

Advocate, strategist or dogs' body: the Associate Dean (Student) role in co-shaping and managing students' expectations in consumer focused higher education

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The Associate Dean (Students) is an addition to the now more established roles of Associate Dean (Academic or Education) and (Learning and Teaching) in university middle management. While the role is well established in the United States, a cross between student management, student life (or affairs) and academic responsibilities, a student-focused role in academic sections is a relatively recent phenomenon in Australia. Potential functions include those of a traditional ombudsman or student advocate, providing a 'catch all' for the multiple issues facing students. Other functions include a more operational role, incorporating day-to-day processes and procedures, or one that is more strategic and proactive, managing student expectations and crossing divides – divisions, sections, and schools – to support students and staff. In order to interrogate this lack of definition, a pilot qualitative research study was conducted in an Australian regional university. In the study semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders were conducted and participant observation employed. The findings show that by helping staff to support students in both strategic planning and operational processes, the Associate Dean's (Students) role, located in the academic division, can be vital and complex. In today's rapidly changing higher education landscape, such a role can operate to develop, implement and disseminate procedures and processes to assist the institution, students and academic and professional staff to not only respond consistently and proactively to manage student and staff expectations about the student role, but also to **co-shape** them, critical in a growing consumer focused market.

Keywords: Associate Dean Students, student expectations, middle management

Introduction

As universities increase enrolments across a wider student cohort in an economically-driven and rapidly changing higher education (HE) sector, traditional approaches to managing student learning and support are challenged. These stem from swelling diversity, imperatives to enhance the student experience, transition, progression and retention and quality assurance demands including a focus on measuring student outcomes. Students' employability skills are being highlighted as well as inherent requirements, confrontational students, academic integrity, academic standing and at risk processes, and students' rights and responsibilities. Responses embrace a plethora of new organisational structures and institutional roles. This paper will address the theme *The Shape of Higher Education* and its sub theme 'Leadership

across the academy' by exploring the emerging position of Associate Dean (Students) (ADS) in academic divisions; its definition, credibility and status.

First, the paper canvasses the range of institutional responses to 'change forces' impacting on the student experience. It also reviews discourses relating to middle management in academic contexts both globally and in Australia. The structure of the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) is then explained. Thirdly, the paper reports the findings of a small qualitative pilot study interrogating the ADS role at USQ.

Context and background

The contemporary higher education sector

Universities are highly specialised organisations typically differentiated into academic, student, administration and finance sections (Bess, Dee & Johnstone, 2012). In academic sections, staff possess specialized expertise in their academic disciplines, which, while aggregating expertise into functional work units, can also generate problems, including a lack of coordination between segregated units leading to duplication, inefficiency and competitiveness for limited resources. Bess and colleagues(2012) argue that the challenge is to design efficient clusters of professionals and then to find ways to develop coordination mechanisms across these clusters that integrate the work of separated groups but do not impinge upon the work of highly trained specialists.

These structural challenges are exacerbated in the highly volatile and contested context that is the contemporary HE sector. There are requirements to balance growth with quality and access and excellence and mission with market against a climate of funding cuts and demands to manage growth, costs and risk in an environment of increasing regulation (Scott et al., 2008). As well, the IT-revolution is reshaping information, interaction and knowledge-generation and sharing, redesigning HE delivery, affecting both students and academics.

Along with escalating student diversity are changing student expectations and pressures as students increasingly seek just-in-time support, real world learning and placements, targeted learning assistance, convenient access and value-for-money in their studies, along with successful employment or further study outcomes (Quinlan, 2011). Consequences include demands for 'future ready' graduates able to use their knowledge and learning to enable them to engage productively with the unfolding challenges of social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability in their professions. Questions thus ensue about how best to manage student expectations in a context where economies of scale are paramount and student learning is primarily seen to involve transmission of set content using a "one-size-fits-all" model delivered increasing in a digital environment or in a set timetable operated at the institution's convenience over fixed semesters (Scott et al., 2008).

This contextual volatility is intensified for academics who are managing increasing workloads – both academic and administrative, continuous technological change, quality assurance requirements, generally outdated human resources management and slow and unresponsive administrative processes (Scott, 2012). Bolden (2011) adds that rising managerialism and pressures to demonstrate economic value in the current climate run counter to most academics' values. Responding to government mandates, increasing accountability and cost pressures create value conflicts as academics experience tension between internal and external motivations especially as they are called upon to do more with less, workload accounting is heightened and time pressures more keenly experienced (Clegg, 2013). There is also a general

decline in the real value of academic salaries and working conditions as well as the relative lack of recognition of quality teaching within university incentive systems (Bexley, James, & Arkoudis, 2011).

