

# Active Teaching & Learning

## International Cohorts

### GENERAL PEDAGOGICAL ISSUES

The Anglo-European Socratic discourse (philosophic disputation) approach to tutorials and seminars is likely to be a new experience for many international students. It may also present cultural difficulties for them. However, properly used this approach is likely to produce a higher level of understanding of the critical analysis skills required to be mastered by international students in the Australian university campus context.<sup>1</sup>

#### Seven Principles -

Chickering and Gamson's *Seven Principles*<sup>2</sup> guidelines and the Chickering and Erhmann's follow up on using technology to lever those *Seven Principles*<sup>3</sup> provide convenient yardsticks for the delivery of effective courses in the Socratic tradition, particularly in the context of currently available technologies. Briefly restated, the seven principles for good teaching practice are those that –

1. Encourage contact between students and faculty
2. Develop reciprocity and co-operation among students
3. Encourage active learning
4. Give prompt feedback
5. Emphasise time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

Unfortunately, we do not operate in a perfect Socratic environment –

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of the Socratic seminar method and a suggested lesson plan, see Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> Chickering, A. W. and Gamson, Z. F. (1987) *Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education* AAHE Bulletin, 39(7), pp. 3-10

<sup>3</sup> Chickering, A. W. and Ehrmann, S. C. (1996) *Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as a Lever*, AAHE Bulletin, October, pp. 3-6

1. Regular contact between students and faculty can be problematic with large lectures (often several hundred students at a sitting), large tutorials (often 30 - 40 or more), and high F2F teaching hours.
2. Reciprocity and cooperation among students can be inbuilt with group assessment tasks, but these can be time-consuming with large student classes and cohorts.
3. Active learning can be encouraged through tutorial engagement, on-line student minute books or reflective journals, on-line quizzes and a focus on scenario problem solving. This requires a time and training commitment by course coordinators to design, set-up and maintain sites and to design and test site content.
4. Giving prompt feedback can be problematic if mid-semester assessment items are either too complex or due too late in the semester. On-line quizzes can provide immediate feedback, but as indicated above they require a significant time investment by course coordinators.
5. Student time-on-task is an area that is often emphasised only as a global time commitment (e.g., 4 hours F2F requires 12 hours student self-study), rather than a more specific guide for individual self-directed assessment items. Provision of a breakdown of 'time-on-task' expectations into component parts (e.g., class preparation, assignment writing, and revision), might provide more specific guidance to students.
6. Educators often overlook the communication of high expectations to their students. Individual assessment items seldom specify the level of expectation, but it may be a useful psychological tool to provide encouragement (and warning), especially for international and other ESL students.
7. Respecting diverse talents and ways of learning implicitly suggests that a need to adopt a variety of assessment methods. Large classes, large cohorts, and a lack of available preparation time for course coordinators often make this seventh principle difficult to achieve in practice.

In their 1996 paper, Chickering and Ehrmann<sup>4</sup> gave examples of technological strategies that may be useful in addressing each of the principles. There is a discussion of issues encountered in evaluating the design issues of on-line courses in the 2001 paper of Graham and others.<sup>5</sup>

Providing students with a clear description of the examiner's expectations for assessment items is an increasingly important requirement for course co-ordinators. There are several drivers for this: firstly, equity principles dictate that students should be able to readily ascertain and understand what examiners expect of them (simply restating the general qualitative expectations for the P, C, D and HD grades is insufficient). Secondly, Business and Informatics courses often involve complex issues that are at the same time broad and deep and students need to be given some degree of clarity of what the question is asking them to do and specificity as to the expectations of the assessment regime (this is especially the case where criterion based assessment is used). In this connection, the 2001 work of Sue McGowan at University of South Australia is instructive.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, international cohorts present cultural and pedagogical challenges.

