2007 AALL grants
The AALL grants committee consisted of A. Barthel, president and convenor, A. Bartlett, vice president, D. Rowland, treasurer and K. Chanock, senior academic and executive committee member (abstained form the assessment of grant application 07/02).

total AALL grants budget: $13,000, approved: $13,130

(ordered chronologically)

07/01   University of South Australia
Evaluation of 1:1 student & ALL adviser interactions
contact: marie.stevenson@unisa.edu.au

project/activity description:
The purpose of this project is to research and develop an evaluation process for sessions that ALL advisers conduct with individual students. Previously reported approaches to evaluating one to one teaching/learning interactions have been conducted for institutional purposes (as in a count of students using the services and/or their reasons for doing so) or focused on the role of the individual adviser (as in an analysis of the teacher/student dialogue). However, the expectations of both students and advisers in relation to the one to one interactions and the links between these interactions and student learning outcomes have not been explicitly investigated. One aim of the project is to investigate the criteria students use to assess the effect of ALL interactions on their learning and to incorporate the identified criteria as part of an evaluation process. As ALL practitioners are required to report to their institutions on their work such an evaluation process could balance the predominantly quantitative processes currently used and give a clearer view of the effect of ALL work on student learning.

The project will involve:
- A literature review to identify potential models for evaluating one to one interactions (from education and other disciplines)
- Focus groups with students who have attended one to one sessions, to identify student criteria
- Interview/survey of colleagues to determine their objectives for one to one interactions
- Development of an evaluation process based on the findings

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Australian National University
A picture - then 1,000 words: essay writing for visual thinkers.
contact: valli.rao@anu.edu.au

project/activity description:

Our project comes under the general category of "The production of … resources which could benefit AALL members", and meets the criterion of "web-based materials which could be put on the Association's website". Associate Professor Kate Chanock from La Trobe University and I are currently writing a book of about 90-odd pages in length, intended to meet a need for which we are not presently aware of any comparable resource.

Books on essay writing do not appear to cater specifically to visual thinkers. However, ALL advisers work each year with students who can benefit from training in visual thinking, either to make better use of their visual learning preference or to develop visual skills that are underused. Moreover, a widespread need is attested to by the existence of a number of websites with materials such as mindmapping instructions (UQ) , "advance organiser" templates, or information on learning styles (Univ of Melbourne and elsewhere).

There is not, however, a compact, inexpensive student resource which brings together ideas about visual learning style with more specialised advice about the purposes of university education, and relates both to the process and structure of essay writing. We wish to do this, and we think it will benefit AALL members because they will be able to make it available to students (either free, on the web, or at a low price for students who wish to have it "in hand" as a publication); and they will be able to use the materials in it, and adapt the ideas, for handouts in their teaching. The target audience is undergraduate students who think visually, including students with learning disabilities who might find the visual mode easier to understand than dense prose writing. ALL advisers may also find that diagrams offered in the book are useful to students with English as an Additional Language, because they present thinking processes and text structures "at-a-glance".

Our aim is to make the publication available at a very reasonable price - say $5 per copy - as we do not need to make a profit. Any money obtained from sale of copies would go to repaying loans from funding bodies which have supported the publication, including AALL. We also intend to put the book up on the ANU and La Trobe websites, as well as on the AALL website if welcome there.

We have not applied for institutional funding to publish this resource, as it is an effort that involves staff of two separate universities (which we think is a strength, from the point of view of developing AALL collaborations, but which complicates its institutional "ownership"). However, our institutions are supporting us in informal ways such as allowing time to work on the book, printing and photocopying of drafts, advice on suitable software and its use, and in the case of the ANU, substantial support for travel in order for the authors to work intensively together, as well as technical assistance with software such as Indesign and Photoshop. We gratefully acknowledge such support, but would prefer not to impose unnecessarily on our units' generosity. We may have to apply for further support from the ANU because the amount we are seeking from AALL is unlikely to cover our expenses (we do not wish to borrow more than we can hope to pay back), but it will certainly facilitate the publication.