Responses to this complexity have escalated managerialism and corporatisation in HE as well as increasing disquiet about university leadership (Barnett, 2015). Bell, Warwick and Galbraith (2012) identify global university managerialism characterised by divisions between academic and corporate management where university managers are seen as the leaders and agents of change and progress in the predominantly target-driven economic environment. The drive for efficiencies and productivity has increased managerial staff whilst also reimagining students as clients/consumers. There is the emergence of often large divisions to 'care' for the student experience in a way frequently divorced from the academic functions of the university (Bell, et al., 2012). Thus a privileging of the corporate over academic modes of university governance is gaining momentum (Vidovich & Currie, 2011).

Middle management in the Academy

Studies in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia typically describe middle managers in HE as occupying positions below the level of Dean, such as Directors, ADs, Heads of School (HOS) and faculty or institutional research registrars (Bess, et al., 2012). Preston and Price (2012) in the UK, argue that many academics accept the role to contribute to the strategic successes of the department or feel a sense of obligation to lead. In Australia HE, Scott and colleagues (2008) argue that middle managers achieve improvements across teaching and learning, helping staff achieve their goals and managing resources and strategy formation. In the management literature, middle managers in academic sections have a "particular role as the pivot between the more strategic interests of senior management and the local knowledge of front-line managers and employees" (Clegg & McAuley, 2005, p.21).

There are four discourses relating to middle management, according to McCauley and Clegg (2005). The first emphasises core organisational values where middle managers are seen as agents of organisational control, acting as buffers between transient senior management and the instrumental orientation of employees. In HE, this can mean that middle managers in an academic section, rather than representing core organisational values, represent core academic values (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). This is because many of the basic orientations of academic staff are based in disciplinary practices with their academic identities perceived to be more significant than managerialist practices.

The second discourse sees middle managers as essentially self-interested agents of control, operating, often superfluously, between the vision and strategies of senior management and empowered employees (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). In HE, the growth of student numbers and the development of the managerialist agenda has led to corporate reorganisation where schools and faculties exhibit flatter organisational structures in restructures and where primary concerns are with the promotion and development of a corporate vision for the university (including student management). One of the consequences is the perception by senior managers that academic parts of the university have become too diversified in their staffing, teaching profile and research outputs (Clegg & McAuley, 2005), and in consequence may operate to marginalise academics in demanding consistency using a one-university vision.

The third discourse, the corporate bureaucrat, depicts the middle manager as a key actor in the development of the managerial discourse, as an agent of organisational control who effectively acts as the agent of senior management. In HE, the key features of managerialism

involve “management’s right to manage; a top-down approach, involving a “technology” of management and a “policy science” approach; an orientation towards the market and customers; individualism and acceptance of the status quo; and in education “an atomistic and mechanistic understanding of knowledge and learning” (Clegg & McAuley, 2005, p.28). Another characteristic is that quality assurance agencies assess the quality of learning and teaching and implement attempts to bureaucratically control and regulate knowledge expansion. At an institutional level, the corporate bureaucrats are those, whether academics or from other sections, who initiate systems and procedures to exert more control by appealing to measurable outcomes, thus comprising part of the rhetoric of the more corporate university.

In the fourth discourse, the middle manager is conceptualised as transmitter of core strategic values, acting as a repository of organisational knowledge who exercises “benign control through personal but organisationally located wisdom” (Clegg & McAuley, 2005, p.28). Middle management can thus be seen as a strategic asset: linking management with organisational core capability and competitive advantage; developing and maintaining the institution’s core competencies; managing the tension between long- and short-term organisational purposes; linking dispersed knowledge and best practices across the organisation; and embedding processes of change and renewal into the organisation. Academic identities remain significant for middle managers who “may rely on consent and negotiation within the confines of mutually understood norms of collegiality to bring about changes involving the mass of practitioner academics” in this instance in relation to the student experience (Clegg & McAuley, 2005, p.29). This can put middle managers at the forefront of change in key areas such as learning and teaching and in the advancement of core pedagogical and academic goals as well as organisational goals. Thus middle managers can establish important roots in debates about critical pedagogy and this is one where many women academics can become active.

