic courses. This shows an improvement when compared to the findings by Ransom and Greig (2007) who conducted a benchmarking exercise for the Language and Learning Skills Unit (LLSU) at the University of Melbourne and found that only six universities offered credit-bearing academic literacy support courses within the Group of Eight and three international Universitas 21 partner institutions. Further, Melles et al. (2005, p. 292) identified a further three credit bearing courses that do not appear in the AALL review.

The type of ALL support provided for students will depend on the academic culture prevalent in each institution. For example, the degree of collaboration between ALL practitioners and discipline lecturers will determine whether ALL support can be embedded in course units. Also, practical considerations such as timetabling and room and staff availability will impact on the type and number of ALL courses provided. The credit structure of the degree programs has for some time now been put forward as an important consideration for institutions when deciding whether to make ALL courses credit or non-credit bearing, even though cross-institutional comparability and increased motivation through positive feedback have been given as reasons to make ALL courses credit bearing (Bolton, 1990). However, the strategy of embedding the development of academic skills as an integral element of discipline-specific units of study is increasingly being implemented in Australian universities (Baik & Greig, 2009; Evans, Tindale, Cable, & Mead, 2009; Skillen, James, Percy, Tootel, & Irvine, 2003).

In the specific area of ALL support for postgraduate students, several Australian universities have different strategies in place. Adelaide University has been offering an integrative bridging program for its international postgraduate students since 1994, (Cargill, Cadman, & McGowan, 2001). Students are streamed into coursework and research strands and within those strands into discipline-specific programs. The programs are delivered as part of the first semester of studies and aim to induct students into academic practices with a focus on writing. Details regarding the curriculum and various strands offered are available at http://www.adelaide.edu.au/graduatecentre/rep/ibp/

The University of Melbourne offers a credit-bearing English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course to postgraduate international students, delivered at the beginning of students' postgraduate studies and concurrently with their degree programs during their first semester of study (Storch & Tapper, 2009). Faculty-based English language support advisers for international students are also available (Woodward-Kron, 2007).

At the University of New South Wales, the "role of the researcher" is the focus of a 40 hour pilot intensive academic preparation program (IAPP) for international postgraduate research students prior to the commencement of their first semester of study (Jones & Farrell, 2009).

Macquarie University, as part of its quality assurance process and in line with the *Good Practice Principles*, is undergoing an academic restructure as set out in the *White Paper* (Macquarie University, 2008). In keeping with the guidelines and rationale for this restructure, the project outlined in this paper by its course developers focused on meeting discipline-specific academic literacy needs of postgraduate students enrolled in the Linguistics Department. In effect, applied linguists had for some time voiced concerns regarding the difficulties those students face in meeting academic expectations in writing and reading for their discipline. Therefore, the Academic Skills Adviser in collaboration with a Linguistics lecturer with a background in EAP curriculum development and in teaching academic literacies to both native and non-native English speakers, developed a discipline-specific diagnostic assessment tool, a one-week intensive academic literacies program and a one-semester academic literacies program. In 2008, this project was funded for development through the Macquarie University Learning and Teaching Priority Grant Scheme. In 2009, students enrolled in their first semester of postgraduate studies in applied linguistics were offered the opportunity to have their academic literacy skills assessed and to participate in these programs.

3. Course Status

The course developers decided to offer the course as a non-credit bearing course which could be attended on a voluntary basis. This mode of delivery was adopted to maximise attendance since the fact that students would not be burdened with an extra fee would probably result in a larger cohort. By making attendance voluntary it was hoped that students attending would be more motivated to learn.

4. Project participants

Participants were eight postgraduate applied linguistics coursework students whose countries of origin were: Australia, China, England, Indonesia, Japan, Korea and USA. Their academic background was varied and spanned areas such as Arts (including Russian, German, French, History, English literature and Chinese literature), Science, and Theology. The students had worked in countries as culturally diverse as Russia and Taiwan. Their professional roles included IELTS examiner, EFL teacher, high school teacher, English Head Teacher, and curriculum developer.