Timely mid-semester feedback is also critical, especially for those students who might underestimate the complexity and sheer volume of the course content. Without appropriate feedback, assessment submissions lose much of their utility for students. In my opinion, the design and exploitation of on-line assessment regimes will be the coming imperative for coordinators of Business and Informatics courses. In some courses, we may need more well targeted assessment items rather than fewer, as has been the trend in some faculties.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Chickering, A. W. and Ehrmann, S. C. (1996) *Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as a Lever*, AAHE Bulletin, October, pp. 3-6

<sup>5</sup> Graham, C., Cagiltay, K., Lim, B., Craner, J., and Duffy, T. M. (2001) *Seven Principles of Effective Teaching: A Practical Lens for Evaluating Online Courses*, The Technology Source, March/April 2001

<sup>6</sup> McGowan, S., *Clarifying criterion based assessment: The impact of letting students know what you want – an example in accounting theory*, Proceedings of the Accounting Educators Forum 2001, CSU 2002

<sup>7</sup> At one university at which the writer has taught, the Deputy VC Academic issued a recommendation that no course should contain more than two assessment items

### **Course Design and Delivery -**

A wide performance gap in the course design and delivery area has a propensity for many of them to be at variance with the seven principles. At one end, we have the simplistic course –

- F2F lectures based upon the chosen text using transparencies
- F2F tutorials based on questions (and answers) from a case book
- Little or no use of web-technology
- Incorporating only basic items of assessment

At the other end is the technologically advanced, *peer-reviewed* course –

- F2F lectures based upon the chosen text and using sophisticated PowerPoint or similar presentations
- On-line lecture materials (podcast enabled)
- F2F tutorials utilising questions devised by the course co-ordinator from practical professional experience with clearly structured answer templates
- On-line supplementary tutorials scheduled during the semester and tutor blogs
- On-line supplementary materials (particularly dealing with generic skill issues not covered in set text)
- Student chat rooms and a dedicated course e-mail system
- On-line quizzes and on-line assignment submission and plagiarism checks, with timely feedback
- Final invigilated exam designed to test student knowledge and skills (critical thinking, analysis, problem solving and communication).

I see two major emerging issues in connection with the delivery of courses. These are firstly, the expectations of the net-generation student; and secondly, the special needs of international and first generation domestic students from ESL backgrounds and non-European cultures. CQU has the opportunity to become the benchmark setter for Australia's contribution to both net-generation and international student pedagogy.

The net generation student has not known a world without computers. They are comfortable with technology and expect that much of their learning consumption will be available via or enhanced by, technology with which they are familiar. A book recently published (appropriately enough on the *www*) focuses upon issues of concern in connection with educating the net generation.<sup>8</sup> In a chapter contributed by Gregory Roberts to that book<sup>9</sup> the author random polled students on, inter alia, how they rate teacher traits and what was their preference for the level of interactivity in their courses. The results are illuminating.

The teacher rating factors polled<sup>10</sup> were –

1. *The professor's experience and expertise*
2. *The professor's ability to customise the class using the current technology available (for example, CourseWeb, BlackBoard, and so forth)*
3. *The professor's ability to professionally convey lecture points using contemporary software (for example, PowerPoint)*

On a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of learning importance, the respective average scores were 8, 7.64 and 7.68. Statistically, the degree of interrelationship preferred by the polled students is overwhelming. The lesson: expertise is only as important as the ability to effectively communicate that expertise *using contemporary technology*.

The preferred level of interactivity factors polled<sup>11</sup> were –

- *100 percent lecturing*
- *75 percent lecturing and 25% interactive*
- *50 percent lecturing and 50% interactive*
- *100% interactive*

Interestingly, ***all*** students polled rated the balanced (50/50) environment as the preferred option. Commonly cited was the *appropriate use* of PowerPoint to

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<sup>8</sup> Oblinger, D. G, and Oblinger J. L (Eds), *Educating the Net Generation* 2005 Educause [www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgeneration](http://www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgeneration)

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, G. R., *Technology and Learning Expectations of the Net Generation*, in *Educating the Net Generation*, Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.3.4

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.34

effectively support learning. The lesson: students want to see and hear lectures, but also want to have equal time *interacting* with teachers (and their peers?).

## **MULTICULTURALALAL COHORTS**

The ESL background student often brings a different experiential and cultural experience to the classroom. Australian universities broadly follow the Socratic tradition. Knowledge and understanding is the primary focus. Many ESL students come with a previous experiential or cultural expectation that higher education involves didactic or instructive teaching styles and rote and/or repetitive learning patterns. Further, their cultural ethical perspective may be different to that expected by Australia's still predominant Anglo-European heritage. Because many international students are 'anchored' to these expectations and perspectives, there is likely to be a degree of difficulty in their coming to terms with the need to exercise critical analysis and problem solving skills.

There are two distinct elements of internationalisation of Australian university cohorts. The most obvious to the public, is the growing number of full-fee international students choosing to complete either undergraduate or postgraduate courses under the auspices of Australian universities. Initially, universities integrated these students within Australian domestic cohorts. However, there has been an increasing concentration of these students on Australian city campuses reserved exclusively for international students.

