

The only constant has been the students

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Kia ora ATLAANZ whanau,

As I retired as a learning advisor in August 2024, it has been an interesting exercise to reflect on my career in the profession. I started my career as an English language teacher on general English language courses in private language schools and then on English for academic purposes courses at Unitec, so it seemed a natural progression to move into a learning support role.

I worked as a learning advisor at Unitec from 1996 to 2004 and then at Auckland University of Technology from 2005 until I retired in August 2024. Over my almost 30-year career in learning support, I have observed the profession change and evolve to be unrecognisable from the early days. The only constant has been the students!

When I started in the learning support field, the learning advisor roles at Unitec comprised a number of learning advisors who focused on teaching reading, note taking, memory skills, time-management, academic writing, conversation, and presentations, two learning advisors focused on maths and statistics, and a Pacific learning advisor.

While this may not be the case for other institutions, there are three significant changes to provision of learning support that I have noticed over the course of my career:

- Provision of learning support
- Focus on writing for different assessment types
- Online teaching and learning

In the early years of my career, my role mostly involved providing 1:1 consultations for students, teaching generic workshops, and some subject embedded teaching. This approach proved to be unsustainable as the number of students has increased, but the number of learning advisors has not. There is still some provision of 1:1 learning support, but this has changed significantly. At present, at AUT in a Learning Support team within a library context, a number of learning advisors and postgraduate learning advisors develop resources for teaching academic writing skills for both generic workshops and faculty courses. These roles are mostly focussed on supporting cohorts of students with writing for specific assessment types. This includes ongoing and new collaborations with lecturers across the faculties to provide assessment support teaching and/or materials for students.

Further to this change, the focus of our work has evolved into obtaining (with permission) and analysing the writing in well written student assessments to identify the writing challenges of different assessment types. Then, we collaborate closely with lecturers to design teaching and learning materials to help students meet the different writing challenges of specific assessment types. The focus is on using short sections of the student's writing to develop annotated text examples to highlight language features. The focus is ideally closely related to elements in the assessment guidelines and marking criteria. This has been a very interesting and rewarding change in the nature of our work, particularly as it draws more closely on learning advisors' language and linguistics teaching expertise and experience.

In the last five years, perhaps driven by the COVID pandemic, there has been a considerable shift to providing online resources and teaching sessions for all our learning support services. This has been embraced by the learning advisors at AUT and has had the biggest impact on our role as we have had to be agile in the way we develop and share our resources and adapt our teaching practice.

GenAI is also impacting our practice in positive ways as we navigate how to use the tools and develop resources to help students do the same. Even though I have only experienced the early stages of its impact, I have faith that learning advisors will create a space for demonstrating ongoing value to student learning and success.

Hopefully, the changes in our practice that I have observed will all help to future proof the important role of learning advisors in tertiary learning environments. I wish those working in the profession every success in the years ahead.