5. Post-enrolment diagnostic assessment tool

According to the *Table of ALL activities/service provision by university* (2010), 25 universities conduct post-entry language assessments (PELAs). Some examples of the assessment tools used are MASUS (Measuring the Academic Skills of University Students) at Sydney University and the University of New South Wales, MELSUS (Measurement of English Language Skills of University Students) at Wollongong University, and DELA (The diagnostic English language assessment) at the University of Melbourne. Parallel models emerged at the University of Auckland with the development of DELNA (Diagnostic English language needs assessment) (Elder, Erlam, & von Randow, 2002) and at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, with the implementation of CAEL (Canadian Academic English Language Assessment) (Hirsh, 2007). At the University of Technology in Sydney, a pan institution Post Enrolment Language Assessment (PELA) project is being implemented. In her recent survey of current practice in 34 Australian universities, Dunworth (2009) reveals that, "... over one third of Australia's universities offer some kind of PELA, with many more considering their introduction", and further promotes the many advantages for institutions in using a single diagnostic tool. This wide variety of diagnostic assessment tools developed to date across the

university sector also appears to reinforce Carroll's (2005, p. 37) claim that due to the limitations of current language testing there are difficulties involved in designing an academic language proficiency test that can be used across disciplines and faculties.

However, while recognising some of these difficulties, program developers at Macquarie chose to set about designing a diagnostic tool to meet the specific needs of postgraduate coursework students studying applied linguistics. Initially, drawing on the experience of researchers within the Linguistics Department at Macquarie University who have taught and researched extensively in the area of academic literacy (Hall, 2001; Jones & Sin, 2004; Agosti & Bernat, 2008; Brick, 2006), it was decided that four features of academic writing that students regularly find difficulty with should be measured by a diagnostic tool. These four features were:

- selecting and structuring of appropriate genre
- critical analysis
- appropriate use of scholarly literature
- hedging.

The diagnostic tool adopted the form of the production of an essay. The question set was: *How will studying within the Linguistics Department at Macquarie University differ from studying at other universities where I have previously been a student?* This question was posed in order to draw on, validate and gauge the extent of the experience and knowledge that students possessed, not only in the area of academic literacies, but also in the areas of study skills and cross-cultural awareness.

The results yielded by this tool confirmed the relevance of some of the choices that the course developers had already made regarding the topics to be included in the syllabus for the one-week program. The decision regarding what topics needed to be covered had initially been made based on a review of assignments set for applied linguistics subjects and also on a review of a sample of the written responses to these assignments produced by previous applied linguistics students. The input of staff teaching in applied linguistics and that of the Academic Skills Adviser, who are conversant with recurring issues that postgraduate students face when completing written assignments, had also contributed significantly to the syllabus choices made.

6. Theoretical underpinnings for the one-week program

Literacy practices are of a quite specific nature since they are social practices embedded in a specific context (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Baynham, 1995; Johns, 1997; Lankshear, 1997; Street, 1984, 1995). This makes it imperative to raise students' awareness of those practices to enable them to read texts "… in much the same way as the professor does" (Gee, 2008, p. 163) so that they can then write texts that conform to the literacy practices specific to their discipline. As Bachman (1990), points out, students should be helped to develop not only language competence but also strategic competence, that is, shown how language is used in different contexts according to the function that texts are fulfilling in those contexts. In addition, students need to be made aware of the fact that the academic texts that they encounter and are expected to produce are of an ideological nature (Lillis, 2003, p. 194). So, if the teaching-learning cycle within an academic literacies program is to be effective, its point of departure must be a careful consideration of the purposes for which students need to develop literacy practices (Johns, 1997). Explicitly drawing the students' attention to structural patterns and writing conventions characteristic of academic texts will hopefully help them achieve those purposes and become effective members of the discourse community with which they intend to engage (Lea & Street, 2006). Therefore, recognising these factors, course developers built into the syllabus for the one-week program opportunities for students to become aware of the influence that context of culture and context of situation bear on texts (Halliday & Hasan, 1985).