Thus while the contemporary discourse often equates middle management with managerialism, Clegg and McAuley’s (2005) evaluation of middle management reveals its multifaceted roles; that middle managers can variously represent core organisational values, act as self-interested agents of control or corporate bureaucrats or be situated as repositories of organisational wisdom. Middle management can also exhibit characteristics of all four discourses simultaneously. For example, they can exercise considerable power when they are not procedure bound, where there is capability for variety in work and innovation rewarded, where they are at the heart of affairs (physically and emotionally), and where they can participate in high-level decisions and problem-solving situations. However if these organisational conditions are not present, as McCauley and Clegg (2005) warn and as Scott (2012) foreshadows, middle managers can become alienated, marginal and prone to stress as a result of the role’s pivotal nature and its generally less well articulated identity.

The Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)

One consequence of increasing student diversity as well as the evolution of middle management in academic sections was the addition of an AD (Learning and Teaching) (ADLT) role to that of the AD (Academic). In Australia this position is now well established with a range of disciplines sponsoring ADLT networks, for example the Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) and the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE). The literature exploring the ADLT role (Krause, 2012; Scott et al., 2008) however also revealed challenges inherent in the new ADLT role, challenges reflective in the discourses outlined by McCauley and Clegg (2005). These include the overwhelming nature of the role with huge responsibilities but little power, a propensity to

react to events, perceptions of isolation, difficulties dealing with poor performers (Scott et al., 2008), being sandwiched between competing expectations of central administration and academic staff (Pepper & Giles, 2015) and an 'us and them' situation where ADLTs increasingly lose touch with their colleagues (Preston & Price, 2012). Southwell and colleagues (2008) characterise these pressures as 'caught between a rock and several hard places' while Krause (2012) refers to the 'wicked problems' associated with the role. Strategies however have also emerged with Scott and colleagues (2008) reporting that flexible, responsive, role-specific, practice-oriented and just-in-time, just-for-me approaches assist the development of middle management academic leaders and Southwell and colleagues (2008) developing a framework for institutional leadership which includes self-directed induction and mentoring advice.

The Associate Dean (Students)

An emerging AD role is that of the ADS located in academic sections. A student-focused role in management terms has a long history in the US, where it was labelled a Dean of Men, emerging in the early twentieth century to help manage a growing student population (Schwartz, 2010). Over time, these positions increased in size and responsibility and by the 1940's they had become significant figures with many students seeing them as the "face" of the college or university. This student-friendly Dean role declined from the early 1960's when the reliance on measurement, testing, the bureaucracy of mass registrations created a less humane environment on many campuses (resulting in a discourse relating to "don't treat me like a number") (Schwartz, 2010, p.186). However, as institutions grew more complex, the role re-emerged in managerial sections of universities. In Australia, equivalent positions are often located in Student Management sections and provide strategic direction for the development and implementation of student support and services.

The University of Southern Queensland

This is the case at USQ. Established in 1967, USQ campuses include the Toowoomba, Springfield and Ipswich Campuses in Brisbane's western corridor. USQ graduated 88,428 students during the period 1967 to 2013 and has over 28,000 currently enrolled students. Its student cohort is very diverse of whom approximately 34% are low SES students and many first in their family. In July 2013, in a sweeping restructure, five divisions were established: the Vice-Chancellors, Academic, Research and Innovation, Academic Services, University Services, and Students and Communities (S & C) Divisions. The S & C Division, headed by a Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC), is responsible for student recruitment, admission, orientation and welfare. The Vice Chancellor's Committee (VCC) includes the Heads of these Divisions, of whom only one, the Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, represents academics. The new structure reduced five faculties to two: the Faculties of Business, Education, Law and Arts (BELA) and Health, Engineering and Sciences (HES). Each Faculty has an Executive Dean, six HOS and four ADs (Academic (ADA), (LT), Research (ADR) and ADS). The AD positions do not possess line authority but each is supported in each school by a School Coordinator (SC) (with a 15% loading).