These campuses do not provide any real opportunity for exposure of international students to domestic student cohorts. This may be contributing to a lack of engagement with Australian culture and creating a 'black-hole' issue given the high proportion of these students who will be seeking Australian professional qualifications after graduation. They will also graduate with an academic qualification that provides maximum points for permanent residency visa purposes. Their quarantine from the Australian cultural mainstream during their Business and Informatics degree studies is likely to restrict the assimilation of these future residents

by limiting their campus networking to the predominant cultures with whom they studied.

### **Cultural Literacy -**

The work of Eric D. Hirsch<sup>12</sup> (which prompted much debate in the USA regarding the teaching of American culture and the relevance of it to learning and literacy) may provide some guidance for those of us that recognise this issue. One of the relevant perspectives I have distilled from Hirsch's work is that an exposure to the common body of information a society holds (its culture?) is required for an understanding of the literature (in its widest sense) of the society concerned. Without a basic understanding of that literature, international students will not be as well empowered for their future careers as mainstream domestic students might be.

We need to take account of this potential lack of empowerment in our teaching and learning strategies. If we do not accept the responsibility of teaching our international students the relevance of culture to the basic frameworks of Australian business, law, language, and generally living within this society, they may experience difficulties in both learning and living in their new environment. In the first chapter of his book, Hirsch describes an experiment reported in the *Scientific American* about intuitive responses to requests for directions from those visually identifiable as local as compared to the responses proffered to strangers. Researchers found that respondents gave locals very brief directions – there was a presumption of pre-knowledge. However, the responses to strangers tended to be much longer and more rudimentary. Our classes are full of strangers but we often make the error of presuming that those strangers have the same amount of pre-knowledge as is held by locals. If we do not provide clear directions for these strangers in our courses, how will they know where they are supposed to be going?

Another of the major issues confronting those who teach international students on a face-to-face basis is the fact that the secondary and tertiary experience of those students will have been substantially different in their home country to that

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<sup>12</sup> Hirsch, E. D., *Cultural Literacy*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987

experienced by Australian domestic students. A prerequisite for the standard Australian lecture plus tutorial format and formal assessment regimes is the use of critical analysis skills to resolve problems by explanation or argument. This Anglo-European Socratic discourse approach to tutorials and seminars might not only be a new experience for many international students, but it may also present cultural difficulties for some.

In particular, they may lack the skills needed to break into, or even to respond appropriately to an invitation to participate in tutorial discussion. Furthermore, as previously suggested, these cohorts may exhibit an anchoring to their prior experiential or cultural learning perspectives (i.e., didactic/instructive teaching and rote/repetitive learning). These are challenges for the use of engaged learning processes (e.g., critical analysis, problem-solving, reasoning, decision-making) in our teaching and learning strategies. Engagement theory postulates that students are motivated to learn when their learning environment and tasks are meaningful.

### **Research -**

Research into the pedagogical aspects of international student cohorts in Australia is not plentiful. However, preliminary studies undertaken by Sydney<sup>13</sup> and Melbourne<sup>14</sup> Universities respectively provide some useful insights. The following points include ideas adapted or paraphrased from these studies –

1. Encouragement by more experienced peers is likely to improve participation.
2. Developing challenge strategies, such as suggesting a discussion about casting aside shyness and being “conversational” in class might pay dividends.
3. Students within international cohorts have differing degrees of English comprehension. Lecturers and tutors (particularly those teachers who are also from ESL backgrounds) need to speak clearly and more slowly than normal

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<sup>13</sup> Asmar, C. et al, *Report on Diversity and Inclusive teaching Project*, University of Sydney Institute for Teaching and Learning, 2003

<sup>14</sup> *Students from Asia: Issues in Learning and Teaching*, University of Melbourne Faculty of Education, 2004

when explaining complex issues. It may be necessary to probe to ensure proper understanding of the issue.