When considering students entering postgraduate studies in applied linguistics at Macquarie University, past experience shows that regardless of whether they are international or local students, many students will not have been exposed to the academic literacy conventions and expectations typical of an Australian tertiary academic context. In addition, these conventions and expectations might result in students needing to accept values that, though intrinsic to the new discourse they are becoming proficient in, might be in conflict with those of other discourses of which they are also members (Gee, 2008, p. 162). However, as Gee (2008, pp. 166-67) rightfully points out, making "the rules of the game" accessible to students is a difficult process that might be fraught with problems.

One strategy that can assist students to engage with the discourse practices prevalent in their field of study is the use of simulation tasks as has been suggested by Horowitz (1986, p. 456) who identifies three stages as necessary for facilitating simulation. Table 1 below sets out the topics that course developers included in the one-week academic literacies program as they relate to each of the stages that Horowitz (1986) has identified. Given time constraints for course delivery, the program focused mainly on the development of some of the discipline-specific academic literacy "norms, values and conventions" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 485) used to explore and construct knowledge at tertiary level within the discipline of linguistics.

Table 1.

Stages of task simulation identified by Horowitz (1986)	Articulation of Horowitz's stages in the intensive one-week program
Selecting data which is relevant to a question or issue from a source or sources	Understanding the question The research process Study skills Critical reading In-text referencing Reference lists
Reorganising the data in response to the given question or issue	Summary writing Paraphrasing Critical thinking (synthesising)
Encoding the data into academic English	Plagiarism In-text referencing Reference lists Essay Journal article Paraphrasing Coherence Hedging Reporting Punctuation Nominalisation

The topics taught and the skills that were the focus of the one-week program and later the 12 week program were not presented in an atomised manner. Rather, they were approached as "cultural and contextual components of reading and writing practices in higher education" (Hallett, 2010, p. 236), and more specifically as those skills valued by teachers and researchers in applied linguistics at Macquarie University.

7. Overview of some of the topics included in the one-week program

As due to space constraints it is not possible to explore all program topics listed above in a comprehensive manner in this paper, it was decided to provide a detailed analysis of only those topics that were considered the most useful ones by both teachers and students in their evaluation.

7.1. Journal article and essay – reading and writing critically

A review of assignments set in the applied linguistics postgraduate units offered at Macquarie University revealed that the two genres that students are more likely to encounter are the journal article and the essay. Therefore, it was decided that the one-week program would focus intensively on these two genres. Based on the program developers' experience, students' diverse schooling and social experiences are factors which see them pick up critical reading and writing skills with varying degrees of success as they engage in tertiary studies. With this in mind, several scaffolding activities were provided in the one-week program to help students familiarise themselves with these genres and the text types associated with them (Paltridge, 1996, p. 237). The focus of these activities can be gauged by consulting Table 1 above.

When approaching the journal article, the aim of the one-week program was to raise students' awareness of what it means to read critically. In this context, students' attention was drawn to the importance of text structure and linguistic features, especially those related to the expression of voice. The rationale for the implementation of this methodology was that by being able to identify these features in texts they read, students should be able to use this knowledge when producing their own written texts. In line with Bakhtin (1981), Ivanič (1998), Ivanič and Camps (2001) and Matsuda and Tardy (2007), voice in this context was defined as an author's self-representation in discourse stemming not only from self-expression but also from the social relations that surround the individual.

When approaching the essay, models were used to analyse generic and textual structure elements (Paltridge, 2006) as scaffolding for students' to produce their own essays. A set of assessment criteria was also developed and given to students to use as a checklist during the writing process. Although they were guided in the analysis of generic and textual structural features characteristic of essays, this was not an attempt to control the nature of the work produced by students (Horowitz, 1986) since they were frequently encouraged to include their voice in the texts they produced. However, students were also warned that in academic settings, markers of assignments approach students' work with certain cultural expectations. Therefore, the one-week program focussed on the discourse features of the essay as a means to enable students to produce texts that would conform to those expectations and aimed to facilitate students "… becoming familiar with the normative aspects of discursive practices … [as] an important prerequisite to an understanding of divergent aspects of discursive practices" (Matsuda, 2001, p. 51). It is this familiarity that will allow students to resort to their L1 discourse practices in a way that negotiates the practices of their L2 successfully and will thus help them avoid misunderstandings or miscommunication.

