Academic literacies and the Academic Pathway to Undergraduate Studies (APUS) Programme at Urban University Malaysia

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of University of Liverpool

for the degree of Doctor of Education (Higher Education)

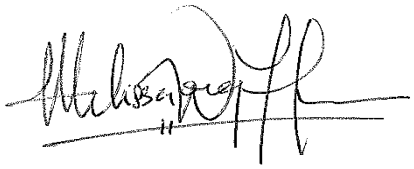
by Melissa Y F Wong

January 2017

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.



Signature

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Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Abstract

Millions of young people transition from K-12 education to higher education each year. Many meet university entry requirements effortlessly, and yet there are also many who must further demonstrate sufficient readiness for higher learning despite having gained entry into university. For these “transition” students, higher education institutions have increasingly created pathway programmes in order justify letting lesser prepared students through their gates, but with intention to assist them up to speed academically. This thesis documents a research case study conducted on the Academic Pathway to Undergraduate Studies (APUS) (pseudonym) programme at Urban University Malaysia (pseudonym). The study aimed to determine the effectiveness of academic literacies, as a teaching and learning approach within the APUS programme in better preparing students for further study at the university. The articulations of APUS students on their ability to employ academic literacies post APUS were gathered as a means of gaining one perspective on the programme’s effectiveness. A third aspect of the study is the practitioner reflection done in order to locate possible curricular (or other) improvements to the programme based on the study’s findings. Academic literacies was used as the theoretical foundation for the study as it is also the current pedagogical framework for developing essential academic competencies within the programme. This study utilised a documentary analysis approach and student interviews as the two primary research methods, triangulated against a literature review. The study has produced five main findings revolving around misalignments in the learning outcomes of certain modules and between disciplinary assessments. A second finding shows that APUS students perform less well academically than their non-pathway disciplinary peers across all disciplines. It has also

found that Computer Science-stream of the module find that the academic literacies component of the programme lacks relevance to their disciplinary learning. Despite the unearthing of these gaps within the programme, APUS students still find that the programme is helpful overall in their personal projections of what future academic competencies post-transition will be needed in order to be successful in completing a full undergraduate degree programme. The study concludes with several strategic recommendations for change to the programme.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Malaysia's economic development imperatives drive the need to produce work-ready and skilled graduates are part of the Ministry of Higher Education's policy reforms. The liberalization and rapid expansion of private higher education using a market model resulted in the expansion of Malaysian higher education to an international market. It is the perspective of the Malaysian government that education is a significant contributor to social and economic capital. "It provides our youth the necessary skills to be able to compete in the modern labour market; and is a key driver of growth in the economy" (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025, Ministry of Education, 2012, p.3). Private higher education providers have responded to this national aim by diversifying their programme offerings from diplomas to doctoral programmes. The Alternative Pathway to Undergraduate Studies (APUS) programme at Urban University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia was envisioned, at least on paper, to respond to the national agenda for higher education and national development.

Urban University is a branch campus of a transnational university of foreign origins with branch campuses in several other countries. Officially set up in the late 1990s, it is a for-profit private university. The campus has a student population of about 6,700 students, 30 percent of whom are international students. At the organizational level, the strategic, business and academic case for the APUS not only corresponds to Malaysia's agenda for higher education and also exists for a strategic business agenda. There is no doubt that the APUS programme was created to capture a market of students who almost make

it to the university, but may have be lost to other for-profit competitor universities. Accepting underprepared students however may also mean that readiness issues for higher education and academic gaps will have to be addressed.

This APUS programme is characterized as a pathway programme for students who do not meet the minimum admission score but want to undertake study at selected undergraduate degree programmes at university. They are accepted as transition students and are admitted to a programme of their choice on condition that they pass the eight compulsory courses that are equivalent to year one study at undergraduate level. Two courses of those courses are compulsory literacy modules, while the remaining six are first-year core modules in their respective disciplines. The purpose of this programme is to ensure that entering students are equipped with literacies and capacities to cope with rigorous academic learning in higher education.

Academic literacies was conceptualised into one of the two literacy modules. The two literacy modules do not have the same approaches in teaching and learning. One module utilises a strong academic literacies approach whilst the other was designed along a skill-based approach. The implications of this finding will be discussed in detail in following chapters. Students of four disciplines comprise the student audiences of both modules. They study in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences, Business and Finance, Computer Science and Science. The literacies classrooms therefore are the very definition of a multidisciplinary classroom.

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In at least one of the literacies units, there is a concerted focus to utilise *academic literacies* as the pedagogical approach in developing academic skills and competencies in students. In terms of the content of weekly topics, tutorial activities, and assessments revolves around the concept (and reality) of disciplinarity in the classroom (Appendix A.4, p. 221). One sees that disciplinarity is embedded into weekly topics of learning including disciplinarity in academic reading in Week 3, responding to academic discourses in Weeks 4 and 5, disciplinarity in academic writing in Week 7 and finally developing their own disciplinary voices in Week 11. Academic discourses and disciplinary differences therefore are built into the modules' syllabuses.

Another important means of embedding academic literacies into the module is through assessments. In Literacy 102, students are required to do some simple research on a topic relating to either ethics, creativity or internationalisation but within the context of their disciplines. For example, Business students may research on a creative innovation in the field, or a Science student exploring the ethical issues in producing genetically modified food. In this fashion, students see these common areas of knowledge shared by all the disciplines represented in the classroom. In fact, academic discourses are made even more pronounced through the oral presentations that each student does on her or his research topic. As the others listen, they are given opportunities to see the differences in the constructions of knowledge in each discipline. Furthermore, students are required to produce an annotated bibliography, literature review and major essay on their research (Appendix A.5, p. 222), common genres of writing across the fields of study, but each also different because they feature research on a discipline-specific research topic.

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The Need for Research

The inspiration for this thesis stems from informal conversations that I had with my students. When I asked about what they thought of the programme and their content learning, I began to obtain their thoughts and feelings about their experiences. Computer Science-stream students said that learning essay writing was not particularly useful or helpful to them. Science-stream APUS students reported the same, who claimed that lab report writing and short answers sufficed in their everyday learning. Instances of such feedback became the lynchpin for my teaching practice that coincided with my need for a topic for a doctoral practitioner research project. I had to design a study that "chronicles a research study that is clearly linked to the practice (and thereby education) of the student, and reports the contribution to knowledge" (Laureate Online Education, 2010-2014). At the same time the campus academic committee at Urban University requested data on the academic progress of students in the programme. It was opportune for me to bring the two missions together.

As the University of Liverpool clearly intended, I was meant to use my workplace experiences as a basis for reflection, learning and research within a doctoral programme. I embarked on both tasks by brainstorming, asking questions and reflecting on the formal and informal feedback that I had gathered from my students. I had hoped that this study would provide me some insight into the practices and policies surrounding the APUS programme. It has in fact allowed me the opportunity to bridge the academic, pedagogical and experiential gaps as a teacher in the programme, particularly in understanding and

explaining how my students comprehend intended learning outcomes and compare them to actual ones that they may have. If I managed to bridge some academic and practice gaps through reflection, then I have considered my personal aims to have been met. A good overall outcome of this study is an improvement in the retention of students in the programme. It also has the potential to contribute to the work of other academic literacies scholars in the wider academic community particularly within the pathway context, or first-year learning and transition studies in higher education.

Research Aim and Key Research Questions

This case study aims to uncover what former (graduated) APUS students determine to be their capacity in using taught academic literacies post-completion of the pathway programme. It is designed to primarily determine if academic literacies contributes to learning within their disciplines as well as to ascertain those espoused programme learning objectives on academic literacies that students say are appropriate and practical, and those that are less relevant. These broad aims draw me towards the ultimate objective of making recommendations for curricular changes to the programme. The rationales behind the composition of these research questions will be detailed in the Methodology chapter, but it may be useful to state them here at the outset of this thesis. They are:

1. Is academic literacies effective as a conceptual framework for transition learning for lesser prepared students in the APUS programme?

2. What do APUS students say about their ability to employ academic literacies after having completed the pathway programme and transitioning into year two of undergraduate study at Urban University?
3. What strategic improvements can be made to the programme using new knowledge from this case study?

My next chapter will outline the literature review and explain the foundations of academic literacies as a theoretical concept, its role in past research, and its place within the broader conceptual framework of this thesis.

Theoretical Framework

Having been an extension of decades of research on literacy studies, academic literacies is most widely attributed to the work of Lea and Street (1998, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2006) and Creme and McKenna (2010). The basis of this theoretical framework is academic socialisation (Duff, 2007; Hyland, 2009), and although there are overlapping features between them, academic literacies developed broadly to include concepts of disciplinarity, writer identity and power relationships between the different actors in a higher education setting. The term academic literacies will be replete throughout this thesis and its meanings is interpreted in three different ways in my study.

In the context of this research, academic literacies is simultaneously a 1) *theoretical concept*, 2) a *pedagogical approach*, and 3) an overall *conceptual approach* to this research project. In most research literature, academic literacies is discussed as a theoretical concept that underpins the academic approach to teaching literacy in higher

education. In other words, it acts as a kind of educational theory. That is however different to my interpretation of academic literacies as a pedagogical approach in which I consciously build and incorporate academic literacies into weekly lessons and activities in order to achieve certain learning outcomes. For example, I may keep the disciplinarity in mind as I design an activity on academic writing by tailoring the same task to a student audience from four different disciplines. Finally, as a conceptual framework to this study, academic literacies is an analytical tool that is used in this study to explain, predict and understand students' learning in the APUS programme. It is used as a means to organise ideas around the teaching and learning of academic literacy in order to direct the collection and analysis of data.

Thesis Outline

This thesis has the following structure: Chapter 2 contains a literature review and outlines the theoretical foundations of this study. It provides a snapshot of the Malaysian higher education in terms of its historical to modern-day context and within its wider role as a regional and international provider of tertiary learning. What follows is a brief outline of literacy practices in higher education in general. It foregrounds academic literacies as the theoretical framework that underpins the relationships between specific variables in this study such as learning outcomes, academic disciplines, academic underperformance, just to name a few. Finally, the chapter outlines two debates within academic literacies that resonate with the findings and subsequent discussions in the latter sections of this thesis.

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Chapter 3 details the research design and methodological rationales that guided the research activities undertaken in this case study. It beings with a brief discussion of epistemology and outlines constructivism as a paradigm through which knowledge in this study is generated. I outline and explain what my research questions are, and provide justification for why this project is a case study. The chapter also outlines the two primary research methods used to gather data, which are documentary analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews. I also outline and summarise how the gathered data was analysed using both research methods. Finally, I end the chapter with a discussion on the ethical and access issues that concerned this study.

Chapter 4 presents the results and findings of the research based on documentary analyses and the narratives of students who participated in the study. The chapter will outline the five major findings of this study whilst Chapter 5 outlines the attempt to make sense of those findings in the order that they were presented in the previous chapter. Finally, chapter 6 ties the entire thesis together by reflecting on the implications of practitioner research and the reflective process on educational research. It summarises the proposed strategic changes to be made to the programme, and outlines new questions that have resulted from this case study. It considers the future of the APUS and concludes the thesis with a final note.

Definition of Terms

There are several unique terminologies that will be used throughout such the word "module" taken to mean a (disciplinary) subject, course or unit: terms that are interchangeable across many higher education institutions. I will also refer to the term academic literacies in its plural form (not its singular academic literacy) as it refers to the many literacies involved in a multidisciplinary programme. It is also the term used by the academic community to refer to the many literacies students need to learn in higher education. Finally, as has been established, APUS is an acronym and pseudonym for the Alternative Pathway to Undergraduate Studies programme at Urban University, also a pseudonym for the institution I work at in real life.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

This chapter is a literature review that will describe the theoretical foundation for this research and its place within the broader conceptual framework of this study. The chapter will begin with a brief overview of the Malaysian higher education system and context and then describe the place of Malaysian private higher education in the global environment. It will briefly summarise theories of literacy in higher education while highlighting some basic assumptions about literacy practice and research in tertiary learning. Following that, I will outline academic literacies and its development from the study skills model to the academic socialization model and its subsequent evolution into 'academic literacies'. The review will then cover the reasons why there is an emphasis on academic writing within academic literacies and why this activity is stressed above other literacy activities. It will also look at the debates on whether generic and standalone academic literacies programmes are better than embedded academic programmes. The final section of this chapter comprises a short evaluation of the research available on actual academic literacies programmes implemented across different institutions of higher education.

The Malaysian Higher Education System and Context

The higher education system in Malaysia had its origins in a diverse ethnic social fabric that was imported from Britain during their colonial rule. According to Selvaratnam (1985), the historical development of this borrowed and modified system can be categorized into four stages: the HE system before independence in 1957; the foundation of Malaysia's first public university in 1961; the establishment of three other national universities and

one International Islamic University post 1969 and finally, the upgrading of agricultural and technical colleges in 1971 and 1972. Before independence, higher education really began in Malaya in 1905 with Singapore first modelling Britain's professional medical school (Selvaratnam, 1985; Abdul Rahman & Mahani, 2007). Its purpose was to transfer health and medical knowledge to help its colonial state meet its health needs. After that, it was renamed King Edward VII College of Medicine. The earliest higher education model was a liberal one with English as a medium of instruction for courses in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, History, English, Economics, Education and Geography at diploma level (Selvaratnam, 1985; Lee, 1999a, Lee, 1999b). Most graduates of these courses eventually became teachers under the colonial education system. In stage two, the Government of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore appointed a Commission with Sir Robert Aitken, the VC of the University of Birmingham to research and recommend if it was feasible to establish a new university in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city. Indeed, Sir Robert Aitken made his recommendations and higher education in Malaysia began its development a year after independence with a branch campus of the University of Malaya in Singapore, in 1958. It became a full-fledged public university in 1961 (Selvaratnam, 1985; Sivalingam, 2006; Abdul Rahman & Mahani, 2007). Today, there are 20 listed public universities (MOHE, 2015).

Private higher education on the other hand, began even before independence with the founding of Goon Institute in 1936, Stamford College in 1950 and Islamic College of Malaya in 1955. 1971 figures prominently in the history of higher education in Malaysia

through the enactment of The Universities and University Colleges Act of 1971 (Lee, 1999b; Lee, 2004; Sirat, 2009; Abdul Rahman & Mahani, 2007). This Act was envisioned as being within a larger framework of constitutional and social policy reform in which the racial makeup of Malaysian society was considered "fragile". The goals of higher education in Malaysia today are historically tied to national development policies such as the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the Post-NEP Development policy (Lee, 1999b; Sarjit, Morshidi, & Noraini, 2008). The Second Malaysia Five-Year Plan in particular focused on diverting attention from a simple egalitarian growth-distribution policy to an economically fairer and progressive nation (Selvaratnam, 1985). It also aimed at doing away with economic specialisations along racial lines and to realign previous economic imbalances and reduce poverty by raising income levels and diversifying opportunities for all Malaysians. These historical rationales continue to form the basis of higher education growth today (Lee, 2004).

Thus, modern-day higher education in Malaysia is driven primarily by similar national economic and social development policies and is a significant source of national revenue. The demand for higher education in Malaysia is manifested by the growth of private higher education in particular with more than 513 private universities, colleges and branch campuses of foreign universities registered with the Ministry of Higher Education in 2014 (MOHE, 2014). Economic policies such as Vision 2020 outlined by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad (1991) paved the way for the setting up of private higher education institutions that claim to operate in alignment with national socio-economic development

goals. Institutions of private higher education are seen to be part of the process of producing work-ready graduates to feed the need for a knowledgeable and skilled workforce. Malaysian private higher education institutions have gradually met the challenge of delivering semi-professional and managerial human capital needed to meet the demands of the nation's growing economy (Tan, 2002; Lee, 1999a, Lee, 2004).

National education policies address in particular, the economic and social stability and competitiveness of the country by focusing heavily on the development of human resources (Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). There has been a concerted drive to liberalise the Malaysian higher education sector that allowed for the participation of private universities and colleges (Lee, 1999a). There was rapid expansion as it adopted a market perspective by including and targeting the international market and offering qualifications of all levels from diplomas to doctoral programmes (Lee, 1999b). Such liberalization efforts impacted upon the management and organization of higher education institutions that are governed by the need for sound financial decision-making by their leaders (Kok, Douglas, McClelland, 2009). Thus began the discourse of the commercialization and the overall widening of participation and access to higher education in Malaysia. In order to survive in the competitive private higher education landscape, private higher education institutions depend on their power to innovate, experiment and create a niche market by creating new programme offerings (Lee, 2004; Grapragasem, Krishnan & Mansor, 2014).

Malaysian Private Higher Education in a Global Environment

The growth of private higher education in Malaysia, and its efforts to be a significant participant in global higher education, is a response to global trends and forces in the field. Tan (2002) posits that these trends have led to government efforts to restructure private higher education in the country in order to capitalize on global demand for higher education. These forces and trends are by and large economic in nature and Malaysia is more than keen to ensure that it is part of trade liberalization regionally and globally. Malaysia's neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Vietnam and China were catching up by opening up to multinational business this affected the former's perceived competitiveness in the global economy (Tan, 2002). A key strategy in remaining competitive in this type of environment is the development of human capital to feed greater participation of international business in the nation and the expansion of small and medium and heavy industries. All of these economies required not just knowledge, but rather knowledge that was increasingly driven by the growth of information technology.

The Malaysian government's response to global trends and strategic responses were put in place in the early 1990s, which has since enabled the growth of private higher education in the country to become a popular destination for international students. This aim is reflective of popular arguments by education researchers focusing on the internationalization of higher education in countries across the world (Deardorff, de Wit, Heyl & Adams, 2012; Knight & de Wit, 1997; Knight, 2004). The Ministry of Education in Malaysia (1990) announced that it would, "…develop a world class quality education

which is flexible and innovative that in turn will make Malaysia a regional educational hub of educational excellence (p.2)". According to a UNESCO Institute for Statistics report (2014) there were 63,500 international students enrolled in Malaysian colleges and universities, which meant that six percent of all higher education students in the country were foreign students. Malaysia is actively seeking to further increase that number by four percent to ten percent of international students out of total enrolments as a source of national income. Each international student spends roughly around USD 10, 000 a year throughout the course of his or her study, which amounts to RM2 billion in revenue (Abu Bakar & Abdul Talib, 2013).

The effort to internationalize higher education in the country was supported by invitations to some international (foreign) universities to open branch campuses on Malaysian soil. This research takes place in this setting, hence the importance in considering internationalization as a driving force in the growth of private higher education in Malaysia. Abu Bakar and Abdul Talib (2013) are not mistaken when they claim that private higher education institutions are commercially driven and therefore target undergraduate students as the most lucrative market. In addition, it is estimated that 70 percent of all international students studying in Malaysia are enrolled in private higher education institutions.

Literacy Practices in Higher Education

This section of the literature review will focus on literacy as one of the foundations of learning in higher education. Literacy is the state of being literate particularly with the

ability to read and write and by that extension, a person's ability to use language proficiently. Gee (2008) defines literacy as a product of acquisition, not learning, in that it requires exposure to discourses in natural and meaningful social settings. This particular definition is an ideological understanding of literacy as it sees it as a set of socially-embedded practices imbued with values and attitudes about the manner in which ideas and thoughts should be written and expressed and read, and how these practices should take place (Street, 1983, 1995). For the purposes of this study, various literacy practices in higher education were reviewed and several themes identified. They encompass the transfer of literacy skills and knowledge from one ideological teaching context to another.

One central theme is academic writing in the sub-field of English-for-academic purposes (EAP). Within this area of study an important focus is higher education students' ability to transfer academic English-language skills to alternative learning contexts. Higher education students are student writers. While this may seem like a fairly obvious statement, it can be a struggle for student writers to work out nuances in written expression, and other linguistic components such as vocabulary and acquisition of lexical phrases or multi-word sequences (Cortes, 2004; Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Moon; 2997; Wray, 2002). In addition, there might be problems trying to figure out the appropriate tone and voice that are to be used (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2000), the students' voices to express original ideas, or the attribution of ideas to one or multiple authors, thus incorporating in their writing the voices of others. Students initially acquire these skills through a slow process of noticing various expressions in their assigned readings, through observation of how ideas are articulated in textbooks and in the classroom and then unwrapping and

imitating the work of others (Li & Schmitt, 2009). They also learn to write better from feedback by their teachers. These practices are often more difficult for English as a second language (L2) users as a significant body of research literature is published in English.

There have been studies that suggest that there is little and unsubstantial correlation between skills and strategies learned in English as a Second Language (ESL) programmes and their application to new learning situations (Greens & Weir, 2003; Johns, 1998; Hyland, 2002; Leki, 2003; Read & Hayes, 2003, Russell, 1995; Spack, 1997; Wardle, 2007). The findings for concrete and successful skill transfer in these studies are elusive. They argue against there being a set of generalisable academic skills that can be learned by students in one context, such as an EAP class, and later transferred for use in writing in other learning contexts, particularly disciplinary ones. Other studies however claim that academic writing can be marginally improved through writing instruction in a college writing course, although the results for these studies varied in terms of what skills were transferred by different sets of students learning in assorted learning contexts (Elder & O'Loughlin, 2003, James, 2006; James, 2010; Shaw & Liu, 1998; Storch, 2009). Storch (2009) found that although there was marginal improvement in the tone and formality of L2 student writers' language there was no evidence of any improvement in linguistic accuracy or complexity. James (2010) found that certain language skills to do with sentence structure, grammatical tenses, and discipline-specific terminology had each been transferred successfully by the students he interviewed and obtained writing samples from. In research on transfer of writing skills, it can be difficult

to determine if certain skills were transferred from an EAP course in a college or university setting or prior to enrolling in higher education.

A central issue concerning academic writing amongst non-traditional learners in higher education is what constitutes good academic writing. It has been noted that university students can be confused in terms of writing for assessments and fulfilling their tutors demands for their written work (Lillis and Turner, 2001; van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012; Louw & van Rooy, 2010). They often had a framework for writing at tertiary level but also frequently had difficulty understanding what specific language and structural requirements their teachers had for academic writing. In Lillis and Turner's (2001) study, they discovered through interviews of two student-writers that tutors' feedback on written work often revolved around vague and confusing interpretations for their essay instructions. For example, a student was instructed to "show that you understand key terms" (Lillis & Turner, 20p. 59) in an essay on gender and sexism which led to confusion on whether the student was meant to how exactly the student was meant to "show" her understanding of key terms. Their study showed that higher education instructors often take-for-granted that students starting out in higher education would have an understanding of academic discourse that the instructors themselves have taken years to understand. The tutors assumed that the meaning of the instruction was as transparent to the student as it was for them - that students implicitly knew that a definition-type essay was required. That is perhaps why it has been argued that retention of first-year students in higher education largely depends on how well they are able to transition to higher education and how well they assimilate and acculturate to the university environment.

Furthermore, for a long time the generic approach to teaching academic writing has been used by both EAP and ESL instructors. In practice, it is often assumed that there are common features in academic writing that can be taught similarly across the board even to native speakers of English (Etherington, 2008). The various branches of studies in EAP however demonstrate otherwise. Not only are there different pedagogical perspectives to teaching English to native speakers rather than non-native speakers, there are different approaches to teaching low-performing native writers of English (Flower, 1994) or students may in fact be writing in English as an additional language (Hinkel, 2002). More recently however, a new approach to teaching and learning literacy has been offered that is an ethnographically-based analysis that shifts attention from written texts to the language capacities of student learners. Researchers in the field of academic literacies redirect the focus on literacy development to the role of identities, power relationships, and social practices of learners and teachers in higher education, which thus will be the theoretical underpinning for this thesis. The review below constitutes a critical analysis of academic literacies as the embodiment of a new development in literacy studies.

Academic Literacies

Academic literacies is central to this thesis for the reason that it is the conceptual approach used in the teaching of literacy in the APUS programme at Urban University. It is a term originally used to describe the study of literacies in higher education. In its early definition, it was limited to the ability to read and write at college or university-level but it has been significantly developed over recent decades to be understood as an academic

perspective that sees reading and writing activities as contextualized, cultural and social practices (Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea & Street 2006; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). The study of academic literacies is also often known as the study of academic discourse (Hyland, 2009). Lea and Street (2006) make the argument for the academic literacies model as thought of in terms of three overlapping viewpoints or models i.e. the (1) study skills model, (2) the academic socialization model and (3) the academic literacies model. The study skills model is one that views academic literacy as a cognitive skill that emphasizes the foundations of language form. More importantly, it assumes that students can transfer study skills such as academic reading and writing from one learning context to another without problems (Wingate, 2006). The second model, academic socialization (Beatty, Collins & Buckingham, 2014; Duff, 2010) is primarily related to students' ability to assimilate and acculturate into disciplinary and subject-based academic discourses and genres and "students acquire the ways of talking, writing, thinking, and using literacy that typified members of a discipline or subject area" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). The final model, the academic literacies model is the one that will form the foundations of this paper. It is focused on "meaning making, identity, power, and authority, and foregrounds the institutional nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular context" (p. 369).

Academic literacies is the theoretical lynchpin of this thesis not only because it is the approach to teaching literacy in the APUS programme, rather also that it is what students in the programme are explicitly taught to be – academically literate. As I explored academic literacies, I found that *disciplinarity* is a key notion in this study. Pedagogically,

students are taught to distinguish differences in skills and knowledge across diverse fields of study. They are asked to consider differences in academic practices, different student identities, concepts of power, and how learning is unique in each discipline. As previously mentioned, this study has the explicit aim of ascertaining the extent to which students are able transfer what they learned from their literacy classes to learning later in their undergraduate degree. The learning objectives that form the basis for learning in these classes are built upon the concept of academic literacies. The aim is for students to be gradually socialised into academic practices at university.

To a large extent the academic literacies model is deemed to be similar to the academic socialization model. Although there are overlapping similarities, academic literacies departs from academic socialization as a theoretical construct. The following outlines the difference. Academic socialization refers to the process of acculturating students into academia. Academics who have spent years in the university environment know what it means to exist in the community. We know how to read, write, listen, speak and we understand each other as we have undergone a similar socialization process. We have been brought into the fold and have a natural feel for doing things (Duff, 2007; Duff and Hornberger, 2008; Lea, 2004). It is another thing however if we instantly assume that our students are able to do the same activities that we do, and with the same level of efficiency without having had time to develop these social skills nor having had guidance from those who have already developed such skills. Morita (2004) aptly describes the difficulty as not simply being a matter of obtaining a pre-determined set of knowledge and skills, rather the student is involved in a complex process of negotiating cultures and

identities. Indeed, the ability to read and write through this view is more than just acquiring new vocabulary and grammar.

For international students especially, the dissimilarities in learning cultures can be very jarring and which makes challenges in learning are more significant. These differences raise the question of whether universities are setting these students up to fail by not taking into account students' ability to acculturate to their new learning environment (Hyatt, 2012). This is best exemplified through Shen's (1989) narrative in which she recounts that it was with great difficulty and struggle to which she tried to reconcile her Chinese identity with an English identity dictated by the rules of English composition. The "Oriental" technique of organizing and expressing thoughts in writing had to be modified and redefined when learning English composition – a reprogramming of the mind as it were. Shen (1989) explains this with the following:

> The instruction was probably crystal clear to students raised on these values, but, as a guideline of composition, it was not very clear or useful to me when I first heard it. First or all, the image or meaning that I attached to the word "I" or "myself" was, as I found out, different from that of my English teacher. In China, "I" is always subordinated to "We" – be it the working class, the Party, the country, or some other collective body. […] The word "I" has often been identified with another "bad" word, "individualism", which has become a synonym for selfishness in China (p. 124).

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Shen's account above highlights not just a student writer contending with which voice to use, the discomposing first-person voice foreign to Shen, or, the familiar collective second-person voice in her native tongue. Clearly, it was not just whether to use 'I' or 'We' rather that each bore significant meaning about where the student writer is from, and what that means for her or his identity. In China, it was not appropriate to emphasise "I" as it was seen as privileging the "individual" (albeit student writer) over the cultural norm of collective over Self.

This is perhaps where the third model, academic literacies, can fill the gaps where academic socialization cannot. This perspective views learning as obtaining appropriate and effective uses of literacy as "more complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated, and involving both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among people, institutions and social identities" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). Higher education institutions are now, if they are not becoming, places where diverse languages are spoken and different cultures practiced. Zamel and Spack (1998) suggest that convergences of such differences often comprise struggle and conflict as these different languages and cultures "build on and give shape to one another" (p. ix). Lillis (2003) echoes this by describing academic literacies as "socially situated discourse practice(s) that are ideologically inscribed". The social-situatedness of the ideological discourses that broadly makeup academic literacies is seen through higher education students who find themselves transitioning from secondary school to a new academic setting that is higher education. They find themselves having to contend with a new set of social and academic expectations.

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Despite the three models' similarities, particularly the academic socialization and academic literacies models, Lea and Street (2008) argue that they are not mutually exclusive; rather, they intersect at theoretical and practical levels. Both models address the epistemological and practical differences within disciplines and subject areas (Baik & Grieg, 2009; Bretag, 2007; Kennelly, Maldoni & Davies, 2010; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue, 2009; Scouller, Bonanno, Smith & Krass, 2008; Starfield, 2001). What might be considered a difference is that the academic literacies model focuses not just on subject area epistemologies rather also in fulfilling organisational policies regarding teacher feedback and academic integrity. Further to that, it also takes into account differences in individual teacher's requirements and student assessments. Despite this, it is difficult to generalize across social settings. Beginning students in higher education often find themselves having to negotiate new and various cultures practiced in different classrooms. According to Zamel and Spack (1998):

> Each has its unique conventions, concepts, and terms. At the same time that each classroom culture brings with it a particular language and set of assumptions, like all cultures it is inevitably shaped by the interaction of students, teacher and texts (p. ix).

Part of assisting higher education students in developing academic literacies is socializing them into the world of academia and showing them "how we do things". Hyland (2009) refers to the concept of academic discourse as "ways of thinking and using language which exist in the academy" (p. 1). These ways are embedded in the complex social activities that take place in higher education institutions such as teaching and

deploying knowledge, teaching students how to learn, using textbooks, writing essays and dissertations and other academic activities. Bringing students into academia and helping them see the big picture requires us to help them familiarize themselves with their disciplines. Ever since there have been universities, we have been constructing the terms and rules of being part of the academic elite. Reinforcing certain academic discourses can be seen as restricting the possibilities for acting as a 'student' or 'teacher', or it can be seen as empowering individuals by making them a member of the team.