4. It is advisable to simplify technical language and explain words with Latin/Greek roots that may not be familiar.
5. When dealing with philosophical issues, we need to remember that Judeo-Christian cultural traditions provide the source for the Anglo-European concepts of ethics, law (especially common law), and ‘truth’ that are inherent in the theories, law, and ethical standards contained in many of our courses. We primarily teach Asian students who come from Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic, Buddhist and Confucian cultural traditions. These are “... cultures and societies which present a second set of fundamental beliefs for framing the world ...<sup>15</sup>” Our students may need particular help to properly understand those parts of the course that require an understanding of ethical and legal issues that derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition.
6. Asian students are more likely to take a “collective” approach to learning and research and may be more successful in small group learning situations. Group tasking in tutorials may provide opportunities for exploiting this predilection. Active encouragement of students to form their own study/research/revision groups might also show benefits.<sup>16</sup>
7. Asian students are likely to place a high value on outside class interaction with lecturers and tutors. This is essentially a rapport building issue and may start with as little as a nod and smile of recognition in passing. Simply enquiring about how they are going with their courses may pay a rapport dividend effect upon student participation.
8. The great majority of our students will have little or no background knowledge about Australian business practices or culture. Use tutorials to impart some basic concepts by storytelling based upon current business news items. Try to

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<sup>15</sup> See Orton, J (1995), *Becoming ‘Asia-Literate’: From rhetoric to reality*, Asian Studies Review, vol 19, no.2, pp. 73-84

<sup>16</sup> However, the need for assessment items to be the effort of an individual or group with a finite number of members means that we need to ensure students are properly aware of the difference between common research properly referenced, and plagiarism.

do this whenever a newspaper article touches upon an area that is currently being dealt with in your course – bringing ‘real World’ situations into the classroom may help orient international students to practical aspects of the topics they are studying.

9. Asian students exhibit a preference for ideas expressed in a structured or point-by-point style. Use of PowerPoint and overhead slides in both lectures *and* tutorials can be a worthwhile exercise.
10. The usual good teaching issues are also very relevant. *Teacher enthusiasm, interaction with students (eye-contact and body language) is very important.*

The Melbourne and Sydney studies also raise questions about course structure and assessment that are very relevant. A major question that arises is: “How do we cater for the teaching and learning expectations of these students in the design and delivery of our entry level taxation courses whilst maintaining the Socratic tradition?”

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS?**

Given the paucity of research into the most appropriate pedagogical strategies for international cohorts, at CQU we have the opportunity (or more importantly, the obligation) to lead the way in experimenting with new strategic directions in teaching and learning involving these students.

Australia probably has the most diverse multicultural society in the World, so from an academic perspective, seeking to improve the cultural literacy of both academics and students might be an appropriate starting point. We are in the early stages of formulating the best response and the preliminary discussions centre upon the education of both academic staff and students in relevant aspects of culture. From a research perspective, we would have the opportunity to collect data that would measure changes in the academic outcomes for students that result from the programs.

### **Cultural Education for Students -**

We are investigating a program on *Australian Cultural Literacy*, designed to provide students with a more perceptive framework for their studies and employment. We envisage that this would be a multi-week voluntary seminar offering of say 2 hours. The topics so far suggested are –

#### ***Seminar 1: Introduction to Sources of Australian Culture***

Law & ethics  
Social interactions/manners/chivalry  
Gender equality/anti-discrimination  
Multiculturalism  
Education methods (high school & university)

#### ***Seminar 2: Academic Approach***

Socratic discourse  
Student responsible learning  
Time investment  
Life-long learning  
Student discipline

#### ***Seminar 3: Legal Heritage***

‘1066 and all that’  
Judaic law  
Greek influence

Christian influence  
Governmental systems

***Seminar 4: Philosophy***

Truth  
Ethics  
Free-will  
Personal responsibility  
Fun-in-the-Sun

***Seminar 5: My Culture/Your Culture***

Before 1770  
British colonisation  
20<sup>th</sup> Century migration  
21<sup>st</sup> Century multiculturalism

***Seminar 6: Study & Assessment Strategies***

Why the lecture/tutorial format?  
Why do we need tutorial problems?  
Why don't I get full marks for my answers?  
Why only three courses per semester?  
Why is critical analysis so important?

***Seminar 7: Free Services***

The Library  
Client Services  
Learning Services Unit  
TECC  
Student Association

**Cultural Education for Academic Staff -**

We are investigating a program for academic staff on *Main Student Cultures* designed to provide them with the background knowledge and understanding that will help them to better understand how to implement good teaching strategies with our international student cohorts.

