This is the published version


Available from Deakin Research Online

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30030958

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner

Copyright: 2010, HERDSA
The 'lived' experience of the Unit Chair

Pauline Hagel, Allison Ringer, Ambika Zutshi, Andrew Creed, Leanne Morris and Caitlyn Mecanovic
Deakin University, Australia

The unit chair (or 'subject coordinator') role has been progressively reshaped over the past decade by the extension of management practices to universities, global competition, a growing and diverse student body, increases in regulatory and quality requirements and the use of information and communication technologies. These forces have lead to a larger and more complex administrative role for academics in designing and delivering a unit of study to students. The aim of the research is to investigate how academics experience, enact and interpret the unit chair role itself, and in relation to their traditional roles of teaching and research. The first stage of the project involved an investigation of the lived experience of one unit chair over two teaching periods. Data was collected using a combination of diary keeping and document analysis. Preliminary findings identify several tensions in the experience of the unit chair: between the demands of students and the technocracy of the university; between individuals who may share the role in different teaching periods; and between the multiple roles played by academics as unit chairs, teachers and researchers. This study will result in both theoretical and practical outcomes. First, it will contribute towards understanding the current and emerging demands and dimensions of unit chair role. Second, it will improve our understanding of the different ways people experience and interpret this role in the context of their broader academic roles. Finally, our findings will influence initiatives to improve the design, resourcing, conduct and management of the unit chair role.