

Various academic staff at the Faculty of Law, Stellenbosch University, were exposed to the lecturing processes and teaching and learning methodologies used by Prof Ed Jacobs, during an informal session entitled “Peer Learning in the Classroom”, held in January of 2012.

The two hour session focused on the underlying rationale behind Ed’s decision to implement his peer-learning/flashcard approach, how it aligned with best practices in respects of Teaching and Learning theories, and the extent to which similar techniques could be incorporated in large-group, law lectures or tutorials.

The combination of the successes enjoyed by Prof Eric Mazur, as demonstrated in his presentation at STIAS in May 2012 entitled “Confessions of a Converted Lecturer”, together with the aforementioned on-campus experiences of Ed Jacobs – no doubt contributed to an ever-increasing awareness of peer instruction, and its integration of practical techniques such as flashcards and rapid feedback assessment techniques, within the context of the Law Faculty.

Ms. Mary Nel, in her capacity as lecturer of Criminal Law 171, was one of the first Law lecturers, following a complete redesign of her course in 2012 in order to better utilise the benefits of the “flipped-classroom”, to attempt using smartphone-driven clicker technology, in her main lectures (comprising of approximately 350 students). Whereas the initiative was ultimately stymied by infrastructure/wireless-connectivity issues, should these be sorted in the foreseeable future, it remains a viable option for future classes.

Prof. Annika Rudman, is currently in the process of finalising the redesign of International Law 341 (comprising approximately 180 students), which is to commence in the second semester of 2013. One of the key aspects of the restructuring sees the adoption of a seminar-type lecture every Thursday, which is designed to test the self-formulated knowledge of the students, based on compulsory assignment-research allocated to them in the preceding week. Prof Rudman will be using the so-called “low-tech” clickers, namely flashcards, similar to that utilised by Ed, in order to gauge the competency and extent of knowledge present amongst the student-groups, in response to focused questions and problems.

Both Ms Nel and Prof Rudman were present at the “Peer Learning in the Classroom” session with Ed Jacobs, held in January 2012. Whereas both have no doubt been influenced by many different sources in undertaking the necessary research in planning the redesign of their courses, it can nonetheless be said that Ed played a prominent role in raising the awareness of peer-learning at Stellenbosch University, and at the Faculty of Law, in particular.