The general debate surrounding academic literacies is that there is a wide assumption that there is a single, overarching literacy which students have failed to master before they get to university. Hyland (2009) argues against assuming that there are certain literacy deficits can be corrected by a few top-up English classes. Indeed, this very case study affirms that this deficit view is not helpful. A main finding in Chapter 4 will show that students in certain disciplines find that forced acquisition of certain writing skills are irrelevant and unhelpful to their learning. This assumption that there is a one-size-fits-all type of literacy needs to be further interrogated. If the fault lies with learners themselves, then in what ways are they seen to be deficient in terms academic literacy? There is a need to carefully examine the assumption that secondary schools are able to adequately prepare students for entry into higher education. Under-prepared students experience learning gaps more acutely than those who are prepared (Niven, 2005). This debate is captured within a discussion of student preparedness and acquisition of academic literacies in Chapter 5. I will argue that the disciplinary nature of knowledge can predispose it to different attitudes towards learning.

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In internationalized higher learning contexts, EAP learners' backgrounds and native languages are often downplayed or seen as an impediment to learning. Where writing skills are concerned, non-native English speaking students often feel like they have deficient abilities that can be reinforced by their lecturers (and tutors) (Preece, 2003; Weiderman, 2013). Academic literacies as an alternative to literacy *skills* takes into account diverse student identities in a more sensitive fashion. Literacies discourses can be developed in order to help students and learners adopt alternative approaches to, but not limited to, the teaching and learning of academic writing. In a similar vein, Lillis (2003) explores the academic literacies student writing in higher education in the UK and draws on Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) notions of the monologic and dialogic to illustrate a need for a shift from practices that reproduce official discourses at higher education institutions towards practices that challenge official and unofficial discourses and ways of doing. Students are often made to write in ways that often undermine their own dialogical understandings of academic writing for higher education. This ties in to an earlier argument that teachers expect a single overarching version of literacy at universities.

The predominant part of literacy focused on by teaching staff at university is academic writing, particularly as key forms of assessment are short and long essays, reports and other types of extended writing. Lea & Street (1998) made very early discoveries on the issue of writing conventions at universities in that:

> […] implicit models that have generally been used to understand student writing do not adequately take account of the importance of issues of identity and

> institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within diverse student writing practices across the university (p. 157).

In keeping with the focus of the review thus far, again, a prevalent finding seems to be that academic discourse is dictating that students should be able to write a certain way, and that they need to be socialized into doing so. There exists a notion that those who are not able to conform to standard expectations of writing will have to face the consequence of being made to feel inadequate as a student or worse a failure as a learner. Increasingly scholars in this area are pushing for alternative meaning making and more inclusive constructions of knowledge. The aim is not to revolutionize academic conventions; rather to encourage transformation of generic academic writing conventions to take into account the social practices of non-traditional students. It is a means of legitimizing the voices of these students.

There is a need for higher education institutions to recognize more realistic notions of language requirements at Malaysian universities. Rather than focus on fixed and narrow standard notions of written and spoken academic literacy in Malaysian higher education, Koo (2008) argues for the need for reflexive pluriliteracy as a pedagogic perspective that calls for the awareness of multilingual students in developing alternative notions of academic literacies and skills for those studying in Malaysia. Similarly, Shuib (2008) reports on a preliminary small-scale study on the teaching of three academic courses in English across all Schools in a Malaysian public university. Responses collected from students on the effectiveness of those newly-introduced English courses claimed that they did not improve their English and academic skills and that those courses had no

effect at all on their proficiency in the language. These studies drew on the responses, feedback and textual works of students enrolled in various types academic skills development programmes. Interestingly, those studies challenge the idea that academic skills development should be geared towards forwarding a hegemonic, dominant and accepted framework for what constitutes 'academic literacy' in and across most institutions of higher education. Elbow's (1991) reflections as a freshman college writing instructor however resonate with my own experiences teaching literacy in my program. Given however that it is very rare that university graduates will ever need to write using academic expressions and prose in their future workplaces, there needs to be more consideration for the development of various types of academic literacies. It is quite possible that these students may have to unlearn the painstakingly developed conventional academic writing skills that they were rewarded for acquiring in higher learning.

In short, this section of the review attempted to outline academic literacies and its historical development in literacy studies. It shows that literacy studies has undergone a shift in perspective, that is from a skills based approach to literacy development to a more liberal and plural approach known as academic literacies. The following section in the review will look at further developments in this area of literacy studies.

Further Debates in Academic literacies

Academic literacies has reached the point that several key debates have emerged within the field. Firstly, they revolve around the emphasis on academic writing in higher education institutions and in academic literacies, and secondly, whether generic academic writing programmes are superior to embedded, disciplinary-based academic writing programmes. These debates are significant within the context of this thesis for the reason that this case study has found through student feedback that academic writing is not that important to Computer Science stream pathway students than students in the other disciplines. As such, the idea that academic writing is an equally applicable skill across any and all disciplines is challenged in this context. Furthermore, APUS is in its current implementation is a generic deployment of academic literacies for a multidisciplinary student audience. The findings and discussion chapters will show that there are challenges teaching and learning-wise with this approach.

The first debate is on the lofty place in which academic writing is given in many universities and institutions of higher learning. Weiderman (2013) argues that in higher education today, we uncritically think that an emphasis on academic writing must be made if students are seen as unable to write at university. Tertiary institutions prefer to employ what Weiderman (2006) deems are quick solutions in that treating writing as a separate skill has negatively impacted solutions on the teaching of writing, a point that is also argued by writing experts such as Lillis (2003) and Archer (2006). A general opinion is that the reason why writing is so focused upon in many disciplines within academia is that extended writing, such as student writing and report writing, are predominant assessment

methods within university education. It is as such considered to be a “high stakes” activity for many students and teachers (Lillis and Scott, 2007 p.9). Perhaps it is that essay writing has been historically used by teachers to assess students’ knowledge and resulting in the activity becoming so deeply embedded pedagogically that we are where we are today with its importance in higher education.

The emphasis on academic writing within the Academic Literacies movement has meant that, as a whole, the field has lost somewhat its conceptual clarity and soundness. It is reproached for “being nothing more than criticism guided by postmodern reasoning” (van Dyk, & van de Poel, 2013, p. 50). This is echoed by Weiderman (2013) who similarly argues that isolating writing in higher education has stunted the development of research on the skill that may have been augmented by broader research themes and methodologies. A resulting criticism following an emphasis on academic writing in academic literacies is that research in this area is often characterized as being essentially qualitative and ethnographic in nature. Many studies are conducted on a small scale as it gives scholars deep insight into teachers’ and students’ interpretations and practices of writing in higher education. On the flip side however, such narrow methodological approach has meant that there is a lack of generalizability of findings that in turn encumbers others to appropriate and implement changes on a large scale (van Dyk & van de Poel, 2013; Lillis & Scott, 2007). On this matter however, one has to ask the question of whether or not there can exist singular, homogenous academic writing cultures that can simply be acquired, applied and practiced universally and across varied educational contexts?

This question will be answered in the discussion chapter where the findings of this study show several different kind of tension that can arise from the insistence on a singular approach to literacy in higher education. At this point, I describe these tensions as being a result of academic traditions, and their set ways in assessment design that first-year students find difficult to navigate. The following chapters will explain these tensions in full and ultimately suggest that academic literacies may not be the ultimate solution to disciplinary differences in higher education.

The second debate revolves around whether academic literacies should be taught as embedded within discipline-specific course designs rather than as generic courses (Bohemia et al., 2007; Baik & Grieg, 2009; Butler, 2013; Clerehan, 2003; Crosling, 2005; Goldsmith & Newton, 2011; Henderson & Hirst, 2007; Kokkinn & Stupans, 2011; McCabe, 2011; Weideman, 2013). Those that are in favour of academic literacies to be embedded in disciplinary programmes argue that literacy skills and knowledge cannot, and should not, be taught separately from disciplinary content (Gunn, Hearne & Sibthorpe, 2011; Jacobs, 2007; Goodier & Parkinson, 2005; Murray & Nallaya, 2014; Stoller, 2012). Conversely, proponents of generic standalone institutional academic literacies programmes argue that disciplinary subject-specialists do not have sufficient expertise in teaching academic literacies and therefore are unable to assist students, particularly non-native speakers of English, as meaningfully as they can (Sebolai, 2014). Skills such as academic reading, writing, listening and speaking, as well as critical thinking are often seen as neutral sets of skills that can be taught to entering tertiary students outside of situated university contexts. It may be more common for higher education institutions in

general, to offer literacy programmes of a generic nature (Butler, 2007; Jacobs, 2005; Parkinson, 2000) rather than embed the teaching of literacies within disciplines although the latter approach is increasingly being experimented across various institutional contexts.

Generic literacy programmes across different universities and institutions of higher learning, language and literacy programmes are generally located and based where they are most needed and are most efficient (Kaplan, 1997). Departments within higher education institutions that handle generic academic literacies programmes are often not seen as being cohesive to the rest of the organization and are “idiosyncratic” and “ad hoc” (Ivanic & Lea, 2006, p. 9, 11). They are seen to fulfil the need to deliver and assist with developing courses and programmes that revolve around the literacy needs of the wider student population. However, there are those who critique a hegemonic, decontextualised and generic (or disciplinary) view of a one-size fits all concept of academic literacies in higher learning (Blue, 2003; Heller, 2011; Wingate & Tribble; 2012; Zamel & Spack, 1998). The method of teaching literacy generically has been criticised for addressing language skills, particularly academic writing, on a surface level and therefore undermines the important relationship between disciplinary knowledge and writing within disciplines (Somerville and Creme, 2005).

There are strong proponents for embedded programmes that revolve around the development of academic literacy. Hyland (2000), Nesi and Gardner (2006) and North (2005) are just some scholars who argue that the teaching of writing should be embedded within disciplines rather than left to language specialists. According to Monroe (2003,

2006), as “insiders” and disciplinary members of communities of practice, it has been argued that teachers in the disciplines are best-suited and equipped to familiarise students with the implicit and explicit language rules of the field, or academic discourses (Hyland, 2000, 2002; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002b). Despite this being a solid argument, there is also the counter-argument that subject-specialists do not naturally know how to teach language and may require professional development in teaching academic literacy, a skill already possessed by language and literacy specialists. Moreover, subject lecturers themselves may not be willing to teach writing in addition to content, the latter already taking up much of their time and effort (Mitchell & Evison, 2006; Bailey, 2010; Donahue, 2010). If the subject lecturer takes time out to teach writing that may be at the cost of time devoted to teaching disciplinary content (Wingate, 2007). If professional development were indeed to be given, they would also need to be able to map identified literacies onto their disciplinary curriculums and test various pedagogies to teach them (Klinger & Murray, 2012). It should not be that assumed that students who have been taught disciplinary discourse and socialized to acquire a certain academic identity means that they are automatically and implicitly able to apply those skills to learning in other areas. Indeed, evidence for this remains sparse and little reported (Wingate, Andon & Cogo, 2011).

One proposed solution to a way forward on the debate between generic versus disciplinary academic literacies has been offered by Jacobs (2005, 2007, 2010), Carstens (2013), Kennelly, Maldoni and Davies (2010) and Clerehan (2003) who recommend a transdisciplinary collaboration between discipline specialists, those whose job it is to

deploy content knowledge, and academic literacy practitioners (ALPs), those who are education experts specialising in language and literacy. At most higher education institutions the work of inducting students into disciplinary academic culture is left to ALPs who may or may not possess the tacit knowledge that disciplinary specialists have spent years acquiring. The following section will further describe academic literacies programmes in other educational contexts.

Summary

In short, this literature review has been instrumental in formulating my understanding of the background in which my case study takes place, which is the Malaysian higher education context and its relevance to global higher education. Within this geographical context, I outlined a brief review of literacy practices in higher education as they form the foundational understanding in academic literacies, the key theoretical concepts utilised to frame this case study. Using academic literacies as a lens, as the following chapters will demonstrate, enabled me to understand the primary pedagogical approach used in teaching literacy in the APUS programme. This literature review has demonstrated that it can be used in various learning contexts across the world, and similarly in my context of a higher education pathway course. It has the potential to be modified in order to fill curricular gaps but also argued to be deficient in remedying many learning issues within the APUS programme.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The focus of this chapter is to outline the rationale for the selection of the case study methodology as a conceptual approach to this research. This chapter describes my epistemological position as a researcher and outlines the rationales behind the approach in which knowledge is generated in this research study. I will then state my research questions and why they were asked. The chapter then explains why this research was designed as a case study, what it aims to uncover, and also why this methodology is the most suitable for this research. This will also be done through the rationalisation of the specific methods used to gather data that are, documentary analysis and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Following that, I will summarise how the gathered data was analysed using both research methods. Finally, I end the chapter with a discussion on the ethical and access issues involved in this study.

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of the form and nature of the very bases of knowledge and how knowledge can be gained. It is thought that the way one aligns one's self with his or her epistemological beliefs deeply affects the directions he or she will take in unpacking knowledge of social behaviour. One could be positivist and hold the view that knowledge is observable, objective, hard and tangible. It is aligned to natural science methods, or, one could be subjectivist and see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique. I am

decidedly the latter as a researcher. Clift (1987) posits that English teachers are not simply “born” or “made” rather, their epistemologies are cultivated from their own prior experiences as students that impacts their understandings of teaching and learning. The manner in which they practice may have been influenced by their own prior studies in language and literature, their experiences with teachers within the field, different forms of texts and teaching resources, their individual learning contexts and past learning histories, the way that they perceive themselves as learners, and perhaps their relationships with their colleagues and superiors. It can be argued therefore that epistemology is and can be related to identities. Lincoln and Guba’s (1994) use the phrase ‘Paradigm to Basic Belief Systems’ to explain using four predominant paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory and constructivism. The table below summarises these different epistemologies:

Table 1: Summary of Lincoln and Guba’s (1994) epistemologies and their characteristics

Epistemology	**Characteristics**
Positivism	“Dualist, objectivist assumption that enables the investigator to determine ‘how things really are’ and ‘how things really work’
Postpositivism	“Modified dualist/objectivist assumption that it is possible to approximate (but never fully know) reality”
Critical theory	“Transactional/subjectivist assumption that knowledge is value mediated and hence value dependent”
Constructivism	“Similar but broader transactional/subjectivist assumption that sees knowledge as created in interaction among investigator and respondents”

Note: Adapted from Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, *4*, 97-128.

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I revealed above that I perceive myself to be constructivist-subjectivist as a researcher. This stemmed from my past experiences in higher education having begun in many diverse Arts fields such as journalism, media studies, political science, history, and literature and writing. Prior experiences in research with my former teachers had formed within me a propensity for developing a constructivist-interpretivist identity as a researcher, which now why I find that the best ways to generate knowledge on education is through a constructivist-interpretivist research designs. This makes sense especially since Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) argue that what happens in classrooms and other educational settings are difficult to pin down and generalize. Therefore, classrooms are places where complex human behaviours exist and can often be elusive and intangible.

However, I must note that my selection of methodology was not just a product of my past experiences with qualitative research. As comfortable as I am with such approaches, it is that qualitative research in the context of this case study allows me the flexibility to change directions if I find that a particular method was not reaping the results needed. More importantly, it can generate the kinds of thick and rich data suggested by the research questions in this study.

Therefore, this research study focuses on finding out what students *say* about their prior experiences learning within the academic literacies framework of the APUS programme as a means of transitioning them learning post-pathway. It also centers around finding out if the learning objectives set in the modules mitigates the risks of student failure as a result of them entering lesser-prepared than their peers. As will be

demonstrated below in the section on my research questions, I focus on retrieving and obtaining knowledge from my research sample that is former APUS students who have successfully completed the year-long transition programme. The research design therefore very much focuses on the experiences and views of my prior students and involves interpreting their articulations using a constructivist framework.

To summarise the paradigm positions outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994), the constructivist's inquiry aim is to understand and to reconstruct. This is the aim of my own research in that, as aforementioned, I want to understand and explain, and reflect on the articulated experiences of my students in applying the learning strategies taught to them during their study in the APUS programme. Using a constructivist paradigm, the inquirer is usually also a participant as well as facilitator in the process. Knowledge in this study will be treated as being subjective and as a result of the constructions and reconstructions of knowledge by both the researcher and students recruited as participants in the study. The inquiry also operates on the assumption that the students' realities can be sufficiently recorded "in the form of multiple, intelligible constructions socially and experientially based […]" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Therefore, I seek to understand and reconstruct these articulations of raw experience through semi-structured interviews into transcripts that will then be analysed. These procedures will be outlined and explained below.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions that guide and direct my research study:

1. Is academic literacies effective as a conceptual framework for transition teaching and learning for lesser prepared students in the APUS programme?
2. What do APUS students say about their ability to employ academic literacies after completing the pathway programme and transitioning into year two of undergraduate study at Urban University?
3. What strategic improvements can be made to the programme using new knowledge from this case study?

These three questions are the predominant questions that drive my study. They were carefully crafted after much reflection on my practices in the APUS programme. This research project for my doctoral thesis was timely in that there was a gap in the data and information on the progress of APUS students after they have completed their pathway programme equivalent to year-one of undergraduate study. There have been requests for data of this nature from senior management of Urban University. They required that this information be made available in order to know if the programme is meeting the objectives and goals for which it was set up. Leaders at Urban also wanted to know if APUS students were coping with the programme and if they required additional support from the university. This study however goes beyond being just an evaluative study leading simply to the improvement of this programme from a managerial perspective. This

study was designed for an academic purpose. It does this by examining how transition students learn using the lens of academic literacies. I actively seek to uncover their learning experiences and match those experiences to educational and theoretical principles of academic literacies.

As such, the first research question reflects the aim of assessing how literacies was taught in the programme for the specific purpose of transitioning its students to further learning at an undergraduate level. This question put academic literacies as a theoretical and teaching approach that can be critiqued on its claim to address academic reading and writing in terms of disciplinarity. Can a generic approach to teaching academic literacies to a multidisciplinary student audience truly reap the results of successful transfer of skill, and to different disciplines at that?

The second question came from a desire to ascertain from APUS students their experiences in using and employing learned academic literacies acquired through the programme in their learning post transition. According to Sheridan (2011),

> Students' perceptions of good practice are frequently out of kilter with the requirements of the institution and the discourse community of which they need to gain membership and it is this mismatch that often results in poor learning outcomes (p. 3).

When the learning objectives of the APUS programme were articulated, based on strategic education plans orchestrated by senior faculty at Urban University, they had intended that APUS students acquire a specific set of academic literacies. As APUS

students are entering Urban with lower entrance scores, there is an added need for their academic skill sets to be reinforced and for them to perform a smooth transition to the rest of their undergraduate study. This however assumes that APUS students are able to successfully employ at least some of the espoused learning outcomes in their future studies post-exit from the APUS programme. Ford, Foxlee et al.'s (2009) study for example found that second and third year students had not retained generic skills explicitly taught in first-year. A rather important assumption that needs to be challenged is that APUS students are already entering higher learning being at-risk of underperforming. Is it reasonable to assume that they will be able to perform at par with traditional-entry students? And is academic literacies the way to do that?

The motivation is therefore to uncover the gaps that exist between the learning objectives of academic literacies in the programme, and those competencies that APUS students are actually able to successfully transfer. If they are able to apply some or all of the taught skills, competencies and knowledge, which ones have they applied and used with some degree of practicality in this disciplines? I aim to ask these questions in line with the constructivist paradigm of this study where I build knowledge of the programme's efficacy based on data generated from former APUS students' verbal narratives of their experiences learning about academic literacies in the pathway programme.

Finally, the third question that centres on the improvement, enhancement and advancement of the APUS programme, wants to find out what meaningful changes might be made in terms of curriculum and academic literacies courses in order that the goal of students' successful attainment of academic literacies will be achieved. The academic

literacies agenda is not embedded in the curriculums of the various disciplinary programmes as in many other institutions (Durkin & Main, 2002; Bretag, 2004; Kennelly, Maldoni & Davies, 2007, 2010). Academic literacies is taught as two stand-alone modules by the School running the APUS programme. As the primary facilitator for the APUS programme, I want to fill the structural gaps within the programme to do with teaching and learning. The first place to begin would be with the overall curriculum of the APUS programme. This is perhaps easier said than done since the disciplinary modules of the programme are administered and taught remotely by other staff in other Schools. Any efforts to make suggestions for improvement will have to be in consultation with various decision makers at multiple levels within the organization. The first two questions address the theoretical nature of teaching and learning academic literacies within the programme but I have found that there is a need within practitioner research especially as educators to apply academically-derived knowledge to actual educational policies and practices surrounding APUS.

Case Study

Case study is typically used to recognise a specific form of inquiry where a researcher creates a ‘case’ out of a naturally occurring social situation such as a complex social phenomenon. There are also implications for the type of data that are collected, that is, they are often unstructured data that are qualitatively analysed (Hammersley & Gromm, 2000). Stake (2000) claims that epistemologically, case studies can be the preferred research method if they are aligned with the researcher’s experiences. As such, the aim of case study research is to capture a case’s uniqueness rather than to use them as a

foundation for generalisation. Case studies are typified by the investigation of one or more number of cases. The researcher seeks to gather and analyse information about a sizable number of features of each case. However, it is not a priority to quantify data and in fact, data more often than not is obtained qualitatively. Although the main concern with case studies may not be to infer theoretically or generalise empirically, there may be an attempt to do either one or both of these. Findings are often conceptualized in terms of its 'transferability' or basis for 'naturalistic generalisation' in that they are often restricted by description, explanation, evaluation and prescription (Hemmersley & Gromm, 2000; Stake, 2000).

Case studies can be employed within the boundaries of people, organisations, groups, individuals, local communities or nation states (Swanborn, 2010). This research is a case study for the reason that its focus is on the APUS programme at Urban University. It is thus set in a particular temporal, geographical, organizational context that enables certain perimeters around a case and that they can be defined by individuals and groups involved; and they can be defined by participants' roles and functions in the case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Gerring, 2007; Swanborn, 2010).

When this research commenced, statistical and administrative data on the programme were generated by my School and were formed into reports for the different Schools teaching into the programme. At the time, the numbers hinted at certain phenomena for students who had successfully completed programme since its commencement in 2013 such as the high failure rate of computer science students and the relatively low failure rate of students in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. What the data also

showed was that compared to first-year students enrolled through regular admission, APUS transition students fared slightly worse in terms of academic grades. As an education practitioner, I needed to explore and understand how my students were learning and if I was successfully teaching my students to survive the rigor of learning at Urban University. What was needed was a close up to the reality of the students' lived experiences, thoughts about and feelings for a situation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

As such, this case study was an *exploratory* case study (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2009). It is exploratory in that since the programme went into operation only in March 2013 it has never been evaluated academically, or even administratively. I was guided by a broad research question, and after studying some initial data, more precise research questions were formulated (see above). The findings from this research will give me an idea of where the programme stands two years since its commencement, and if the espoused learning outcomes are making a difference in the academic progress of APUS students at Urban Malaysia. It is a process of describing and explaining the social processes that unfold between students' learning processes, their values in learning, as well as their expectations, opinions, perceptions, struggles, decisions and behaviours in learning (Swanborn, 2010). The goal therefore is to formulate some strategic recommendations for further inquiry (Yin, 2009), which is in line with reflective practitioner research and the idea that education practitioners never stop thinking about what they are doing in the classroom, and how they are doing it.

Thus, the rationale for choosing the case study method for this research is a strategic and logical one. For the reasons above, using this research method allowed me to evaluate the APUS programme using an organised process of collecting and analyzing data on the quality and effectiveness for purpose of making decisions and changes to it in the future (Martella, Nelson, Morgan & Marchand-Martella, 2013). Systematic procedures are important if not for the reason that case studies have traditionally been seen as lacking in rigour and are susceptible to researcher biases that may skew the direction of the findings and conclusions. My defence for the case study method lies in the need of the research, which is to uncover the unique aspects of the case that is the APUS programme, how it works to help students apply academic literacies learned in the programme to future learning within their disciplines and to formulate measures to improve the course syllabi of the programme. This can most certainly be done in a rigorous and non-biased fashion as described in the sections below.

Sampling

A purposive sampling approach was undertaken to select participants for the semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling requires one to think carefully and critically of the boundaries of the population we are studying and to choose sample participants on that basis. In this case, it was determined that a smaller sample of research participants is sufficient for the study as the APUS student population is in itself small, averaging thirty students per semester intake. Furthermore, as this is an exploratory case study that is meant to be used as a basis for further research, a smaller sample size of eight students is deemed therefore suitable especially having taken into account the time frame in which

the project had to be completed. Two APUS students from each discipline, Humanities and Social Sciences, Business and Finance, Computer Science and Physical Sciences were selected. The table below summarises the sample of students that were recruited for the study.

The rationale for the selection of students from each discipline are as such: firstly, I felt that it was important that APUS students from each of the four disciplines be represented equally in the research. There is a possibility that students from each School might experience the APUS programme differently hence the decision to include two students from each discipline. It was known for example that there is numerical evidence obtained from documents provided by the administrative staff that there is a high failure rate for computer science students. Many were failing modules such as programming algorithms and continuous mathematics. The interviews however offer the opportunity to find out why there is a significant failure rate. The in-depth nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to ask questions designed to find out specifically the struggles that APUS computer science students face. Similarly, there may be other specific disciplinary issues faced by students in the other disciplines that may require unearthing.

In my research, each interview began with questions of each student's learning background. Mary Lea and Brian Street who founded studies on academic literacies, recommend that academic tutors discover as much as they can about the former experiences of reading and writing when designing (or redesigning) a course. Lea (2004) states:

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> The course design needs to incorporate attention to the practices students bring from other contexts, both of work and previous study, and also to acknowledge how the textual demands of this course might sit with other more familiar literacy practices (p. 746).

As such, each interviewee was prompted to narrate their experiences of learning in primary and secondary school as well as any other programmes they might have enrolled in prior to entering Urban University.

I purposively selected the eight students from class lists provided to me when the selected students were enrolled in the programme.

Table 2: Purposive Student Interview Sample

Code/Discipline	**Age**	**Gender**	**Nationality**
S1/Humanities and Social Sciences	19	Female	Indonesia
S2/Humanities and Social Sciences	20	Female	Malaysia
S3/Business and Finance	20	Male	Malaysia
S4/Business and Finance	19	Female	Malaysia
S5/Computer Science	19	Male	Indonesia
S6/Computer Science	23	Male	Taiwan
S7/ Science	22	Male	Pakistan
S8/ Science	21	Female	Malaysia

Table 2 above lists the disciplinary majors of each of the students. I ensured that there was equal division of male and female students in each of the lists.

At Urban University, it is policy that as long as I had ethical approval from University of Liverpool, who is overseeing my study, then all I had to do was obtain permission from the Head of School to approach my former students to invite them to participate in my study. The Head of School granted me approval to email individual students with the participant information sheet and the invitation to participate.

Seventy percent of the students whom I emailed registered their interest to participate in the study. I had not emailed more than twelve students so that I would not have to reject any interested participants if there were more who registered their interest than I needed for the study. I then set a date and time for the interview and upon meeting face-to-face I furnished them with the informed consent form for them to sign as a form of informed consent.

Research Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first research method that I will describe in this section is semi-structured in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews was a method that I chose for this research as a means to achieve the second aim of this case study, which is to retrieve knowledge on the ways that APUS students employ academic literacies post-transition from the pathway programme. The other predominant research method in the study is documentary

research and analysis. Its rationale, function and purpose will be outlined in the next section.

The research interview method is designed specifically for the purpose of furthering knowledge and is characterized by a unique type of conversational interaction (Wengraf, 2001). Semi-structured interviews have to be well thought out and organised as with any other research method. However, what is planned is an intentionally half-scripted interview. The constructive approach to knowledge revolves around individual or collective reconstructions that circle around consensus where control is shared between the inquirer and the participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2011). Although the inquirer has an interview protocol to abide by, as previously outlined, the interview is deliberately half-scripted. The interviewer has to be able to ask new questions based on interviewee responses and in this sense, the interviewee has some control over the direction of the semi-structured interview. Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe this as the researcher and the interviewee being in a relationship, a conversational partnership that changes the interview process. As opposed to regular conversations, in-depth semi-structured interviews are more focused and more thorough. The interviews that were conducted were also more active in nature (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). I endeavoured to make sure that the interviewees understood that they could also ask questions to the interviewer. The eight interview sessions were more interactive and two-way rather than the conventional one-way interviews where the interviewer asked all the questions with the interviewee dutifully answering them. Although there was good intention on the part of the researcher to ensure that the interview sessions were democratic, some interviewees

were often shy when it came to asking the interviewer questions. I waited for them to work up the courage to ask the questions. This could be in part to do with the deferential culture that typifies the learning context. Students from predominantly Asian contexts find it difficult to assert themselves in front of those that they perceive to be in a position above them such as their parents, teachers and elders (Gieve & Clark, 2005; Coleman 1996). Nevertheless, once they were reassured, some of them did manage to relax and interact with much more ease.

Based on the description of the semi-structured approach to interviews as a research method for this study, an interview protocol (Silverman, 2010) was developed as a framework for obtaining data. A set of questions were carefully crafted (see Appendix B) to ensure that each interviewee response can be analysed according to a fixed number of themes. The protocol however was merely a guide and departure away from it did not detract from the value of the data.

The interview questions were designed with themes in mind. One of those themes was the APUS students' learning histories. This theme is significant in my research for the reason that I feel that it is important to know where APUS students come from, and the manner in which they were socialized into learning from an early age (Grbich, 2007). The interview began with an inquiry into the learning background of the interviewee. Each participant was prompted to recall significant experiences in their early education to the point where they are ready to attend university. They were then asked about choice of tertiary education preparatory course and what motivated them to choose that programme as a gateway to higher learning. Then they were asked if they thought that the preparatory

programme sufficiently prepared them for learning at Urban University. This was to find out if they felt like they could cope academically upon entering my institution, or if they ultimately discovered that they were under-prepared to tackle the challenges of learning in a new environment. They were also asked to describe their learning at Urban University and what they felt were the most significant challenges in their first-year of study. Conversely, they were also asked about what they felt were the easiest parts of learning at Urban University. This then progressed to questions asking them to recall what they learned in the two academic literacies modules, the compulsory subjects that they had to undertake as part of the programme.

