

Designing a peer-led approach to teaching review and enhancement in academia

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Abstract

One of the challenges of 21st-century academia is meeting the often-competing demands from students, universities, and professional associations. Among many diversities, students at regional universities, such as the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), often have higher rates of first-in-family learners than metropolitan counterparts. Law academics at regional universities, then, must address the challenges of maintaining high-quality teaching to fulfil student satisfaction for a diverse student demographic, while both meeting university and professional requirements and supporting students' personal satisfaction. One avenue to support academics in enhancing teaching practices while aligning with university and professional obligations is through peer discussion, review, and enhancement of learning and teaching practice.

Peer discussion, enhancement, and review of learning and teaching practice occurs regularly on an informal basis in most academic settings. However, opportunities to engage in structured and meaningful peer review and enhancement of teaching are neither prevalent nor popular. Academic staff in the School of Law and Criminology (SLC) at USC instigated and developed an interdisciplinary, formalised framework for enhancing teaching and learning practice within the SLC, in accordance with the SLC's mission: to provide a personal, inspiring, and rigorous learning environment that empowers graduates to be career- and future-ready and able to make significant contributions to their communities. This framework, termed Peer Review and Enhancement of Practice (PREP), delivers a teaching-enhancement best-practice structure that is informed by evidence-based pedagogy and involves shared experience, self-reflection, and peer review. PREP is innovative in nature through its ground-up approach, which is driven by academic staff within the SLC, to create a collaborative space that is relevant and suitable for academic staff to address learning and teaching challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, PREP is flexible, voluntary, and organic, tailored to suit the needs and wants of academic staff. PREP also provides an opportunity for academic staff to develop portfolios that collate authentic evidence of effective learning and teaching

Keywords

peer review, learning and teaching practice, enhancement of teaching, higher education, law and criminology

Cover Page Footnote

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Introduction

Learning and teaching in higher education is influenced by many competing factors. Teaching must be responsive to the diverse student population whose demographics influence their learning needs (Hockings et al., 2008). Within every higher-education institution, bureaucratic frameworks affect teaching approaches and resourcing (Ball, 2003). Professional obligations, particularly in some disciplines such as law, demand certain content-delivery and course-design practices that can limit teaching approaches (Nagy & Robb, 2009; Baron, 2013). Finally, most academics must balance their teaching and research commitments to ensure quality teaching, as well as quality research outputs, while maintaining personal satisfaction and motivation for career development (Thornton, 2012).

Students themselves can provide valuable input into the strengths and areas for improvement within a course and, implicitly, provide insights into their changing needs and motivations (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013; Brewer-Deluce et al., 2018). However, the problems stemming from student evaluations of teaching have been widely circulated, and such evaluations of teaching can be regarded as circumspect (Borch et al., 2020). It is well documented that they are subject to systemic biases with respect to certain characteristics of teaching staff, including gender and even attractiveness (MacNell et al., 2015). For example, MacNell et al. (2015) demonstrate that students consistently rate male teachers higher than female teachers in student evaluations of teaching quality. In a different study, Riniolo et al. (2006) found that teachers who were identified as more attractive received higher student evaluations (approximately 0.8 points higher on a five-point Likert scale). Morgan (2008) has argued that students are not equipped to properly evaluate academic teaching quality in some instances. Students can be independently motivated by their results in a particular course rather than an evaluation of course or instructor effectiveness, which can bias their feedback of teaching staff (Ginns et al., 2007; Davison & Price, 2009). MacNell et al. (2015, p. 300) suggest that student evaluations may at times be based on arbitrary measures, and hence be inappropriate tools to determine or evaluate teaching quality. Further, student entitlement can stem from other factors including age, use of technology, and influence of parents, which can then influence student expectations of their higher-education experience and lead to a sense of entitlement that is reflected in their evaluations or feedback (Goldman & Martin, 2016). Using student evaluation as the sole evaluator of academic teaching performance is therefore highly problematic, and alternative approaches are needed to collate evidence of good teaching practices.

