

History of HERDSA by Roger Landbeck

Roger Landbeck is a Life Member of HERDSA. Roger is also the Editor of the HERDSA News and HERDSA Listserv.

Roger has kindly agreed to give a brief History of HERDSA as he recollects it.

This is a personal history of HERDSA and so does not claim to be a strictly accurate record. I was appointed to Griffith University in October 1974 as a member of one of the new academic units that were beginning to be established in Universities around Australia at that time. As an aside, to show how things have developed in the 30 years since then, the PC had not been invented then and computing was done with punch cards. I joined HERDSA the following year and attended one of the first annual conferences of the society, which was held in Canberra.

The society had been formed in 1972 as a result of the interest of a few academics, like Barbara Falk (now a life member of HERDSA) from the Centre for Studies in Higher Education at Melbourne University, who met during an annual conference of ANZAAS.

The 1975 conference had a format that has never been repeated since. Delegates were given a choice of joining a team, who considered issues relating to topics in higher education, such as curriculum development and assessment. They remained with the team for the three days of the conference and the team produced a report for the final plenary session. The next year the format was changed to what has now become, the very familiar, parallel paper sessions. In recent years there have been experiments with formats to improve the conference experience such as symposia and round table sessions. However in my experience the most satisfying learning experiences have come through active participation in workshops.

Each year the conference venues were shared between capital cities in Australia, centred on a university with accommodation in halls of residence. During the last 15-20 years there has been a move towards the use of hotel accommodation by delegates and the employment of professional conference organisers. Furthermore institutions are no longer willing to be generous about the use of facilities for conferences.

Sometime in the 80's the conference moved to New Zealand for the first time in recognition of the growing number of members there. Since then the conference has visited New Zealand in 1991, 1998 and 2003. The 2004 conference held in Miri, Malaysia, was the first time a full conference had been arranged outside Australia and New Zealand. I recall sometime in the late 80's the conference was split between Perth and Singapore.

Branches were established in the 80's to promote local activities in teaching and learning and encourage more academics to join HERDSA. The Queensland branch held a very successful state conference in 1998. However branches have been very difficult to sustain so several are no longer active, nevertheless, others like New Zealand, Western Australia and Hong Kong are thriving.

Special interest groups were formed to meet the interests of particular groups in higher education such as academic developers, those in leadership positions and those in language support groups. However they were never very active or effective and only the language and learning group, UNILEARN, now survives. At the 1999 conference the student learning group organised an afternoon session in which their members presented a series of papers. This would seem to be a useful activity, both for the conference and for a special interest group, and would be worth reviving.

HERDSA News began publication early in the life of the society as a vehicle for sharing news with members (note this was pre-email days, if you can conceive of life without electronic communication!) and it also published some short articles on teaching and learning written in a journalistic style. This genre has continued at the present time with an increase in the number of articles compared with news.

However there was a growing desire among some members for a scholarly journal published by the society and thanks to the vision and drive of John Powell then acting director at the UNSW Centre and a President of the Society, Higher Education Research and Development (HERD for short) was launched in 1981. Initially HERD was produced in-house, first in Sydney then in Brisbane but it is now published by Taylor and Francis and has become a respected international journal.

At about the same time the Green Guides began publication to provide academics with short, practical help with the varied aspects of teaching. The first guide 'Supervising Postgraduate Students' was written by Ingrid Moses, who was then working at TED! in the University of Queensland, doing pioneering research into postgraduate supervision. The second guide 'Up the Publication Road' by Royce Sadler has been one of the most successful.

After several Green Guides had been produced there came a call for a different type of guide, aimed at practitioners. So the Gold Guide series was launched, the first one being written for clinical teachers. Others followed on the social responsibility of SCientists, lab work and fieldwork. Sales have dropped markedly in recent years, possibly due to the increasing availability of resources on the web. However a number of guides have been modified and reprinted by higher education societies in South Africa and Canada. Furthermore the two types have now been merged into one Guide series with a small number of new ones still being written and some of the most popular being revised.