The process followed in the one-week program to check students' acquisition of such skills was one of simulation (Horowitz, 1986, pp. 455-459) of university writing tasks at a smaller scale. This involved students being asked to produce a 500 word essay based on research as the summative assessment task to be completed on the last day of the program.

7.2. Plagiarism – In-text referencing and writing reference lists

The differences between borrowing someone else's work to substantiate one's claims and plagiarising the work of others (Pennycook, 1996) were discussed extensively with students in the one-week program. In this context, students were made aware of the referencing protocols implemented in their discipline by way of a detailed handout that included examples of how to reference the most frequently used sources. They were then required to complete an

in-class task which involved compiling a reference list on the basis of a variety of sources provided to them. Students' attention was also drawn to in-text referencing protocols through the analysis of examples of such practice found within authentic texts from the field of linguistics. The end-of-course summative assessment essay task called for students' knowledge of these protocols to be put into practice.

7.3. Hedging

As mentioned above, the expectation within the Australian academic context for members of its discourse community to express their voice in writing was discussed with students. It was also pointed out that while "writing with a strong voice" is acceptable in the academic literacy practices of some cultures, this is not generally the case in the Australian academic context. In line with this, students' attention was drawn to the fact that as newcomers to the discourse community of their discipline, they need to understand the importance of abiding by the academic literacy practices that are prevalent within that community. One such practice is the use of hedging, that is, using evaluative or tentative language (Crompton, 1997) as a resource to express points in a precise but cautious manner thus leaving room for negotiation and possibility while at the same time avoiding sweeping generalisations (Hyland, 1995). Hedging was introduced to the students as a strategy for both mitigating and strengthening the claims they made in their writing (Lewin, 2005).

It was further discussed that while knowledge shared by a discourse community can be presented as fact, propositions to be evaluated by that community must be presented as claims in order to avoid transgressing the pragmatic rules of politeness (Hyland, 1995). Therefore, the skilful use of hedging language was highlighted as an especially important strategy for avoiding the appearance of being too categorical when presenting new findings or controversial ideas in writing. Students' attention was drawn to their novice status in the discourse community of applied linguistics of which they are becoming members and they were made aware of the possibility that their claims may be questioned or even rejected by other more established members of their community.

Also, in order to help students develop the linguistic repertoire required for the use of hedging in their writing, the one-week program covered lexical and strategic markers as identified by Hyland (1995, pp. 36-37). In the category of lexical markers, students' attention was directed mainly to lexical and modal verbs, adverbial constructions, adjectives and nouns. The strategic markers that were discussed included ways to refer to limitations or lack of knowledge that students identified in relation to their research, as well as ways to acknowledge models, theories and methodologies put forward by established members of the discourse community of applied linguistics.

8. The relevance and effectiveness of curriculum choices for the one-week program

One of the aims of the one-week introductory program was to provide students with an overview of the main academic literacy skills they would need to function effectively within the discourse community of applied linguistics. The concept of voice was highlighted in the context of a critical approach to text production.

Another aim was to provide students with a set of resources to which they could refer when they worked independently to complete assignments in their future studies. This set of resources comprised a checklist on structure, the content and language of essays, handouts on the language of reporting and the language of hedging, an APA style referencing guide both for in-text and end-of-text referencing, a handout on questions to apply to a text when reading critically and a handout on the steps to follow in the research process.

A third aim of the program was to help students identify those areas of need that would be addressed at a deeper and more detailed level in the 12 week academic literacies program to

follow. Therefore, on the last session of the one-week program, students were asked to provide written answers to a course evaluation questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A and the answers that students provided are summarised below.