Academics striving to improve learning and teaching practices may find it difficult to access support, share their experiences, and collate evidence of their good practice. As early-career academics, namely those within five years of completing a PhD at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), we have been informally sharing our teaching experiences and resources. In the process, we have identified that a more formalised process may assist us to improve our teaching practices. We conceptualised the Peer Review and Enhancement of Practice (PREP) program with the intention of running a pilot of the program for our peers. In this way, our intention is for PREP to remain a peer-led initiative. This article documents our reflections on the conceptualisation of PREP using Rolfe et al.'s (2001; Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001, p. 529) framework for reflective practice.

Reflecting on the development of the Peer Review and Enhancement of Practice Program (PREP)

Rolfe et al.'s (2001; Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001, p. 529) framework for reflective practice challenges the traditional relationship between research and practice, with its focus on turning inwards to the "personhood" of the researcher along with the research context, participants, and society. Some of these aspects are deemed as extraneous variables in traditional research, as they may limit the generalisability of findings (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001). However, reflective practice is accepted as a process that generates knowledge, has the ability to foster professional development, and can influence the research-practice gap (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001). Rolfe et al.'s (2001) model asks three simple questions: What? So what? Now what? The first question (what) seeks to describe the situation (Brown, 2020), which can include a difficulty, role, response, action, consequences, and experiences (University of Cumbria, 2016). The second question (so what) involves explaining and analysing what happened using theory, literature, or knowledge (Brown, 2020). The third question (now what) considers how the learning outcome can be applied in future practice, which involves knowledge and theory building, action-oriented reflection, and description (Brown, 2020). Through reflective practice, the individual can challenge dominant discourses and identify areas for future development and research (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2001). This is a useful tool in higher education in that it allows the academic to critically immerse themselves into their teaching practice, resulting in new ways of thinking and doing. We will be using this framework to outline our experiences in conceptualising PREP at our institution.

Using Rolfe et al.'s (2001) model of reflection, we undertake three stages of reflection. First, in "What?", we reflect on the conceptualisation of PREP, including why we chose peer review as a method for advancing good teaching practice and our experiences in situating PREP within our institution. Second, considering "So what?" allows us to explain why a collaborative model of peer review is most suitable at our institution. Finally, in "Now what?", we consider the process we will need to undertake to run a pilot and develop PREP into a framework that provides peer review, shared experiences, professional development, and evidence collation. In this part, we also prescribe the competing considerations and challenges we will need to address as we work our way through designing this program at our institution.

"What?" – The Conceptualisation of PREP

Our workplace at USC provides an important context to academic teaching, student learning, and their challenges. USC, one of Australia's fastest growing regional universities, is among the world's top 150 "young" universities (those less than 50 years old) (USC, 2018). Student demographics are changing, with students showing an increasingly varied range of capabilities and capacity to undertake tertiary education (Edwards & van der Brugge, 2012); this is reflected at USC. Changing student demographics may be attributable to diverse factors, including students' non-English-speaking backgrounds, lower intake requirements, students' work responsibilities, their lack of adequate preparation for tertiary study, or a combination thereof (Briggs et al., 2012). As a regional university, USC encompasses a diverse student cohort, with almost 50% of USC students being first in their family to attend university, and with 23% of the total student cohort drawn from international students (USC, 2018). Despite the diversity of higher-education students, USC's law and criminology programs, situated within the School of Law and Criminology (SLC), have grown significantly since the SLC's inception in 2014. SLC now has 15 academic staff, of whom nine are early-career academics, coordinating and teaching over 40 courses and Honours programs to nearly 700 enrolled students.