There has been an on-going debate over the years about whether HERDSA is a society mainly catering for academic developers and therefore does not appeal as much as it potentially should to practitioners. I do not have the breakdown by membership categories to back that up but it certainly is something to keep in mind. It is worth noting that six of the ten initial HERDSA Fellows were practitioners.

In 1985 the first HERDSA Visiting Scholar, Professor Don Woods, a chemical engineer from McMaster University, ran a series of workshops on teaching and learning in Australia and I think New Zealand. The aim of the programme was to invite academics, who had distinguished themselves, both in their discipline and in teaching, to run interesting and stimulating events, which would attract a wide variety of academics to think about teaching. In 1985 teaching and learning were definitely not high on the agenda. Don Woods was followed by Georgine Loaker, an English Professor from Alverno College, David Humphries (Chemistry, McMaster) and more

recently Tom Angelo (1998) and Charles Glassick in 2000. One major problem with the programme is to balance the need to hold workshops in several venues without exhausting the scholar.

In the late 80's with the growth of the society there was a need to establish an administrative office with some part time staff. Initially this was housed in the Problem based learning and research centre (PROBLARC) at Newcastle, courtesy of Penny Little. However with further growth the office moved to the Cook Primary School in Canberra where it shared office space with the Australian Association for Adult Learning. Two part time paid positions were created, with Coral Watson managing the office and Heather Koch looking after the membership administration. The resignation of Coral in August 2002 led the Executive to rethink the office arrangements. In December 2002 an agreement was signed with Support U, an office management service in Sydney, to run the administration of the society with Jennifer Ungaro as part time manager. Jennifer's full time job is manager of the Institute of Teaching and Learning at Sydney University so she is ideally qualified for the task. Roger Landbeck also took on some administrative responsibilities.

In the 90's a Listserv was established to communicate more speedily with members. The list was moderated and most of the postings concerned with job opportunities or conferences. At an Executive Meeting in July 2002 it became clear that by no means all HERDSA members were subscribers to the list so it was agreed to subscribe every member and Roger Landbeck took over as moderator. He now makes a weekly posting to members. There are about 100 non-members who are subscribers.

Perhaps the most significant development of recent years has been the Fellowship Scheme to recognise quality teachers. After much discussion by the Executive and a lot of hard work by a small group led by Angela Brew a pilot project was launched at the Perth conference in 2002. One year later at the Christchurch conference the first HERDSA Fellowships were awarded to the ten volunteers who had successfully completed the project. The scheme continues to evolve with promotional publicity being sent to Pro-Vice Chancellors of Teaching and Learning in July 2004.

Earlier, in the mid 90's, HERDSA had made a contribution to the growing interest in teaching in higher education by publishing 'Prompts for good teaching' aimed at assisting debate in institutions about how to encourage teaching. The prompts are still available in hard copy and on the web but in need of revision, particularly with development of e-learning.

The composition of the Exec tries to ensure representation from all states in Australia and from New Zealand. Over the years the Exec has experimented with different ways of distributing committee responsibilities and currently has returned to the concept of portfolios. It has also sought to identify the core business of the society and concentrate on that. Unfortunately it is no longer possible to hold a face-to-face meeting in November which makes it difficult for the committee to function efficiently especially in the year when the majority of the committee are new. The high workload on academics means that it is difficult to devote the amount of time to a professional society that was possible in earlier times, which means finding different ways of operating so that the society can continue to function.

A new development is the invitation from bodies like DEST and AVCC for the President to attend various meetings and serve on important committees. However with that comes the expectation that the President will be at the Professorial or Pro-

Vice-Chancellor level. This is not easy to meet given the large workload on staff at these levels.

HERDSA has grown to become one of the leading professional societies of its kind in the world with members in many different countries. It has the potential to have an important influence into research and development into teaching and learning in higher education. May the next 30 years be even more successful than the past 31 recounted by this potted history.

Roger Landbeck

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