In order to introduce students to the techniques required for locating the resources and information they would need for assignment completion in the field of linguistics, a database workshop was run for them by the linguistics librarian in collaboration with the course developers. This workshop aimed to familiarise students with the library catalogue and the databases relevant to their discipline. Overall, students reported in the questionnaire that they found the database workshop was extremely useful. It was apparent while the workshop was being conducted that most of these students were unfamiliar with how to search efficiently and effectively for relevant resources.

When asked about the workload for the one-week program, students responded overall that they found it somewhat difficult. This was primarily due to a lack of enough time to both revise the content of each session and complete their homework tasks. The reason they gave for their lack of time was that some of them were already attending lectures for their degree program while some international students were still trying to settle into their new environment.

Students were also asked to rank the usefulness of the materials included in the one-week program on a scale that included the following values: Not at all useful, somewhat useful, useful, very useful and extremely useful. The responses indicated that students found:

- resources on in-text referencing, writing a reference list, and using cohesive ties to be extremely useful.
- resources on academic expectations, understanding assignment questions, searching databases, critical reading, essay structure, theme and rheme, synthesising and organising ideas, the language of reporting and the language of hedging to be very useful
- resources on summarising and paraphrasing skills to be useful.

The questionnaire also included a section for further comments from students regarding the resources they had been given. These comments as well as those made during the course delivery are summarised below.

In relation to the value of in-text referencing and writing a reference list as syllabus items, many positive comments were made. All students expressed their lack of knowledge of in-text referencing protocols. A Russian student strongly questioned on several occasions the need to include sources in her writing in order to substantiate knowledge that she already had from years of teaching experience.

Students also reported that they found essay writing difficult since the text type they were expected to produce within the discipline of linguistics at Macquarie University reflected values of the Australian tertiary academic context and these values did not align perfectly with those they associated with that genre before attending the one-week program. This was the case to varying degrees depending on the students' cultural background. Students of South-East Asian background reported having some difficulty with critical analysis of sources and organisation of ideas. While speakers of English as L1 did not express problems regarding the organisation of ideas or issues related to plagiarism, they pointed out that they had not been aware of the use of hedging language and realised, after discussing hedging during the one-week program, that they were prone to writing "sweeping statements" in their essays.

All students, regardless of their cultural background, agreed that time was needed to develop the skills they required to be able to write effectively within the discourse of linguistics. Some students indicated that they would have liked more opportunities to practise the range of academic literacy skills they had been introduced to in the program. However, this practice

could not be provided to them within the time constraints of the program given the number of academic literacy related topics that needed to be explored.

Nevertheless, students were appreciative of the opportunities provided to them within the program to engage in discourse analysis of various model essays. They felt that focussing their attention on how discourse features were used in the different models they analysed in class enabled them to include these elements in the essay that they were asked to produce on the final day of the course and this prepared them well for further assignment completion during the semester.

9. Rationale for the design and the syllabus choices for the 12 week program

To tailor the academic literacies program to the specific academic literacy needs of the cohort, the 12 week program aimed to provide students with sustainable academic literacy support based not only on the results of the diagnostic assessment conducted at the beginning of the one-week program, but also on students' perceptions about their academic literacy needs as expressed in their responses to the questionnaire they completed at the end of the one-week phase. The program developers decided to adopt a learner-centred approach (Nunan, 1995; Feez, 1998) to syllabus design for the 12 week program and therefore they decided on a flexible hybrid model that combined individual consultation sessions with group workshops.

Students were given the opportunity to nominate the particular topics that they wanted covered in the workshops while the individual consultations were offered to them as opportunities for discussing with the lecturer any difficulties they were encountering when completing assignment tasks for their degree program. The course developers concur with Woodward-Kron (2007) regarding the role that academic literacy experts can play in helping students come to grips with not only academic culture and the language requirements they need to meet expectations in the areas of academic English and discourse organisation, but also with "... the more intangible aspects of the writing requirements of their chosen discipline" (p. 254).

The hybrid approach of a combination of workshops and individual consultations was chosen so as to maximise the flexibility of delivery as it was recognised that students would be negotiating the demands of the academic literacies program with those of their degree program. In the initial design it was also envisaged that consultations and workshops would be held in alternate weeks. This format was chosen to give the lecturer time to prepare workshops that would address the specific needs expressed by students during consultations or arising from them.