As early-career academics and colleagues within the SLC, we, the authors, have over the past several years developed a practice of informally sharing teaching experiences and resources organically. We discuss our teaching approaches, share strategies that have worked well, and lament attempts that did not receive the desired effect, including processing negative student feedback. We have appreciated the value of our collegial approach to teaching, but we have also identified an ongoing need to collate evidence of good teaching practice. We have also realised that a more formalised system of developing portfolios of teaching practice and reflection would benefit our ongoing professional development (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Kift, 2005). This is particularly important for career progression when applying for promotion or external teaching accreditation, such as the Advance HE fellowship program (Advance HE, 2019). Out of our informal sharing, we initiated the conceptualisation of a more formal peer-review process within the SLC, which we have named the Peer Review Enhancement of Practice (PREP). This acronym, PREP, is designed to reflect that the program involves taking steps to *prepare* for enhancing teaching and learning. We, as academics in the SLC, are the designers and implementers of PREP. PREP is designed to be both flexible and voluntary, and centres around shared experiences, self-reflection, and peer review. Our goal for PREP is to assist us in recording, sharing, reflecting upon, and continually enhancing good teaching practice. Thus, one of the primary motivations in designing PREP is to develop a process or framework that can capture the informal discussions and sharing of experiences that had been taking place in the SLC, and add the benefit of collating or collecting evidence of self- and peer-reflection on teaching and learning practice. The motivations and consequential conceptualisation of PREP is not simply reviewing face-to-face teaching practice, but sharing and developing resources, experiences, and professional-development pathways.

Through PREP's initial conceptualisation, we determined that creating a structured framework around it would assist in its longevity and its perceived legitimacy and integrity. As it is a voluntary process, academic buy-in would be essential. At the same time, we were concerned that creating formality may lead to ambivalence or a lessened uptake (Chamberlain et al., 2011) if potential participants perceived that the program was primarily evaluative or regulatory. This tension led to three initial design decisions: first, to create a “formal” informal process; second, to decide on the optimal structure for PREP; and, third, to determine our role (as instigators of PREP) – specifically, whether we would simply design and set up a framework in and around PREP and then take a hands-off approach, or take responsibility for its ongoing implementation.

We attempted to resolve these issues by securing Head of School approval in principle to pursue a formalised process, which was to be finalised by review of the School Board. This provided an avenue and structure around which to formalise PREP. The initial step was to draft the Terms of Reference for PREP. The production of the terms of reference, despite SLC support, encountered initial challenges at the university level. The first hurdle was the need to comply with institutional naming conventions and the impact of those conventions. We had initially posited that the goals of PREP would be best served if it were constituted as a committee, but this led to confusion and tension about whether PREP (and the framework underpinning it) was intended to be:

1. an officially sanctioned University committee;
2. a committee as in the ordinary usage of the term: a group of people undertaking a specific function; or
3. some more informal group, or another form of collective.

Our motivation in seeking a more formal mechanism was to maintain peer-led control, and generate trust that PREP was not, and could not become, a university-driven evaluation regime. At the same time, we were mindful to avoid potentially onerous compliance processes that an officially

sanctioned university committee structure might bring (requirements for minutes, formal approvals, and so on). Resolving the structural issues for the format of the group involved navigating the internal School Board structure and receiving university-level advice on the nature of governance structures. Ultimately, the path of least resistance and the outcome most consistent with the group's desired culture and approach was to formalise a PREP framework, but to avoid over-formalisation of a university-level committee structure. A formalised PREP framework that remained peer-driven best captured our conscious desire to maintain (and extend) existing dialogue and approaches that academics in the SLC had already been taking. This involved a liberal sharing of resources and experiences in teaching and learning and an ability to further support and develop this by a formal, yet flexible and accessible, extension.

We then needed to determine whether PREP could, or should, be organically driven and isolated within the SLC, or whether it would be better run as part of an institutional teaching and learning framework. The argument for the latter was that wider institutional support would generate greater legitimacy and credibility (Smigiel et al., 2011) and allow PREP to have broader impact across the university. However, we prioritised the independent autonomy and voluntary nature of PREP, which, in our view, required us to minimise the chance of external influences to the SLC, or a repurposing or use of PREP as any form of managerial or evaluative process. At the same time, we were also conscious of not duplicating work already done by educational developers or designers either at USC or, more broadly, in the tertiary sector, concerned with peer review of teaching (Barnard et al., 2015; Grainger et al., 2015; Grainger et al., 2016). Although PREP is designed to be led by SLC staff, we nonetheless adopted a consultative approach to engaging with USC's central teaching and learning staff to both gain support for the organic nature of the process and consider how to best use – and perhaps ultimately contribute to – the established expertise in this area.