Discussions on this aspect is still at the very early stages and all constructive input will be welcome.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### The Socratic Seminar

Extracts from a 2003 article by Paraskevas and Wickens.<sup>17</sup>

“The Socratic method in adult education involves the use of systematic questions, inductive thinking, and the formulation of general definitions. Adult learners are presented with a scenario and the instructor systematically poses a series of pre-set questions. The questions are designed to channel the learners' thought processes along predetermined paths. The learners are required to use their experience and any knowledge they already possess to solve simple or more complex problems or issues posed by the questions. Subsequently, inductive techniques are used to help the learners move beyond the details of the scenario to conceptualise its broader implications. Once the generic ideas and concepts are understood, the instructor uses questions to help the students develop the rationale or a more universal definition of the concepts (Macmillan and Garrison, 1988). This way, the learners have the opportunity to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the topic explored.

In a Socratic seminar, students perform in a ‘variety of thought-demanding ways to explain, muster evidence, generalise, apply concepts, analogise, represent in a new way’ (Perkins, 1993:29). The underlying idea here is that when students actively and co-operatively develop knowledge and understanding, they are more likely to retain these attributes than if they had received them passively. In the case of adult learners who are generally more experienced than younger ones this method might be proven more effective, as a large number of them have what Kroll (1978) calls a ‘cognitive egocentrism’. That is, they find it difficult to entertain points of view other than the ones they themselves embrace.”

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#### The Nine Steps of a Socratic Lesson Plan

**Step 1.** The instructor decides on the concepts/ideas/practices that s/he wants the students to go away with.

**Step 2.** S/he then comes up with a ‘scenario’ that will be used a starting point for the discussion.

**Step 3.** A string of questions that will lead the students in the desired direction needs to be developed (a mind-map might be a useful tool here). This is the most important part of the lesson plan as the instructor has to be prepared for all kinds of answers. The dialogue may move towards a number of directions, therefore ‘plan B’ questions and counter-examples that will bring the discussion to the desired direction need to be available.

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<sup>17</sup> Paraskevas, A. and Wickens, E. (2003) *Andragogy and the Socratic Method: The Adult Learner Perspective* Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education, Volume 2, No.2, October 2003

**Step 4.** In the classroom, the instructor describes the scenario and starts the questioning string by asking, “What would you do in this situation?”

**Step 5.** Each and every answer should go through the elenchus process (tested, cross-examined and possibly refuted by counter-examples – see step 3). The instructor should be cautious not to dismiss any answer; it is the students who will refute inappropriate answers. There may be answers that were not refuted but are still not appropriate (in the eyes of the instructor). These will have to be considered as well in the next level of more complicated questioning and will probably be dismissed there.

**Step 6.** Once the basic ideas have been discussed the instructor starts to complicate the situation by adding new parameters to the scenario: “What would you do then?” Again all answers should survive the elenchus.

**Step 7.** The process goes on with adding further parameters and asking “What now?”

**Step 8.** In the case that no satisfactory result is achieved, the instructor may take the students to an out-of-the scenario ‘observing’ position, where they watch the key player (perhaps a restaurant or hotel manager) behave in the way they suggest. The instructor reposes the objective and asks: “Is this a proper course of action? Would you react in the same way? What would YOU do differently?”

**Step 9.** When a consensus is reached, the instructor wraps up by presenting the students’ solutions to the ‘scenario(s)’. It is important here that the instructor emphasises that this is the result of ‘their’ knowledge and experience achieved though the continuous questioning. The instructor thanks the students for their contributions and sets tasks for the next session.”

**Appendix 2**

**Taxonomy of Socratic Questioning**

The following table has been adapted from:

Paul, Richard, *Critical Thinking: How to Prepare Students for a Rapidly Changing World*, 1993.<sup>18</sup>

Questions of Clarification	Questions that Probe Assumptions	Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence
What do you mean by $x$ ?	What are you assuming?	What would be an example?
What is your main point?	What is Jenny assuming?	How do you know?
How does $x$ relate to $y$ ?	What could we assume instead?	Why do you think that is true?
Could you put that another way?	You seem to be assuming $x$ . Do I understand you correctly?	Do you have any evidence for that?
Is your basic point $x$ or $y$ ?		What difference does that make?
What do you think is the main issue here?	All of your reasoning depends on the idea that $x$ . Why have you based your reasoning on $x$ instead of $y$ ?	What are your reasons for saying that?
Let me see if I understand you; do you mean $x$ or $y$ ?	You seem to be assuming $x$ . How do you justify taking that for granted?	What other information do you need?
How does this relate to our problem/discussion/issue?		Could you explain your reasons to us?
What do you, Mike, mean by this remark? What do you take Mike to mean by his remark?	Is that always the case? Why do you think the assumption holds here?	Are these reasons adequate?
Jane, can you summarize in your own words what Richard said?	Why would someone make that assumption?	Why do you say that?
Richard, is this what you meant?		What led you to that belief?
Could you give me an example?		How does that apply to this case?
Would this be an example, . . . ?		What would change your mind?
Could you explain this further?		But, is that good evidence for that belief?
Would you say more about		Is there a reason to doubt that evidence?
		Who is in a position to know