Documentary Analysis

Documentary research has over time become more accepted as a legitimate research method in the field of Education. It refers to analysis of a certain type of written material (Bowen, 2009; Rapley; 2007; Schreir, 2012). Education practitioners may deal with documents on a daily basis e.g. attendance registers, subject guidelines, lesson plans, policy reports, minutes of meetings, or record of students' grades; and the list goes on. According to McCulloch (2004):

> To understand documents is to read between the lines of our material world. We need to comprehend the words themselves to follow the plot, the basic storyline. But we need to get between the lines, to analyse their meaning and their deeper purpose, to develop a study that is based on documents (p. 1).

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Documentary analysis is one aspect of this study's design. Documents that concern the APUS programme at Urban University were gathered for documentary analysis. Documentary analysis necessitates that the researcher locate, categorise, select and analyse documents. According to Duffy (2005), documentary analysis is used to enhance data and information gathered by other methods such as when there is a need to check the reliability of evidence gathered from interviews or questionnaires. This is the rationale for this particular research, documentary analysis is used to triangulate against evidence gathered through literature, and semi-structured interviews.

I began the search for documents pertaining to my programme by looking at these documents where I already had access. There were many sources including handbooks and prospectuses, the subject guide, attendance registers, test papers, personal files, records of student grades, lecture notes, tutorial activity guides and samples of students' work. In a quest for documentary sources (Duffy, 2005) I explained my research project to my School Manager, a senior administrator, who then furnished me with further relevant documents such as accreditation documents for the programme, a comprehensive self-review report, and a document detailing the transitioning of the programme to course architecture compliance.

Upon locating these documents, I then proceeded to categorise them into sections of information (Duffy, 2005). Some documents pertained to students' learning and were either documents that directed their learning or were documents that were evidence of their learning. The former category were self-generated documents such as subject guides that documented the programme's objectives, assessment structure and policies

that govern the students' study in the programme. The latter category 'evidence of students' learning' comprised an assortment of documents from academic progression reports generated by the School's course manager, my own record of students' grades, and students' written assignments including their learning journals that had to be written for one of the module's assessment tasks. I also received documents from a colleague who sat on the campus education committee who was tasked to report on the academic progress of students in the APUS programme.

A second category is administrative documents that capture information about the programme, from its inception, to its planning and its compliance with institutional policies on higher education. The various policy documents are made available for access by Urban University's staff on the intranet as well as password-protected website. The database of policy and planning documents were quite significant and had to be sifted through to identify which ones were relevant to my study.

A third category is the compilation of documents that come from national and institutional sources. National documents include the Ministry of Education's reports, and the National Educational Blueprint. Other supporting organisational documents were gathered such as the institution's ten-year plan and other strategic plans. These documents served to provide insight to the overall institutional context.

Students' Learning Journals

Learning journals can be a rich source of data and information for the constructivist researcher and they offered a great wealth of data to my study. The use of this method

has been somewhat documented in literature (Boud, 2001; Everett, 2013; Hiemstra, 2001; Lew & Schmidt, 2011; O'Connell & Dyment, 2006). Student learning journals that are usually a form of assessment are a good vehicle to capture students' thoughts, feelings and experiences with learning that might be otherwise unknown. The purpose of this assessment was to introduce journaling to first-year students as a means of capturing their thoughts about learning in higher education and encourage reflection on every day learning tasks. This assessment item was formative in nature in the sense that through these reflections I hoped that my students were able to look at their own learning practices and be able to step away from how they used to learn to consider other, better learning strategies. Indeed, the assumption is not they should change everything about how they used to learn, but upon learning something new learning skills, how that knowledge has will impact their future learning.

For this journaling task, students were required to write a journal entry of 200 to 250 words a week. There were twelve weeks in a semester. They could journal about any learning activity that made an impression on them in a particular teaching week whether it can an interesting lecture, a learning activity that required their participation or even the difficulties that they encountered learning throughout the week (see Item A5 in Appendix A). The students were encouraged to journal about their disciplinary learning in addition to their learning in the literacy unit. Nothing was off limits except that they had to journal about learning at university, and each entry should ideally not be about their personal non-academic lives. They were also instructed to be as reflective as possible and avoid

merely describing learning events as they occurred in the classroom. Essentially, this quality was the determinant of the grade they would receive for this assessment.

The process of sampling student learning journals began by determining which journals stood out other ones that were not considered for analysis. The total number of journals that I gathered at the start of this process was 111 hard copies that were stored in an online repository. I also had corresponding hard copies that were stored in the School's strong room used to keep student documents for review purposes. Each journal was read through once using coding frames as a lens (see below).

Many students often just recapped the learning points of the week, which tells me a lot about what I taught my students, but does not tell me very much about what they learned. I eliminated journals of those nature from my dataset. Instead, I selected journals that evidenced the students' self-awareness, self-reflection and independence in terms of their learning. I also selected journals that evidenced the student's development of understanding, application and integration of key academic skills taught in the literacy units and their disciplinary learning. In the end, out of 111 journals that were collected, out of this process I was left with a sample of 10 learning journals to be analysed for content analysis. The procedures that I used to conduct the analysis is described below.

Data Analysis Procedures

Content analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used to derive meaning from sets of documents put together through the research process. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) content analysis can be defined as "the process of summarising and

reporting written data – the main contents of data and their messages" (p. 475). An alternative definition by Krippendorp (2004) is that it "is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). Content analysis was performed on documents namely the interview transcripts, institutional and programme documents and student learning journals using two coding frames, the second a variation of the first one. My coding frames were structured according to hierarchical levels (Schreier, 2012) where each frame has a main category that forms the first level and subcategories at a lower level. This allowed me to sort themes into a type of order and sequence that would make them easier for management and analysis.

Patterns in the student learning journals and interview transcripts were identified particularly in terms of how certain key ideas were expressed and described, as well as the number of times they occurred. Coding frames such as represented in Figure 1 below provide a mental picture of how data was gathered. Coding frame 1 depicts the categories of identified themes and categorisations for the data gathered through the student learning journals. The frame consists of clusters and themes on various levels otherwise known as order of abstractions. An example of a cluster at the first order of abstraction is 'Past Academic Experiences' which breaks down to three themes on the second order of abstraction. As above, level two consists of the themes: differences in terms of past schooling, academic challenges and preferred learning styles. Data analysis seeks to go beyond surface levels, hence a third level of analysis is shown in some cases. In the figure above, one can see that 'Preferred learning styles' breaks down to academic

activities, types of academic activity, level of interest and engagement and finally the role of the tutor and instructor in facilitating past learning. I had four major themes, fourteen minor themes and three subordinate themes in what is known as a layering process (Creswell, 2012). Coding frames ensured that I was always aware of what data had been derived and at which level. In this manner, such procedures contributed to the reliability and soundness of data and data analysis. Table 3 below is an abridged example of a table of themes that were entered into Microsoft Excel. In order to analyse thick data found in various sets of institutional documents and student learning journals, I used Microsoft Excel. An example of the Coding Frame 1 is as follows:

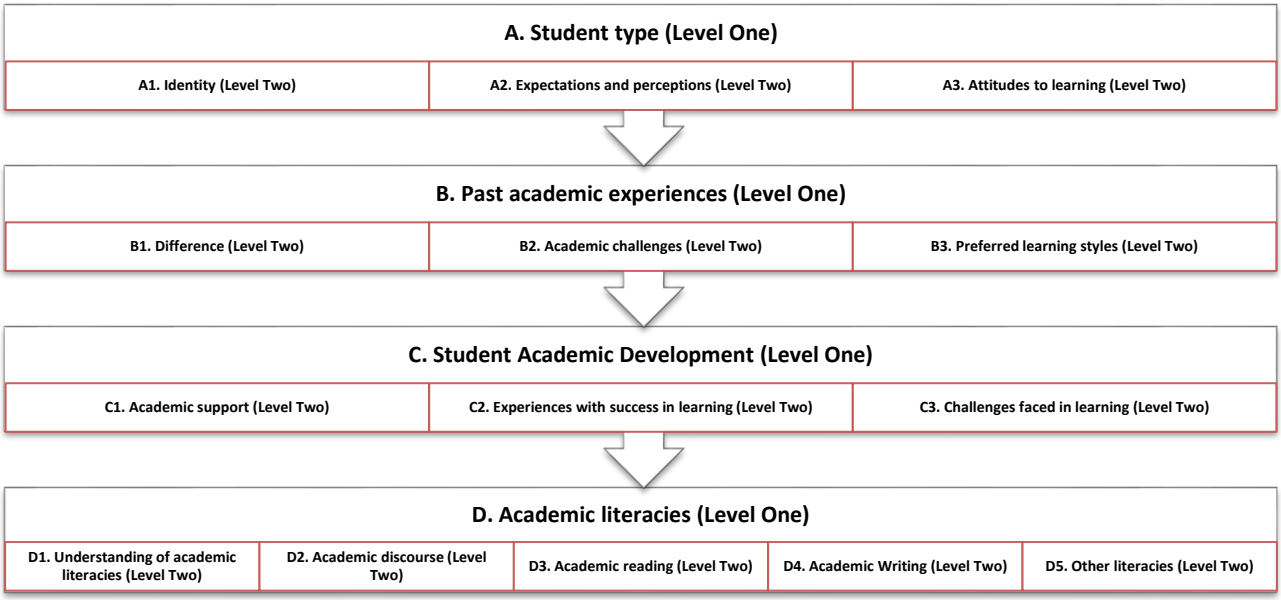


Figure 1: Coding frame 1 depicting thematically clustered data derived from student learning journals

Referring to Table 3 in below, the first column lists the major themes that emerged from the data. These abstractions were formed looking at my research questions bearing in mind what I wanted to find out. In the coding frame, forming such abstractions is level

one of the analysis. The next column denoted minor themes that form the second level of analysis. For example, one major theme that I looked at was 'Student Academic Development' (Row 3). Minor themes that at level two were divided into A) Academic support B) Experiences with success in learning and C) Challenges faced in learning. After identifying these themes that occur throughout the student learning journals for example, I noted down the number of times in which the student alludes to or writes about the theme e.g. 'type of support received'. I then noted in one column where this was mentioned. The final column lists the Keyword. In order to analyse the keyword, I wrote down exactly what was written by the student and the page on which it was written. The organization of data in Microsoft Excel in this fashion greatly facilitated my ability to revisit them until the patterns emerged and I was able to reflect and understand them. I could also search for keywords using the 'find' function.

Table 3: Sample Clustered Data for Thematic Documentary Analysis

Major Theme (Level 1)	**Minor Theme** (Level 2)	**Subordinate Theme** (Level 3)	**Frequency**	**Document**	**KWIC/TWIC (Keyword/Theme in Context)/Page No.**
Student Type	A. Identities B. Expectations & perceptions of university C. Attitudes to learning		A: 3 B: 2 C: 11	Student Learning Journal No.1	A. "I am now an [Urban] University student. I can't imagine being here" (p.1) B. "I expect to learn many new and difficult things especially since I'm a Science student" (p.2) C. "I need to work very hard because programming is very difficult" (p.7)
Past academic	A. Difference to past schooling	**Academic activities**	A. 2	Student Learning	A. 1) "A-levels was very different to what I am learning now" (p.1)

experiences	B. Academic challenges faced C. Preferred learning style(s)	A: Types of academic activity B. Level of interest and engagement C. The role of tutor/instructor	B. 23 C. 5 **Level** **Three:** A. 3 B. 3 C. 5	Journal No. 1	2) "We learned grammar and stuff not how to write acceptable essays" B. 1)"Pre-university was much easier compared to what I'm doing now particularly academic writing" (p.1) C. 1) "I prefer to listen to the lecturer rather than read on my own" (p.3)
Student Academic Development	A. Academic support received B. Experiences with success in learning C. Challenges faced in learning		A. 4 B. 6 C. 13	Student Learning Journal No. 1	A. "Miss Melissa explained very clearly the structure for a standard academic essay" (p.6) B. "I never knew how to write thesis statements. Now I know how important they are" (p.6) C. "If I don't learn how to write essays now I won't do well in future assignments" (p.11)
Academic Literacies	A. Understanding of the concept of academic literacies B. Academic discourse C. Academic reading D. Academic Writing E. Other literacies		A. 1 B. 3 C. 4 D. 9 E. 3	Student Learning Journal No. 1	A. 1) "I can apply academic reading and writing skills in the future" (p.9) B. 1) "The way we are supposed to sound is sophisticated. We shouldn't sound ordinary. It must be formal" (p.6) C. 1) "Now I know that we should do skimming and scanning when reading" (p.4) D. 1) "Academic writing is not important in computer sciences" (p. 6) E. "Referencing is crucial and we must

					reference properly" (p. 2)

Content Analysis of Institutional Documents

A different coding method was used for my documentary analysis than the coding frames used above for the semi-structured interviews and student learning journals. Programme documents were procured for analysis including unit guides, programme and subject planning papers and review documents. The approach to analysis for the documents were in fact quite straightforward. It involved reading the documents multiple times, combing through them repeatedly and meticulously to gain familiarity with the contents of those documents. Following this, I determined which parts of all the documents analysed were *not* relevant to my research study. What I was primarily concerned about were looking for thematic recurrences such as stated learning outcomes for the two literacy units, the overall programme learning outcomes and items that explicitly indicated how the two literacy units should be taught and what students should have learned.

The next step involved a rather simple but effective method of using different coloured highlighters to highlight similarities and differences. These highlighted items formed the items or keywords that were then coded. They were coded into four separate categories i.e. 1) programme learning outcome, 2) unit learning outcome, 3) teaching item and 4) student learning outcome/objective. The final step was to note these down into a research journal for reflection and note-taking.

Limitations

These methods for dealing with data allowed me to generate sufficient information for analysis. There were however certain limitations in analysing data in the manner that I just described. As with any form of analysis, the selection and categorisations were done with a degree of subjectivity on my part. Of the copious amount of 'thick' data (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010) gathered, I chose to examine and highlight themes that were of interest to me and my study. Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin and Lowden (2011) argue that researchers need to familiarise themselves with their recordings, transcripts, notes and diaries, which can work to sensitise the researcher to relevant content and key issues. However, that can also become a challenge that is a researcher becomes too familiar with her data. In my case, particularly with the student interviews, I found that students often had similar thoughts about their experiences learning in my classes which meant that I had to make sure that I did not overgeneralise their responses and in so doing risk not being able to see beyond their responses to identify outliers in the data.

Indeed, the process of knowing what to do with unexpected themes and surprising findings required a lot of consideration in order to know what to make of them. It meant sometimes that I had to deal with my own biases as a teacher in the programme. For example, the data had shown that Computer Science-stream APUS students had largely articulated their observations that academic literacies is irrelevant to their disciplinary learning. At first their feedback was quite puzzling to me. I thought surely they could see that all university students would be required to graduate from university with good, if not strong language and writing skills regardless of their discipline. This was an inherent bias

that I had to slowly dismantle as I considered their responses over a lengthy period of time. The data that I thought were outliers were in fact was what formed major themes and the opposite was true due to the ways in which I initially chose to classify them. This process has called up my biases as a practitioner-researcher and compelled me to reconsider my deep-seated assumptions about the ways that I teach and the ways that I research. I understood ultimately that this is what O'Toole and Beckett (2010) meant by conversing with one's data.

Ethical considerations

Research in education should never be conducted without regard for those that could potentially be impacted by it particularly when the study concerns human participants. I consider it important to examine my study in terms of its ethical dimensions in standard educational and research practices and norms. Although primary concern is given to those students who were approached to participate in the study, as well as those who eventually involved themselves, it is also the duty of the researcher to consider herself in the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Oliver, 2003). Research is not research in itself as educational contexts can also be political and micro-political sites that an educational researcher must navigate (Howe & Moses, 1999). The APUS programme involves staff and students of many levels with whom the researcher will continue to have professional relationships after the conclusion of the study. It was in my best interest that I considered conscientiously the ethical and access issues that impact upon my study.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

The first ethical dimension that I had to consider was my research participants. In the context of this case study, they were former APUS students. I wanted to find out how APUS students were transferring academic literacies knowledge to further learning in their undergraduate programme. One ethical issue that I was always aware of was the dual role that I played as both teacher and researcher. I did not feel comfortable researching the students that I taught at the time of data gathering. Fortunately, the question focusing on skill transfer helped mitigate this problem to an extent. As these students had progressed from the APUS course there would be very minimal to no conflict of interest since I no longer hold a stake in their interests. Proponents for research for social justice state that it is important to be explicit about one's values and motives (Menter et al., 2011). It was therefore important to me to aim to be as neutral and objective as I could since I recognised the immense power that I have in the interests of my students. I have the power for instance, to determine if a student completes the APUS programme, or is held back from it effectively impeding their progress to further study at Urban.

In order to demonstrate that I have considered most ethical issues in practitioner research in education, I made sure that I complied with the guidelines set the University of Liverpool. Complete ethics forms were submitted that covered all ethical considerations. Having checked with the ethics office governing research concerning humans at Urban University, I received confirmation that I could proceed with my study if I had obtained ethical approval at the University of Liverpool, and if I corresponding

consent from my Head of School that explicitly stated that I had permission to email identified individual students and issue a call for participation.

To ensure that my participants had comprehensive information regarding my study, such as the aim of the study, and their entitlements and rights including their right to withdraw, I sent a participant information sheet (PIS) to them in the invitation email. It stated the full right of the participant to withdraw at any time of the study for whatever reasons without any consequences to her or him. The PIS also outlined their right to privacy, and confidentiality is guaranteed to the participant. The information that they provided me was de-identified and pseudonyms assigned to them. This occurred throughout the entire process of my research including the de-identification of data when they were stored. They were similarly informed of how data was stored, and when they would be destroyed. With these and further information, upon consideration of these terms, they were asked to indicate informed consent by signing an informed consent form. The PIS also directed them to someone they could make a complaint to if they deemed anything was amiss with the manner in which I conducted participant research.

Apart from considering the impact of the study to my research participants, I had to consider ethical issues for when data collection had been completed. It is important to be aware of local issues when conducting sensitive research and to consider a conflict of responsibilities to the research community and to the institution (Oliver, 2003; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Although I would not say that my research is sensitive in nature, I would have had to deal with any potential misgivings for reporting negative findings. For instance, the data has revealed that Computer Science students found that

an academic literacies focus bore little to no meaning to them in the context of their discipline. They found the two foundational literacies courses to be “a waste of their time”. Another finding is that APUS students are underperforming academically relative to their disciplinary peers, with little to no additional support by the university. There are risks that any sort of recommendation to respond to such findings may not sit well with stakeholders at the School of Information Technology, and other Schools including their leadership and teachers, not to mention senior management of the university.

To mitigate the uncertainty that may occur with the possibility of reporting contentious findings to senior decision-makers, I plan to first approach the School’s Education Committee with my findings and recommendations before they are then presented to the Campus Education Committee. In the event that I may have to recommend significant changes, I will have a private discussion with my immediate supervisor to discuss how I might go about doing so. Amongst other considerations, I believe that I have a duty to myself in protecting my well-being and reputation as a practitioner-researcher. This is also to ensure that I will have support in further research to be conducted if necessary. As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) correctly observe, it is not possible to identify and mitigate all potential ethical issues or say with precision what ethical researcher behaviours are. However, I believe that as long as I am continually reflective as an education practitioner, and aware of the potential political and ethical dimensions (Parsell, Ambler, & Jacenyik-Trawoger, 2014; Wright, Suchet-Pearson & Lloyd, 2007), this research project should result in meaningful and positive results for the development of academic literacies and constructive change to the APUS programme.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter states and outlines the five main findings of the study conducted using the research design presented in the previous chapter. These findings are a result of meticulous scrutiny and analysis of data derived using two research methods: 1) documentary analysis including data from student learning journals and 2) semi-structured in-depth interviews. The manner in which the findings of this study are presented is deliberate. Upon a statement of the main finding, evidence from the documentary analysis and interview data will be presented to explicate it. A simple device that can be used to follow the development of the five main findings is the 5As, which stands for Alignment, Achievement, Assessment, Antithesis and Application.

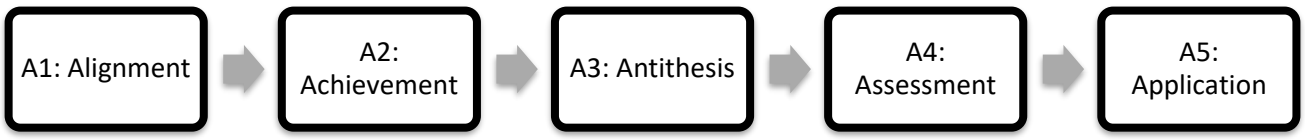


Figure 2: The 5As: A mnemonic device that summarises the five findings of this thesis

The first 'A', (A1) alignment, revolves around the misalignment between two foundational literacies modules in the programme. A2, achievement, is the finding that students in the programme underachieve compared to their non-pathway first-year peers. A3, outlines the difficulty that Computer Science students have reconciling the learning capacities needed in their discipline versus the emphasis on academic writing under the academic literacies approach to transition learning. A4 - assessment, is an issue where students

struggle with assessment in their discipline that may not be alleviated through academic literacies. Finally, A5, Application, which reveals that despite the four preceding problems (A1-A4), APUS students in general are of the view that academic literacies are still beneficial to them in that they believe that at some point in their future learning, they will be able to employ the knowledge acquired in those modules.

A1: Alignment: Academic Literacies, or not?

The primary finding of this study as a direct result of documentary analysis is that the academic literacies core component of the APUS programme falls short of truly being an academic literacies approach. Based on programme documents, the teaching of academic knowledge and skills is *supposed* to have been deployed using an espoused academic literacies framework. The academic literacies approach combines the importance of linguistic knowledge and consideration of student identities, the interactions of power and authority, and formations of disciplinary knowledge (Lea & Street, 1998; Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea & Street 2006; Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). In the literature review section, I showed that academic literacies, as a theoretical framework, underwent two model transitions within the field of literacy studies arriving as part of a New Literacies tradition. From a study skills model, scholars began to conceptualise literacy studies using a socialization model. The academic literacies model is a development of the latter model that sees literacy practices as contextualized within social and cultural practices. The finding shows that one module was designed with academic literacies in mind, but the other module is more in line with a skills-based approach to literacy. The two foundational modules are therefore misaligned to the

intended academic literacies approach of teaching and learning in the APUS literacy classroom.

There are evidences to demonstrate the different emphases of the two foundation literacies study modules in the programme. Firstly, there are obvious differences in the words used to describe the espoused learning objectives of the two modules. The descriptors in the learning objectives of one module shows that it aims to develop generically prescribed academic “skills” rather than focus on the construction of different literacies across disciplines that is couched in the academic literacies model.

Table 4 below provides a snapshot of the learning outcomes of these two foundational literacy modules. The left-most column lists the number of learning outcomes while the second and third columns states the learning objectives of each module. In keeping with the protection of my institution’s identity, I have assigned pseudonyms for the two modules that I will refer to in this section. One pseudonym will be Literacy 101 and the other Literacy 102. The words (in bold) and underlined are used to highlight these differences in word descriptors.

Table 4: Learning objectives of two core academic literacies modules

Learning Outcome No.	Learning Outcome (LO) Literacy 101	Learning Outcome (LO) Literacy 102
LO1.	Demonstrate the ability to access, evaluate, interpret and use information appropriately from a variety of sources, especially within **their disciplines**.	Demonstrate an appreciation of the centrality of **skills development** in academic excellence.
LO2.	Employ skills and strategies for reading a variety of **discipline-specific** texts: textbooks, reports, research articles and others.	Access and evaluate information needed appropriately.
LO3.	Engage in critical and reflective thinking to respond to and construct **academic discourses**.	Use **strategies and skills** for effective, efficient and critical reading of academic texts.
LO4.	Manage group dynamics and work effectively in teams to solve problems and generate desired outcomes.	Produce essays that present a well-developed, coherent viewpoint and adhere to the **conventions of academic writing**.
LO5.	Make appropriate choices regarding context, purpose, rhetoric, structure, strategies, and style to communicate effectively for **different audiences and academic communities**.	Effectively prepare for and deliver oral presentations.
LO6.	Revise and refine work in line with **academic conventions**, **clarity and correctness**.	Maximise their learning from lectures, tutorials, reading materials and assessment tasks.
LO7.	Demonstrate a degree of independence and integration of skills to produce a research paper in their **discipline** area.	Employ a **range of skills**, including academic reading, thinking and writing to academic tasks in this and other modules.

LO8.		Apply teamwork, leadership and independent **learning skills** through various learning opportunities.

As shown above, there are obvious differences in the expressions and individual words used to state the learning objectives of both modules. The learning objectives for Literacy 101 reflect more of the core thrust of academic literacies than Literacy 102. The learning outcomes for Literacy 101 are framed around recognising disciplinary differences (LO1, LO2); to develop criticality and reflectivity in terms of responding to and constructing academic discourses (LO3); and to make relevant choices about context, purpose, rhetoric, structure, strategies and style in order to make themselves understood by various audiences within academic communities (LO5). This includes the ability to review their work according to standard academic expectations. Although LO7 for Literacy 101 outlines the ability to integrate skills to produce a research paper, it couches this aim within the ability to "demonstrate a degree of independence" and to do so within their discipline.

The meaning-making focus of the academic literacies approach is evident in the learning objectives of Literacy 101 as it stresses the development of the ability to recognise disciplinary differences and academic discourses. The word 'discipline' is explicitly mentioned three times. It is also explicitly stated that the module takes into account "different audiences and academic communities" (LO5). APUS students are meant to engage meaningfully with core disciplinary literacy conventions and are encouraged to exercise autonomy in meaning-making as disciplinary students. They

show that students should be able to make learning decisions by noticing the parameters of their learning contexts, to consider how knowledge is presented, structured and talked about within their disciplinary communities, as well as the rationales for assessments (Zamel & Spack, 1998; Lea & Street, 2006). LO1 for Literacy 101 also focuses on "appropriate" retrieval and use of sources of knowledge as provided by the University. This is theoretically in-line with the academic literacies perspective that learning is what "the institution […] counts as knowledge in any particular context" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). Students of four separate discipline streams are represented in the APUS classroom. As such, the espoused learning objectives for Literacy 101 are aligned to an academic literacies approach deemed useful for the APUS programme due to this fact. It does this in an explicit and clear manner, and therefore follows a clearly marked trajectory for pedagogical deployment of literacy knowledge by teaching staff to APUS students.

Literacy 102 on the other hand, clearly emphasizes the development of strategic generic (and specific) learning and academic *skills* rather than disciplinary literacies, evidenced by the overt use of the word "skills" in four (LO1, LO3, LO7 and LO8) of the eight learning objectives. The study skills model to teaching literacy is an approach that centres on the surface language structures such as grammar, punctuation and development of other sentence skills particularly within academic writing (Lea and Street, 2006). To reiterate, the difference lies in the study skills model view of writing being an individual practice rather than one that is bound within the conventions of disciplines. It does not take into account meaning-making beyond the individual or the student's ability to transfer knowledge of writing and literacy without problems from one context to another.

It also does not take into account collective identities within a disciplinary or institutional context, and neglects the role of authority and power in influencing students' ability to learn. Although the word "skills" is not used in the other four objectives, I contend that they revolve around the development of generic skills such as the ability to "access and evaluate information" (LO2", to "produce essays" (LO4) to "effectively prepare for and deliver oral presentations" (LO5) and to learn as effectively as possible from lectures tutorials, assigned readings and assessments (LO6).

The question at hand is: if there is a lack of coherence in the learning objectives of both these modules then how can the programme's academic literacy practitioner reconcile the differences in theoretical and practical foci between them? Is the pedagogical impetus to develop study skills or develop academic literacies? In order to align the two towards a coherent approach to foundational studies, it should be one or the other.

One of the unintended and tacit consequences of this misalignment is that it potentially affects students' ability to comprehend what it means to learn within an academic literacies approach. Where it is taught in one, it is not reinforced by the other. One directs students towards study skills and the other to academic literacies. If the end goal is for students to recognise disciplinary differences, it is best to align both modules towards coherence. This finding seems to be coherent with the outcomes of the student interviews. While the module guides focused on learning objectives, student interviews evidence the outcomes after teaching and learning. One of the key questions during the semi-structured interviews with former APUS students is (see Appendix B): what do you

recall learning in both the non-disciplinary module in the APUS programme? There were a variety of responses. What was clear was that each student had graduated from the programme with their own learning outcomes. Amos, a male Computer Science major recalled, “Referencing. I didn’t know referencing before I came to Urban. And that was the most useful to me (line 23)”.

Indeed, referencing systems and the importance of academic integrity and the consequences of plagiarism was deeply emphasised in the teaching of the academic literacies modules. In fact, most assessments required students to display proficiency in using citations in their work. It was enforced to a strict degree and more often than not, the use of Turnitin software for electronic submissions of work and to check for similarity in phrases with published material found online was a useful deterrent in academic cheating. When prompted on how Amos now applies the knowledge of referencing systems that he learned in the modules were useful he replied:

> Well, in Computer Science, we don’t do much referencing since we only deal with programming algorithms and mathematics. We’re not required to reference most of the time. So I don’t know actually how it is useful. Maybe some time in future I will have to reference (line 25-27).

This extract may not seem to mean much with a surface reading. It can be seen that Amos understands academic citations as being a beneficial skill to have, although as he admits, he does not actually understand how possessing this knowledge would be “useful” to him. Academic literacies sees learning as being to do with meaning-making,

student identities, and learning as having relationships to power and authority and institutional and disciplinary formations of knowledge. Following it, Amos should have been able to articulate the importance of referencing to university students and Urban University takes plagiarism seriously. In actuality, all students have to conform to conventional referencing standards, even in the Computer Sciences. When further prompted to recall what else he remembered from the two courses, Amos replied, “And then, there’s something about skimming and scanning (referring to academic reading strategies) (line 27)”.

Skimming and scanning are taught as effective reading strategies to use in higher learning. For example, students are encouraged to recognise the functions of abstracts, introductions, different sections of academic articles and conclusions. Rather than using the comprehension method, the reading of academic texts line by line, slowly in order to develop deep understanding of the article, students are taught that in research, that method can be less useful especially when the aim is to determine the gist of the article, or when locating specific information such as the main and supporting ideas, and the article’s conclusion. When asked if he now employs skimming and scanning techniques in his reading, Amos responded that in the field of Computer Sciences there is very little prescribed reading and that they are mostly required to learn programming language and create computer programmes. Amos is saying that he perceives a lack of future opportunities to use skimming and scanning techniques in his discipline. The following chapter will discuss the extent to which this understanding is true in the discipline.