“So What?” – PREP as a Collaborative Model

We needed to determine the most suitable type of peer review for implementation in the SLC during the conceptualisation stage. Each peer review model – evaluative, developmental and collaborative – can arguably be used as a teaching-enhancement method. The approach of each focuses on a different perspective or beneficiary. The *evaluation* model, often referred to as the “managerial approach”, is a compliance-focused method, as it is designed and used for purposes such as performance reviews (Gosling et al., 2009). Academics can feel ambivalent towards a traditional evaluative peer-review model because such processes can facilitate “workforce surveillance and performance management” (Chamberlain et al., p. 198). Performance assessment can impair an academic's wellbeing and exacerbate stressors (Grainger et al., 2016). Concerns have also been raised relating to power imbalance (MacKinnon, 2001) and lack of control of the process (McMahon et al., 2007). As our PREP structure had evolved from organic and informal practices and was constructed as a peer-led and supportive approach, we determined that an evaluation model was an unsuitable peer-review option for us to adopt.

The *development* model draws upon the work of pedagogy experts or educational designers to improve teaching competencies through their expertise in good teaching practices (Gosling et al., 2009; Grainger et al., 2016). Educational designers can blend diverse teaching methods with pedagogy to provide broader teaching perspectives for academic staff (Gosling, 2005). However, educational designers may not necessarily be aligned with individual disciplines, which may require very specific subject-matter or skill expertise. In law, for example, academic staff need to teach legal problem-solving, legal research and/or oral advocacy skills, with very specific nuances peculiar to the legal discipline (Kift et al., 2010). Additionally, law is subject to requirements stemming from legal professional-accreditation bodies, with which education experts may not be familiar (Galloway

et al., 2012). Relying solely on a pedagogy expert or educational designer, without specific discipline context, can result in review or enhancement processes that do not align appropriately with discipline-specific requirements and goals. When universities create peer-review processes that are initiated and delivered by educational developers or designed to be led by senior experts or managerial staff, concerns about the process focusing on compliance or evaluation, rather than on the academics' benefit, tend to surface (Chamberlain et al., 2011). While we consulted with educational designers during PREP's conceptualisation, and intend to continue receiving their valuable guidance, the development model was considered unsuitable for the SLC because of law's unique disciplinary challenges, including accreditation, which will be outlined further below (Baron, 2013; Thornton, 2012).

The final model of teaching review, the collaborative model, most closely aligned with our motivations for PREP in the SLC. This model involves peers providing feedback on teaching practices (Gosling, 2014). Peer review and enhancement, in a collaborative model, is an opportunity to capture goals, gather suggestions, identify specific measurable outcomes, collate teaching experiences, and develop capacity in a manner that is supportive of academics (Lomas & Nicholls, 2005). Grainger et al. (2016) emphasise the importance for all stakeholders, including in-discipline academic peers, to work together to enhance teaching practice. Engaged in the appropriate manner, peers are in a unique position to provide a positive influence on teaching enhancement (Shortland, 2010). We had experienced the value of peer feedback during our informal collaborative experiences, and wanted PREP to capture these opportunities for other academics. Chamberlain et al. (2011) argue that academics are considered equal partners under a collaborative model of peer review, and that they are not necessarily constrained by the institutional hierarchy in the same way that supervisors or educational designers might be. Given our experiences in constructing a PREP framework and navigating the inevitable institutional challenges, we felt confident that a collaborative model was ideal for the SLC.

We believe it is important for PREP to function as a form of *distributive leadership*. Barnard et al. (2015, p. 35) describe distributive leadership in relation to the "empowerment of relationships and distribution of responsibility". A traditional leadership structure is typified through a hierarchical model of delegation and management: more akin to the developmental or evaluative models. However, empowering individuals as peers, as opposed to designating them to the base of a leadership hierarchy, assists in building strong working relationships and developing a positive organisational culture (Fryer, 2011). We envisage that our peer-led approach for PREP will give us the opportunity to lead, but also empower and encourage our peers to positively contribute to the SLC learning and teaching culture.