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07/04 University of Tasmania
Recognising student learning in student-adviser consultations
contact: marian.may@utas.edu.au

project/activity description:
The project examines interaction and learning in individual student consultations with an ALL adviser, using the methodology of conversation analysis (CA), also known as talk-in-interaction, When I enquired about institutional (Teaching and Learning) funding for this research, I was told that the budget was already committed to teaching development projects. If awarded this grant, I intend to apply to the Faculty of Business Research Committee to supplement the funds, particularly at the transcription stage. They would routinely provide technical support. The next allocation of funds from the Faculty is in several months' time. As I'm on a one-year contract at this stage, applying for Faculty funds would not allow me to complete the project this year.

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07/05 University of Western Sydney
Benchmarking transition programs
contact: h.farrell@uws.edu.au

project/activity description:
UWS has been going through such a period of change that we have been doing less in the important area of cross institutional collaboration. This is an opportunity to reforge those links at a time when the UWS budgetry restrictions on the Student Learning Unit would preclude such an endeavour.

The plan is to visit other multicampus universities (VIC SA QLD NSW) to exchange ideas about First Year Experience (FYE) initiatives. As well, we plan to have an Open Forum day on the Parramatta campus (to be advertised through Unilearn and on AALL website) for academics involved in FYE to discuss best institutional practices, emerging issues and needs of future students etc. The forum and campus visits will include discussion of academic literacy and mathematics programs and will utilise Dixon's (1999) 4 stage model of organisational learning to inform the project.

It is hoped that this project will enrich learning and teaching of transition programs at each of the institutions who participate. A paper reporting on the project will be completed for submission to the AALL Journal. Additionally it is hoped that the synergies created by discussion and sharing may lead to a joint application for a Carrick Award for Australian University Teaching with one or more of the institutional participants.

This project aims to establish firmer collaborative working relationships across the AALL network and through collaboration to foster the recognition of best teaching practices related to the FYE in the participant institutions.

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07/06   University of Wollongong
Towards benchmarking AALL practices
contact: bjames@uow.edu.au

project/activity description:

In this project, we seek to do some of the initial 'leg work' that will enable AALL as a professional body to meaningfully benchmark the diverse range of practices currently employed by AALL units to support their students' development of core, disciplinary academic and professional skills and attributes. Part of this work will involve a review of current AALL practices and relevant benchmarking literature. For the final stage of the project, we propose a Benchmarking Colloquium at the 2007 AALL conference. This colloquium will enable us to take the initial project findings to the wider AALL community for discussion and for decisions about how AALL might use these findings to further AALL benchmarking activities.

Project Background

Despite the recent formation of the professional association for learning and language advisors in Australia, the Academic Association for Language and Learning (AALL), the current climate in tertiary education is one in which our units are at risk of being restructured out of existence (evidenced by the recent demise of the unit at Monash). It seems imperative at this point in time that we are able to argue for the value of learning units to higher education. To do that, we must have a full understanding of what our individual and collective contributions to the sector are in terms of inputs, processes, practices and outcomes. Such knowledge would allow us to demonstrate our effectiveness in terms of improving success and retention rates in our universities and would also provide a mechanism for sharing practice and developing a process of continuous improvements. Most importantly, it would provide a way to benchmark our practice against others.

With increased calls for accountability in higher education, especially as part of the quality agenda, there is more demand for evaluative mechanisms that demonstrate that standards are being maintained and improved (Garlick & Pryor, 2004). The Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) , for instance, has stated that in its second audit cycle (2008-2013) it will expect:

… evidence of setting, maintaining and reviewing institutional academic standards and outcomes (e.g. relating to student progress, student achievement, graduate attributes, research achievements) … together with evidence of the institution's comparative national and international performance, and that professional accreditation requirements are being met.

As relevant to the themes selected, the audit will investigate: … How are standards compared nationally? How are they compared internationally? What explicit benchmarking has there been to compare standards? How frequently does this occur? (Woodhouse, 2006).