Similarly, but in a different way, Anna, a female international Humanities and Social Sciences student makes sense of her experience of learning foundational reading strategies:

> I have learned about critical reading on this week. I tried to do critical reading during tutorial. Ms. Melissa gave us to read one article and do critical reading. The article was about euthanasia. There were a lot of scientific words so it was really hard to understand. However, I was keep trying to do skimming and scanning but I could not get important point by skimming and scanning. I think that is because I am not used to it yet. However, if I am used to it then skimming and scanning will be really useful to me because I always have a bunch of reading for my modules (Student Learning Journal, 1 p.6).

This account suggests that Anna's understanding of academic reading strategies were learned in a skills-based fashion. They are generic academic skills to possess simply to read at university. Anna does not describe how these are literacy capacities to be adapted to her learning in the Humanities and Social Sciences and how they would fit into wider disciplinary learning or indeed even how such knowledge may be transferable to future learning. It is merely "useful" because she is expected to read extensively in her discipline and it would end there. The scientific words she referred to belonged to the article that I issued in a reading activity. It had the dual aim of teaching critical reading and encouraging them to understand the nature of articles in disciplines foreign to theirs.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Although it may not be explicit in the anecdote above, it seems that Anna did not realise that she was meant to gain exposure to knowledge to another field of study and be prompted to compare that to knowledge in her own field. There is no further evidence in her learning journal to suggest that she realized this, as there is also no evidence to show that she does not realise this. Indeed, her narrative may have been written in that particular manner because she is a novice learner at university, and that being a first-year student, she may not have had adequate time or guidance to understand the intricacies of academic literacies. Despite this, what Anna's narrative indicates to me is that there may have been opportunities to reinforce differences in academic reading across disciplines, and how students in different disciplines may employ the same skills differently depending on the learning task and objectives.

The inconsistency of emphases and the lack of distinction between the study skills and academic literacies approach would continue to be made more apparent. Amos, the male Computer Science student who was cited earlier also said, "Oh yes, and I remember academic listening and academic speaking and writing different types of essays. And there was something about critical thinking" (line 30-31). I prompted Amos for more, I asked: "What do you recall about academic speaking?" Amos duly replied, "Umm, hand gestures when giving oral presentations, tone of voice. And how to structure oral presentations I think. But then I've always been confident in speaking academically" (line 32-33). He could not recall any specific academic listening strategies and could not recall many other intended learning outcomes of the foundational literacy modules. If an analogy were to be used, it is like generic study skills are pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that

are ill put-together and hence a coherent picture cannot be seen. When prompted to recall how he was taught to write academic essays, he was unable to recall much except that there should be a thesis statement in the essay and a few major structural elements. At the end of the student interviews, it became clear that most interviewees had cited academic writing as the most recalled learning outcome. They recalled learning the "proper" way to write academic essays but very few were able to recall comprehensively and accurately what constituted a good academic essay in their discipline.

Nima, an international male student and former APUS student in the Science-stream admitted that the modules on academic writing helped him with essay writing but he too could not remember the key strategies to essay writing that were outlined in the taught modules. He offered, "I remember that an essay needs to have a thesis statement and topic sentences. Also to end an essay, one should write either a recommendation, solutions or make a prediction" (line 34). While he was able to recall these elements to writing a traditional essay he does not consider essay writing to be skills that weigh heavily in his disciplinary learning as Science-stream students tend to have to write more lab reports than essays but does not discount that it will be useful backup knowledge to have in future learning. In this case, Nima has some disciplinary awareness but was unable to fully make sense of why writing is either useful or otherwise in his discipline. Similarly, Anna, a female international Humanities and Social Sciences student recorded in her learning journal in the sixth week of the semester:

> This week's lecture and tutorial was [on] how to organize overall essay. For example, we should have topic sentence[s] for each paragraph and we should

> have thesis statement to help readers understand and [a] hook to draw readers' interest in the introduction. If I follow this rule for my essay then my essay *will be great and clear* (my emphasis) (Student Learning Journal 1, p.7).

As recalled by Anna, she was taught the importance of essays being organized and the usefulness of thesis statements, topic sentences and engaging the reader with an interesting introduction to an essay. Anna however was then just learning the newly introduced concepts of academic writing. The order in which she recalled those skills: first the topic sentences for body paragraphs, the thesis statement, and the 'hook' to an essay that are in fact inaccurate. A student who is more familiar with these essay parts would perhaps refer to them in the proper order of hook, thesis statement, and then topic sentences. At the initial stage students will have to acquire such knowledge as skills since the overall aim is for the student to be able to construct a basic structure to an essay. It is important however not just to have the ability to do so rather the rationales for why hooks, contextualizing information, thesis statements and topic sentences have become standardised components of essay writing that were explained in lectures and tutorials. There was also content deployed around the disciplinary differences in the structures and foci of academic essays but were not highlighted in Anna's journal. She merely wrote, vaguely, that by being able to include those essay parts her essay will somehow be "great" and "clear" with no reflection on how that might come to be so. A week later however Anna wrote:

> I learned essay formatting in this week lecture. It will be really useful when I prepare for writing. Ms. Melissa gave us structures and formats outline handout. I learned English at an English Language Center so I learned the basic structure of essay in writing class but it was 3 years ago. Thus, I almost forgot about the structure of writing and did not care about it. However, this week's lecture and tutorial reminded me about the significance of structure and formatting on writing. I will use that information for my next assignment (Student Learning Journal 1, p. 7-8).

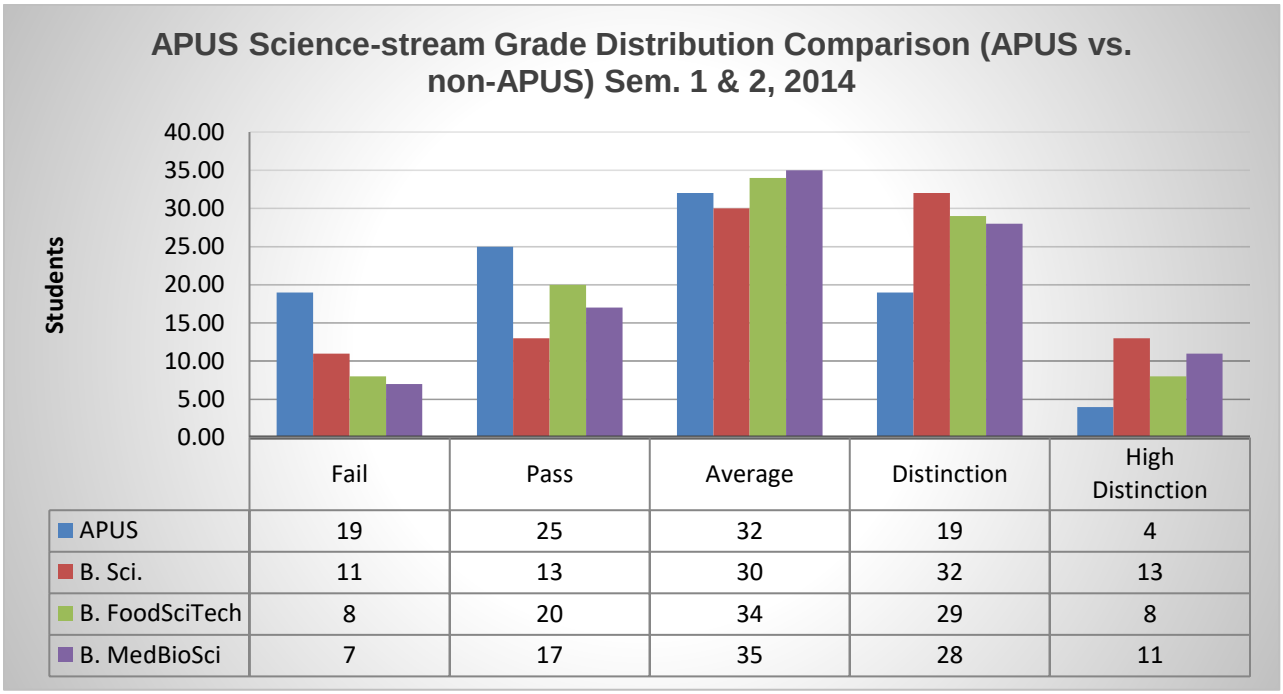
Once again this narrative reads like it is knowledge that is skills-based rather than an academic literacies conceptualization of academic writing. At least in this journal entry, Anna related her past learning experiences and how she had previously encountered taught knowledge on essay structures and formats and admitted to not caring about it. Perhaps on a subconscious level, she is self-aware as a learner and knows what she now privileges and finds necessary in comparison to a time when she did not. To write about the "significance" of this knowledge however is to suggest that she has an inkling, though not grounded in a strong literacy foundation, that structured essays are an institutional and disciplinary formation of knowledge. Referring to the fact that I was the one who made that knowledge available to her again means that she recognizes that this must be the right way to good academic essays as her lecturer and tutor who is in a position of power and authority told her that it was. All of this however is my personal reading and interpretation of Anna's journal entry from an academic literacies perspective. Anna herself was unable to make the same connections nor was she aware of what she was actually writing about. For Anna they are merely skills to be learned and employed

because they result in good academic essays without understanding why that would be so.

A2: Achievement: Comparative Underperformance

Several times annually, the university holds education committee meetings to discuss matters relating to education at Urban University. Each School appoints an academic representative to be on the committee. Before meetings are held, these representatives will sometimes be asked to collate reports for discussion by the committee. Early in 2015, there was a request made to compile an academic progress report for APUS students. The second finding of this study shows that APUS students' academic performance levels are somewhat lower than that of their non-pathway disciplinary peers.

The datasets used in the report reveal where APUS students stand academically compared to non-pathway regular entry students. At the time of writing, the datasets are limited since the programme is just only two years-old having begun being offered in 2013. Nevertheless, I was able to extract some meaningful themes from those statistics. Data on APUS students' academic performance in terms of their grades i.e. whether they obtained a high distinction, distinction, credit, pass or fail were compared to the grades of non-APUS student cohorts enrolled in the same disciplinary modules.



	Fail	Pass	Average	Distinction	High Distinction
APUS	19	25	32	19	4
B. Sci.	11	13	30	32	13
B. FoodSciTech	8	20	34	29	8
B. MedBioSci	7	17	35	28	11

Figure 3: APUS Science-stream students' grade distribution compared to non-APUS cohorts enrolled in the same first-year Sciences courses in 2014

The bar chart above shows the grade distribution differences between APUS and non-APUS Science-stream students enrolled in the same disciplinary modules in year-one. The numbers show that on average APUS students perform less well than their non-pathway course mates within their disciplines. Noticably, fewer APUS students achieve high distinction (80-100%) and distinctions (70-79%) scores than their peers. While the number in the 'average' (60-69%) grade category is not significantly dissimilar, there are more APUS students who merely pass (50-59%) Science-stream modules and significantly more who fail (0-49%) the modules in the stream. More recently, we were able to obtain a breakdown by areas of study:

Table 5: Differences in weighted average marks of Science-stream APUS students and non-APUS cohort

Discipline/Area of study	APUS Weighted Average Mark (WAM)	Non-APUS Weighted Average Mark	Difference	Number of Students Observed
Food Science Technology	55.1	66.3	-11.2	6
Medical Bioscience	64.7	67.4	-2.7	10
Science (General)	56.6	66.6	-10.1	5
Science (Biotechnology)	56.2	63.8	-7.6	2
Science (Medical Bioscience)	64.6	65.4	-0.8	6

This table more adequately shows exactly how APUS students are underperforming by area of study. The greatest differences in academic performance are in food science technology, general science and biotechnology streams. The weighted average mark differences are less pronounced in medical bioscience. The difference of more than 10 average marks equates to a difference in grade band. For instance, in Food Science Technology and Science (General), APUS students are scoring an average of Pass (50-59%) and their non-pathway peers (60-69%). More significantly, what this means is that in three streams, on average, APUS Science-stream students are in reality performing within the credit and pass range of marks.

Another category of APUS students are the Computer Science-stream students whom upon completion of the APUS programme will progress to year-two of an undergraduate degree in computer science. While the grade distribution for the fail, pass, and average

are somewhat level, it is quite clear that significantly fewer APUS computer science students achieve distinctions and high distinctions.

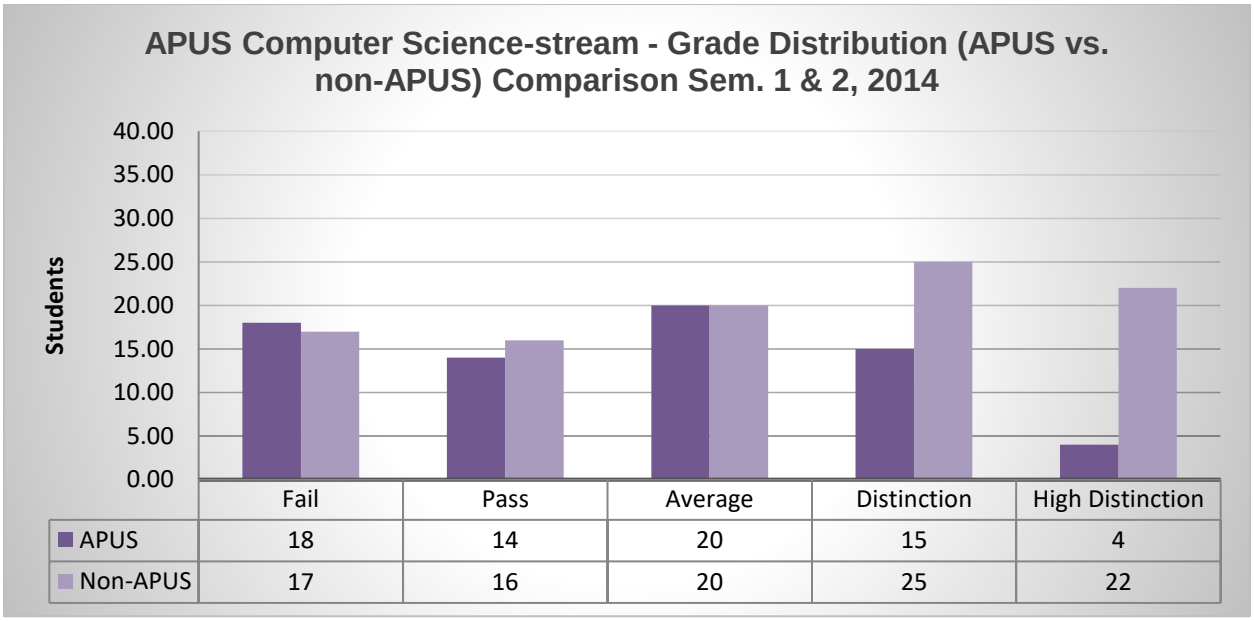


Figure 4: APUS IT major students grade distribution compared to their non-APUS peers enrolled in the same first-year Computer Science courses in 2014

The table below provides a clearer assessment of academic performance using weighted average mark as an indicator:

Table 6: Differences in weighted average marks (WAM) of Computer Science-stream APUS students and non-APUS cohort

Discipline	APUS WAM	Non-APUS WAM	Difference	Number of Students Observed
Computer Science	59.2	66.7	-7.4	32

The breakdown above shows again that Computer Science APUS students are scoring on average 7.4 marks less than their non-pathway disciplinary peers.

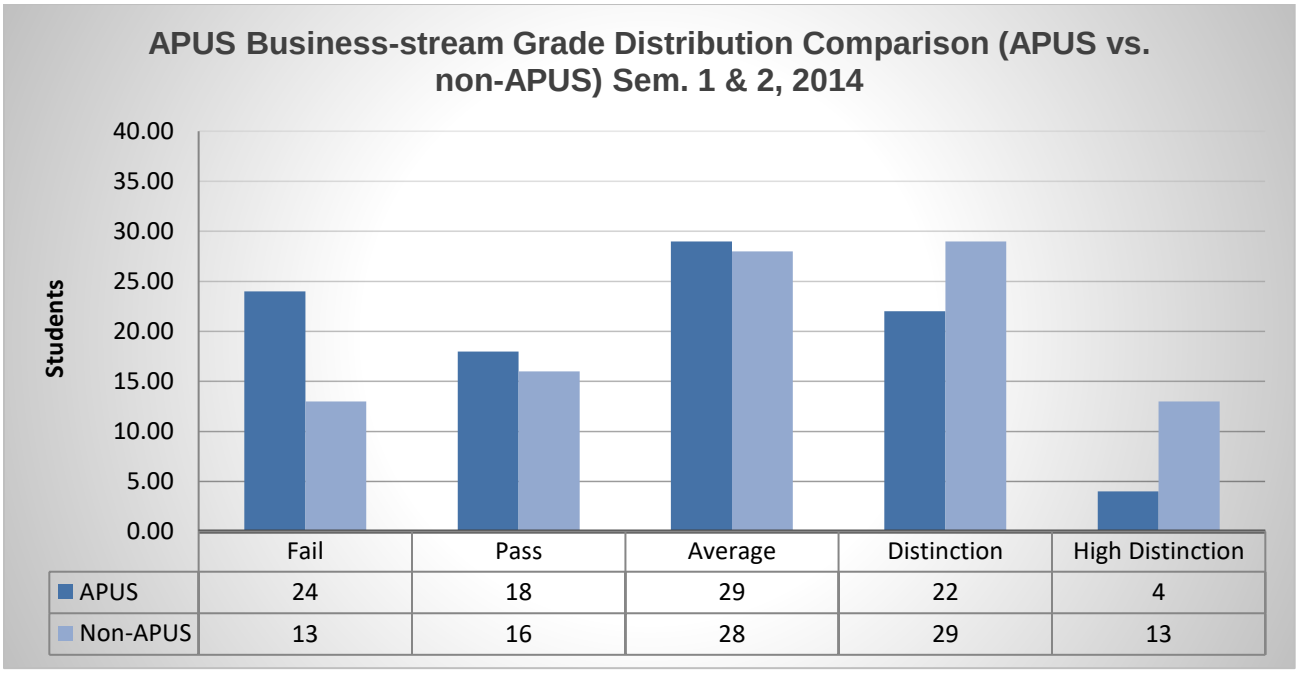


Figure 5: APUS Business and Finance major students' grade distribution compared non-APUS peers in 2014

According to this chart that shows the academic performance of APUS Business and Finance stream students, the trend continues with significantly fewer APUS students scoring high distinctions, and whilst the grade distribution for distinction, average and pass scores are quite similar, significantly more APUS students fail the Business and Finance modules than their non-APUS contemporaries.

Table 7: Differences in weighted average marks (WAM) of Business-stream APUS students and non-APUS cohort

Discipline	APUS WAM	Non-APUS WAM	Difference	Number of Students Observed
Business and Commerce	61.0	64.7	-3.7	37
Business and Psychological Science	67.8	68.4	-0.5	3

As it appears, Business and Finance-stream APUS students do slightly less well than their non-pathway peers, which may indicate that they are able to cope better than APUS students in the earlier two streams.

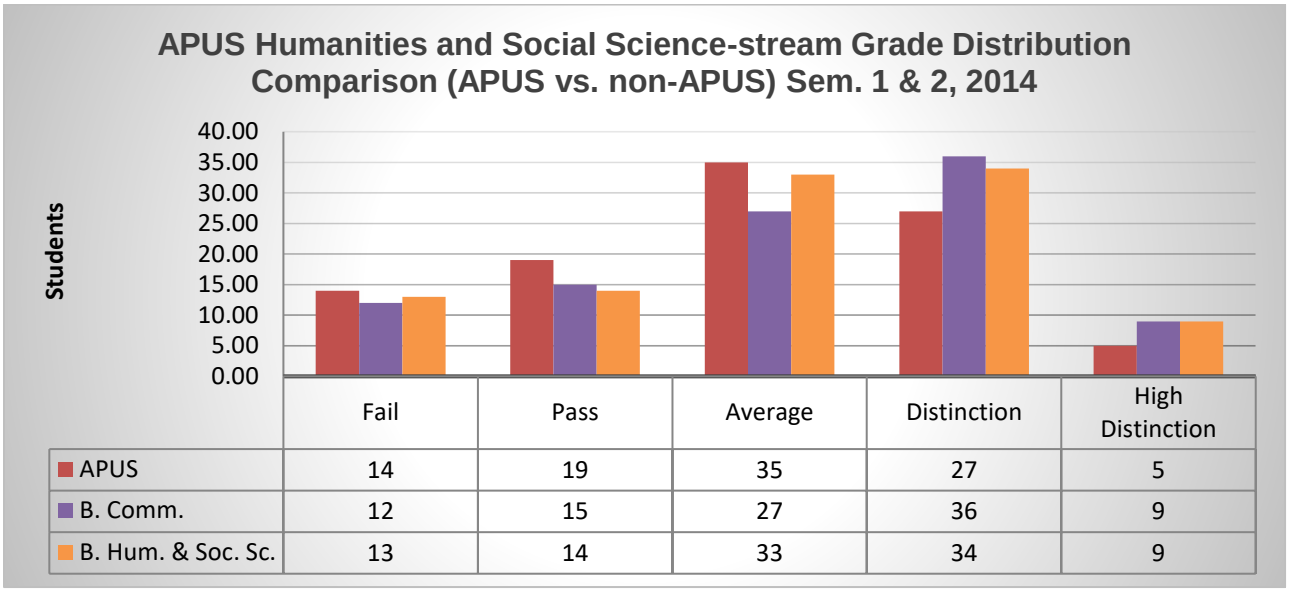


Figure 6: APUS Business major students' grade distribution compared to non-APUS peers in 2014

The same seems to be true of APUS students in the Social Sciences and Humanities stream. Although it can be seen that APUS Humanities and Social Sciences-students do perform marginally poorer than their non-APUS peers, the statistical differences do not vary as widely as APUS students in the Science and Computer Science streams.

Table 8: Differences in weighted average marks (WAM) of Humanities and Social Sciences-stream APUS students and non-APUS cohort

Discipline	APUS WAM	Non-APUS WAM	Difference	Number of Students Observed
Arts (Social Sciences and Humanities)	61.3	66.9	-5.6	18

In summary, the four bar charts and tables above demonstrate that APUS students fare less well academically than their non-pathway disciplinary peers. This academic gap that has just been pointed out is a meaningful conclusion given that it supports the notion that APUS students require additional academic literacies assistance so that they can learn as effectively as their non-APUS disciplinary peers.

A3: Antithesis: Conflicting Proficiency Requirements

A third major finding of the study is that APUS Computer Science-stream students articulate and express a strong disconnect between their disciplinary learning and the academic literacies learning in the programme. Their primary contention is that the nature of knowledge in the Computer Sciences does not require them to utilize academic literacies. To preface this argument, I want to contextualize this finding by citing from the learning journal of one of my former students.

Sam, a male computer-science major and former APUS student's weekly journal stood out amongst the others for the reason that he expressed what I suspected was the greatest shortfall of the APUS programme and that is its ability to prepare APUS students

in the Computer Science discipline to cope with the rigors of second and third-year level study at Urban University. Sam's account is reflected through the journals of other APUS computer science students enrolled in the module. From my perspective, the knowledge of this issue warrants serious attention from decision makers in the programme. Sam wrote in his journal in Week 3:

> In academic literacies class we learnt about listening and speaking. The tutorials of this class I always enjoy for some reason. Perhaps because you are allowed to speak more and the tutorial exercises are light and fun. I submitted the first of 10 weekly math assignments yesterday. I'm really happy I did it on my own with a little help from some friends. Unlike last semester where we just used to *copy* [my emphasis] the assignments from other students (Student Learning Journal 2, p.2).

Two weeks later Sam journals:

> The weekly Maths assignment was submitted again. This time though I copied from Alan who himself copied the whole thing from another student. I realize and know copying is wrong but sometimes we as students need to do it or we lose marks. Although I realize if we study honestly and on time, we don't need to cheat but most of us are not perfect and hence we need to do what is necessary when there is little time (Student Learning Journal 2, p.3).

This narrative of "copying" or collusion is echoed in the journals of a few other Computer Science APUS students. These students reported having to complete and submit assessments on a weekly basis and alluded to the fact that there is insufficient time to complete these assignments, thus the motivation to cheat. They understand that copying is "wrong", but their actions are governed by the fear of getting a low grade for the module. Sam evidenced self-awareness as a learner. He knew that if he had allocated adequate time to problem-solve and tackle the assignment questions that that would mean that he and his friends would not have to resort to collusion. These entries were illuminating at the time of reading, but it also caused me to be very concerned about what had been discovered. My Computer Science-stream students were struggling, and the main question that ran through my mind was: why really are they colluding and copying each other's work? The table below illustrates a clue that was uncovered through the analysis of the subject guide documents of the Computer Science's disciplinary modules.

Table 9: Learning outcomes and assessment design for two Computer Science modules

Name of Module	**Module Learning Outcomes** **(The knowledge students are expected to gain)**	**Assessment** **How the knowledge will be assessed**
Computer Science		
Basic Computer Programming	1. Develop skills to use diagrams to design solutions for programming problems 2. Apply problem-solving strategies and use pseudo-code to design algorithms 3. Design object-oriented solutions to simple problems using multiple user-defined classes 4. Create and test programming solutions to problems using JAVA programming language […]	Assignment 1 – JAVA basics (10%) Assignment 2 – Designing a JAVA application Laboratory Work and VILLE Quizzes (20%)

		Final exam (60%)
Computer Algorithms	1. Develop knowledge and understanding of the basic ways to structure algorithms, recursion, modular algorithm structures, the equivalence of recursion and iteration, top-down design and bottom-up design, and simple standard patterns for algorithms	Assignment 1 and 2 (25%) is on locating an algorithm to solve problems and understanding different search techniques. Mid-semester test (15%) Final exam (60%)

The table above offers a snapshot of the nature of knowledge in Computer Science-stream of the APUS programme. These two modules were selected from four others that also form the first-year disciplinary curriculum for this stream of students in the programme. They also happened to be troublesome modules that these students struggled with the most. Knowledge in Computer Sciences revolves around computer programmes, understanding problems, analysing them and designing solutions to those problems. Computer science is also constituted by mathematical and algorithmic research but also the engineering of complex systems (Parlante, 2005; Fee & Holland-Minkley. 2010). The principal pedagogy in computer science is problem-based learning (PBL) that focuses on "student-driven problems facilitated by an instructor in order to achieve the learning outcomes of a course" (Fee & Holland-Minkley, p. 129). Therefore, problem-based learning provides a framework for the content of computer science courses and students are required to solve problems across different coursework

projects. The Association for Computing Machinery's (2013) computer science curriculum characterises computer science graduates as being able to grasp the relationships between theory and practice, knowledge of common themes and principles, considerable project experience, focus on rigorous thinking and adaptability.

The nature of knowledge in Computer Science is different to the type of knowledge traditionally focused on in academic literacies. Academic literacies pays more attention to academic reading and writing, as has been shown in the literature review. The two core academic literacies modules in the APUS programme however are somewhat misaligned to the academic foci of the Computer Sciences. Based on Table 9 above, the Computer Algorithms module is designed to develop specialised knowledge in computer algorithms, which is a language different to the use of Standard English and academic writing. Students are required to use computer language for writing codes and not prose for summary or essay writing. The APUS Computer Science students interviewed seem to question, and then dismiss the importance and relevance of academic literacies to their disciplinary learning. The divergence between the nature of knowledge in Computer Sciences and traditional academic literacies hints at the difficulties experienced by APUS students in this discipline. To further illustrate this finding as a serious problem, I cite from the learning journal of another Computer Science-stream student.

Sharul, a male Computer Science former APUS student described the difficulties that students in that discipline face. Sharul writes of the importance of background knowledge in disciplinary learning:

> [The] first proper lecture on programming, which I already had background knowledge of, but this particular module was different as I had to learn a new programming language using a new programming application. The first quiz of the semester was easy, but I have a sense that as time moved on it will become more difficult. The lab session was very difficult at first as the program we used was new to me and the task to be completed was challenging. I needed help and more practice. Algorithms is a completely new subject to me, and the first lecture in algorithms was interesting but difficult to comprehend (Student Learning Journal 3, pp.1-2).

In the following week he wrote:

> Discrete Math is a bit more confusing. Algorithms is getting difficult and not a single thing entered my head. Lab session for programming was tough, but I had help from my peers who helped me complete the task in time. The first assignment was tough, so I had help from a friend who showed me how to solve a few problems. Still, the lectures for algorithms continue to be a tough module to understand even with tutorials. I feel demotivated about this module because it wasn't helping with my understanding at all (p.3).

It is unclear how his friend "helped" him complete his lab task. It is probably unfair to allude to collusion when there could have been genuine collaboration between Sharul and his friends. The crux of his journal however is clear: he found his disciplinary modules difficult to cope with. Discrete Math was confusing, algorithms were difficult and he talked

of feeling discouraged at not being able to understand lectures and tutorials. The mention of his difficulties with learning persisted through the weeks:

> After the mid semester break and with a new week I decided to start afresh. However the first day back was and I had an algorithms test that I was not looking forward to at all partly because I wasn't well prepared due to the fact that algorithms was such a difficult concept to grab. The Discrete Math for this week was extremely tough and I could not do it at all. I asked for help from friends and neither knew how to solve it. On the bright side, programming was easier this week especially with the quiz and lab session partly due to fact that I had prepared beforehand (pp.3-4).

Sharul's struggles in his disciplinary learning are palpably felt while reading his journal. What seems to be clear is that from a superficial perspective, there is little that academic literacies can contribute in helping students like Sharul overcome their learning difficulties in their discipline. It is not beyond comprehension that Computer Science students feel that academic literacies has nothing to contribute to their learning problems and is therefore irrelevant. In an in-depth interview with an APUS student in this field, Amos took this argument a step further by opining that the academic literacies component of the programme disadvantaged him and his peers rather than empowered them with better literacy skills to cope with learning in his discipline. According to Amos:

> I feel like I'm disadvantaged compared to my peers. Because I'm an [APUS] student, I have to take these writing modules that have nothing to do with my

> learning, but I have no choice. My friends are already ahead because they do two foundational I.T modules. When they get to second year they understand better because they have the basic knowledge needed and they don't struggle as much (line 53-54).