"Now What?" – Constructing the PREP Framework

Despite our initial conceptualisation of PREP, various factors impeded its commencement, including the global COVID-19 pandemic. However, this delay allowed us to spend further reflective time to determine how we envisaged constructing the PREP framework. A peer-review process alone may not achieve enhancement of teaching practice; multiple strategies are ideal (Peel, 2005). Thus, we determined to build PREP upon four foundational pillars: peer review (Cassidy & Lee, 2011); shared-experiences workshops (Hockings et al., 2008); professional-development opportunities (Skelton, 2005); and evidence collation for portfolio development (White et al., 2014). These foundational pillars, outlined below, will guide a pilot program for PREP in the SLC.

Peer Review

To facilitate the teaching-review component of PREP and ensure we are delivering an effective collaborative model of peer review, we will need to consider *how* the peer-review component of PREP will function. We intend to encourage PREP participants to form small teams to observe and support effective teaching practices among themselves (Shortland, 2010; Siddiqui et al., 2007). Observation is a particularly valuable professional-development activity (Pressick-Kilborn & te Riele, 2008). PREP will assist in the team process through providing a prescribed selection process, specific program stages, an avenue for clear goal-setting, and triggers for optional evidence collection (Cassidy & Lee, 2011). We will also provide materials to support development of the peer reviewers in their observation and feedback skills (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Cassidy & Lee, 2011).

In line with the collaborative model for peer review, we intend for participation in PREP to be entirely voluntary. This is intended to foster a culture of empowerment and intrinsic motivation (Grainger et al., 2015). However, we foresee that encouraging participation is likely to emerge as a concern, particularly if PREP is adopted on a broader institutional basis. Low levels of participation in voluntary review processes have been recorded as an outcome when participants are given a choice (White et al., 2014). One of our goals for PREP, and a response to low participation rates amongst our peers, is to develop good teaching practices and inspire leadership over time (Barnard et al., 2015).

Shared-Experience Workshops

We propose *shared-experience workshops* as the second foundational pillar for our PREP program. We intend these workshops to be regular forums to allow participants to share and reflect on teaching experiences, methods, practices, and issues. Shared experiences (Hockings et al., 2008; White et al., 2013) can result in academics discovering or developing new approaches or perspectives (Arkoudis et al., 2013) and strengthening collegial relationships (Shortland, 2010; Georgiou et al., 2018). Staff can also find supportive opportunities to collaboratively develop strategies to address tensions in maintaining student standards while supporting them as higher-education consumers (Arkoudis et al., 2013).

Instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching enhancement, there is scope for developing nuanced teaching approaches based upon sharing experiences and reflecting on teaching strategies (Hockings et al., 2008). For example, group workshops that consider ways of addressing diversity motivate academics to become aware of their role in engaging, or disengaging, diverse student groups. Shared experiences, then, encourage experimentation in adopting new approaches (Hockings et al., 2008). The approaches and strategies derived from these workshops can result in a more student-centred approach that allows students to draw from their own knowledge, at their own pace and level, and make links between course content and facets of their own lives (Hockings et al., 2008). We intend for PREP to offer such opportunities through the shared-experiences workshops.

We feel that the shared-experiences workshops have considerable value in the SLC, as academics within a discipline understand the “disciplinary insight” (Georgiou et al., 2018, p. 196). Law academics must be mindful to fulfil professional accreditation obligations for our disciplines, and our teaching must thus consistently reflect these professional considerations.