Research Study

Methodology

To investigate the effectiveness of the ADS portfolio and how it is perceived across USQ a pilot case study was conducted. The study was located within a critical realist paradigm using interpretive methods so that meaning and processes could be explored (Sayer, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participant observation employed to contextualise

the interview findings. Twelve participants were interviewed, including School Coordinators Students (SCS), professional staff from the Schools and HOSs (considered as key stakeholders as they task the SCS). Participants were asked to discuss their experiences in dealing with the ADS portfolio with a series of open-ended questions which asked what they understood the role to incorporate, whether they perceived that it was gaining or losing credibility, and if they had identified any challenges endemic to the role, for example how well the portfolio was understood. These questions allowed reliable, comparable qualitative data to be revealed (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, p.1), and helped to identify the parameters of the study.

Participant observation incorporated the use of reflective practice by the two ADS (the authors of the paper) and their Executive Assistant (EA) and comprised self-analysis and reflexivity, collective discussions and analyses of documents produced within the portfolio, for example the 2014-2016 portfolio plans, reports to Faculty Executives and minutes of the Academic Division Student Management Committee (ADSMC), the designated divisional committee co-chaired by the ADSs. The researchers remained aware of biases and did not enter the study with any misconceptions about not bringing in any subjectivities into the data collection process (Kawulich, 2005).

Interview data were analysed using a grounded theoretical approach (Thomas, 2006) with narrative analysis employed for data collected via participant observation (Chase, 2005).

Preliminary findings

Preliminary data revealed three key themes: institutional priorities; policy, procedures and quality assurance and compliance; and student support. Weaving through these themes were threads linked to management imperatives/directives/desire for divisional *collaboration*, *consistency* of policy and practice and *communication*.

Institutional priorities

Institutional priorities emerged as a key theme identified by participants and through participant observation and surfaced essentially in relation to intra-division and interdivision *collaboration*. The two ADSs advocated strongly that a key goal was to “work across divisions so that all sections work together to support students”. To achieve this both ADS prioritise, consult and seek and provide feedback as a team, never as individual Faculty ADS. In this way the ADS were instrumental in 2014 in ensuring that the academic voice about the student experience was consulted and addressed in the Strategic Adjustment Fund (SAF) projects. Previously the academic voice was represented by the Learning and Teaching Services (LTS) located in the Academic Services Division. This is ongoing with the ADS ensuring that their ADSMC includes key stakeholders from across the wider USQ community (including the PVC, S and C Division, as well as key members of that division). This allows the portfolio to act as a conduit for providing the academic voice for key student-focused projects, disseminating information about key projects and vice-versa so that, in turn, all staff dealing with students are empowered, consulted, ‘heard’ and informed.

I sit in the Management meetings and have seen various members from around USQ gain knowledge that is crucial to their understanding of how different stakeholders view issues related to students and the perceptions of academics about students (SCS HES).

The portfolio thus positions the Committee as a principle means of strategically aligning the student portfolio across USQ, building the capacity of academic and professional staff in student matters, not only advocating students’ rights but also students’ responsibilities in

relation to expectation management. USQ strategic goals are also facilitated through a series of ADSMC working parties (in 2016 these include conditional academic standing, inherent requirements, academic intervention strategies and recognition of student learning). Participants confirm that the portfolio offers a conduit for divisional collaboration.

The Management meetings are excellent in informing me of the work done by other divisions, for example ICT, marketing and LTS, etc. You could also see presenters from these areas taking on board feedback from the academics (Student Relationship Officer (SRO) S and C).

This observation sometimes surfaces in response to tensions materialising from the new divisional structure which was perceived as exacerbating divisions between USQ sections.

I have observed a lack of respect across the Divisions with some professional staff having a negative view of academics, referring to them as 'like herding cats'. There is a lack of knowledge and respect which exacerbate the view that staff who are peripheral to core learning and teaching business have 'all the power'. The ADS position is helping to alleviate these views with their presence on committees and their determination to connect with professional staff across different sections (Academic Support Officer (ASO) BELA).

While these tensions emulate the managerialism/collegiate duality present in contemporary HE, this view of the USQ context exemplifies the ways in which the middle management role may mediate between the core and periphery of an organisation (Clegg, 2013), illustrating a broader understanding of how such a role can be enacted to maintain an academic voice across an institution. The portfolio, through the ADs and their committee, is also able to mediate between core organisational and academic values. For instance, while there has been an increasing emphasis on managerial organisational priorities in the USQ restructure, academics' attachments to both their discipline and their core role in learning and teaching can be enacted with the ADS and SCSs educating the wider committee about the constraints and objectives experienced in their disciplines and in curriculum design. Their capacity to communicate these concerns affirms McCauley and Clegg's (2005) assertion that academics value their connection with the wider community of scholars and to their disciplines as the central axis for their identity. The practice also works in reverse however with members from other sections also educating the ADSMC and the SCS about their subjectivities/objectives.

