Teaching Forum: Peer-Assisted Learning and the PAL Community of Practice

Abstract of proceedings:
Peer-assisted learning (PAL) can be broadly defined as an organised activity where students are encouraged to work together to develop their understanding rather than learn new content from an expert. Such learning often occurs without encouragement, but structured PAL programs seek to structure this process with a trained facilitator that assists in facilitating discussions.

This year, with the support of the Centre for Higher Education Teaching and Learning, a PAL ‘Community of Practice’ (CoP) has been formed, bringing together individuals interested in PAL programs, as well as existing PAL-based educational groups, to enhance PAL practices at the ANU. The CoP hopes to achieve this through increased information-sharing between groups and collaboration on projects relevant to CoP members.

The first PAL CoP Teaching Forum was held on Friday 22 March 2013 to further promote PAL practices and start a dialogue within ANU about how PAL can work with other educational programs in order to enhance the student experience. Following an introduction to PAL, workshops discussing three key aspects of peer-assisted learning were held:

(1) How peer-assisted learning programs fit into existing courses
(2) Evaluation of programs
(3) Mentor selection and ongoing support.

A variety of approaches addressing the above three issues were presented; all attendees are also encouraged to contribute to the discussion.

Where to from here?
The forum was well-received, with the volume of feedback demonstrating a high level of interest in peer-learning across the ANU campus. Matters arising from the forum will be discussed at the following Community of Practice Meeting to be held on **Friday 26 April from 12pm in Hancock West Room 2.27**.

In addition to the CoP meetings, an additional avenue of collaboration on peer-assisted learning has also been created, with the recent launch of the Peer-Assisted Learning Website, [www.pal.anu.edu.au](http://www.pal.anu.edu.au). It is hoped this website will become a hub of collaboration at all levels of peer-assisted learning from mentor training and support through to the administration of programs.