The influence of professional associations is particularly high when they control accreditation. For example, admission to practise as an Australian lawyer is achieved only through demonstrating

compliance with professional associations' requirements. These professional demands are mediated by the Law Admissions Consultative Council (LACC), which accredits all Australian law school programs. LACC employs accreditation that is focused at both the law-school or program level and at the individual course level (Council of Australian Law Deans, 2009). These standards prescribe a range of requirements for teaching law courses, but are phrased in a general way, and responsibility is collectively ascribed to the law school (rather than individual academics). For example, law schools are to use "teaching methods which enable each student to acquire the appropriate understanding and competence" (Law Admissions Consultative Committee, 2018, p. 10). Law schools also need to satisfy admitting authorities that academic staff teaching in the program meet the required AQF standards, and are suitably qualified or experienced to teach particular law courses. Accreditation for law programs serves as a form of "status, legitimacy, and a public statement about a certain threshold of quality being achieved" (Nagy & Robb, 2009, p. 237).

The LACC accredits the minimum academic study requirements for legal practice. In designing these Accreditation Standards, the goal was to prescribe the areas of law that are crucial to a law graduate's future practice (Law Admissions Consultative Committee, 2018). These standards thus heavily influence how the core courses are taught.

In designing PREP, we are conscious of the need to assist law academics to navigate these professional demands. PREP can assist in this by helping academic staff to understand the role and importance of the LACC Standards, and to ensure that all required content areas are fully explored and appropriately integrated into a curriculum that is also engaging socially, culturally, and ethically, and not just practically. This is because the process of accreditation aims to control, or at least shape, curricula. At a high level, the most significant critique that arises about the nature of such requirements is the way in which teaching time and resources in these basic areas may come at the expense of other material that is more expansive or socially challenging. This means academics must provide to students a form of education that has elements of being "practically useful rather than morally edifying" (Nagy & Robb, 2009, p. 228). However, precisely how this balance is struck depends upon the nature of each accreditation standard or process. There are large numbers of students who study law, and who do not intend to, or do not ever, practise law; the law curriculum needs to support broader graduate outcomes than just providing for those wishing solely to practise as lawyers (Baron & Corbin, 2012).

We foresee PREP mediating a collegial approach that balances the need to make content "more engaging" for students with the practical need to maintain the integrity of professional requirements and academic standards. This includes practical difficulties encountered in designing curricula and assessments that suitably, and critically, examine key accreditation requirements in law. Additionally, established academic staff in professional fields, such as law, may not have practice experience; conversely, some have extensive practice experience, but limited teaching experience. Each may bring its own challenges in addressing accreditation requirements in an educational setting. To some extent, this reflects the autonomy of the legal profession, as academics are granted broad remit, within the LACC framework, to deliver material, so long as the minimum common core is observed. Further, the lack of a real research-teaching nexus may mean that academics, faced with significant publication and grant demands, may be stretched thin in covering research areas, let alone in teaching in different areas or exploring teaching pedagogy in general (McKenzie et al., 2018). PREP can address these issues by providing support for teaching methods that capture the practical focus through experience-sharing to develop course content and approaches that reflect the accreditation requirements, whilst maintaining the evolution of teaching in law, which remains a vexed process (Jones, 2017).

Professional-Development Opportunities

While we have conceptualised that the third foundational pillar of PREP relates to professional-development opportunities, we need to be mindful of what opportunities might be useful for our peers. Reflecting on the professional development we have undergone in the conceptualisation of PREP has highlighted the challenging role that academics fulfil. It has emphasised that professional-development opportunities for PREP participants will need to address those challenges.

A primary challenge that our peers experience, and which PREP will need to address, relates to the multiple duties of academics; these include subject-matter expertise, administrative duties, communication, teaching, research, and understanding technology (Mitten & Ross, 2018; Skelton, 2005). The intersection of these competing demands has been termed the “nexus” between research and teaching (McKenzie et al., 2018, p. 1). The university requirements to produce recorded outputs or generate income, usually in the form of publications, grants, and HDR supervision, competes with an academic’s time for both teaching and professional development as teachers. While it might be considered that the content and expertise generated through research might inform teaching, academics do not necessarily teach in the field of their research, and certainly not exclusively. An academic’s teaching-research role is particularly difficult in the context of the increasing pressures seen in the teaching-research nexus in Australian universities. As Duff and Marriot (2017, p. 2416) argue, there is often significant disconnect between research and teaching areas, based upon

... lack of relevance of contemporary research to the curriculum; the different personal qualities required to succeed as a teacher or researcher; the necessity of developing professional skills rather than research skills in students; the technical content gaps that can be created by making a curriculum too research focused; and institutional focus on research at the expense of teaching. It is plausible that a similar gestalt may operate in other disciplines, particularly where professional accreditation is to the fore, for example ... law.