The portfolio also ensures academic division representation is present on a range of University committees and working parties to enhance *consistency* of purpose in relation to the student experience as well as facilitating multiple possibilities to customise/ personalise their learning journeys. USQ has a large student cohort from non-traditional backgrounds – low SES, rural and remote, NESB, First in Family, etc. and as such these areas become a core part of the portfolio. The portfolio has significant input into positions which oversee projects and initiatives to improve access, participation and success of these students, for example USQ's Social Justice Strategic Plan, the corresponding Social Justice Strategy Board and the Student Engagement Advisory Committee (SEAC). The ADS also lead projects in this sphere, for example the incarcerated student project, funded from the Commonwealth Government's Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP) which they led and involved mapping and aligning USQ processes in relation to incarcerated students. It culminated in two well attended institutional workshops and a report to VCC putting forward policy initiatives in this area. Not all work is targeted at underrepresented groups. Outlining not only students' rights

but also their responsibilities is vital as a first step to being explicit about student and staff behaviours and practices and managing expectations in relation to student issues and concerns. These are subject to continuous improvement and thus the portfolio liaises not only across USQ but also with HOSs and the other ADs so that the role is recognised and more clearly understood within Faculties and Schools, as a SCS testifies.

While I think my SCS role still has some way to go in terms of being accepted as a leadership role within my School, my Head of School wants a focus on three items - retention (which is progressing well), academic integrity (mainly from the point of view of developing a training course based on School needs) and student engagement (which is linked with retention). He is also interested in the more operational role of fostering student societies (SCS HES).

Policies, procedures, quality assurance and compliance

The new organisational structure has meant that former faculty-based policies and procedures needed to be developed and implemented consistently at institutional level. These included Academic Integrity (AI) and Conditional Academic Standing (CAS). While these were led by relevant DVCs, the ADS portfolio makes certain academics' and students' voices are consulted and work with the SCS and staff to operationalise and gather feedback for continuous improvement to ensure processes are consistent, transparent and agile.

I have witnessed the constant emphasis on consultations to ensure consistency across USQ which is very important as student welfare goes across the whole university (Executive Assistant (EA HES)).

The ADS are currently leading an initiative to develop agreed cross-divisional protocols for processing and escalating student support enquiries by forming a working party of key student-facing staff from across USQ. The protocol will ensure students receive appropriate advice and are directed through appropriate procedures such that issues are effectively and efficiently resolved. Through an ICT Capital Project, a searchable staff resource which will enable staff to identify the appropriate section to handle each type of student enquiry, and appropriate routes for escalation where required. The content incorporated into core systems and thus will be kept current by the appropriate Area Content Editors. Other initiatives include facilitating collaborative partnerships between course examiners and Student Relationship Officers (SROs) in the Division of S & C to ensure consistency, avoid duplication and to develop mutually responsible partnerships with students. Other projects have focused on digital literacy (DART) and a new academic intervention strategy (AWARE).

This evidence points to the ADS role in making a significant contribution, albeit with little recognition by senior management (for example the HOS), to organisational change. In this context, the ADS ensure that the organisation stays 'close to the customer' (the student) so that 'repeat business' (student recruitment and retention) can be ensured (McCauley & Clegg, 2005).

In the old structure there were no written processes and mistakes were sometimes made. This has changed under the supervision of the ADS (ASO HES).

There has been a new focus on the individual student whereas it was generalised before. In CAS the templates developed by the ADs in consultation with

professional staff allow each case to be considered individually but with efficiency (ASO BELA).

While the ADS capacity here confirms the traditional view of middle management as the implementers and communicators of senior management's strategic plans, it also seen to be important in gaining the cooperation of the staff despite the fact that the rate of change may be making interpersonal relationships more fraught. The implementation of the CAS policies and procedures thus signify what McCauley and Clegg (2005) label as a neo-managerialist agenda. Other symptoms arise from institutional demands for measureable outcomes, demands that can spearhead increasing compliance, leading to a proliferation of 'red tape' and a kind of learned helplessness exhibited by staff constrained by rules and regulations. The portfolio is mindful of these considerations as the ADSs endeavor to build staff capacity about student capability in the long term, leveraged not only by consultation with stakeholders about policies/ procedures but also by tempering compliance with humanity and support.