This point in particular is a seemingly strong argument for how the academic literacies component of the APUS programme "disadvantages" Computer Science-stream APUS students rather than empowers them with stronger literacy capabilities to navigate learning in their discipline. In another interview with Andrew, he described what happens exactly in a classroom of a typical Computer Science module. He explains that those classes are traditionally not delivered as lectures, rather they are sessions where his lecturers show students examples of coding and how to write computer programmes. Tutorials are often sessions where computer science students work on their programming with their tutors monitoring and checking on their progress. The academic literacies classes on the other hand, are currently designed around a lecture and tutorial format where students are meant to listen for an hour and then participate in group activities in a two-hour tutorial. Andrew thinks that Computer Science students are more focused on "hands-on" activities and doing things like programming rather than listening as they do in the academic literacies classes, which he theorises may be "boring" for them.

> The lecturer doesn't talk to us like you do in your lecture. He or she usually stands in front of the class and shows us how to write a code. Then, he or she will give us a lab assignment that we have to solve in class. The teacher will go around to check if we have done it correctly (line 79).

Andrew was also asked if academic literacies had any use for him in his learning. Unlike Amos, he feels that he has benefited to a certain measure by learning academic literacies. He thinks that at some point in the future, he might have to do research project in his final year and may have to write a report of research paper and that is when those skills may be useful. Being forward-thinking, he also opined that there might be select Computer Science students who would like to pursue further studies such as Masters of PhD in the field where academic writing skills would be needed. Otherwise, he agrees that the most writing that they have to do as Computer Science students is short answers in response to questions asked as written tutorial assignments.

A4: Assessments: Differences Across Disciplines

The fourth finding that resulted from this study is the former APUS students' reports of having struggled with doing and completing their assessment within their disciplines. This finding bears similarities to the earlier mentioned learning gap faced by Computer Science students that caused them to feel keenly the divergence between academic literacies and their disciplinary learning. In the previous finding Computer Science students reported feeling something akin to being "disadvantaged" by being forced to undertake academic literacies modules compared to their disciplinary peers. Nevertheless, students in the other three disciplines namely Humanities and Social Sciences, Business and Finance and Sciences did not report of a gap so wide that they felt left behind in their disciplinary learning. On the contrary, they exhibited an awareness that particular gaps exist, yet also recognised that certain literacies are important in their disciplines. More than gaps in

disciplinary content knowledge, the students also brought up gaps in terms of assessment structures and styles that may not necessarily be remedied through academic literacies.

At mid-year 2015, I obtained the academic transcripts of past APUS students who had failed in at least 50 percent or more in the modules of enrolment in their first semester. It was an administrative procedure to identify underperforming students in order that interceptive steps may be taken to help them improve academically. Such processes have led in most cases, to an Academic Progress Committee being assembled through which students may be asked to defend the continuation of their study at Urban University. More importantly, the academic progress of international students in particular has to be closely monitored as failure in more than 50 percent of their modules in a year may risk them not having their student visa renewed by Malaysian Immigration. Those aforementioned transcripts showed that some APUS students had failed compulsory modules in their stream at least twice. There were even students who have failed all their modules across two consecutive semesters and others who managed to pass only one or two disciplinary modules. It is perhaps important to note that out of the 30 academic transcripts that I received from the course management office at the start of 2015 for poor student performance, thirteen were transcripts of Computer Science students, twelve Business and Finance-stream students, and five Science-stream students.

Having this set of data on hand, I began analysis on the nature of those students' poor performance. Using the coding frame detailed in the previous chapter, I began finding out who these students were, what grades they achieved in their study prior to entering Urban, and examined the modules that had the highest failure rates, and the number of

times students failed those modules. Using what I identified as *troublesome* modules, deduced from the aforementioned student transcripts, I began investigating the nature of knowledge encapsulated in those modules, what the purported module learning outcomes were and the modules' assessment structures.

Table 10: Module learning outcomes and assessment design for identified 'troublesome modules' for Business, Computer Science and Science APUS

Name of Module	**Module Learning Outcomes** **(The knowledge students are expected to gain)**	**Assessment** **How the knowledge will be assessed**
Business		
Introduction to Microeconomics	1. Explain how people make decisions. 2. Assess students' ability to apply economic concepts to real world applications. 3. Explain how and why an oligopoly may act like a monopoly (i.e. cartel formation) 4. Integrate concept of the course to global implications 5. Explain the concepts of consumer surplus and producer surplus and evaluate market efficiency. […]	Assignment 1 (500 words, 5%) is a mini research task on lesson from economics. Assignment 2 (1000 words, 10%) that tests ability to discuss a practical application of microeconomic theory and conduct research into an economic issue. Multiple choice test (40 questions, 15%). Final examination (70%): tests students general understanding of the central concepts discussed in the module.

Business Statistics 101	1. Interpret business data using descriptive statistics techniques, including the use of spread sheet functions 2. Apply basic concepts of probability and probability distributions to problems in business decision-making 3. Describe the role of statistical inference and apply inference methods to single population means 4. Evaluate relationships between variables for business decision-making using the concept of correlation and simple linear regression […]	Online quizzes (30%) Final examination (70%)
Economic and Business Statistics	1. Interpret business and economic data using descriptive statistics and techniques. 2. Comprehend and use Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in making appropriate comparisons. 3. Describe the concept of a sampling distribution, estimators and their properties using p values to make inferences on single population means for business and economic decision-making. 4. Interpret and evaluate relationships between variables for business and economic decision-making using simple linear regression and multiple regression model.	(30%) six online tutorial responses and three multiple choice tests. Two hour examination (70%)
	1. Describe the salient features of the Malaysian legal system, with a focus on its law-making institutions, the interpretation of statutes and the various dispute resolution techniques. 2. Examine and apply the principles of contract law, misrepresentation and agency law to hypothetical legal problems	Written work consisting of one analytical assignment requiring students to apply laws that have been taught to problem-based questions (30%) and an exam

Business Law in Malaysia	3. Examine the legal differences between partnerships and corporations 4. Conduct basic legal research using primary and secondary sources	that tests students' knowledge of the issues and application of the law to problem-based questions (70%).
Science		
Statistical Methods for Science	1. Understand the key steps of the 'scientific method' and how these can be applied to real problems that involve data analysis and interpretations 2. Gain an appreciation of how statistical data is collected, analysed and stored, the meaning of population parameters such as mean, standard deviation, and median 3. Understand how to present and interpret data graphically, determine confidence intervals for population parameters 4. Distinguish between a population parameter and a sample statistics, determine which statistical technique is appropriate in a given context […]	Examination (60%) Assignments, laboratories and tests (40%) will assess their ability to analyse and interpret statistical data graphically, conduct hypothesis testing and interpret results, and to communicate findings through a scientific report.

The table above shows that there are four Business and Finance first-year modules and one first-year Science module deemed to be "difficult". These subjects are listed under the first column of the table. The Humanities and Social Sciences however do not offer any first-year modules that are considered to have the same level of complexity. In fact, any occurrences of failure were rare for APUS students in that stream. It began to become apparent what questions needed to be answered. Why were the other

disciplinary fields susceptible to high failure rates, and why certain disciplinary modules in particular? What are the commonalities that underpin the difficulties of these subjects? Was it to do with the fundamental nature of knowledge in these fields? From the table above, it can be seen that students who have taken these modules will be expected to have gained understanding of certain knowledge elements and disciplinary skills. These are outlined in the Module Learning Outcomes, the second column of the table. The assessment of students were parallel to the learning and literacy skills expected from them as they sought to demonstrate competence in those modules.

Assessments are strong indicators of how academic literacies may be transferred and applied in APUS students' disciplinary learning. More importantly, university students in general put considerable emphasis and attention on their assessments and assignments and it is also through these items that students are able to learn (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Gibbs, 2006; Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Heywood, 2000). My findings show that students articulate concerns with completing their assignments and juggling a hectic learning schedule. The nature of these assessments is also important to consider in light of academic literacies and the question of whether they can be transferred and applied within their disciplinary learning. Below are some of the quotes extracted from interviews with former APUS students from the Humanities and Social Sciences, Business and Finance and Sciences. The gaps for Computer Science students have been detailed in the finding above. The quotes below show that APUS students find that gaps exist in terms of the nature of assessments and their impact on disciplinary learning. Morad an

international male former Science-stream APUS student, acknowledges that there are learning gaps that may not be filled by academic literacies:

> For Science students we mostly do lab work and experiments and then write lab reports. We don't really have to write essays or anything like that. At the most we write short answers for questions given to us by our lecturers (line 28-29).

One detects a measure of disciplinary-awareness in this response. Morad is able to distinguish between the differences in assessment requirements in his discipline and that of the perceived 'standard' assessment requirement that is the academic essay. Lab reports have a different structure to the standard academic essay in that the former is usually contains various sections of information beginning with the objective of research or problem statement, followed by hypothesis, procedures and materials, data or observations, the results of the experiment or study and the conclusion. Academic essays on the other hand typically have a simpler structure such as the introduction, body and conclusion. Morad is essentially pointing out that Science assignments are somewhat different to those of other disciplines. An alternative reading of this is that Science students may not benefit from an emphasis on essay writing.

Science-stream student Shien on the other hand, notes that despite differences in the type of assessment, the greater challenge lies in the *numbe*r of assessments a typical Science student has to complete in a week. Science students have to complete a pre-lecture quiz, post-lecture quiz, and various other assessments a week a burden that puts considerable stress on them. She further adds that there is little time to complete these

mini assignments and when the answers are discussed in tutorials there is often little time to understand the material completely and this will influence the quality of their assessments.

Apart from over-assessment, the greatest challenge it would seem is that lecture sessions are too short and that students often leave the lecture theatre with mixed feelings of confusion, frustration, and to a mild extent, anger. Students in the Science-stream in particular feel that the amount of information that requires understanding in a given week is greater than the amount of time dedicated by the system through lectures and tutorials. Lecture content is usually deployed in the time frame of an hour and the number of disciplinary sub-topics is not sufficiently covered in their lecturers. The account below has been confirmed through a general probe of a class of APUS students to verify that this is a recurring issue and the problem is faced by other Science-students. To illustrate, Shien who was clearly frustrated and despondent when describing this issue narrates:

> The lecturers keep skipping the slides. They don't explain them properly and move on to other slides. We can't follow and it's very confusing. They keep saying skip, skip. I know it's because they don't have time and they can't finish it in an hour. They also keep telling us to refer to Moodle like we understand what that means on our own (line 44-46).

From an academic literacies point of view, the linguistic and literacy approach coupled with emphasis on academic writing is inadequate in helping to solve this issue. It cannot be remedied with students being able to read or write better. Perhaps herein lies the

greatest barrier that needs to be overcome. If students are unable to understand certain foundational concepts, ideas or knowledge particularly in the Sciences then it would be very difficult to complete assessments of how much students have understood the content. To exemplify and illustrate, Shien describes the complication:

> You know in subjects like Chemistry for example if you can't understand one concept or formula then later there's very little chance we can understand what comes next especially when the lecturer skips slides and explanations. When I go to tutorials I don't know what's happening and it's very hard to follow. They discuss the questions so quickly (line 49-51).

In modules like Statistical Methods for Science this can also be a problem since the nature of that subject is the need to understand mathematical reasoning and formulas. What my finding through the student learning journals and interviews suggest is that, what how they are being assessed rather literacies capabilities, are perceived by students to be more problematic. Indeed, they are concerned about whether have had access to the content being assessed such as lecture material, as in the quote above rather than their ability to understand through reading the items that are being assessed. They are also less concerned about *how* to complete those tasks.

On the other hand, Business-stream APUS students may not experience the same level of disconnect in terms of assessments than Science-stream students do. They are required to apply many more disciplinary writing strategies. For instance, many of their disciplinary modules require them to compose essays in the form of assessments. In

order to conduct research, many of them would have to write annotated bibliographies and literature reviews, formats of writing that are taught within academic literacies. According to Malaysian former APUS student in this stream Cyrus, there are many ways in which he is able to apply the literacies that he acquired in the two academic literacies modules. He eventually went abroad to complete his undergraduate degree and reports doing very well there. He has managed to retain a distinction average and reports that feedback-wise his lecturers are happy with his work. He attributed being able to write well from the academic literacies modules he undertook while he was learning here. More than his writing capacity, Cyrus described how the most useful competency that he gained was information literacy.

> The thing that I find most useful would be … I would say research skills, such as when you taught us to retrieve sources from databases. You also taught us to preview abstracts before reading the body of the article. This helped me to save a lot of time when doing research (line 29-30).

At the start of this section, I described how the finding is that there are learning gaps in certain disciplinary learning that academic literacies may not fill. Unlike Computer Science students however, students in Sciences, Business and Humanities and Social Sciences experience the gap much less keenly and they do in fact recognise where academic literacies can inform their individual learning. While this is largely beneficial for students like Cyrus, not all Business-stream APUS students have managed to transfer learning in a successful fashion. Amir, an international former APUS student has struggled with Introduction to Microeconomics and Business Statistics 101 (see Appendix B) and failed

these two modules and had to retake them the following year. He confessed that he may not have paid as much attention as he could to these modules but upon probing it would seem that he lacked an understanding of higher learning in general:

> Currently I am undergoing my second semester and in the beginning of this semester I already realise how much difficult for me was it to adjust here at first, I was homesick […] As I did O-levels and A-Levels before entering [Urban] I never had to do assignments or oral presentations, so at first it was hard for me to get things right, but I had peers and lecturers to teach me. I didn't know how to do referencing properly or how to use online resources to improve my academic performance. Studying here taught me how to learn and think independently and made me realise how higher education is different from secondary education (Student Learning Journal 4, p.1).

It would seem that for some APUS students it is not even a matter of differences in assessment types. What they struggled with were incorporating references "properly" into their written work, and using the library database to source for information. Hence, to say that students can successfully transfer writing skills successfully on the basis that they have been taught to do so prior to university may be a fallacy. Some students have the individual capacity to orientate quickly to new academic practices whilst others may not necessarily be able to do so in the same time frame.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Academic literacies cannot be all-encompassing solution to all disciplinary academic knowledge. Students and lecturers alike need to cultivate realistic expectations of the extent academic literacies can be used to set the foundation of academic learning. This finding has shown that when it comes to assessments, the nature of knowledge, and approach to testing and assessing knowledge will be different. This finding will be discussed in detail in the following chapter in terms of making effective transitions to higher learning.

A5: Application: Academic Literacies Still "Helpful"

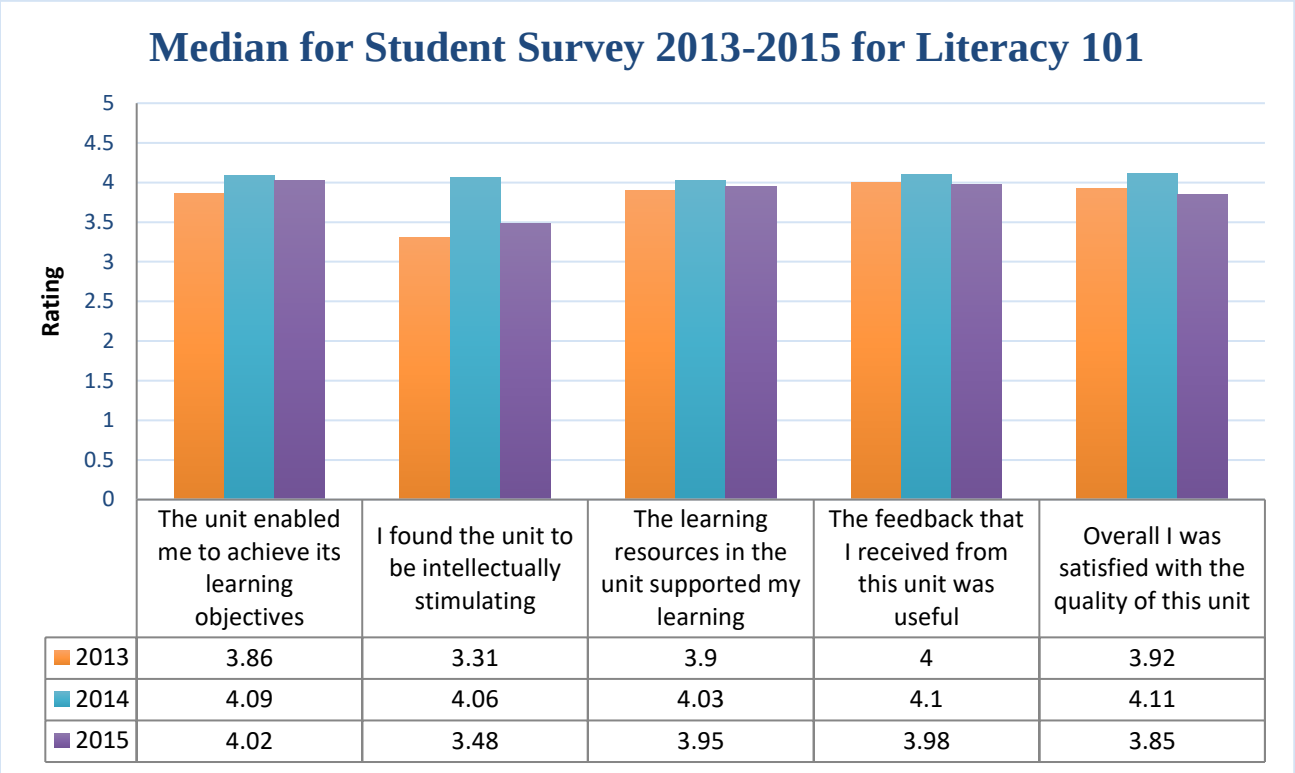
The final finding resulting from this case study is students' reports that the foundational academic literacies modules have resulted in greater confidence in learning and assessments post-transition to year two of higher education. This appears especially jarring when compared to previous findings. APUS students, should on the basis of those findings, be less satisfied with the programme. However, they did not notice the misalignment of foci in the two core academic literacies modules; their lack of academic prowess compared to their non-pathway peers; and did not let gaps in assessment types and structures affect their favourable perception of the programme. They should have felt the effects of these issues; however they seem to report than on the contrary they are in fact better off for having undertaken the foundational literacy modules. In particular, former APUS students have recurrently said that they have improved in their academic writing and other learning concepts.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

An accreditation exercise was conducted on the APUS programme approximately six months after it had begun being offered at the start of 2013. A report by the panel of assessors for the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) found upon review of the programme that their stated educational goals matched its espoused learning outcomes (Report of Full Accreditation, 2013, p. 3). The panel interviewed a panel of APUS students as part of their review. The report stated that:

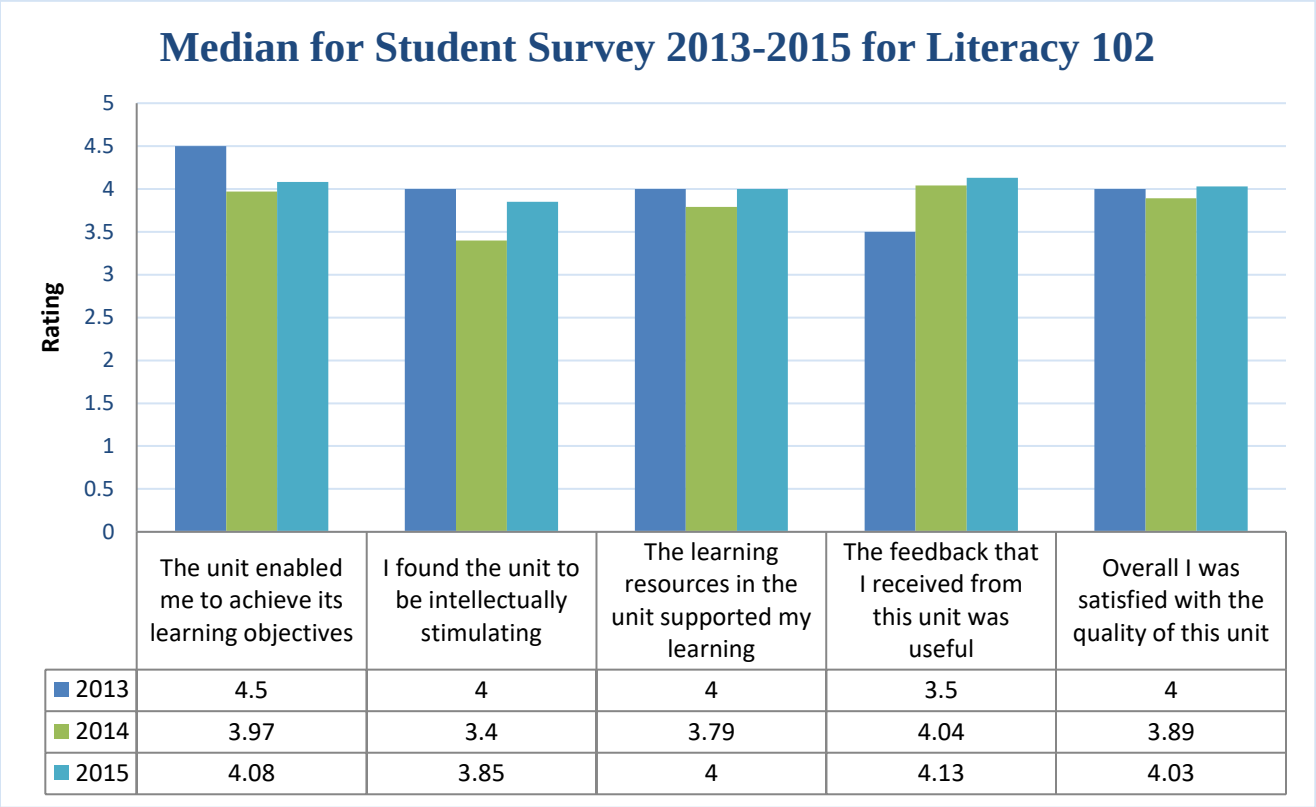
> Learning outcomes are clear as students are aware of the aim of APUS e.g. they value the potential to transfer to the degree programme and do not see the programme as an exit point (p. 4).

It also found that the evaluated the two core academic literacies modules as being "helpful" (p. 5). Other documentary evidence seems to support this claim. Urban University uses a platform for surveying student satisfaction with their coursework modules and for gathering data on teaching quality. The surveys are administered online and students have to answer questions on a Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with additional categories of Not Applicable and Don't Know. There are five core items that are evaluated that are 1) The module enabled me to achieve its learning objectives, 2) I found the module to be intellectually stimulating 3) The learning resources in the module supported my learning, 3) The feedback that I received from this module was successful and 5) Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this module. The charts below shows the median scores for the two core academic literacies modules between the periods of 2013 and 2015.



	The unit enabled me to achieve its learning objectives	I found the unit to be intellectually stimulating	The learning resources in the unit supported my learning	The feedback that I received from this unit was useful	Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this unit
2013	3.86	3.31	3.9	4	3.92
2014	4.09	4.06	4.03	4.1	4.11
2015	4.02	3.48	3.95	3.98	3.85

Figure 7: Median scores on five survey items for Literacy 101 Module between 2013 and 2015



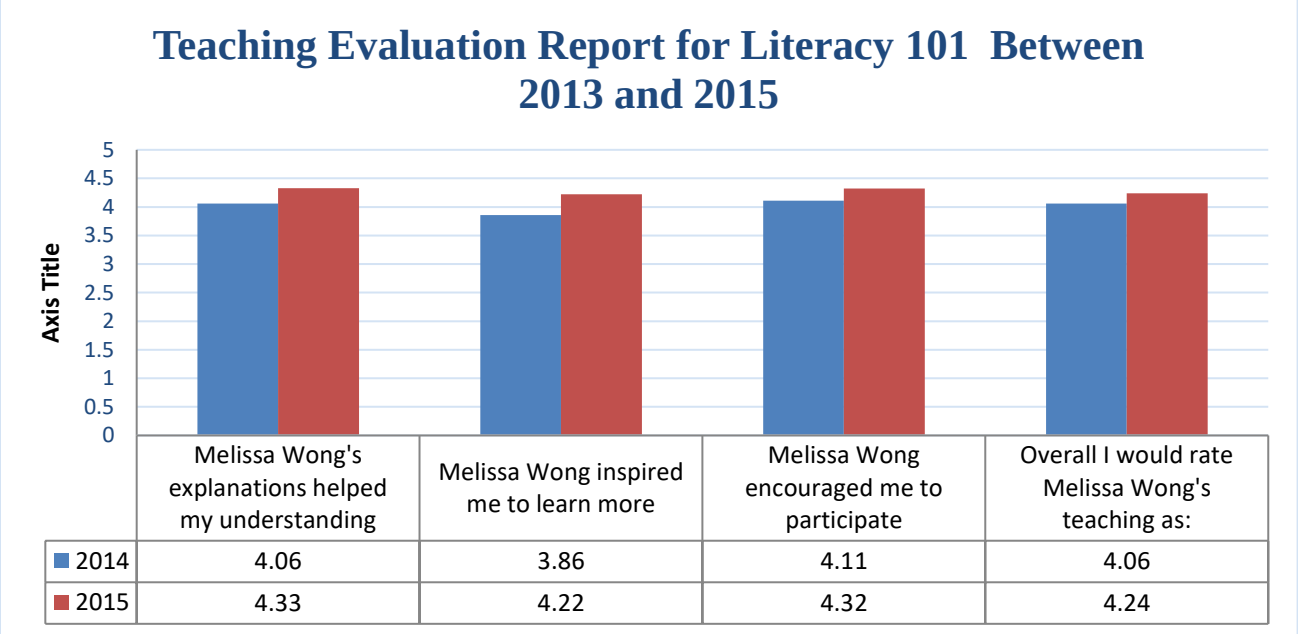
	The unit enabled me to achieve its learning objectives	I found the unit to be intellectually stimulating	The learning resources in the unit supported my learning	The feedback that I received from this unit was useful	Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this unit
2013	4.5	4	4	3.5	4
2014	3.97	3.4	3.79	4.04	3.89
2015	4.08	3.85	4	4.13	4.03

Figure 8: Median scores on five survey items for Literacy 102 Module between 2013 and 2015

Data show that out of a possible maximum rating of 5.0 for each item surveyed, past APUS students have in general been satisfied with the quality of the module as shown in the charts above. The indicator that matters most is the final one 'Overall I was satisfied with the quality of this module'. The campus has set the aim of a rating of at least 4.0 out of a maximum rating of 5.0 as the goal for all teaching staff. Where achieving learning outcomes is concerned, students seem to think that they are meeting the objectives set out for them. However, to a lesser extent, they felt that in terms of being intellectually stimulating, the module can do better. Previous findings show that Computer Science-

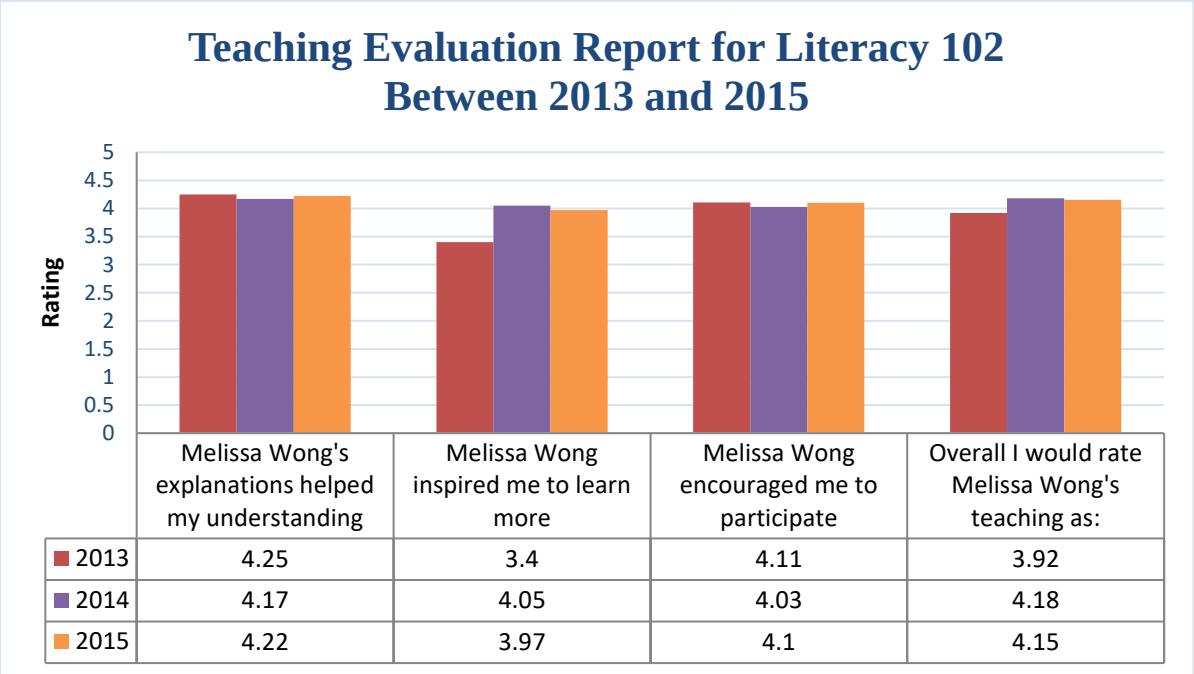
stream students did not see the relevance of the foundational academic literacies modules so this may explain the low ratings on this item. While students rated that the learning resources available to them were very good, this is credit to the university's library department. It is however encouraging to see that they appreciate the painstaking efforts to give them feedback on their learning through assessments and face-to-face consultations. However, it should be noted that participation in these surveys are not compulsory. Data shows that on average only half of total students enrolled in any one semester will complete the survey.

Apart from the data above, the university also documents teaching evaluation reports that capture students' voluntary feedback on their individual lecturer's quality of teaching on a separate online survey.



	Melissa Wong's explanations helped my understanding	Melissa Wong inspired me to learn more	Melissa Wong encouraged me to participate	Overall I would rate Melissa Wong's teaching as:
2014	4.06	3.86	4.11	4.06
2015	4.33	4.22	4.32	4.24

Figure 9: Median scores on five teaching evaluation items for Literacy 101 between 2013 and 2015



	Melissa Wong's explanations helped my understanding	Melissa Wong inspired me to learn more	Melissa Wong encouraged me to participate	Overall I would rate Melissa Wong's teaching as:
2013	4.25	3.4	4.11	3.92
2014	4.17	4.05	4.03	4.18
2015	4.22	3.97	4.1	4.15

Figure 10: Median scores on five teaching evaluation items for Literacy 102 between 2013 and 2015

It is heartening to see that my teaching has been somewhat positively received by the students who participated in the surveys. Should their responses have fallen below the 3.0 median largely taken to mean students have been 'neutral', or unhappy with my teaching, that indicator may suggest that I have made little to no impact on their learning. The broad indicators of these surveys however should be expanded by the institution given that they lack specificity by any means. They do not explain in what areas students are happy with the understanding, inspiration, or encouragement given to them. In fact, such surveys can often be used as instruments to either reward or punish their lecturers depending on how well-liked that teaching staff member is to students. However, the lack of detail in this survey is remedied through the open feedback section at its end. The university will normally compile students' feedback in a separate document and make it available for teaching staff to view and act upon. While the survey shows that students

are happy with the module overall, there have also been a few negative responses to the modules.