10. The relevance and effectiveness of program design and syllabus choices for the 12 week program

As mentioned above, the initial design scheduled consultations and workshops to be held in alternate weeks. As time and financial constraints are two factors that prevent students from attending academic literacies courses (Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004), it is not surprising then that students requested the session frequency be open to negotiation with their lecturer. They wanted to decide when the individual consultations or workshops would take place depending on their needs throughout the semester. As to their individual consultations, students stated that rather than having one-on-one sessions with the lecturer, they wanted to discuss any difficulties they were experiencing with the lecturer but as a group rather than individually. The reason they gave for this request was that they felt that they could learn from each other's difficulties. Only one student in the group insisted on having regular individual consultations with the lecturer. Other students requested one or two individual consultations throughout the semester. The lecturer found that this flexibility of delivery, while being very beneficial for students, put more demands on her time.

A course evaluation questionnaire was given to students on the last session of the 12 week program. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix B and a summary of the students' insights regarding the course as given in their written responses is provided below.

In terms of course content, students felt that as they were given the opportunity to choose the topics for each of the workshops, the content was highly relevant to their needs. The topics they requested were: nominalisation, punctuation, reading efficiently, the dangling participle, and the use of first-person pronouns in writing. They also requested samples of high quality essays and of effective introductions and conclusions to be analysed with the lecturer.

Students unanimously reported that learning how to deconstruct assignment questions was the most important activity included in the program. They valued this activity since they felt that discussions they engaged in with other students and the lecturer led them to a better understanding of what was required of them in responding to assignment questions. Another activity that they believed assisted with fulfilling task requirements was the use of various models. One student commented: "Models of introductions and conclusions were really helpful, especially because we were asked to find ways of making high distinction ones even better so we really had to pay attention when reading the models." Students also indicated that they valued highly the feedback that the lecturer gave them on their marked assignments during consultation sessions.

In relation to the handouts they had received in the one-week program and had used throughout the 12 week program, students described these resources as a great help for when they were producing their assignments and that they had referred to them frequently. This was particularly the case with those resources provided to them on the language of reporting and on the language of hedging. The students also commented that it was easier for them to add variety to their writing by consulting these resources.

As reported in the evaluation of the one-week program, students found the database workshop very useful. However, after having completed the 12 week program, they indicated that more practice was needed to help refine their research skills and suggested that a second database session held four or five weeks after classes have commenced would be beneficial.

Also, even though students felt that they could write in an "academic way" because they had learnt how to use hedging and nominalisation, they also commented that they needed more practice in the areas of paraphrasing and applying critical thinking skills to reading and writing in order to complete assignments.

In relation to hedging, one student commented that being exposed to Hyland's (1995) article in the intensive program was like a "baptism of fire": although he felt a little overwhelmed, he realised how beneficial it had been to be made aware at an early stage of his postgraduate studies of the need to use hedging strategies when writing critically.

The introduction to referencing protocols was another topic the students appreciated even more after their first semester of studies. One student observed: "We didn't lose marks and got compliments on our reference lists and felt really sorry for other students who did lose marks in such a silly way". Another student commented: "The course should be a requirement for international students. Some of our classmates were really struggling with things like referencing which should have been taken care of at the beginning."

In her end of program evaluation, the lecturer observed that the 12 week program was also very effective in building up the self-esteem of international students who had English as an additional language because in the workshops they got the opportunity to see that the lecturer also questioned the writing skills of students for whom English was their L1. This made them realise that they, as international students, were not the only students encountering difficulties in the academic literacies area.

The lecturer taught the complete academic literacies program and observed that there were improvements in the students' writing during both the one week and the 12 week phases of

the course. She pointed out that these improvements were evident not only for those students who had English as an additional language, but also for those students who had English as their first language. Especially noticeable, were improvements in the use of sources to substantiate claims. In-text referencing was not only used appropriately by students in the writing tasks they were set during the course, but also carefully followed the referencing protocols prevalent in the Linguistics Department at Macquarie University. Students also used a number of hedging and reporting strategies in their writing giving variety to their written expression and mitigating or strengthening their claims as required. They also ceased to use sweeping statements in their written work.