The ADs have the capacity to provide accessible and individualised support and service, with their role establishing clear mutual expectations in relation to CAS and understood by staff involved (ASO BELA). The AI process has been enacted and is achieving positive outcomes for all students (EA ADLT HES). We have brought about a greater level of awareness and understanding of what academic integrity means and there are signs that academic misconduct has been declining (SCS BELA).

Student support

This theme emerges throughout the analysis of the first two themes as, by its nature, it is endemic to the student portfolio. It also appears in its own right however as the divisional re-structure has proliferated misunderstandings, duplication and replication in student support across the Academic Services, Academic and S & C Divisions, epitomising the tensions that can arise between organisational and academic responsibilities (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). The ADS's determination to *communicate* meaningfully across sections and divisions has achieved gains in these areas though it is important to remain vigilant in this task.

We are seen to be improving student learning experience through greater involvement in communicating about student support by engaging professional staff and by ensuring that sources of support in the other divisions are understood by academics with information consistently conveyed to students (SCS BELA).

Participating in the role of SCS role at a school level has been a revealing exercise. It clearly takes time to carve out new spaces that can be understood and accepted by all. The ADS have worked hard in this space. However, I would observe there is a way to go (SC HES).

This evidence verifies the ADS stance on support in this role. It also confirms Clegg and McAuley 's (2005) view that middle management's role and identity is often less well articulated and less understood than that of (and by) management and requires constant attention.

Conclusions

Both interview and participant observation data corroborate that, like early research on the ADLT role (Southwell et al., 2008), perceptual difficulties exist in understanding the ADS role with continuing skepticism about its credibility. As an SCS HES, states *My Head of*

School is unsure about what my role is exactly. This perception is intensified by the student-facing role embedded both in the S & C Division and in the more recent ADS portfolio, unlike the ADs for Learning and Teaching and Academic, whose work is clearly identified in the Academic Division. It is important therefore to establish the portfolio's credibility and relevance and how it can enhance both staff and students' work. This is a continuous process.

HOS does not always see/agree how our role and things we have done have impacted/ influenced on the student's learning experience as a whole. Quite often the outcomes are not easy to measure (e.g. intangible and soft) and takes time to realise. For example, our efforts in the orientation can provide students with a greater level of confidence in their learning journey (such as telling what they want to know rather than what we think they should know). Academic writing and integrity workshops help students to gain a better understanding and minimise any misperceptions (because they may have a different views coming from a different background). Student profile is a very important role that we play but it is often regarded as a dumping area by the Heads and others.

As Clegg and McAuley (2005) argue, the discourse of the collegiate/managerialism dualism tends to position middle management in a negative light. However, if the frame of reference is changed to a more neutrally conceived discourse it is possible to recognise that the ADS portfolio can play a creative and innovative role in the academic sections of HE institutions. The evidence presented in this preliminary study corroborates this assertion. For instance, while the ADS portfolio is very recent, and its challenges documented, its effectiveness can be measured in terms of its early impact on the institution as well as validation in interview testimony. However, although improvements are present in each of the three themes, the portfolio's efforts to enhance the student experience need continuous reinforcement and its pertinence as a viable role in middle management in the academic sections of universities requires constant advocacy and verification. The outcomes thus far have provided an effective though tenuous beginning. As an SCS in BELA verifies

I think the role has a lot of potential and will inevitably grow and change in useful ways. However, I think staff and management are still struggling to understand what it includes and ways to make appropriate delegations and develop responsibilities.

More research on the roles and functions of student-facing roles emerging in Australia, for example the Australian National University's ADS in School of Arts and Social Sciences, the University of Sydney's Dean of Students and University of the Sunshine Coast's DVC Students, could clarify and generalise the preliminary data documented here about how Clegg and McAuley's (2005) discourses are evolving in terms of student management in academic sections. Another way of investigating these preliminary findings is to apply them to McNay's theory of institutional culture (McNay, 2006). As Clegg (2013) argues, paying attention to how changes are being experienced is an important element in theorizing trends in the sector.

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