Program Director’s Induction - Learning and Teaching Unit session

Three experienced Program Directors were asked to provide up to five items of advice in the broad area of ‘learning and teaching’ they believed were important for beginning Program Directors to take on board. The data were coded to draw out key themes which are represented in Figure 1. The connecting lines indicate one or two-way relationships.

Immediately evident is the extensive set of relationships which are associated with the role of Program Director. They have relationships with groups of people, for example, academic and professional staff, staff from UniSA services like LTU, Campus Central and the Library, and students. Further, there are themes which signify the importance of the Program Director making certain that staff and students understand the program, and the expectation that a consistent approach with both staff and students is the best way of operating. There is also a theme around managing communication between the Program Director and the students.

Figure 1. Key themes in the work of Program Directors

Raw data

Advice from experienced Program Director 1

- Setting precedents (e.g. I’ll let student “x” take a course before they have passed/have recognition of prior learning for a prerequisite). Can be very dangerous. Students talk and you set yourself up for further requests and the old line “you did it for them! Why won’t you do it for me?”
- Some students have a habit on relying on advice from “friends” – “he/she said I could”. Nip this in the bud real fast. Friends are invariably incorrect or don’t take all issues into account. So, if a student wants advice – see the PD or their Program Advisor/s.
• International students need to stick to their study plans. These match their visas. Some depart from their plan and get into dreadful strife!
• Use e-mail – setting out key information in e-mails to all students in the degree is good. Expect that they’ll read it. If they don’t, that’s not your problem. We can have an expectation that students will read what they are sent.
• Stick to teaching and learning, credit and study planning issues (which will include international student visa issues, exchange and the like). That’s plenty! If students have an admin query (e.g. a certain form, etc) direct them to Campus Central. That way, you can concentrate on the issues you should concentrate on. For example, I use a constant “out of office” on my e-mail and phone. At present, it states:

Thank you for your e-mail.
If you would like to discuss course choices, study planning, academic review of progress/notification letters or international student visa issues, please call the School of (deleted) office on 8302 (deleted) to make a telephone or face-to-face appointment. However, as advised in previous e-mails, I cannot assist with places in classes. Also, any IT related or password problems with enrolment need to be directed to Campus Central.

Regards

Advice from experienced Program Director 2
• Working closely with the various Course Coordinators to ensure the smooth planning and running of core courses in the program. This is especially important when courses are taught by sessional staff, sometimes with limited experience. Poor feedback in the CEIs reflect badly not only on the Course Coordinator but also on the program and its director.
• Working closely with the Program Support Officer and making clear what duties belong to whom. Making the PSO the first contact for students with questions will make the PDs life a lot easier.
• Being in control of longer term program development, which may include liaising with various industry bodies etc, is an important aspect. Be aware that the process for implementing program changes is a long and tedious one.
• Having a good understanding of the program, so that you are confident that for example the expected learning outcome of the program and graduate qualities is the same as the sum of the learning outcomes etc of the individual courses.
• Maintaining a good working relationship with for example Campus Central. We hold regular meetings with the CC staff, which helps me stay on top of things.

Advice from experienced Program Director 3
• Developing a culture where students take responsibility for their own program; however having said that students should be encouraged to check if unsure & not hope that the problem goes away
• Setting aside set times for student consultation particularly if responsible for large program otherwise your time will be eaten up with admin & students
• Use your program support person efficiently & help them to get to know the program
• Document student meetings. Keep a record particularly of programs of study for part-timers – work out their full program & not just semester by semester as prerequisites can become an issue
• Encourage collegial discussion & organise regular meetings for this to happen
• Program meetings should be a time to highlight successes & discuss innovative practices as well as the issues & problems. Start a meeting with the positive/highlights that have occurred
• Things will go wrong (“Sh#t happens”) so get over it!!!!