One student commented in the open section of the Teaching Survey in Semester 2 of 2015's survey that:

> It's the worst module I have taken. I would gladly drop this module if I could. I never do understand what I am learning in classes. The lecturer is good it's just that the module itself is driving me crazy. Suggest switching this with another module (Teaching Survey Semester 2, 2015, Teaching Survey, Semester 2, 2015, Column G, Row 2).

Another student provided this feedback in the same survey:

> Personally, I don't think that the textbook was useful to me. This is because it only provided very basic knowledge of writing in English and I do not think it is necessary. Doing the exercises or homework also took up a lot of time when I could be doing other more useful exercises (Teaching Survey, Semester 2, 2015, Column G, Row 8).

Such feedback enables teaching staff to consider areas of teaching and learning that students are concerned about; vague as they may be. It is not known how the module is driving the student "crazy" in the first comment, or why it is the worst module that the student has taken. Similarly, there is no indication of what the second commenter would

prefer to do rather than writing exercises, or exactly what other activities are more useful. That is not to say that such comments are not valuable. The ambiguousness of the comments aside, it is useful to know that where survey instruments fall short in capturing the true feelings of students, the open feedback section gives some indication of the issues that concern APUS students. The teacher can then reflect on such comments and adjust their teaching accordingly.

While there are other comments of this nature, the open feedback section has also equally provided insight on how these modules have been positively received by APUS students particularly in terms of how they have helped them improve in their learning. One student commented:

> I was able to apply everything I learned in this module, especially the essay writing skills, to all of my other modules and it proved to be very helpful. Melissa made tutorials and lectures very easy for students to open up and ask questions, and I really appreciate that because I think it's important for students to feel comfortable in their learning environment (Teaching Survey, Semester 2, 2015, Column E, Row 25).

According to another student:

> Because I am in my first-year first semester of university, I find this module useful as it has helped tremendously in my other module assignments. As it was my first time doing university assignments, I had no clue on how to do university assignments and what the requirements are as I did not do any pre-university

> programmes. However, this module has taught me and showed me the guidelines to doing assignments like research papers (Teaching Survey, Semester 2, 2015, Column E, Row 6).

These students shed light on just how the foundational modules have made a difference to their learning. Essentially, these students are saying that these modules help them with their ability to complete their assessments, particularly those with strong academic writing components. The first comment on the availability of a safe and open space to ask questions shows how important it is to engage students in their learning. The second student in particular notes how this is important in terms of her or his transition as a first-year student at university. That student did not have a framework for understanding university assignments, but the academic literacies modules helped form a foundation for approaching assessments for the student.

Yet for other students, these foundational modules are not just practical in nature, they also help students consider their identities and legitimises their voices and make sense of their sense-making power in a teacher-centred learning environment. Consider Ahmed's learning journal where he writes in week six of study:

> This week I actually voiced out my opinion in class during [Literacy 101]. I seldom did this but I just tried because I really held strong to my point of view on the topic. I was shocked when another student backed up my point of view and I was thinking, "at least there are a few students who think outside the box and are not just robots. This is one of the reasons why I found this subject relaxing and

> informative. Students actually really participate and voice out their opinions […] and I feel that during this subject I can expect any activity to happen. (Student Learning Journal 5, p. 2).

Disciplinary learning for some students can be rigid due to large class sizes that limit student-teacher and student-student interaction. Also, the sheer volume of information that needs to be covered within the constrained time frame can also influence the level of student participation. Academic literacies modules may in fact allow students time, space and respite from disciplinary information overload to reflect on their learning. Another student Amos seems to concur:

> This week I was taught to listen and speak academically. My first thought was 'What? Why are they teaching us how to listen and speak?' I never expected to be taught such things in university because generally everyone knows how to speak and listen without even attending this lecture, or so I thought. Being in that lecture made me realise that I have not been really listening well academically. It is as if the information goes into my left ear and comes out the other side (Student Learning Journal 6, p. 4)

The literature showed that the focus in academic literacies often lay with writing and to a lesser extent academic reading. The foundational modules however use an academic literacies approach to teach reading and writing but they also do not neglect listening and speaking activities that are equally important to the development of academic literacies. In this sense, there may yet be room to reconsider the definition of academic literacies to

include peripheral but equally important sub-skills that lack attention from education practitioners. Even if listening and speaking do not improve immediately, at the very least, they now notice that learning in higher education is more than just the ability to read and write. These skills however will continue to be the focus of teachers and students alike.

Pooja, a former APUS international female student studying Humanities and Social Sciences, reports having become more confident with academic reading and academic writing. Humanities and Social Sciences, according to Pooja, is characterized by a heavy prescription of readings that she finds difficult to keep up with. She notes that the taught skimming and scanning reading strategies helped her approach the content of her prescribed articles better. She also found that being taught different formats of writing and referencing and citation strategies helped her do much better with her written assignments. She recommends that more in-class writing assignments be given in the two academic literacies modules. A colleague reported that Pooja obtained a good grade in her assignment and suggested that perhaps it was the academic literacies modules that were responsible for it. She reported not having any regrets about entering through the APUS programme since she has been given the tools to succeed academically in the future.

Nima, a male international Science-stream student is considered to be one of the more academically successful amongst former APUS students based on his above average high distinction score. Upon graduating from the programme and progressing to second year of study he has managed to maintain a high grade point average. He explained that

the module was helpful in terms of preparing him to tackle disciplinary assessments that he had to complete in his second year modules.

> The most helpful parts about what you taught us were writing annotated bibliographies and literature reviews. There is a module in second year that all Science students have to take and it requires us to write an annotated bibliography and literature review. I was one of the few people in my class who knew how to do these assignments. The rest didn't have a clue – because they didn't take your subjects (line 38-41).

In this case, there was practical application of the skills that he learned from completing two specific assignments that were part of one of the academic literacies modules. In the past, Science major students enrolled in the APUS programme have complained about the lack of relevance between the taught literacies and disciplinary requirements when it came to assessments. Similar to Computer Science students, they saw little relevance in the emphasis of essay writing and with that, writing annotated bibliographies and literature reviews. These were not requirements in first-year study but as Nima testified, Science students in Year 2 are required to produce those assignments and are therefore practical.

Andrew, a former APUS male international student in Computer Sciences was able to complete and exit the programme successfully without having to repeat any disciplinary or academic literacies modules. Despite the complaints of his peers on the lack relevance in being academically literate and learning Computer Science, Andrew insists that the module has helped him with his overall learning. He claims to have learned how to retrieve information responsibly and to write academic essays and, capacities that he

imagines he may have to put into practice at some point in his undergraduate degree course. A positive attitude notwithstanding, Andrew still laments the fact that his peers who were enrolled by regular admission and not through the APUS pathway are already ahead of him by virtue of the fact that they did not have to undertake academic literacies courses. Still, he expresses his gratefulness for having been given a second chance at Urban.

> I didn't do well in high school. I did terribly and could not attend university at my home country. My mother didn't want me not to have a future, so she told me that she was willing to send me overseas to study. Even though it's so hard, I don't have a life apart from studying, I have to do this. It's my future (line 89-93).

Andrew has his sights on completing his degree in order to secure a job upon graduation. It is likely that he will achieve this given that he has successfully completed the APUS programme and is well into his final year in Computer Science.

In summary, this chapter has outlined the five main findings of this study (A1-A5). It has largely been guided by that aim of finding out how students are applying the academic literacies acquired during their transition learning in first-year of university. Whilst it was important to elicit their thoughts and opinions on this topic, it was also important to know if those opinions somehow reflect actual academic achievement. Documentary evidence demonstrated that APUS students in general are underperforming compared to their non-pathway peers. It is not surprising that according to data, that Arts students struggle the least as academic literacies feeds well into the Arts assessment structure. Computer

Science and Science students however are less convinced about the merits of academic literacies as sufficient foundation for their disciplinary learning. In fact, they deemed those differences to be rather conflicting thus rendering them at an academic disadvantage compared to their disciplinary non-transition peers. Finally, despite the problematic findings outlined through A1 to A4, those students interviewed largely acknowledged that academic literacies may in fact be useful to them at some point in their future learning. They felt that, strong reading and writing skills are useful skills to possess in the future regardless of whether there were immediate and visible benefits from acquiring them. The following chapter will analyse and expound on each of these findings in order to set up the recommendations for change to the programme that will be made in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter will discuss the five findings that were presented in the earlier chapter. The 5As, which were Alignment, Achievement, Antithesis, Assessment, and Application will be further expored here in the context of making recommendations to improve the APUS programme. I begin the chapter with a discussion of a strategic approach in addressing the misalignment in the learning outcomes of both academic literacies modules. More than just the *alignment* between the two modules, I also discuss the importance of this within the overall aim of curriculum coherence in multidisciplinary classrooms. The second part of this chapter is a theorisation of who transition students are and the possible reasons for their under*achievement*. Not only do APUS students have to negotiate an abrupt shift to learning at university, many of them also have to contend with troublesome or threshhold knowledges in their disciplines. This then leads into the aforementioned *antithesis* articulated by Computer Science-stream students who reported the inability to reconcile the coding and arithmetic skills needed in their discipline and those emphasised in academic literacies, which are academic reading and writing. I argue that rather than force these students to undertake literacies courses, that they may instead be helped with more foundational skills relevant to their discipline. The fourth section of the chapter discusses the lack of relevance between some disciplinary *assessments* that APUS students have to complete, and the types of assessments that academic literacies specifically prepares them for. I conclude at the end of this discussion that academic literacies cannot pretend to be the panacea for all types of learning despite its premise in

addressing disciplinarity. The final section of this chapter addresses the ways that academic literacies can still be applied despite the incongruences outlined above.

A1: Aligning the Misaligned

At Urban University where programmes are offered in 'modules', students may not see the relevance of one unit or subject to that of another, especially if they are undertaken across the different Schools on campus. This is the case for students in the APUS programme. They undertake six modules of first-year undergraduate disciplinary modules from their discipline's School, but are enrolled for two compulsor y modules with the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The previous chapter outlined a documentary analysis that showed misalignments between the learning outcomes of the two academic literacies modules offered as foundation courses within the APUS programme. One module's learning outcomes centred on building students' academic skills and the other module was more aligned with the major thrust of academic literacies - that is on the meaning-making practices within their discipline. Students should be able to exercise autonomy in modifying the learning strategies taught in the academic literacies and align them to their disciplinary learning.

The impact of the misalignment on APUS students is somewhat tacit to the student. In fact students may not even be aware of the differences in their modules' learning outcomes, being more concerned with completing the module in the effort to fulfill the conditions of their transition to year-two of study. Their choice of modules or courses to enroll in may be superficial and not meaningful and coherent (Weller, 2012). As

demonstrated in the literature review, students unconsciously develop an understanding of how academia functions both within their disciplinary learning and within learning across the institution as a whole. They can simply acquire a set of 'skills' in order to do something effectively based on a given situation or context, or they could see that their practices as being linked to wider more interdisciplinary learning in higher education (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). I argue that the latter should be preferred to the former for the reason that it enables students to possess background knowledge to engage meaningfully with others in other disciplines. This is important because according to Weller:

> In a supercomplex world, traditional, discipline-based curricula should be open to contestation and students be given the flexibility to construct their own learning experiences. Such opportunities can enable students to meet the challenges of employment and real-world problems that do not straightforwardly map against traditional disciplinary knowledge (p.22).

The important point is allowing students to engage meaningfully with learning and with people, communities and society at large. As long as there is an emphasis on developing academic "skills", students may not develop the ability to practice beyond the context in which a particular skill was taught. The student may not have the capacity to transfer knowledge from disparate contexts (Lillis, 2008; Lea & Street, 2006; Zamel & Spack, 1998), and may not recognize collective identities within a disciplinary or institutional context. Given that students may in fact become very familiar with the conventions of their

own discipline, they may never in a three year undergraduate programme ever learn about the practices of other disciplines.

Moreover, learning outcomes are important constructs in teaching and learning. They need to be 'reclaimed' from being merely tools for monitoring and auditing modules and curriculums and restored to directing good teaching and learning (Hussey and Smith, 2003). Also, learning outcomes often connote a forged sense of 'precision' and 'clarity' that they have become impervious to different contexts and disciplines, and that they are in danger of being interpreted by students and tutors as thresholds – hurdles to be cleared. In a first-year transition learning environment, students cannot and should not be expected to make sense of the intricacies of higher education on their own. As the literature review has outlined, lesser-prepared and at-risk students are in fact disadvantaged by a negatively constructed learning history (Boughey, 2013; Geisler, 1994; Niven, 2005) and may be viewed as less competent by their teachers and peers (Paxton & Frith, 2014). In this specific context, learning facilitators such as their lecturers and tutors will have to show them in deliberate and detailed ways, how to make sense of knowledge, disciplinary or otherwise, within a higher education setting. As such, if the teacher is herself potentially unclear of the teaching emphases of both academic literacies modules, then her teaching will reflect that lack of clarity and coherence.

More precise alignment of the foundational academic literacies modules is one aspect of improving the programme. There can be further efforts at curriculum coherence for the programme overall. There is pedagogical space to influence students' perceptions of the

bases knowledge and practice in their disciplines as they are being shaped learning experiences in other modules.

To achieve cohorence on these aspects in a multidisciplinary classroom is difficult but not unachievable. The nature of knowledge within each discipline can predispose it to different attitudes towards teaching and learning. There are for instance perceived differences between “hard pure” disciplines like chemistry, physics and biology and “soft pure” disciplines such as anthropology and history (Neumann, 2001; Neumann, Parry & Becher, 2002). Students of a hard pure discipline enrolled in modules offered by a soft pure discipline and vice versa may notice differences in the approaches to assessment and grading of assignments, in curriculum delivery and in the amount of autonomy required in student learning. These are more commonly accepted by those in academia as being differences in academic traditions (Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue, 2009; Kolb, 1981; Hofer, 2000; Lillis, 2003). Certain academic traditions can emphasize different student capacities and skills.

The findings outlined in the previous chapter show that certain disciplines privileged and prioritized the acquisition of specific sets of skills in their field of study. In Business and Finance studies for instance, students need to learn and acquire descriptive statistic skills and the ability to make statistical inferences. Similarly, in the field of Science, students do the same within the context of their field. There can be two approaches to the teaching of statistics and interpretation of statistical data. It can be taught as an important fundamental skill within the discipline, or it can be taught as being part of wider particular

beliefs, values and identities (Hyland, 2009; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; North, 2005). If disciplinary learning is a matter of acquiring a set of "skills" then this approach is arguably a rather simple approach to teaching. It may have the effect of pushing students to avoid failure rather than encouraging them to understanding key concepts or the applying the knowledge acquired to real life situations. Academic literacies is a notion that takes the teaching of academic writing past that of simple skill acquisition. It requires students to consider the power relationships at work within disciplinary practices, their identities within their discipline and to make sense of their learning.

Therefore curriculum coherence is important to facilitate such sensemaking abilities. Knight (2001) argues for curricula that are coherent and progressive. He suggests that, "Coherence is that what is planned should be created (delivered) and that what has been created should be understood (received)" (p. 370). Curriculum content, module design teaching and learning strategies, and assessments should fit together coherently. Nevertheless, achieving complete curriculum coherence is a complex exercise. The academic literacies approach to foundation studies needs to be consolidated in consultation and collaboration with other stakeholders primarily academicians in the four Schools who host APUS students. However, Zeigenfuss and Lawler (2008) and Weimer, (2002) observe that, academics are trained as disciplinary experts, not teachers or course designers. A silver lining exists in new trends of learner-centred pedagogy, inspired by changes in student demographics and technological tools for education, such that disciplinary experts are now reconsidering their accountability to various stakeholders. Academicians in various faculties are collaborating to develop curricular models that

combine learning outcomes, active learning strategies within pedagogical academic development (Blackmore, 2000; Lawler & King, 2000; Peeke, 2000; Drew & Vaughan, 2002). In the case of the APUS programme, similar developments can also be made.

A decision will have to be made whether there should be an attempt to realign the misalignment between the two academic literacies modules. The rewriting of the learning objectives for one of the modules Literacy 102 will be a somewhat difficult and tedious task. Typically, the Faculty reviews modifications and updates to existing modules only once a year. Moreover, there will have to be revisions to all documents submitted to the Malaysian Qualifications Agency the university curriculum review committee and the revisions will need to be communicated to all the stakeholders in the other Schools. The process of altering a fundamental part of a module or module is a lengthy, but not impossible. It will represent a change in what students are meant to learn over a twelve week period. Any change is most likely to affect teaching staff and students at the initial stages after those changes have been implemented (Rees & Johnson, 2007). Teachers will have to administer those changes, and while paperwork is one matter, they would need to be able to teach the module to a possible multidisciplinary audience. Nevertheless, the change outlined above will have to be made in order to achieve better alignment and coherence between the two literacies modules.

A2: Achievement: Helping Transition Students

The second finding of this study is that APUS students were found to have performed more poorly than their non-pathway disciplinary peers. Across the fields of Business and

Finance, Computer Science and Physical Sciences, APUS students in general tended to perform comparatively less well than non-pathway regular entry students. This section outlines the discussion of this finding and examines its relationship to academic literacies. I argue that a pathway student's capacity to perform well at university depends largely on the extent of her of his academic preparation prior to university, as well as the quality of intervention that is made during year one of undergraduate study.

Firstly, the capacity for academic achievement in higher education may depend to a large extent on the readiness for students to commence, transition into, and succeed in higher education. Arguably, this applies to all students entering higher education and does not apply only to APUS students. This has been well demonstrated in the literature review (Brinkworth et al, 2009; Darlaston-Jones et al, 2003; Leki, 2006; Etherington, 2008; Hyatt, 2012; Shen, 1998; Zamel & Spack, 1998; Kilinger & Murray, 2012; Lea & Street, 2006). To reiterate, APUS students are categorized as pathway students for the reason that they have lower admission scores than what is required by Urban University. A single numerical determiner in the form of an admission score quite deceptively purports to evidence an objective all-in-one assessment of a student's learning capacity, intelligence and level of preparation for university. In fact, admission scores are often vague, loosely justified and nondescript in many higher education institutions (Astin, 1998). It would not serve higher education institutions well to categorically label these students as low-performing, remedial or low-achieving based on admission scores alone. Doing so risks institutions and teaching staff employing a one-size-fits-all approach to

teaching and learning for these students (Zhao, 2006; Barnes, Slate & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010).

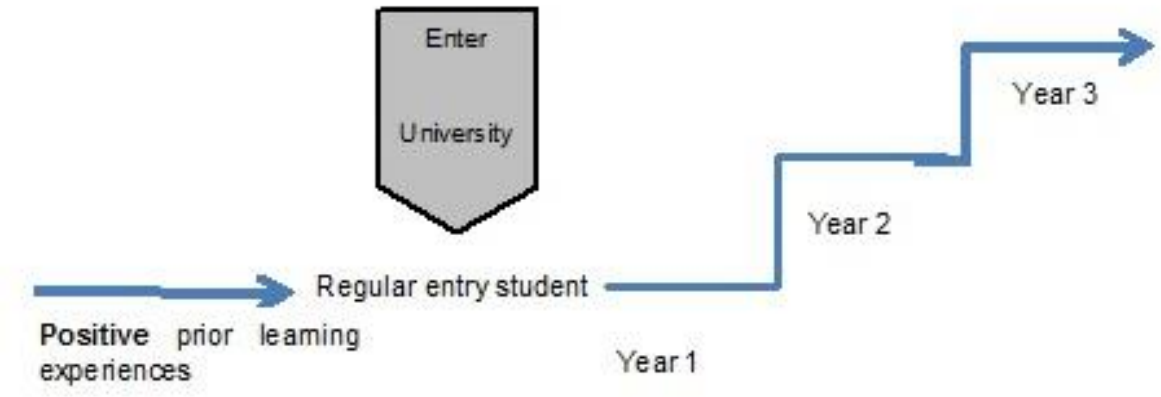


Figure 11: Assumed level of academic preparedness of a regular entry student with positive prior learning experiences

According to van Schoor (2012):

> New situations and contexts, and the information they provide, are filtered through these templates to provide meanings on which actions are based. If the templates stem from *positive* experiences, which affirm a person's ability to control a certain situation, they will engender a sense of efficacy and the expectation of goal achievement. If they stem from *negative* experiences, *they will have the opposite effect* [my emphases] (p. 83).

To transpose this to the higher education context, students entering university understand academic practices through the templates that they have built through prior experiences

of learning. Those templates started out possibly at kindergarten until primary and secondary schooling and post-secondary pre-university learning. Most students have balanced experiences in learning, having undergone both positive and negative encounters that have elicited corresponding responses.

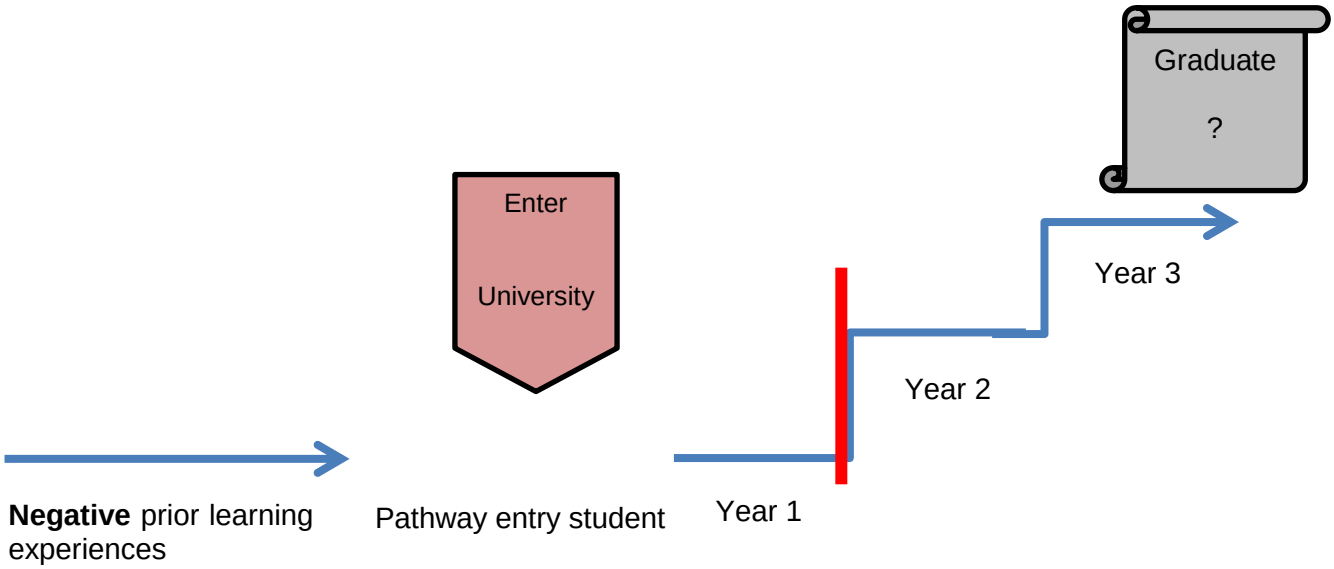


Figure 12: Assumed level of academic preparedness for a pathway entry student to year 1 of undergraduate study with negative prior learning experiences

The red line between year one and year two in Figure 11 above represents the hurdle that all pathway students must pass in order to progress to second year of undergraduate study. Some university students may have had more negative experiences that may have to led to poorer capacity to meet their educational goals. Possible adverse experiences may include receiving instruction from poorly-trained and poorly-motivated teachers throughout primary and secondary schooling, and lack of access to learning resources

and technology. They may have existed in an environment where there was little support from parents or other authoritative figures. All these possible factors may have constructed poor templates for learning for the student going into university. Hence, poor admission scores could very well indicate that somewhere in the students' past there have been some form of dysfunction in learning. A study by Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie and Gonyea (2008) found that pre-college experiences and prior academic achievement influenced their first-year GPA. Supporting studies that have determined the same (Astin, 1993, 2003; Pascarella, 2006) in that they argue that who students are when they start college – their background characteristics and pre-college behavior – is associated to a non-trivial degree with what they do in the first college year. The researchers analysed results based on student gender, ethnicity, parental income, pre-college expectations, types of courses enrolled prior to college, how the student travelled, where they lived, and the number of hours that they spent at work and off-work and the number of hours that they spent studying and socializing. They found that pre-college characteristics such as achievement on SAT scores matter to first-year grades and persistence. However, once those students had a chance to acculturate and assimilate into college life, the effects of those experiences cease to make an impact.

Students entering higher education often have to make an abrupt shift from the structured, regimented and controlled settings of school, college and home to a flexible, self-governing environment. The student decides what courses to enroll in, which tutorials to sign up for, which clubs to join, and where to live during their study, in addition to other social activities. Transition pedagogy scholars argue that the sudden shift from school to

university can create anxiety and distress in first-year students that in turn undermines their ability to cope in their new surroundings (Harris & Harris, 1995; Ozga & Sukhanandan, 1997; Lowe & Cook, 2003; Crisp, Palmer, Turnbull, Nettelbeck & Ward, 2009; Trotter & Roberts, 2006; Tuckman & Kennedy, 2011). Should they fail to transition to the new academic and social demands of university life it can result in the student dropping out and underachieving.

Evidence shows however that quality interventions have the potential to mitigate prior negative learning experiences. Experts on transition studies concur that such interventions can impact students with lower abilities more than regular students (Lammers et al., 2001; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Young & ley, 2002, 2003; Callan et al., 2006; Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert & Pascarella, 2006; Zhao, 2006, 2009; Conley, 2007; Roderick et al., 2009; Zepke, 2013). Since students generally benefit from early interventions and sustained attention at key transition points, faculty and staff should establish key institutional values and expectations early in their transition. As much as possible, students can be shown the potential benefits of the transition or intervention programmes prior to commencement so that they can see its full values. Transition experts argue that it is important that higher education institutions hold induction or transition programmes (Nelson, Duncan & Clark, 2009; Lefroy, Wojcieszek, MacPherson & Lake, 2014) and form support structures “that will help first-year students to make the best of their opportunities and progress to the second year and then to graduation and beyond” (Cook & Leckey, 1999, p. 158). At Urban University, each School runs these transition programmes independently according to their disciplinary requirements.

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Furthermore, the APUS programme through its academic literacies modules was designed to fill any gaps that exist between prior learning and first-year learning. One way of doing that is to help students realise that they may need to cross some thresholds in terms of knowledge and to give students sufficient time and space to do it.

Threshold knowledge or troublesome knowledge are concepts that may serve as a basis for understanding teaching and learning within the discipline (Meyer & Land, 2003, 2005, 2006; Perkins, 1999). According to Meyer and Land (2005) there seem to be present within certain disciplines "conceptual gateways" or "portals" (p. 373) that students must pass through in order to access previously hidden and cryptic methods of understanding something. Finding three showed that Computer Science students were struggled with the difficulty of their disciplinary assessments and the extent to which they could complete them effectively. A few even went to the point of colluding with their peers towards this goal. APUS students are indeed trying to pass through conceptual gateways in order to gain acceptance into the commmoduley of practitioners and practice (Wenger, 1999). Understandably, it is very difficult for these students enter into a foreign learning environment and encounter new and distinctive forms of knowledge that their prior learning would not have provided for. Meyer and Land (2003, 2005, 2006) describe a sub concept that they term 'alien knowledge'. It is defined as being "a perspective that conflicts with our own" it is a kind of troublesome knowledge as it is "reflected in the difficulty that students have in answering questions […]" (p. 9). As has been demonstrated in the findings, there were multiple instances where former APUS Computer Science students complained that the Math modules were confusing and the algorithms classes difficult.

Furthermore, these students may not just be encountering alien knowledge as they are led to pass the gates of understanding to their discipline, rather subsequently after they have crossed over, they then encounter tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is defined by Meyer and Land (2003) as another type or form of troublesome knowledge in that it is knowledge that is highly complex and inconsistent. Indeed, APUS Computer Science students have to on a daily basis wrestle with highly complex and hidden knowledge such as indecipherable computer codes and mathematical equations. It seems that their teachers were aware of their students' struggles citing that on average, they scored on average eight to ten points lower than regular students in their assessments. Not only that, with such difficulties overcoming these challenges, these students also do not understand why they have to undertake writing courses when the skill is simply not needed in their discipline.

Thus far, this section has been a discussion of the role that prior learning has on first-year learning in higher education. One way of understanding the characteristics of APUS students as they enter into the university is through understanding that there may be many factors that have caused them to commence higher learning underprepared. I have briefly shown that it may be worthwhile to understand that they are in a period of transition and negotating a new learning environment as they enter the university. Academic literacies is meant to be the transition pedagogy that is used to help APUS students make sense of their new environment, and one way of doing that is by explicitly helping them to navigate threshhold and troublesome knowledge. The next section of the discussion in

particular describes the tension between the need to grapple threshold (and troublesome) knowledge and learning academic writing in the Computer Sciences.

A3: Antithesis in Academic Literacies: Knowing When to Yield

Former APUS Computer Science-stream students reported that they saw the academic literacies component as being a mere hurdle for them to overcome in order to gain formal entry into a bachelor's degree programme. Overall, they lacked appreciation for the core academic literacies modules more than APUS students of any other stream in the programme. They also felt that knowledge in the Computer Sciences is highly divergent from the academic writing focus of the academic literacies part of the programme. As I mentioned in the previous section, these students spend most of their time with computer codes and mathematical formulae. This type of knowledge is at once troublesome, tacit and alien to them in the first-year of university. They do not see the relevance of having to write essays, literature reviews or reports as they are preoccupied with using computer programming languages, and composing codes rather than linguistic sentences. Interestingly, academic literacies has the potential to remedy this problem. For these students, an embedded approach to academic literacies may be more beneficial than the current existing structure.

Academics and teachers in the field consider the lack of writing competency in their graduates to be a problem when the they enter the workforce. The Association for

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Computing Machinery (ACM) (2013) Curriculum Guidelines for Undergraduate Programs in Computer Science states that soft skills function crucially in the workplace:

> Indeed, soft skills (such as teamwork, verbal and written communication, time management, problem-solving, and flexibility) and personal attributes (such as risk tolerance, collegiality, patience, work ethic, identification of opportunities, sense of social responsibility, and appreciation for diversity) play a critical role in the workplace (p. 15).