<sup>18</sup> <http://ed.fnal.gov/trc/tutorial/taxonomy.html> - viewed 19th August 2006

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Questions of Clarification	Questions that Probe Assumptions	Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence
<p>that?</p> <p>Why do you say that?</p>		<p>that is true?</p> <p>What would you say to someone who said that?</p> <p>Can someone else give evidence to support that view?</p> <p>By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?</p> <p>How could we find out if that is true?</p>
Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives	Questions that Probe Implications and Consequences	Questions about the Question
<p><i>The term "imply" will require clarification when used with younger students.</i></p> <p>What are you implying by that?</p> <p>When you say <i>x</i>, are you implying <i>y</i>?</p> <p>But, if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?</p> <p>What effect would that have?</p> <p>Would that necessarily happen or only possibly/probably happen?</p> <p>What is an alternative?</p> <p>If <i>x</i> and <i>y</i> are the case, then what might also be true?</p> <p>If we say that <i>x</i> is ethical, how about <i>y</i>?</p>	<p>How can we find out?</p> <p>What does this question assume?</p> <p>Would <i>x</i> ask this question differently?</p> <p>How could someone settle this question?</p> <p>Can we break this question down at all?</p> <p>Is this question clear? Do we understand it?</p> <p>Is this question easy or hard to answer? Why?</p> <p>Does this question ask us to evaluate something? What?</p> <p>Do we all agree that this is the question?</p> <p>To answer this question, what other questions must we answer first?</p> <p>I'm not sure I understand how you are interpreting this</p>	

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<b>Questions of Clarification</b>	<b>Questions that Probe Assumptions</b>	<b>Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence</b>
	question. Is this the same as $x$ ?  How would $x$ state the issue?  Why is this issue important?  Is this the most important question, or is there an underlying question that is really the issue?	

### Appendix 3

#### Study and Examination Strategies for CQU-SIC Business & Law Students

Reproduced from Fred Rollo's Memorandum for students –

#### INTRODUCTION:

Answering accounting and business law questions in exams (and for tutorials) requires that students use critical analysis skills. These are skills that are best learned and developed by practice. That is why course profiles and textbooks in CQU business programs contain a variety of practice problems and questions. Experience shows that the most successful students in exams:

- Pre-read the text chapter/s and study guide module before each lecture
- Attempt to answer the set questions before each tutorial (best if written as if in an exam)
- Attend BOTH lectures AND tutorials (see **ATTENDANCE & DEGREE OUTCOME** below)
- Take part in tutorial discussions and raise questions on any aspect about which they are uncertain (it is less embarrassing to ask questions in class than to explain a later exam failure)
- Re-read the text chapter/s and study guide module at the end of the study week as a revision exercise
- Undertake any additional reading/research recommended in the course profile
- Revisit the questions discussed in the tutorial to ensure a full understanding of the issues covered

Remember that the recommended student commitment for each course undertaken is usually 16 hours per week (including class time). This means that students taking a standard load of 3 courses per semester **MUST** treat their studies as if it is a full-time job (48 hours per week of study!). The road is long and hard, but the end reward can be substantial for diligent students.

It is important international students understand that their Australian postgraduate university experience might be quite different to their home country undergraduate study. Postgraduate students in Australia are ***expected to accept a considerable degree of responsibility*** for their own learning (see the dot points above). If you only attend tutorials and read the course profile, you will certainly fail!

#### ATTENDANCE & DEGREE OUTCOME

Recent research has found that “... *the rate at which a student attends emerges as the strongest predictor of degree outcomes amongst a number of variables examined*”.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, it also found that “... *lectures were the most frequent type of timetabled sessions missed*.”<sup>20</sup>

The study also found that another predictor of higher results for both male and female students was a higher level of openness to experience.

