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Editorial

The job description for a University lecturer on the Australian Government's Immigration web site (Department of Immigration, 2009) states that a lecturer "Lectures students and conducts tutorials in one or more subjects within a prescribed course of study at a university and conducts research in a particular field of knowledge." Although one might argue about the lack of detail in such a description, in essence academic staff at universities have traditionally had to balance research, teaching, and service to their institution and the community in order to ensure a satisfactory career progression. Academics are commonly judged by their publication record, successful grant applications and results of student experience surveys. Promotion is unlikely to occur without all of these areas being addressed, but prominence is often given to the research. Many universities make decisions about the promotion of academics predominantly along research performance, which does not always sit well with staff (Houston, Meyer & Paewai, 2006).

The public on the other hand will judge universities by their image as projected by marketing specialists and university rankings. Research quality is one important factor but by no means the most important. In the Times Good University Guide 2009 (Times Newspapers Ltd, 2008), the top UK universities were ranked. Oxford received top ranking despite Cambridge having higher entry standards, a better research record and a superior graduate destinations rating (Freen, 2008). A two year study of Law students showed marketing tools such as university web sites, prospectuses, open days and attending special lectures were key influences in a student's decision-making (Catley, 2007). Interestingly one study showed a negative relationship between an institution's perceived research strength and its attractiveness to students (Drewes & Michael, 2006), perhaps because of a perception that research and teaching are not linked activities. This may be an impression shared by some academics as indicated in a study by Robertson and Bond (2001) where some academic staff felt there was a schism between these two areas. Other academics in this study felt that they were enthused by carrying out research which then flowed into their teaching.

This leads to the question. Why don't academics do more educational research?

Many academics devote much of their time to research. Studying, experimenting and theorising are everyday activities for most of us, and the end result of this work is often a grant application or a journal article or book chapter, which hopefully adds to the body of knowledge in our field. We also spend a lot of time preparing and delivering learning material for students, be it lectures, tutorials, practicals or other types of teaching activity. But do we devote sufficient time reflecting on what we have done or communicating techniques we may have used to try and engage our students in their learning? We have highly trained critical thinking skills which should be regularly applied to our teaching.

If you are teaching, why not take advantage of the situation and try and organise educational research around your teaching strategies. Many lecturers try new strategies every term or semester, to engage their students and improve their learning, but rarely communicate their methods or findings to their peers. An active researcher should be able to adapt their research skills to the educational environment and try and achieve extra benefit from it. If you are working with large classes or tutorials, and you have devised a strategy to improve the learning process, then why not investigate the literature, carry out some evaluations and submit your findings to a journal? The contributors to this issue of *ergo* have applied this principle, and they will use the results of their work to enhance both their teaching and research portfolios, as well as helping their students. It's difficult to imagine a more positive outcome.

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