

Chapter 2

The Vice-Chancellor's Courses

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The Vice-Chancellor's Courses epitomise what is different about ANU. They are courses that are inherently inter-disciplinary in terms of content, teaching staff and the students enrolled in them. They involve ANU researchers from across a wide range of different disciplines sharing through innovative teaching practices cutting edge research with students. ANU alumni in prominent positions in the private and public sectors are also involved in the teaching of the courses. Teaching and learning approaches in the courses stress peer-based learning strategies both in the classroom and electronically through innovative use of Web 2.0 technologies. The courses are aimed at highly motivated students who wish to be leaders in their chosen careers.

Unravelling Complexity UGRD3001 (6 units)

Later Year Course

Semester 2, 2010

Workload: weekly 2 hour panel, weekly 2 hour tutorial, once-off 2 hour workshop the week before students facilitate their particular tutorial topic.

Academic Contact: A/Prof Richard Baker

Prerequisites: Students need to have completed 96 units toward their degree.

Course Description

'Universities serve to make students think: to resolve problems by argument supported by evidence; not to be dismayed by complexity, but bold in unravelling it'. (What are universities for?; by Geoffrey Boulton and Colin Lucas <http://kampela-leru.it.helsinki.fi/?bmlkPT10>). This course takes up this challenge by offering latter year students from any part of the ANU the opportunity to explore a series of complex issues. The connections between economic, historical, social, legal, scientific, engineering and environmental and moral dimensions of complex problems will be explored.

In 2010 the course will examine the linked themes of 'collapse' and 'resilience'. Case studies will include global financial crises, the collapse of empires, contemporary 'failing' states, pandemics, engineering and network failures and the moral and legal dimensions of these issues.

Enrolment process

A maximum of 25 students per College selected on basis of outstanding results and interest in and commitment to working in policy areas.

Please register your interest with your College representative by 2nd July 2010:

- ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences
- ANU College of Asia and the Pacific
- ANU College of Business and Economics
- ANU College of Engineering and Computer Science
- ANU College of Law
- ANU College of Medicine, Biology and Environment
- ANU College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences

Indicative Assessment

1. Reflective learning portfolio that also includes evidence of preparation for each of the student run seminars/tutorials (30 per cent).
2. Prepare and give a policy briefing paper to 'minister' or 'senior public servants' in a role-play on complex real world contemporary problem. This will be done in multi-disciplinary groups at short notice to simulated working in policy areas (30 per cent).
3. Facilitating a tutorial/seminar to maximise your classmates learning (20 per cent).
4. Individual five minute talk to your tutorial group on what course has taught you about unravelling a complex issue in your discipline (10 per cent).

Learning outcomes

1. Knowledge of different methodologies for addressing complex issues.
2. Ability to explain complex issues to other people.
3. Ability to apply more than one method to unravel complex issues.

Suggested pre-course reading

Students should read one of the following books plus some examples of past student work from this course at http://fennerschool-people.anu.edu.au/richard_baker/examples/portfolios/index.html

Bammer, Gabriele and Michael Smithson 2008

Uncertainty and risk: multidisciplinary perspectives
Earthscan

Bar-Yam, Yaneer 2004

Making things work: solving complex problems in a complex world
NECSI Knowledge Press

Harris, Graham 2007

Seeking sustainability in an age of complexity
Cambridge University Press

Mitchell, Melanie 2009

Complexity a guided tour
Oxford University Press