It is logical that these capacities recommended by the ACM would be important in a Computing work environment. In fact, other professional and academic organisations including the IEEE, ABET, CSAB and National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) have accentuated for many years, the importance of teaching computer science undergraduates writing skills and yet the problem endures. This may seem obvious to computer scientists that are already employed in the field that the ability to write is important. There have been efforts by institutions of higher learning offering Computer Science degrees to incorporate writing into their courses. Dugan Jr. and Polanski (2006) offer a taxonomy of writing tasks that can be applied across several computer science courses. Similarly, Fell, Proulx and Casey (1996) offer an outline of the kinds of writing activities given to students in their CS1 and CS2 and advanced computer science courses at the Northeastern University at Boston, Massachusetts. These activities range from summary writing to simple descriptions of the codes and programmes developed by students, logs, detailed reports and essays. Other documents of efforts to teach writing appear in the form of journals also known as lab notebooks and manuals for their software

projects (Drexel & Andrews, 1998, p. 61). Not only do learning instructors in the computer science field recognise the importance of writing in the discipline, they have and are deploying various writing activities for their students. These and many other efforts by proponents of writing across the computer science curriculum (Anewalt, 2003; Garvey, Ladd, 1003; Michael, 2000; Nelson, 2000; Walker, 1998) have been part of the Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) movement.

If studies have shown that teaching instructors in higher education Computer Science courses are actively promoting writing in their discipline, then why is it that students in this field continue to underestimate its importance to their overall education? Dansdill, Hoffman and Herscovici (2008) suggests that although the teaching of writing has been regular in some curriculums in the field over the course a decade, they are proportionately insignificant within the grander body of literature on the subject. According to the authors, the WAC movement is nothing but "a few determined voices addressing the field's general historical indifference to national curricular guidelines for the adoption of writing" (p. 25). Indeed, in my own literature review post-findings of my study, I find this to be a somewhat accurate assessment of the state of writing in the Computer Sciences. Accounts of efforts in this area are somewhat sporadic and incoherent. This is important to note since the overall aims, objectives and trends in the field of computer science in general would influence the success of bringing about writing awareness in computer science-stream APUS students at Urban.

They revealed that Computer Science APUS students mostly intended to continue with the same patterns and with disregard for academic literacies seeing it as a hurdle to

pass. This is insurprising since there is almost no emphasis on academic writing in their discipline. What little writing that students are engaged in, do not require persuasion, rhetoric or argumentation that students of the Humanities or Social Sciences would require. For APUS graduates who have managed to exit this transfer programme they find themselves entering into a paradoxical learning environment that is undecided about the uses of academic writing, or how to teach it. The question before me is whether to persist in teaching these writing genres to Computer Science students when they undoubtedly do not see the relevance nor the value of them. I have often contemplated a move to recommend the deestablishment of the Computer Science stream under its current model for these students. After all, if the discipline itself is largely unsuccessful in generating an enthusiasm for writing as a significant activity in their field then how can a writing expert do so without any specialised knowledge in the field?

Assuming however that the deestablishment of the programme is not an option as it is another revenue stream for the university, teaching of academic writing by disciplinary teachers may better convince students than literacy experts. In this sense, it may be better to use the embedded approach to academic literacies rather than the generic approach (Somerville & Creme, 2005; Monroe, 2003, 2006; Hyland, 2000, 2002; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002b; Klinger & Murray, 2012). A strategy worth trying would be to show how academic writing can be important to them both in their disciplinary learning and future careers. This objective can be reinforced by their literacy and disciplinary teachers and by members of industry invited to our classrooms.

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On the other hand, the question that perhaps should be asked is: is it necessary to push the boundaries of the discipline to this extent? Perhaps not all disciplinary boundaries are meant to be pushed in order to force the acquisition of academic literacies. Academic literacies as a concept in essence can be thought of as the pushing of strict traditional academic boundaries. Before there were concepts of disciplinarity, or indeed interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinarity academic discourses were arguably quite fixed. It was only when academic communities began to acknowledge that there were spaces for disciplinary overlap that higher education began to move in the direction of academic literacies. The blurring of boundaries in that sense underscores the theoretical heart of the concept.

In the case of the APUS programme, there was an assumption made that these Computer Science students would benefit from the same literacy foundation as students in the other streams. This assumption may in fact be flawed. The students in this stream have caught on to the lack of significance and applicability of many of the writing skills and genres taught using a loose academic literacies framework. They express being “disadvantaged” as a result of being forced to build a writing foundation instead of a stronger foundation of computational skills and mathematical reasoning. I cannot pretend to offer an immediate solution in this study. There will be many stakeholders to consult before a decision can be made on the matter of discontinuing the pathway stream for Computer Science students. As such the suggestion will be presented in the next chapter that the data that has been gathered will be presented to these stakeholders with the assumption that there will be two general outcomes. One outcome would be to

deestablish the Computer Science stream in its current design, and to re-design a more relevant curriculum in its place. The other possible outcome would be that we continue to offer the pathway stream but alter the way in which academic literacies is taught to Computer Science students.

In either case, there will need to be consideration for the other finding that Computer Science students are underperforming compared to their peers. Ultimately, the decision that will be made with their interests at heart.

A4: Reconciling Divergent Assessment Designs

One of the consistently debated issues surrounding teaching and learning in higher education concerns assessment and feedback. The study has found that APUS students from Business and Finance and Sciences generally feel that some of their disciplinary assessments by nature and structure, do not line up with the generic attributes of knowledge and assessment taught in the programme's foundational academic literacies modules. As was highlighted in the literature review, extensive debate surrounds this issue. As a means of overcoming this issue, many universities have experimented with embedding academic literacies within disciplines as opposed to teaching them as generic skills from the outside. At Urban University, specifically in the APUS programme the teaching of literacies is external to the discipline, which in this case causes some tension for students who struggle to make sense of different assessment designs.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Differences in assessment design across disciplines, be they by type, structure, weightage, or knowledge assessed, are sources of contention for both students and teachers. Medland (2012) contends that, “differences in disciplinary paradigms can result in differing assessment strategies grounded in different disciplinary discourses, which can disadvantage students working across disciplines” (p. 100). This statement validates students’ claim that some of the research, reading and writing emphases taught as generic skillsets do not in fact match up with their experiences completing their assessments in their disciplinary learning. Therefore, an important perspective to adopt when examining the inherent differences in terms of assessments is to look at it from an angle of generic skills and attributes versus disciplinary attributes (Kaplan, 1997; Ivanic & Lea, 2006; Blue, 2003; Heller, 2011; Wingate & Tribble, 2012; Zamel & Spack, 1998). This discourse has been covered in the literature review chapter. A recent trend has been to move beyond the term ‘skill’ in favour of ‘generic attributes’ (Barrie, 2004, 2006) as the former is usually acquired and practiced within a definite setting with somewhat fixed parameters of practice. Across many higher education institutions, there is a general understanding that these graduate attributes appear as the qualities of critical thinking, problem solving and communication (Jones, 2009).

Urban University’s own graduate attributes policy contains all three attributes; plus cross-cultural competence, ethical values and creativity. Since the academic literacies modules are essentially seen as foundational to students of all four disciplines in the APUS programme, they should ideally address all three attributes. In fact, they do to all intents and purposes but completely omit one key attribute that is problem solving.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

The assessments in the academic literacies modules focus very heavily on two predominant academic competencies, which are academic reading and academic writing. To be more specific, they focus very much on essay writing or other forms of extended writing such as learning journals, literature reviews, and research papers even at first-year level. APUS Computer Science, Science and to a lesser extent Business and Finance graduates however report that they often assigned assignments that do not require extended writing such as the IT report, business systems data commentary; lab reports and Science reports for Science students; and other types of assessments within the fields of Economics and Management. It is clear that the academic literacies modules cover a narrow list of types of academic writing and almost prescribe it as a constitutive and comprehensive set of academic writing genres.

One of the unintended effects of focusing solely on essay writing and certain other types of extended writing is that it does not acknowledge that Business, Computer Science and Science students spend a lot of time problem solving. Within these disciplines there are many formats to report the results of problem solving. They usually simply state the problem, detail the procedures and methods used to understand and decipher the problem, and then report the relevant findings and proceed to make recommendations or solutions to remedy the issue. That is not to say that problem solving cannot be demonstrated in an academic essay. It is just not commonly used within certain disciplines when there are more straightforward formats that require fewer words and give the impression that information is being presented more efficiently. Differences in style, format, and structure are more significant than simply being dissimilar to each other. Even

slight differences can result in a myriad of interpretations of the purposes of a given task and how to comply with its terms (Hounsell, 1987, Nelson, 1990, 1995; Norton, 1990; Storch & Tapper, 2000).

Assessments pertaining to problem solving or other types of learning are typically administered in single form in order to evaluate students' competencies, knowledge and skills. According to Jonassen (2010) teachers most often administer quizzes, examinations or reports as single forms of assessment in order to assign grades. He states, "Single forms of assessment betray the richness and complexity of problem solving" (p. 354). Furthermore, testing knowledge and understanding is one thing, it is another to see if learners are able to problem solve in different contexts using different assessment forms. Many schools and departments in higher education institutions are complicit in perpetuating singular approaches to assessments. Just as those in the Sciences, Medicine, Computer Sciences, Engineering and other hard sciences offer one dimensional assignments to their students, the same is true of the Arts, Humanities and other soft pure disciplines that design assignments in the form of essays and research papers. A case may be made for disciplines to break the mould in terms of assessment genres and structures.

In many cases, there are simply no alternative approaches to testing or assessing one or more disciplinary learning goals. In order to know whether or not a student has understood and can apply statistical knowledge, students will have to demonstrate the ability to compute statistical formulae and apply them to business or scientific problems and contexts. There is little value in assessing this capacity through an academic essay.

Similarly, in order to assess a political science students' understanding of a political problem the student would have to be able to demonstrate breadth and depth of knowledge and reflection perhaps using an expository essay (Somerville & Creme, 2005; Hyland, 2000; Nesi & Gardner, 2006; North, 2005). Academic literacies is a useful tool by which students are empowered with a metacognitive framework for working through the nature of a particular assessment and, if need be, to allow them to make alternative meanings in their assessment practices themselves.

As has been posited multiple times in this thesis, it is a difficult task to alter deep-rooted mindsets to established practices including assessment that have been practiced for a long time. However as rightly argued by Entwistle (1997) and Medland (2012), assessment policies should foster practices that support the development of learners rather than entrenched attitudes that serve to reinforce the dominant academic discourses. APUS students struggle not just with the lack of support in overcoming troublesome knowledge by understanding elusive and tacit concepts, rather are also inundated by the volume of assessments. There has been considerable research done by higher education practitioners and academics on assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning (Price, O' Donovan, Rust & Carroll, 2008, 2011; Kvale, 2007; Dochy, Segers, Gijbels & Struyven, 2007). Former APUS students' learning journals are replete with accounts of the difficulties that they have with assessments. They do not fault academic literacies for being insufficient in pointing them in the right direction with their disciplinary assessments. Rather those journals provide insight into their struggles with keeping to deadlines, their confusion about how to accomplish a disciplinary assessment

task, and the disorder that arises from different interpretations and of the same assignment from tutors and lecturers. Having reflected deeply on this, I realized eventually that academic literacies cannot be the panacea for all their disciplinary struggles.

Academic literacies as a theoretical framework does not pretend to be a structured solution to all multidisciplinary learning. Instead, it a framework flexible enough for teachers to use as a pedagogical tool to highlight, explain, describe and show how students themselves can make meanings about learning without consent or guidance from their teachers. It brings to the fore students' multiple identities and allows for different 'academic languages' to be spoken and different cultures practiced. Much of it depends on the interactions between students, teacher and texts (Zamel & Spack, 1998). The student becomes "an active participant who shares in the responsibility in the process, practises self-evaluation, reflection and collaboration, and conducts a continuous dialogue with his or her coach, tutor or teacher" (Dochy et al., 2007, p. 88). What needs to be done in the academic literacies classroom for APUS students is to continuously recognise their metacognitive powers and to harness them towards meaning making in their own disciplines.

A5: Application: Redeeming Academic Literacies

The final main finding that was outlined in the Findings chapter showed that the APUS students interviewed felt that overall the academic literacies component of the APUS programme is largely 'helpful' to them in their learning. They report that the academic

literacies focused on in the module helped them with assessments in particular and they thought that having those tools would help them complete their assignments in more efficient ways in the future. However, if this were the extent of the effectiveness of the academic literacies component of the APUS programme, I argue that my university should not be satisfied with that assessment, nor with the seemingly positive teaching evaluations by my students. The issues that have been raised from the other four main findings would more than justify considerable reflection on the effects they have on current and future APUS students. Also, more than just reflection the institution has to consider meaningful changes to the programme in order to promote and preserve relevance to its stakeholders, primarily APUS students.

One way forward is to adopt a holistic approach to engaging, transitioning and supporting APUS students towards successful completion of the APUS programme. More than that, they should be prepared for second and third year learning in their respective disciplines. Specific educational strategies should focus not merely on their retention, rather also their success in keeping with the graduate attributes of an Urban University student. There are various ways to consider change for the programme. Efforts from various sections of the university can come together in a collaborative support model (McInnis, 2003; Donnison, Edwards, Itter, Martin & Yager, 2009; Kift et al., 2010; Burnett & Lamar, 2011; Einfalt & Turley, 2013). Indeed, Einfalt and Turley (2013) argue that the enhancement of first-year student transition and experience, lies not only with an individual faculty or department, rather the institution as a whole needs to move beyond the divisions of academic, administrative and support services; to foster cross-faculty and

cross-department communications whereever it is possible to facilitate more collaborative efforts.

A collaborative or embedded literacies approach may mean that disciplinary experts themselves can inform the ways in which academic literacies is taught within the programme. This has been discussed in detail in literature review chapter of this thesis. To recapitulate, research literature has shown that there have been largely two approaches to the teaching of literacies in higher education. One is the generic approach to the teaching of literacies in which it occurs outside of the disciplinary classroom and contexts by literacy experts. In most cases, literacy is treated as sets of study skills that can be applied to any disciplinary context. The other approach, the aforementioned embedded or collaborative approach places the literacy expert alongside the disciplinary expert where students are aided within the context of their disciplines. Following this approach, literacy advisers usually co-teach some disciplinary classes or vice versa in order to merge generic literacy skills with disciplinary conventions in writing (Jacobs, 2005, 2007, 2010; Carstens, 2013, Kennelly, Maldoni & Davies, 2010; Clerehan, 2003).

At Urban University, the generic model to foundational academic literacies is utilised as opposed to the embedded approach. It was a struggle initially when I began teaching in this multdisciplinary, multi-stream context of the programme. Having only a set number of face-to-face hours a week with students of four streams, I had to be very selective of what topics to focus on, and what types of text to use. Being the sole literacy expert in the programme, I possessed the autonomy to make those decisions on a weekly basis, but they were made at random and without a particular structure or rationale. Not having

been trained in the literacies of three of the four disciplines I was teaching, there were many random guesses as to what types of literacies were being employed by my students outside of my classroom.

It may not be effective teaching to continue relying on guesswork of literacy in foreign disciplines, especially in light of the findings of this study. The students that I interviewed have explicitly stated that they are underprepared to tackle certain types of assessment. As rightly observed by Bhatia, Candlin, Hyland (1997), “each discipline has its own variations in knowledge structures and norms of inquiry, different vocabularies, differing standards of rhetorical intimacy” (p. 132). This seems like a fairly obvious observation. The reality of the multidisciplinary literacies classroom is exactly as the authors describe. It is perhaps not a stretch of the truth to argue that one person cannot embody the literacies knowledge of all four disciplines. As highlighted in the literature review, there has been criticism against a one-size-fits-all attitude towards academic literacy by literacy practitioners. As such, there may need to be changes as to how academic literacies is used as an approach within broader teaching and learning framework. Perhaps rather than its current generic deployment model, there can be a strategic but gradual shift to a collaborative teaching model in the disciplinary classroom.

Perhaps through an embedded approach, I can be where the knowledge is at, that is in their disciplinary classroom, in order to be there first hand to assist students with their literacy needs. Embedded literacy acquisiton, not exactly a novel approach (as evidenced in the literature review chapter), a move to adopt this model would certainly be novel at Urban University. At my institution, knowledge and learning is deployed traditionally in

quite fixed and static hard disciplines. These disciplines are collected together under 'Schools' and seldom are there cross-faculty efforts at inter/multidisciplinarity. I imagine that there would need to be months if not years of discussion, planning and development by key stakeholders in order to properly execute this idea. To reiterate an earlier-mentioned point made by Hyland (2009), if there is any buy-in to a collaborative effort between literacy experts and disciplinary teachers, there will need to be a slow dismantling of the assumption that certain literacy deficits can be remedied by a few "top-up" classes.

In this manner, academic literacies may perhaps be redeemed. In my opinion as the practitioner executing the teaching on a daily basis, it does not live up to the idea of being a liberal approach to higher education. The "meaning-making, identity, power and authority" (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369) is not wholly empowering for my students or myself under its current generic deployment. The premise of the academic literacies that is the "foregrounding of the *institutional* nature of what counts as knowledge in any particular context" (p. 369) is realised. The institutional nature at Urban University is that Schools and disciplines are quite separate to each other. Although the academic literacies classrooms espouse multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity as its overall learning outcome, that in reality is not done to its fullest potential. That may be due to the fact that all pedadogical possibilities have not been exhausted in the classroom in its standalone form. However, by entering the classroom the ethos of the concept that is to transcend disciplinary boundaries has the potential to come alive and heigtened in real-life professional practice. As I have argued above, time and space is clearly a limitation. With

only twelve weeks of study a semester, I cannot comprehensively address the literacies of four *disciplines* represented in the classroom.

Nevertheless, at the risk of making the embedded literacies model the magic bullet that solves all the problems of transitioning and engaging first-year students, potential hurdles should be acknowledged and preempted if possible. It requires of university teachers to abandon or at least suspend a deficit view of student preparedness to one that acknowledges that it is a cause that is 'everybody's business' (Kift, 2009; Mitchell & Evison, 2006; Bailey, 2010; Donahue, 2010). Disciplinary teachers should be as involved with the literacy capacities of their students as much as literacy experts. Neither should all the effort be made by pathway students themselves as if they alone are solely responsible for their success at university. Lawrence (2005) argues against assigning blame to students who are designated "deficient" by teachers who are part of dominant elite discourses. As pointed out in the literature review, these teachers have their expectations, but then fail to articulate them and then make judgments about students who fail to demonstrate them. Increased awareness of this problem needs to be addressed at Urban University as part of its teaching and learning development efforts amongst professional teaching staff.

That is why there is much more work to be done despite student views that the foundational academic literacies classes are "helpful". The findings have provided a glimpse into the teaching and learning gaps that exist and despite students saying that they envision academic literacies being useful "some time in the future", they also feel that it may not helping them in the best ways *now*. Their inability as transition students to

cope with making sense of assessments on their own is telling through the narratives of their experiences highlighted in the previous chapter. That may in part be due to the fact that they have to learn literacies outside of their disciplines while bringing those skills and capacities back with them to their disciplines. That is why the idea of moving towards the embedded course design may prove to be a redeeming move for academic literacies in APUS in the long run.

Chapter 6: Practice Implications and Conclusion

Educational practitioner research has the unique benefit of compelling the education practitioner to actively think and reflect on what she or he is doing at the workplace. This research study was motivated by specific questions on efficacy and teaching outcomes in my work setting at Urban University. The reflective practice movement sparked by Schön (1983, 1987) and other education scholars have enabled many higher education practitioners to hone in on the unique nature of their work in the context of professional knowledge and practice (Clegg, Tan & Saeidi, 2002). Zukas and Malcolm (1999) argue that educators can be four types of professionals at once: critical practitioners, situated learners within communities of practice, facilitators of learning, or assurers of quality. This research project has in some ways allowed me to reflect on myself in all four of these roles as coordinator and teacher in the APUS programme. Academic literacies represents one area of literacy studies in higher education. As has been demonstrated in my literature review, it has been significantly developed as a theoretical framework for understanding tertiary literacy over the past decade. The significance of the academic literacies is that it is not merely a model that exists to understand education in a strictly theoretical sense; it is a model that can drive pedagogy and change in the classroom. Altbach (2007) argues that we have arrived in the era of globalised higher education and must be able to face the realities of an unequal world. It is these very inequalities that drive competition for student engagement because students have become our primary stakeholders.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

I embarked on this research study with the ultimate goal of improving the APUS programme using an academically-informed evaluation of its curriculum, policies and practices. Student responses and analysis of programme documents, compared and measured frequently and consistently against academic literacies captured in research literature helped me immensely with my evaluation. In my opinion, it has been successful to a large extent and therefore worthwhile of the time and effort put in. It has managed to produce five important and meaningful findings that are may be useful in helping me to improve on various aspects of the APUS programme.

This research study has significance within higher education research in that it sought to analyse a real-life literacy programme in Malaysian university using a theoretical lens. My literature review on academic literacies showed that the concept had been used to foreground and support many embedded academic literacy programmes across disciplines, and has been used as the conceptual foundation for academic discourse in many literacy classrooms. Its theoretical gaps and practical misgivings however have not been highlighted nor discussed by communities of literacy practitioners in higher education. My study has shown that an academic literacies approach to the teaching and learning of literacy in higher education is not necessarily fool proof in all contexts. If the literacy teacher does not possess knowledge of the intricacies of the literacies needed in a particular discipline, and its teaching is remote from the disciplinary classroom, academic literacies can be undermined as a universal approach to literacy development. Even if the teacher is well versed with the complexities of literacy within many or all

disciplines, there may be insufficient time in the classroom to cover topics relevant to all disciplines.

Therefore, I think that one of the contributions that my study makes is that academic literacies while clearly a valuable idea that can drive multidisciplinary acquisition of literacies, its contribution can be limited if not properly angled as a teaching approach. Arguments however have been made for the redemption of academic literacies. Its foci on sense making, student identities, and recognition of disciplinary differences are key features to hold on to. Whether these take place in one classroom or in separate disciplinary classrooms that may depend on the context of the transition programme. After some deep reflection of the findings of this study, I am now in favour of making a recommendation for small shifts towards an embedded model for teaching academic literacies.

To recapitulate, my first research question was, 'Is academic literacies effective as a conceptual framework for transition learning for lesser prepared students in the APUS programme?' The answer to this, I have determined is that the current approach is effective to the extent that students themselves feel that they have, and will benefit from having been taught academic literacies during their transition to undergraduate study at Urban University. On the other hand, if considered from an alternate perspective, evidence from this study has shown that students are often not able to make sense of why and how certain literacy skills are constructed into their discipline. I have come to recognise that I can help them to make better connections in this respect, and work to improve the programme to make it more coherent and effective overall.

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Finally, I would like to address the issue of the transferability of my findings and conclusions to the work of others in academic literacies and transition learning in higher education. Many literacy developers and practitioners have designed academic literacies into their literacy programmes either through a generic or embedded approach yet few have written about the intricacies, challenges, and gaps in using academic literacies to transition students of multiple disciplines to undergraduate study at their institutions. The challenges faced by pathway students in higher education are unique. Having used student narratives as a primary source of data, and having compared them to institutional documents that obviously cannot 'speak' in a literal sense, has taught me to see my programme through my students' eyes. It has allowed me to see beyond the strengths and benefits of using an academic literacies approach to identify the gaps that can exist practice-wise.

There may be students like mine who feed back to their tutor that essay writing is taught in the APUS programme quite differently than it is in their discipline. They may even complain that being made to learn with numbers and formulas daily, renders essay writing irrelevant to them. They may also be wondering why they learn and research in certain ways, whilst others in other disciplines do the same activities but differently. They may say that they are not improving academically. Perhaps the problems and issues that I have outlined in this study can help them to improve their literacy programmes. Figure 13 below recaps these issues, and proposes possible recommendations for change in response to them. They may be helpful solutions to others who experienced or are experiencing similar issues.

Recommendations for Change

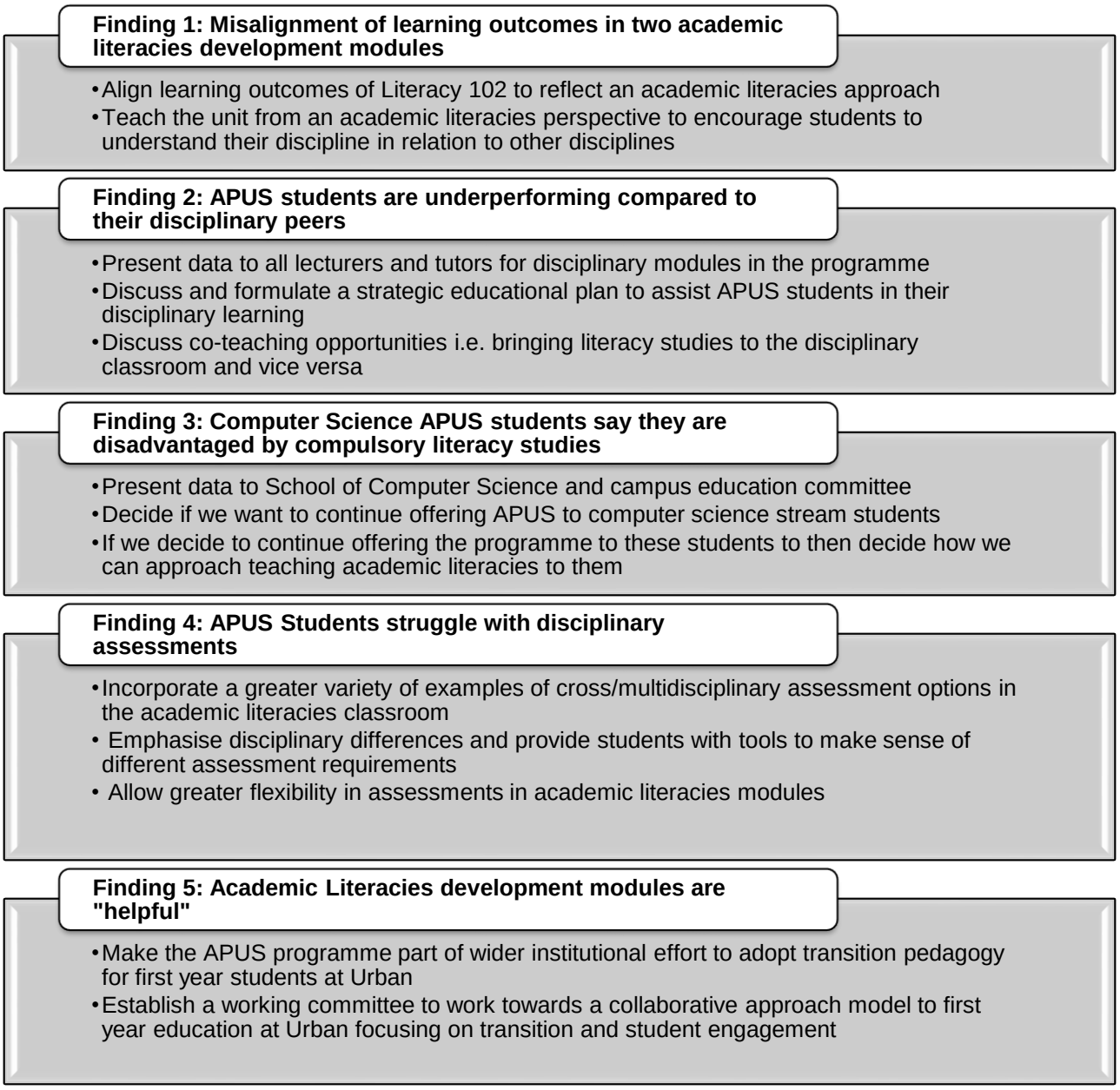

Figure 13: Proposed strategic changes for the APUS programme based on study's findings

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

Figure 13 above lists my recommendations for change to the APUS programme. They are made in response to the findings of this study. The greatest insight provided through this study comes from the understanding on the importance of strategic transition efforts in the first-year higher education. Academic literacies is a useful concept that paves the way for pathway students in adapting to learning in higher education but the work of helping students transition cannot be done alone. One main task forthwith is to align and cohere the literacies modules in the programme. As has been shown, they do not match up in terms of how literacy is viewed within the APUS transition context. One unit was decidedly academic literacies in its approach, and the other treats literacy as generically-acquired skills that can be applied across any disciplinary context. By solidifying the literacies framework, students can be trained to be increasingly self-sufficient in making sense of their disciplines and be able to learn effectively in their setting.

Secondly, APUS students must be given additional academic assistance throughout their transition year. Their academic performance was found to be poorer relative to the average student in their disciplinary cohort. The recommendations in this area are to make their disciplinary teachers aware of this and to explain in a nuanced fashion the extent to which APUS students are underperforming. Following that, there can then be some kind of collaboration between myself and my colleagues at the other Schools vis-à-vis a strategic educational plan to alleviate our students' learning issues. This may be done by identifying specific areas of learning where troublesome knowledge exists and creating targeted teaching to help them overcome those barriers. Literature on literacy studies have shown that there has been a trend of embedding academic literacies within

disciplinary curriculum. I may have to explore the extent to which this educational strategy can be implemented with the APUS programme.

Thirdly, the somewhat more contentious finding of the study is the one where Computer Science-stream students provided feedback that they feel a large practical gap between the foci on academic reading and writing emphasised in academic literacies, and the logical and mathematical nature of learning in their discipline. In response to this, my first action will be to decide whether the APUS programme will continue to be a means of accepting and transitioning Computer Science students into the university. A working committee will need to be formed in order to deliberate this issue and arrive at a decision. If the committee decides that the transition path in its current design is still applicable, then I will need act to find out how academic literacies can be used to locate the relevance of generic literacy skills and knowledge in the field. This may mean the design of another study to discover new strategies in teaching literacy to Computer Science cohorts.

The fourth main finding revealed that APUS students generally struggled with differences in disciplinary assessments designs. The immediate pedagogical strategy is to feature wider options for assessment types in the academic literacies classroom. The academic literacies modules may have to incorporate some features of disciplinary assessments into the existing assessment structure. It can also continue to emphasise disciplinary differences and academic discourse in the academic literacies classroom so as to teach them to approach assessments metacognitively. In doing so, they may be able to practice greater flexibility in their capacities to work within constraints foreign to them.