These demands for benchmarking, identified by both individual institutions and by AUQA, provide an opportunity for AALL to act as a professional body and take the initiative in collectively identifying benchmarking indicators, models and activities that are relevant to

our learning and teaching practices. The University of Wollongong, for example, is currently preparing for its second AUQA audit cycle. During this cycle there will be a 'greater emphasis on standards and performance outcomes. In particular, UoW must report on external benchmarking activities and outcomes' (imPAQT, 2007) . Such benchmarking activities are or will become a requirement for all Australian universities. It thus seems timely that AALL acts to develop benchmarking activities that reflect our particular learning and teaching foci before these activities and foci are chosen for us.

Project Objectives

In the review stage of the project, we aim to gather information from AALL units to develop a horizontal benchmarking framework of inputs, processes, practices and outcomes across all units in Australia. Input from AALL units will build the framework and this will then be open to further review and refinement through publication on the AALL website and through discussion at the AALL conference in 2007. We will also conduct a concurrent review of relevant published benchmarking literature. This literature review will be published on the AALL website and further inform the conference discussion. At that point, we hope that the AALL community will provide direction for any future benchmarking activities.

This benchmarking project supports AALL's mission to act as a lobbying body on issues relevant to AALL members. Although each institution may develop its own framework and priority areas for benchmarking, this project is a proactive approach to establishing an AALL framework that will facilitate access for all units to benchmarking indicators that detail the value of their services to universities. Given that any individual AALL unit is a relatively small unit within the context of its particular institution, it is not expected that individual units could seek their own benchmarking funding. Even if this were possible, we are seeking funding to begin the benchmarking process for AALL as a professional group rather than as individual units.

We will specifically:
1. Review Australian University AALL websites and annual reports to develop a preliminary framework of current AALL practices.
2. Review AALL conference literature to supplement website and report reviews.
3. Develop questionnaires to be sent to all heads of AALL units based on the reviews undertaken in 1 and 2 above.
4. Conduct a concurrent review of relevant benchmarking literature.
5. Collate and analyse questionnaire responses.
6. Modify framework as a result of 5
7. Prepare report for AALL website.
8. Prepare colloquium for AALL conference.
9. Facilitate colloquium at AALL conference.
10. Support initiatives arising from AALL conference colloquium.

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07/07   University of Sydney
Student attitudes & approaches to academic writing in visual arts: creativity vs formal requirements
contact: aardington@staff.usyd.edu.au

project/activity description:
The research project aims to explore the approaches and attitudes of visual arts students to academic writing in relation to their writing assessments in a Visual Arts degree program (BVA). The immediate objective of this project is to gather information on visual arts students' approaches and attitudes to academic writing – an under-researched area in academic writing research. Our experience with teaching this group is that they are perceived by academic staff as either reluctant writers or lacking confidence in their writing ability. The research would result in an increased understanding of BVA students' writing needs, attitudes and approaches. The longer term outcome would be the design of relevant writing models and workshop materials for this group of students.

The study will be conducted at the Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. Areas for investigation include: What kinds of writing are expected? What are students' attitudes to their writing tasks? To what extent do students perceive a disjuncture between creativity and the formal demands of academic writing? How can we best support visual arts students in their practice? Attitudinal (qualitative) data will be collected through focus group discussions from both students and tutors using structured questions to elicit this information.

As a result of the initial research we intend to establish the range of BVA students' writing needs, their diverse approaches and attitudes to academic writing together with staff expectations and locate these findings within the current body of literature on writing in other discipline areas. It is anticipated that the research will assist in informing the development of more appropriate workshop materials for Visual Arts students, that will, to some extent, address students' lack of confidence in general writing ability and their confusion about and resistance to the concept of formal academic writing.

The project furthers the goals of AALL in that such an activity supports the development of core, disciplinary academic and professional skills. It promotes diversity and flexibility in language and learning development, in this case for a specific group of students. The project also gives us a chance to reflectively examine our own relationships to written texts and audiences and enhance and extend teaching and learning practices in both the written and visual domains as a means for developing appropriate learning strategies for all students.