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<sup>19</sup> *Gender differences in undergraduate attendance rates*, Woodfield, R et al, in Studies in Higher Education Vol. 31, No. 1, February 2006, p. 1

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.12

Accordingly, it can be concluded from this research that regular attendance and an attitude of openness to experience, is highly likely to lead to higher percentage scores for students. The clear message is: ***Attendance at both lectures and tutorials delivers higher marks!***

### **CRITICAL ANALYSIS:**

The professional work that our students will do after graduation requires that they approach their engagements with a degree of professional cynicism. In their professional life, graduates will take care to assume neither that people are always truthful, nor that they are always untruthful. That is, they need to ‘test’ facts or opinions put to them against their understanding of the World as gained through their academic and vocational education AND their accumulated general knowledge. This general knowledge will include both life experience and the continual absorption of business and economic news reports. Successful graduates understand business and the economy in which it operates.

In critically analysing arguments or positions for assignments or exams, accounting students need to consider the alternative arguments and positions, to verify the evidence offered in support of each, to test the logical basis of any underlying assumptions and identify and dishonest tricks that may have been used to ‘colour’ an argument or position. Remember that in developing critical analysis skills, there are four helpers available to you: ***how, when, why and who?*** Posing those questions about an argument or position will usually provide you with considerable material upon which to base your assignment or examination answer.

### **PROBLEM SOLVING STRATEGY:**

A useful problem solving technique for students to adopt is called IRAC. IRAC is the mnemonic for a basic problem-solving strategy used by lawyers and others in their professional (or academic) activities –

- **Issue** – Identify each issue or sub-issue
- **Rule** – State the relevant rule or theory relating to each issue or sub-issue
- **Application** – Apply the rule or theory to the relevant facts in the scenario
- **Conclusion** – Reach and justify your conclusion

### **IDENTIFYING ISSUES:**

One of the difficulties that many international students encounter is to identify the issues that the examiner is asking them to address in their answer. One strategy to practice is the ‘deconstruction’ of exam and tutorial questions into their various parts. Underlining or highlighting the various phrases that contain directions, issues, facts, etc can do this. The type of things you are looking for include –

- **Directive** or **instructional** words such as: *identify; describe; explain; comment; illustrate; give examples; distinguish; differentiate; define; why; how; when?* These words tell you what you **need to do** to properly answer the question.
- **Issue** or **subject** words are the ones that tell you what the **issue or problem is** that you are to address.
- **Fact** or **scenario** words are the ones that tell you about **the context** in which the question is framed.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

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Assignments require that you undertake research outside the set text and course materials. Furthermore, like examinations, they require the use of critical analysis skills to demonstrate to the examiner that you *understand* how the information and principles you have found in your research fit together in a meaningful way. Simply repeating facts might show that you have read a great deal, but that has little value if you have not used academic skills to deal with the data that you have gathered.

Remember that you should make a start on your assignment tasks as soon as is possible. These assessment tasks provide you with the opportunity to harvest extra marks over an extended time. If every student were diligent in their approach to the assignment tasks, the failure rate in business courses would be extremely low.

**EXAMINATION TIME BUDGET:**

You should ensure that you budget the time that you have to answer the exam. For example, if there are six questions in a 3 hour exam and each question is worth 15 marks, you would budget 30 minutes for each question (2 minutes per mark).

Avoid the temptation to “blow the budget” on a particular question. This will be very expensive if you are unable to attempt the last question properly. In our example, you may lose 15 marks outright!

If you stick to the budget, you are likely to finish the exam with minutes left “in the bank”. Those extra minutes can be spent revisiting the answers that are still unfinished or where additional mark-earning points can be made.

**GRAMMAR & FORMATTING**

Try to keep your sentences short and to the point – do not pad-out your answer. Retain your focus on the issues and the directives in the question.

**Always** use distinct paragraphs for a major idea or argument. This will facilitate the examiner identifying those separate ideas and arguments. It will also compartmentalise the issues in your mind and help to ensure that you do not miss answering parts of the question, especially if you have physically deconstructed the question (with a pencil or highlighter) to identify separate issues and tasks.

Separate your paragraphs by 2 or 3 lines. This allows space for you to insert last minute ideas or arguments when you are “spending” the minutes that you have banked. It means you can insert the comments under the idea involved, rather than as an orphan at the end of the answer.

Fred Rollo  
Program Facilitator – Business & Law (Acting)  
CQU-SIC  
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