The lecturer also reported that the format and content of the course seemed highly effective in meeting students' needs and recommended that these be kept unchanged for future deliveries. Nevertheless, she did advise that students would benefit from the inclusion of a second database workshop which should be scheduled at a time when they were preparing their first assignments for their postgraduate degree subjects.

11. Recommendations regarding changes that could be made to the one-week program

11.1. When to deliver the program?

Based on students' feedback it has become evident that students would benefit more from course content if the course were delivered before their semester commences. Students felt that they did not have enough time to devote to the program because, even though the sessions were held when no other classes were on, they still had to make time to attend the program in addition to attending their other lectures. In fact, they pointed out that because they were encouraged to attend the initial lectures of several subjects for their coursework program before making a definite choice of which optional units they should enrol in, they were actually spending more time at the university during the first week of term than they would in subsequent weeks. The students made a suggestion that the one-week program be delivered a week or two weeks prior to commencement of classes. When they were asked if they thought that the extra costs involved in meeting accommodation and other related expenses for two more weeks might be too heavy a burden, they stated that they did not think students would mind the extra expense given the benefits that this program would give them.

11.2. Whether to charge students for participation in the program?

When this program was first conceived, course developers discussed the issue of additional costs for the students. It was decided that since students already had high costs for their studies, charging a fee for the academic literacies program might discourage participation. However, the students who attended the program stated that they did not think the charging of a fee would have a negative impact on student participation. In fact, some students even suggested that charging a fee might have a positive impact since they felt that consumers often tend to disregard those products they do not have to pay for. They believed that charging a fee would probably result in a stronger commitment from students to attend all sessions regardless of how busy they were.

11.3. Whether to make the program credit bearing?

This issue involves a number of points. Some of these are:
  - The possibility of raising the profile of this program through making it a credit-bearing one (although caveats have been raised above when dealing with whether to charge students for participation).
  - The difficulties in adding further credit points to a degree program with an already established credit point system.

- The necessity of ensuring that the number of credit points be kept to a minimum if credits are to be allocated to such a program. This would prevent students with already well developed academic literacy skills from gaining a high grade that could be factored into a grade point average (GPA) decision particularly because, if such students chose to continue on to higher degree research, this would give them an unfair advantage. It would, therefore, be important for program developers to ensure the inclusion of an effective diagnostic assessment tool to identify these students prior to their enrolment.

11.4. Whether to make the program compulsory?

The possibility of making an academic literacies program compulsory was raised when a presentation regarding the program reported in this paper was delivered at the NSW/ACT Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) professional development seminar held at Macquarie University on 12 June 2009. Issues of equity in relation to students quickly arose in discussions with seminar attendees. Indeed, some ALL tutors and lecturers voiced their opposition to forcing students to participate in a program that might increase their overall tuition costs. They felt strongly that this should not be the case where international students were concerned, especially if the program was to be delivered pre-semester thus adding considerable expense once accommodation and related costs were added.

An argument against making such a program compulsory is the fact that some students, especially those with English as their L1, will already possess well-developed academic literacy skills and therefore might be able to independently fine-tune those skills in the course of their studies. However, the feedback provided by native-speakers who took part in the delivery of the intensive academic literacies program seems to contradict this argument. In fact, one student remarked that had he not participated in this program, he believed he would not have fully understood what was expected of him when completing assessment tasks.