The final finding was that students APUS students in general regarded the programme as being helpful despite the four previous findings. Moving forward, there can be innovations made to the programme to move it past its current standing amongst APUS students as merely being “helpful”, to being part of a wider transition initiative. I propose that a working committee be formed to explore the possibility of reconfiguring the first-year approach to student learning experiences. It will require the input and collaboration of teaching and administrative staff across different disciplines and may not be an easy task. My aim is to plan for a coherent understanding and approach to transitioning pre-university students into the university. We will need to work out what the general transition needs are and to formulate a coherent plan for students who are in greater need of help bridging learning gaps.

New Research Questions

My research in academic literacies and the APUS programme do not culminate with the completion of this project. In fact, this study is a steady stepping stone for further inquiries on both subject matters. New questions can potentially be raised on a host of teaching, learning, policy and practical aspects of the programme. For instance, further research can be done on the nature of underachievement in lesser prepared transition students entering higher education. There is potential to continue from where this study left off in finding that APUS students underachieve compared to their disciplinary peers and expanded using a quantitative or mixed method approaches. One possible new research

question arising from this study is: does the underachievement of first-year APUS students define how they perform for the rest of their undergraduate study? I have already begun to collect some new quantitative data on APUS students' academic performance post-graduation and transition to undergraduate study. The academic performance of students who first joined when the programme commenced in 2013 until current students enrolling in 2016 were analysed in terms of their academic results. This data shows that APUS students' academic results do not improve by any significant means, instead they remain at the same levels i.e. a 'B' student in APUS remains a 'B' student in year-two. This type of quantitative data is highly interesting in that they provide a glimpse into an area of APUS student performance not addressed in this study.

One important way in which I can see taking the research done in this study forward is to combine the knowledge generated in this case study with quantitative data generated from a longitudinal study of APUS students during and post-APUS. The seemingly 'objective' data gathered from institutional reports on their academic performance coupled with thick and rich data gathered from this study and future qualitative studies on how academic literacies impacts APUS students' future learning will give fuller picture of the overall efficacy of this programme. A research project that I hope to begin soon will investigate how APUS students from two countries Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have had their academic literacies constructed in their home countries and how those literacies in turn constructs their learning at Urban University.

Another area that I am keen to explore is the role of disciplinarity in higher learning and continuing debates around disciplinary differences. It will be useful to monitor growing

trends in this area most notably the movement from traditional disciplinary learning to inter or multidisciplinary learning in higher education. Higher education trends have shown that higher education institutions have recently redesigned, even overhauled their curriculums to align them to interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinarity. Higher education institutions that have made these modifications such as the University of Melbourne in Australia with the Melbourne Model are few and far between. It is difficult for academics entrenched in different academic traditions to make way for competing types of knowledge in their schools and departments. The question that arises therefore is: to what extent can fixed disciplinary boundaries be pushed towards shaping the future fof higher education? Will it spell the liberation of academia or does it breed curricular chaos and incoherence? What does it mean for first-year students who are looking to find their footing in new learning, social and research environments? In this regard, I intend to continue experimenting with the various ways that academic literacies can be used to forward discussions on student learning in multidisciplinary learning environments.

The Future of the APUS Programme

The programme is currently solidifying its foothold as a pathway programme within the institution. Academic and administrative leadership at Urban are keen to see data on the efficacy of the programme evidenced by successful transitions of APUS students to undergraduate degrees at the university. It is already off to a good start given that it has been evaluated through this study as well as two institutional reviews – once in 2014 and

once this year. Sustained reflexivity through practitioner research will help ensure that it continues to benefit from consistent reflection and innovation in classroom practice. The programme is on an upward trend in terms of student enrolments. If it is to continue on this trajectory, the programme has to continually change to accommodate the learning needs of a greater student population. The programme is also currently servicing pathway students of four separate Schools on campus. There may be room yet to expand and serve the needs of students who want pathways to other undergraduate degree programmes at Urban.

There has also been an institution-wide push towards better teaching and better learning initiatives. Funding opportunities are abundant especially towards new education technologies particularly with regards to teaching innovations. Using the findings of this study, I have applied for some of these grants in order to forward the research that has been established in this study. In a globalised higher education environment, universities, particularly for-profit ones like Urban University are eager to demonstrate and promote course innovations as part of the efforts to remain competitive. I have also begun experimenting with teaching by flipping many of classes using internet technologies. They have thus far been popularly received by my students. It is plausible to imagine that higher education will be moving increasingly online, and there may yet be room for APUS to exist as an online pathway even before students step foot into the campus to begin their undergraduate courses. The pathway to online course offerings is as yet not part of the university's strategic educational plans although worldwide trends in higher education

may dictate the eventual transition. In the world of the internet, the possibilities are, as clichéd as it may sound, endless.

Lastly, there may be opportunities for joint research between myself and other academic literacies practitioners at other higher education institutions. Academic literacies programmes are offered at many universities including Swinburne University of Technology, Macquarie University, Murdoch University, University of Tasmania in Australia, including others in the U.K. Comparative studies can be born out of collaborative research in this area including pedagogical differences and their impacts across diverse learning contexts. Other research possibilities include the continuing relevance of academic literacies within literacy studies, and the continuation of the debate around whether academic literacies should be embedded within disciplines or executed as standalone programmes. Apart from research, there may yet be possibilities for student exchange between our institutions in partnerships to foster the understanding of academic literacies across different academic contexts.

Conclusion

Academic literacies is a strong conceptual, theoretical and pedagogical framework that drives the literacy development aspirations of the APUS programme at Urban University. The findings of this study have shown that the case study approach to programme evaluation can produce meaningful results on the basis of which changes can be made. Academic literacies' more significant contribution is arguably, the recognition of the role

of ‘disciplines’ in writing practices in higher education. It has decoupled the understanding of tertiary literacy from being merely skills-based to a dynamic, complex, and situated theory that takes into account power relations, social identities and individual meaning-making. It can also be the basis of what counts as knowledge across singular educational contexts. Moving forward, I would like to see the APUS programme continue to grow as a programme in terms of size, capacity and its contribution to the university as a pathway programme. It is my hope that it can serve as example of what practitioner research can do in higher education studies that is to contribute to teaching and curricular innovation and overall student learning.

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Appendix A: The APUS Programme

A.1 Unit Description and Learning Outcomes for Literacy 101

[redacted]

[redacted]

6 points, SCA Band 1, 0.125 EFTSL

Undergraduate - Unit

Refer to the specific census and withdrawal dates for the semester(s) in which this unit is offered.

Faculty
Arts

Organisational Unit
[redacted]

Coordinator(s)
Ms Melissa Wong Yuet Fun

Unit guides
First semester;

Offered
Malaysia
First semester 2017 (Day)

Synopsis

This unit is designed to introduce students to the practices, requirements and expectations of university study and so prepare them to participate in the academic learning environment. It seeks to equip students with the academic skills, tertiary literacies and attitudes essential for successful university study. The coverage of a range of key skills ranging from academic writing to critical reading is unified thematically by a consideration of what makes university study different, the benefits of a university education and the development of graduate attributes. Throughout the unit, there will be an emphasis on the utility and transferability of these academic skills and competencies for employability, lifelong learning, and to other subjects undertaken so that students can navigate their own learning. Contextualised within themes and topics, lectures will situate skills development within current research, and highlight salient principles and practices. Tutorials will involve participation in a variety of tasks, focusing on discussion, assessment, application, practice and analysis of skills development in context.

Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the unit, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an appreciation of the centrality of skills development in academic excellence;
2. Access and evaluate information needed appropriately;
3. Use strategies and skills for effective, efficient and critical reading of academic texts;
4. Produce essays that present a well-developed, coherent viewpoint and adhere to the conventions of academic writing;
5. Effectively prepare for and deliver oral presentations;
6. Maximise their learning from lectures, tutorials, reading materials and assessment tasks;
7. Employ a range of skills, including academic reading, thinking and writing to academic tasks in this and other units;
8. Apply teamwork, leadership and independent learning skills through various learning opportunities.

Assessment

Within semester assessment: 100%

Workload requirements

Minimum total expected workload to achieve the learning outcomes for this unit is 144 hours per semester typically comprising a mixture of scheduled learning activities and independent study. A unit requires on average three/four hours of scheduled activities per week. Scheduled activities may include a combination of teacher directed learning, peer directed learning and online engagement.

See also Unit timetable information

Chief examiner(s)

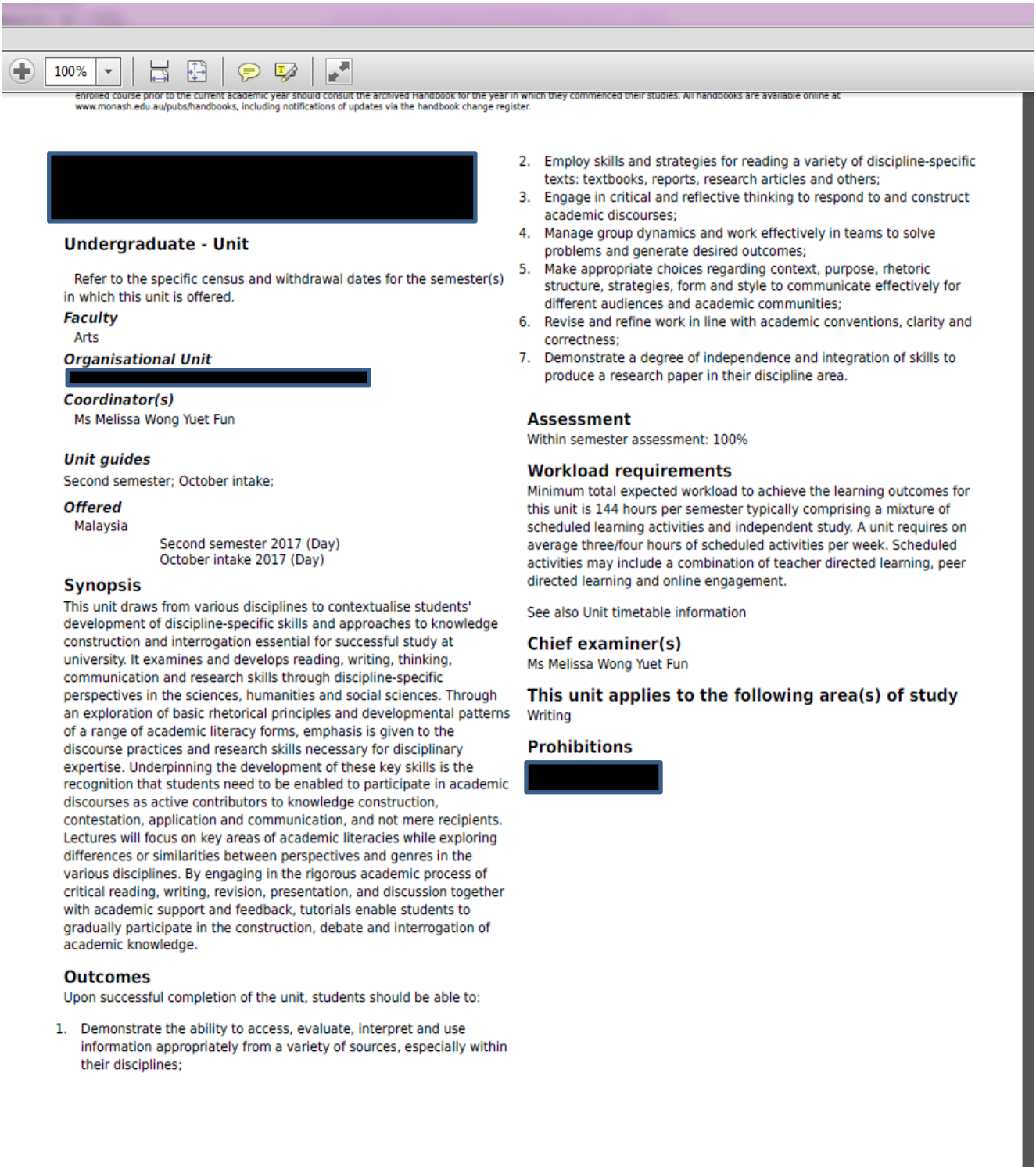
Ms Melissa Wong Yuet Fun

Prohibitions

[redacted]

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

A.2 Unit Description and Learning Outcomes for Literacy 102



enrolled course prior to the current academic year should consult the archived Handbook for the year in which they commenced their studies. All handbooks are available online at www.monash.edu.au/pubs/handbooks, including notifications of updates via the handbook change register.

[redacted]

Undergraduate - Unit

Refer to the specific census and withdrawal dates for the semester(s) in which this unit is offered.

Faculty
Arts

Organisational Unit
[redacted]

Coordinator(s)
Ms Melissa Wong Yuet Fun

Unit guides
Second semester; October intake;

Offered
Malaysia
Second semester 2017 (Day)
October intake 2017 (Day)

Synopsis
This unit draws from various disciplines to contextualise students' development of discipline-specific skills and approaches to knowledge construction and interrogation essential for successful study at university. It examines and develops reading, writing, thinking, communication and research skills through discipline-specific perspectives in the sciences, humanities and social sciences. Through an exploration of basic rhetorical principles and developmental patterns of a range of academic literacy forms, emphasis is given to the discourse practices and research skills necessary for disciplinary expertise. Underpinning the development of these key skills is the recognition that students need to be enabled to participate in academic discourses as active contributors to knowledge construction, contestation, application and communication, and not mere recipients. Lectures will focus on key areas of academic literacies while exploring differences or similarities between perspectives and genres in the various disciplines. By engaging in the rigorous academic process of critical reading, writing, revision, presentation, and discussion together with academic support and feedback, tutorials enable students to gradually participate in the construction, debate and interrogation of academic knowledge.

Outcomes
Upon successful completion of the unit, students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate the ability to access, evaluate, interpret and use information appropriately from a variety of sources, especially within their disciplines;
2. Employ skills and strategies for reading a variety of discipline-specific texts: textbooks, reports, research articles and others;
3. Engage in critical and reflective thinking to respond to and construct academic discourses;
4. Manage group dynamics and work effectively in teams to solve problems and generate desired outcomes;
5. Make appropriate choices regarding context, purpose, rhetoric structure, strategies, form and style to communicate effectively for different audiences and academic communities;
6. Revise and refine work in line with academic conventions, clarity and correctness;
7. Demonstrate a degree of independence and integration of skills to produce a research paper in their discipline area.

Assessment
Within semester assessment: 100%

Workload requirements
Minimum total expected workload to achieve the learning outcomes for this unit is 144 hours per semester typically comprising a mixture of scheduled learning activities and independent study. A unit requires on average three/four hours of scheduled activities per week. Scheduled activities may include a combination of teacher directed learning, peer directed learning and online engagement.

See also Unit timetable information

Chief examiner(s)
Ms Melissa Wong Yuet Fun

This unit applies to the following area(s) of study
Writing

Prohibitions
[redacted]

A.3 Unit Schedule for Literacy 101

Unit schedule

Week	Week Beginning	Activities	Assessment
0	22 Feb	Orientation Week. Download and read unit guide.	No assessment in Week 0
1	29 Feb	Introduction to Academic Skills Development and Managing your Studies	Begin Learning Journal Assessment; Weekly submissions on Moodle (Total 15%)
2	7 Mar	Avoiding Plagiarism & Referencing: Academic Integrity and Learning How to Cite	
3	14 Mar	Academic Listening & Speaking 1	
4	21 Mar	Academic Listening & Speaking 2	Group presentations commence (10%)
	28 Mar	Semester Break	
5	4 Apr	Information Literacy and Critical Thinking	Assignment 1: Research, Reading & Referencing (20%) due 8 Apr (Fri) at 5:00 p.m.
6	11 Apr	Critical Reading in Higher Education	Begin accepting Group Essay (20%)
7	18 Apr	Effective Reading in Higher Education	
8	25 Apr	Academic Writing 1: The Student Writer	
9	2 May	Academic Writing 2: Structures and Formats	Labour Holiday Replacement on Monday 2 May 2016 (Class will be replaced)
10	9 May	Academic Writing 3: Expression, Tone and Voice in Academic Writing	Assignment 2: Essay (20%) due 13 May (Fri) at 5:00 p.m.
11	16 May	Academic Writing 4: Revising and Editing Your Work	
12	23 May	Unit Review	

A.4 Unit Schedule for Literacy 102

Unit schedule

Week	Activities	Assessment
0	Orientation Week. Download and read unit guide.	No formal assessment or activities are undertaken in week 0
1	Introduction to Academic Literacies	Tutorial Participation (15%)
2	Using Academic Sources Responsibly and Effectively: Evaluating Sources, Referencing, Paraphrasing, Summarising	
3	Disciplinarity in Academic Reading: Textbooks, Journals	
4	Responding to Academic Discourses I: Skimming, Scanning, Taking notes	Annotated Bibliography (10%) Due 19 Aug, 5:00p.m.
5	Responding to Academic Discourses II: Evaluating, Interrogating, Critiquing	
6	Information Research Skills	Oral Presentations Commence (15%) National Day (Wed). Replacement for tutorial will be held.
7	Disciplinarity in Academic Writing: Understanding the Conventions	Reading-Writing Task 1 (15%) Due 9 Sept, 5:00p.m.
8	Patterns in Academic Writing I: Definition, Description, Process, Example	
9	Patterns in Academic Writing II: Classification, Comparison and Contrast, Cause and Effect	Reading-Writing Task 2 (15%) Class Test, in Tutorials
10	Argumentation and Persuasion	Awal Muharram (Mon). Replacement for lecture will be held.
11	Developing Your Own Voice	
12	Revising and Editing to Meet Expectations	Research Essay (30%), 21 Oct, 5:00 p.m.

A.5 Assignment Sets for Literacy 101 and Literacy 102

Literacy 101	Literacy 102
Item 1: Learning Journal (15%) Students journal their learning over the period of 12 weeks (one semester). They are free to choose any learning event or experience that was particularly meaningful that week. They are told to do this in a reflective manner and not just provide a descriptive account or summary of intended learning outcomes or learning activities. Each entry should be personalised focusing on the change that has occurred after a learning event. Word count: 200 minimum a week	**Item 1: Annotated Bibliography (10%)** Students are required to choose a topic pertaining to either an ethical issue, creative innovation or aspect of internationalisation in their discipline/field of study. They are required to write an annotated bibliography of five annotations based on their research. Word count: 1000 words
Item 2: Research, Reading and Referencing (20%) Students are required to write an essay on either a global event, historical event or interdisciplinary issue of their choice. This assignment focuses on their ability to source for quality academic sources, be critical about their chosen topic and be able to demonstrate time management in completing assignments.Word count: 1500 words	**Item 2: Literature Review (15%) also known as Reading-Writing Task 1** Students are required to write a literature review that extends the initial literature search that they conducted for the annotated bibliography. They should develop abilities to synthesise information and write a coherent literature review focusing on their earlier chosen topic. Word count: 1500 words
Item 3: Essay Writing (20%) Students are required to write an essay responding to an essay question. This assessment assesses their ability to write a standard, traditional essay e.g. thesis statements, topic sentences, supporting information etc. Word count: 500 words	**Item 3: Essay Writing (15%) also known as Reading-Writing Task 2** Students are required to write an essay responding to an essay question that is given in-class. They have two hours to write this essay. This assessment assesses their ability to write a standard, traditional essay e.g. thesis statements, topic sentences, supporting information etc. Word count: 500 words
Item 4: Group Project and Presentation (30%) Students are required to work in teams to select one research topic out of six topic choices. They have to first give an oral presentation in teams, which is then followed by the submission of a group essay that assesses their ability to produce a standard research paper i.e. research essay. Word count: 2000 words	**Item 4: Research Essay (30%)** This assessment is the culmination of the research work that students did for the annotated bibliography and literature review. In this assignment, they have to bring together their research to write a complete essay of an introduction, body and conclusion that is well-supported and well-referenced. The key aspect of the assessments in this unit is capturing the knowledge that exists in their discipline.
Item 5: Class participation (15%)	**Item 5: Class participation (15%)**
	Item 6: Oral presentation (15%)

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Code No. /Name:

Location:

Date:

Duration of interview:

A. About the interviewee – some background

Question 1

How would you describe yourself as a university student?

Question 2

Prior to entering university or even now what are you expectations or perceptions of university life?

Question 3

One year into your pursuits here, have your expectations or perceptions changed?

Question 4

How would you describe learning at [Urban] University?

B. Past learning experiences

Question 5

Can you describe what learning was like at your primary and secondary school?

Question 6

What pre-university programme did you do and what were your experiences like?

Question 7

Was anything particularly difficult in terms of learning at your pre-university (or equivalent) course?

Question 8

What's your preferred method of learning?

C. Academic Support

Question 9

Would you say that you have support from your lecturers, tutors or other learning facilitators here at [Urban] University?

Question 10

What kinds of support would you say you've received and from where?

Question 11

Has that support led you to improve in your learning? What are some of your successes in learning so far?

Question 12

What about challenges? Was anything particularly challenging for you? Can you tell me about it/them?

Question 13

Would you say that you've succeeded learning something that you've previously found difficult but overcame that hurdle or difficulty through some measure of support?

D. Academic Literacies

Question 14

Can you tell me what academic literacy is?

Question 15

Would you say you practice academic literacy the way that you learned it in the two modules now in your current learning?

Question 16

How do you practice academic literacy? What do you remember learning?

Question 17

Academic Literacies and the APUS Programme

What do recall learning about academic reading in both the academic literacies modules?

Question 18

What about academic writing? What do you recall learning?

Question 19

Have you applied these skills and knowledge to your present learning?

Question 20

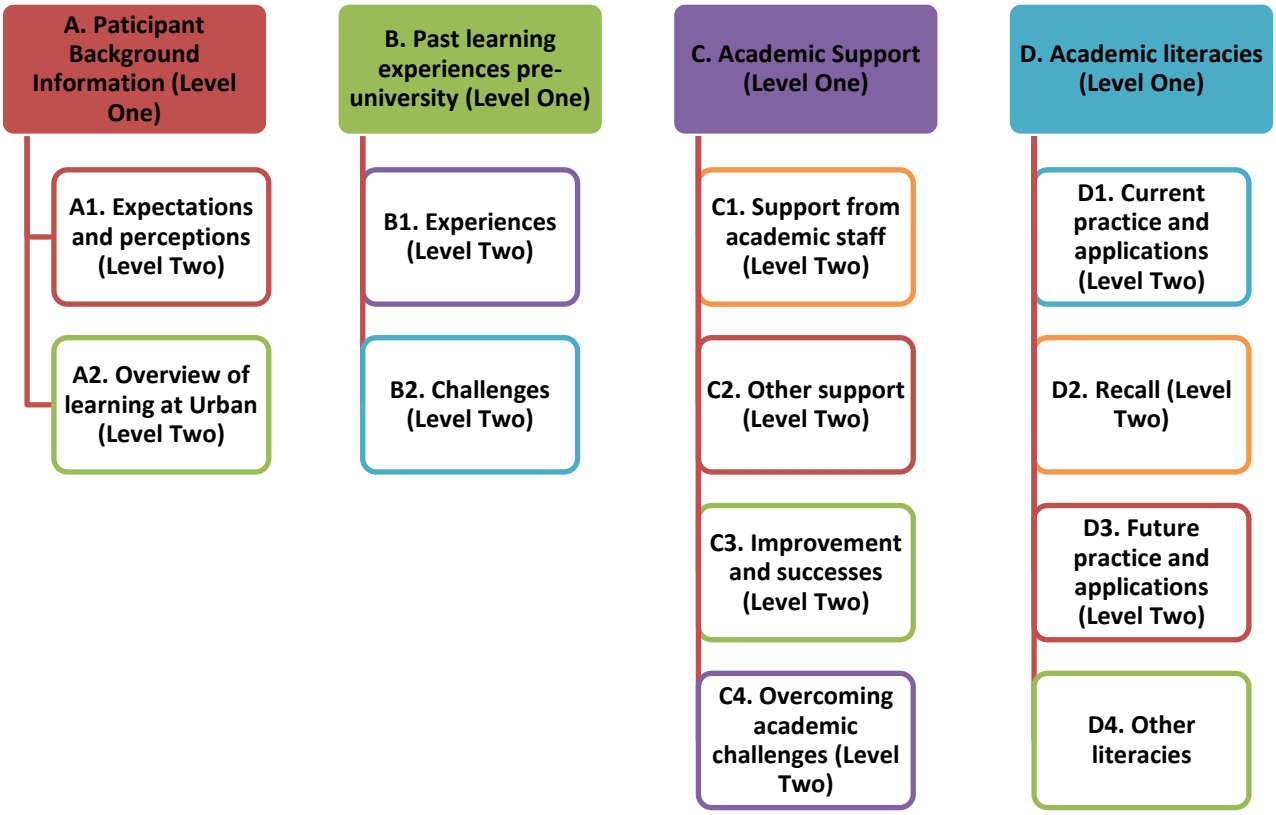
How do you think you might apply these skills and knowledge in the future?

Question 21

What other literacies would you say you've acquired or learned from the course?

Appendix C:

Coding Frame Used to Analyse Data Derived from Semi-Structured Interview



Appendix D

Themes that Emerged from Analysis of Student Learning Journals

Academic Reading
Critical Reading
Access different viewpoints
Ability to judge, critique and evaluate a source
Interrogating facts and use of examples
Reading strategies/techniques
Effective reading strategies
Time efficient
Better recall of information
Elicit main ideas quicker
Deal with information overload/long texts
Comprehension method when topic is very interesting
Academic Writing
Format: how to organize overall essay. Include the following elements in an essay: [a] hook to draw readers' interest in the introduction, topic sentence[s] for each paragraph, thesis statement to help readers understand
Different types of essay formats
Good writing is having: coherence, accuracy, distinct writing style, referencing and citation, correcting mistakes, clarity
Different ways of expressing one's self as a student writer

Importance of language, good vocabulary and good sentence structures

Tone and voice – able to convey the opinions of the writer, is pleasing and attractive, also convincing

Referencing and Citations

Importance of citing and referencing

Giving credit to the original author(s)

Failure to reference results in the consequences of plagiarism

Listening and speaking

Helps with understanding of information presented during lectures

Crucial to pay attention

Improve communication skills

Confidence

Make better impressions

Students of different disciplines make different meanings from the same ideas

Importance of capturing, analysing and evaluating the information gained in lecture

Body language and tone of voice

Information Literacy and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking as an essential skill to develop.

Capacity to work with complex ideas

Capacity to reason

Question based on 5Ws and 1H Reliability of a source Evaluation of a source Biasness

Appendix E

How students say they apply academic literacies to their learning post-exit from APUS

Student	Student Responses (Interviews)
S1/Humanities and Social Sciences	1. Essay writing. Thesis statements, topic sentences and how to write introductions, conclusion. Yeah, it's really helpful to know how to write essays properly, to develop support and write topic sentences. I do that now when I write my essays.
S2/Humanities and Social Sciences	1. How to write essays. That was the most useful. 2. Scanning and skimming. Your modules really helped me a lot with reading and writing. We have so many readings every week, and using the skimming and scanning techniques really help me get through them. […] and then we also learned writing different types of essays […] helps me think about ways of responding to my essay questions. And I also learned how to cite in my essays and to use the proper format that was very useful. Overall, I do much better in my assignments now thanks to taking your [the] modules [you taught].
S3/Business and Finance	*S3/Business and Finance* 1. Choose sources responsibly using the databases and not using Wikipedia. 2. Scanning and skimming. The thing that I find most useful would be … I would say research skills, such as when you taught us to retrieve sources from databases. I also use the scanning and skimming techniques that Miss taught us. I also use Abstract features online to preview articles before reading the body of the article. This is the most useful skill to me now. I also learn to be critical of Internet sources however lecturers provide a list of peer-reviewed web pages or web sites that are approved for reference and used by students. It makes reading much easier for me now, I don't waste time reading the entire text.
S4/Business and Finance	*S4/Business and Finance* 1. Writing different types of essays including thesis statements, topic sentences, developing support, all that. 2. Comprehension, scanning and skimming. In business, one writes "according to flow". We need to have the thesis statement in the introduction, and then topic sentences, use linking words and all that.

S5/Computer Science	*S5/Computer Science* 1. Referencing. I didn't know referencing before I came to Urban. And that was the most useful to me. […] 2. And then, there's something about skimming and scanning (referring to academic reading strategies). Oh yes, and I remember academic listening and academic speaking and 3. Writing different types of essays. Nothing really because I.T. doesn't need the stuff we learned in academic literacies. In fact, I feel like I'm disadvantaged compared to my peers […]. I don't really use any of that. Well, in Computer Science, we don't do much referencing since we only deal with programming algorithms and mathematics. We're not required to reference most of the time. So I don't know actually how it is useful. Maybe some time in future I will have to reference
S6/Computer Science	*S6/Computer Science* 1. Academic writing. Writing essays and all that. 2. Scanning and skimming. Yes I think that it is useful. I know a lot of my friends will say that it is not, but later in [the] third year or after that we may need to write research papers. Like in Masters or PhD. I learned to use the databases and get sources from the library database. That's very helpful now. Even though now I may not always write essays, I think that later it will be useful. I heard from some seniors that in some subjects later we will write essays.
S7/ Science	*S7/ Science* 1. Remembers that an essay needs to have a thesis statement and topic sentences. Also to end an essay, one should write either a recommendation, solutions or make a prediction. 2. Skimming, scanning. 3. We can't use Wikipedia. For Science students we mostly do lab work and experiments and then write lab reports. We don't really have to write essays or anything like that. Learning how to read academically in university is important, it helps me to save a lot of time. The modules (Literacy 1) and (Literacy 2) had a great impact on my learning experiences. I have learnt how to reference properly in my coursework.

	Referencing also helps to support my arguments and gives credibility to the information that I have decided to present in my assignments. I learnt the importance of eye contact during a presentation. I learned to apply critical thinking skills even though I'm in the laboratory during experiments.
S8/ Science	*S8/ Science* 1. Thesis statements, background information, support and a conclusion. 2. Comprehension, scanning and skimming. The most helpful parts about what you taught us were writing annotated bibliographies and literature reviews.

Appendix F

VPREC Approval Letter

Dear Melissa

I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.

Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	
School:	Lifelong Learning
Title:	
First Reviewer:	Prof. Morag A. Gray
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Baaska Anderson.
Date of Approval:	24th March 2015

The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:

Conditions

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,
Morag Gray
Chair, EdD. VPREC