The teaching-research nexus has been described as a “myth [that is] nigh on impossible” to achieve (McKenzie et al., 2018, p. 10). PREP offers the possibility to function as a tool to address the balance between teaching and research through professional-development opportunities. Such opportunities can be tailored to staff who need to concentrate on teaching to enhance teaching quality, improve student experiences, provide enjoyment and job satisfaction, and add to prospects of promotion.

Continual improvement of teaching and learning practice is a desired outcome for the voluntary PREP participants. Academics are often left to judge quality teaching based on their own pre-conceived ideas. Peer review and enhancement can help academics adjust their expectations and experiences and enhance the student learning process (White et al., 2014). The challenge for us was to capture our own enthusiasm and appetite for the enhancement of teaching and consider how that might be shared among our peers. This appetite, based on a desire to improve our own and others’ teaching and learning practices as a priority, underpins PREP’s peer-led approach. We were motivated to establish and operate PREP because it offers an opportunity to develop leadership in teaching and provide evidence of that leadership.

Portfolio Development

A significant motivator for designing PREP relates to portfolio development. As mentioned above, a more formalised system of developing portfolios of teaching practice and reflection is part of ongoing academic professional development, particularly where academics may apply for

promotion or external teaching accreditation, such as the Advance Higher Education (HE) fellowship program (Advance HE, 2019). At the start of this process, we determined that student evaluations were a prevalent method for universities to measure quality teaching (Brewer-Deluce et al., 2018; Borch et al., 2020). Throughout this peer-review journey, we have identified and appreciated the significant problems of student evaluations being used as a sole evaluator of teaching excellence, as discussed earlier in this article (Peel, 2005).

We want PREP to provide a structured approach for each of us and our peers to collate evidence for portfolio development. PREP participants should understand that alternatives to student evaluations exist as standards for quality teaching (Kohut et al., 2007). Part of our journey will involve investigating other avenues for demonstrating teaching quality; peer review through PREP is one form of evidence that can contribute to a participant's portfolio (Kohut et al., 2007; White et al., 2014). We intend to encourage academic staff to improve record-keeping practices and proactively seek feedback that can be used to develop portfolios, and we aim to provide advice on effective methods of evidence collection, collation, and presentation. Because we ourselves are not experts in portfolio development, we intend to collaborate with educational designers at USC to determine methods for effective portfolio collation. This can lead to supporting participants in applying for teaching awards as another encouragement to join PREP and a measurement of its success.

Conclusion

PREP was developed in response to the competing challenges relating to the diverse student population, bureaucratic institutional frameworks, professional-discipline obligations, and fulfilling an academic's own personal satisfaction and career development. Following our informal sharing of teaching practices and resources, we determined that a more formalised model of peer review would address the challenges we face as early-career academics at our institution. Specifically, we identified that a collaborative peer-review model, rather than an evaluative or developmental model, would be most suitable for our circumstances, as we want to build positive working relationships and empower our peers to improve teaching practices. The next stage is to conduct a pilot program. This article has reported the process of our journey in the conceptualisation of PREP to date and how this has allowed us to consider how we would like our program to run. Specifically, we envisage delivering four foundational pillars for those who volunteer to participate in PREP: peer review, shared-experience workshops, professional-development opportunities, and opportunities to collate evidence of good teaching practices for a portfolio. We hope that PREP will foster a culture of improvement (Peel, 2005; Siddiqui et al., 2007) and be a valuable contribution, not only to our school and institution but as a model for others, particularly those teaching in professional degree disciplines.

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