12. Conclusion

The many challenges faced during the design, implementation and delivery of relevant and effective post-enrolment discipline-specific programs are not insurmountable. The program described in this paper successfully overcame these challenges through its innovative two-pronged mode of delivery. This type of delivery made it possible to not only deliver teacher-led lectures, but also to give students the opportunity to negotiate the content to be covered during the workshops and to engage with that content in an active and cooperative manner. Students were also encouraged to reflect on their academic literacy needs right from the beginning of the program through the implementation of a diagnostic assessment tool that acted as a catalyst for their engagement in thinking critically regarding academic literacies and the role of the student in an Australian academic setting. The academic literacies challenges that students would encounter in their first semester of studies formed the basis for the syllabus design of the program reported here. Students' and teachers' perceptions of these needs were met through teacher selection of topic areas to be covered, the development of discipline-specific materials and the inclusion of discipline-specific readings as well as through student-driven content for the 12 week phase of the program. While encouraging students to put forward their "wish list" kept the program very relevant to their needs, it did, however, also create more demands on the course developers' time.

The flexible mode of delivery also made it possible to successfully tackle the challenge of time constraints faced by students. As Carroll (2005, p. 37) points out, even when students realise that they need to develop their academic literacy skills, finding time to do so is difficult for them because the academic studies they are engaged in already make high demands on their time. In this context, making a flexible timetable available to students is of paramount importance.

Also, based on the students' and teachers' evaluation of the program, it can be strongly argued that there is a definite need for academic literacies programs to be made available, not

only to international students with English as an additional language, but also to both local and international students for whom English is their L1.

Within the latter group, this type of program will be particularly useful for students who are returning to university studies after a break or for those students who, having completed a first degree, have not yet mastered academic literacy skills or are newcomers to the field of linguistics. The evaluation of the academic literacies program reported in this paper by one local, mature-aged student for whom English is her L1 confirms many of the findings outlined above:

> [The course] has been a wonderful experience … Running it in an intensive full time manner is the only effective way to do it. As another student said, the pain has been worth the gain. It could be offered in the week or two before semester begins. It is a shame that all students, and in particular native speakers coming from high school, do not have access to a course like this. It would make the university experience less daunting, more worthwhile and improve results right from the start. If it was run during semester breaks, even for a small fee, I'm sure there would be takers.

We concur with Kennelly, Maldoni, and Davies (2010, p. 62) in their view that if universities accept enrolments of domestic or English as an additional language (EAL) students whose academic literacy proficiency levels will not allow them to engage in their studies effectively, those institutions then also have a duty to offer those students the support they need if they intend to claim that they are ethically engaging in the provision of educational services to those students. Indeed, putting in place mechanisms that support the development of academic literacies should be afforded the same level of importance as that which is given to the delivery of all other subjects within the curriculum (see also Hirst, Henderson, Allan, Bode, & Kocatepe, 2004, p. 67).

Although the program reported here was developed specifically for postgraduate students studying applied linguistics at Macquarie University, this model has the potential to be extended to other disciplines and to other institutions of higher education.

Acknowledgements

Appendix A. Course evaluation questionnaire

1) How useful did you find the database workshop?

Not at all useful	Not very useful	Quite useful	Very useful	Extremely useful

2) How did you find the workload?

Too difficult	Somewhat difficult	Just right	Somewhat easy	Too easy

3) How useful did you find the materials?

	Not at all useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	Extremely useful
Academic expectations					
Summarising skills					
Paraphrasing skills					
Understanding assignment questions					
Independent study skills					
Searching databases					
Critical reading					
Essay structure					
Theme and rheme					
Cohesive ties					
Synthesising ideas					
Organising ideas					
In-text referencing					
Writing a reference list					
The language of reporting					
The language of hedging					

4) How could we improve this intensive academic literacy course?

5) Please write any other comments here.

Appendix B. Questionnaire for end of course interview

This questionnaire will be used to build on the information provided by students when completing the end of course evaluation questionnaire.

1. Do you feel that the database workshop met your academic literacy needs?

    Yes   No

    If the answer is "No", the following question will be asked: What areas would you have liked to have seen covered in the database workshop?

2. What changes if any need to be made to the workload in order to meet your academic literacy needs?

3. What did you think about the materials that were provided to you during the intensive academic literacy course?

4. What changes if any need to be made to the content and/or delivery of the intensive academic literacy course?

5. What further suggestions can you make regarding the intensive academic literacy course?

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