



The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers
in higher education

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Examples from Australian universities

Applying Theory and Research to Contemporary Issues in a First Year Cultural Studies Unit

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Broad discipline area:

Arts and Humanities

- Cultural Studies

Year level:

- First year undergraduate

TRN strategy:

- Designing learning activities around ‘real world’ research applications

Teaching and learning context:

- Large group lectures
- Learning to learn/lifelong learning

Brief description of the initiative:

Cultural Studies first year subjects *Contemporary Society*, with enrolment numbers of between 450 and 700, and *Everyday Life*, with enrolment numbers of almost 300, involve research-based learning activities in which students apply theoretical approaches to contemporary social issues. This academic encourages students to reflect on their own everyday experiences of social issues (for example, their perceptions of class, race, or gender in Australia) and then introduces research by linking these experiences to theory.

As the semester progresses, the lecturer guides the students towards deeper analysis of theoretical issues. For example, students read an academic article, then a topical newspaper article applying concepts in the academic article to their critique of the newspaper article. Tutorial questions encourage students to reflect on both the articles and on their own experiences and interpretations. In the exam, students are provided with copies of the articles, and answer exam questions designed to apply specific theories. Topics have included:

- the impact of the Macquarie Field Riots, a series of disturbances across Sydney’s southwest in February 2005, on class relations

- the distribution in Tamworth of thousands of anti-immigrant leaflets by the Australia First Party, a group known for its anti-immigration stance, during January 2007.

The academic considers that this student-centred approach to research enhances student insight, their ability to develop a sound argument, critical thinking and analysis and social research skills.

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