Epigeum case study
Blended Learning at the University of Canberra

Introduction

The University of Canberra (UC) is committed to providing world-class student-centred education which is engaging, adaptive and innovative. Previously the Canberra College of Advanced Education, UC attained university status in 1990 and currently has around 17,000 students and 1,000 staff. In addition to its main campus location in the suburb of Bruce, UC partners with four Technical and Further Education institutions across Australia, as well as having offshore students based in China, Hon Kong, Singapore and Bhutan.

In UC's 2013-17 strategic plan 'Breakthrough', Vice-Chancellor Professor Stephen Parker writes that:

"Those universities that do not make the right changes in their operations, use of technology, approach to education … will founder in a competitive domestic and global environment which has uneven age and demographic structures and differential rates of economic growth."

The strategic plan specifically states the intention to *"expand and improve flexible learning at UC"* and describes the need for multiple *"modes of delivery (face-to-face, blended, online only, online supported, intensive, work-integrated learning)"*.

Teaching & Learning

UC has a central Teaching & Learning unit which is part of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)'s portfolio. Teaching & Learning includes teams dedicated to Academic Quality & Development, Education Innovation, and Scholarly Information Environments, as well as Library staff.

UC's Director of Teaching & Learning made the decision to join the *Blended Learning* development group, to support academic staff in developing flexible and blended learning opportunities for students. Being part of the collaboration meant that staff at UC had the opportunity to contribute to the suite of courses while it was in development – by providing interviewees for video content and by taking part in the alpha review process to ensure that the course materials would meet their needs as an institution.

Technical implementation

When the *Blended Learning* courses were released, one of the Educational Designers in the Education Innovation team uploaded them to a LearnOnline site (UC's instance of Moodle), using screenshots of some of the interactive activities as course images:
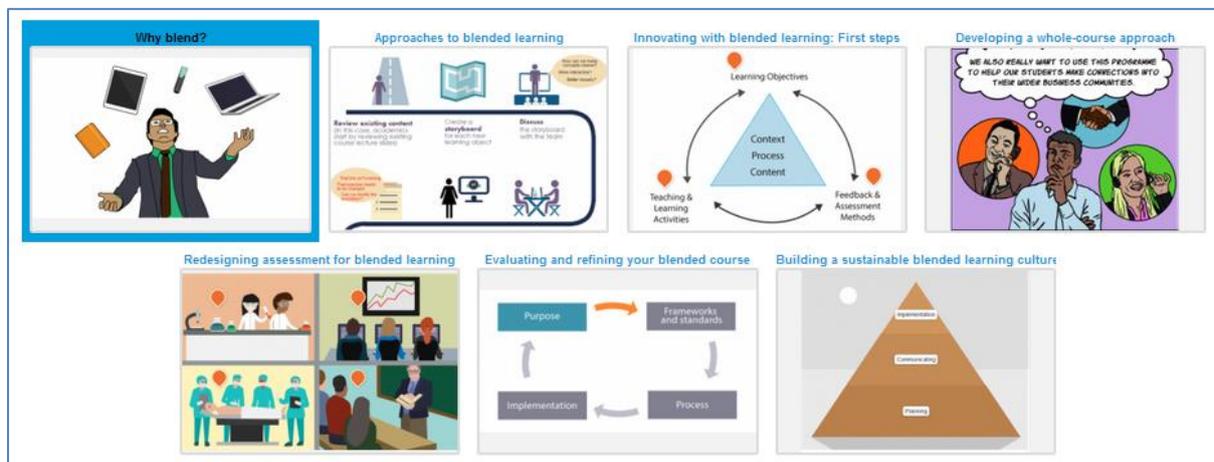
Having experimented with customising the course materials – for example adding, removing and reorganising pages – the team decided to upload the *BL* courses without customisation, with a view to reviewing this decision once they have gathered feedback from staff.

Professional development/ Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education

The *Blended Learning* courses were also integrated into UC's new Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education (GCTE) which launched on 5th July 2016. The GCTE is designed to be a flexible self-organised and work-integrated learning opportunity for teaching staff at UC.

Participants begin by completing a self-audit of current skills and experience and identifying activities to undertake, then generate and collate evidence to meet the learning outcomes across five focus areas (student engagement; assessment; flexible learning environments; curriculum design; leadership, management and supervision). The final assessment task is a reflective Account of Professional Practice which can be used as the basis for a separate application for Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

In consultation with the Course Convener, staff determine their own pathway through the GCTE. Alongside TED Talks, academic papers, news articles and MOOCs, the *Blended Learning* courses are resources which GCTE participants can engage with if they wish to. The Education Innovation team envisages the *BL* courses being particularly attractive to those who are relatively new to teaching and prefer a more scaffolded approach to the GCTE. In the GCTE site, the *BL* courses were uploaded without the end-of-course quizzes, since the GCTE course assessment requires participants to provide evidence of application and changes to teaching practice.

A month after its launch, the GCTE had around 20 enrolled participants, with around 60 staff members on an Expressions of Interest list. The course will evolve over time, with participants encouraged to give feedback on existing resources and to contribute resources themselves, for example by sharing these via the Padlet walls in the LearnOnline site.
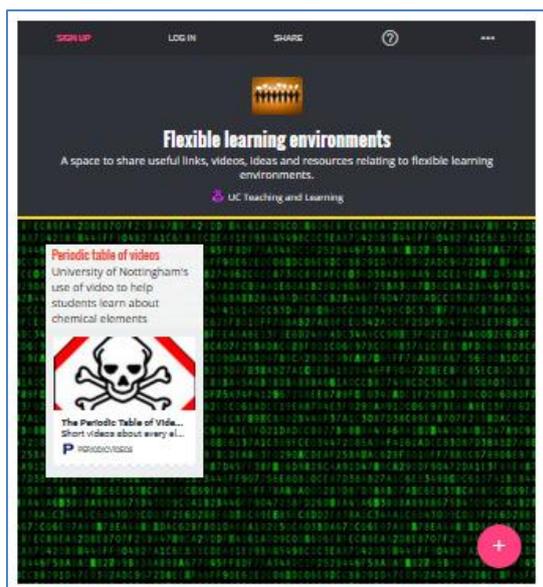
www.padlet.com

Since participants may not be that familiar with Epigeum, the GCTE team also added an entry in the site Glossary, giving further information on how Epigeum operates and describing the types of activities participants might encounter in the courses:

At-elbow support

As well as providing professional development opportunities for staff, the Education Innovation team works with individual staff members and teaching teams to support them in designing new courses, redesigning existing offerings, and reviewing teaching strategies. The *Blended Learning* courses are a useful resource to draw on during these endeavours, as particular activities or case studies can be highlighted where relevant to help staff consider how they could make the shift to a blended approach to teaching and learning.

Communication

The Education Innovation team will be reviewing its approach to staff development for 2017 and part of that review process will be determining the most effective way to promote and deliver the Epigeum courses. UC also has a licence for Epigeum's *University & College Teaching* programme – currently these courses sit in a separate LearnOnline site, so one decision that needs to be made is whether the *UCT* and *BL* programmes should remain separate or whether they should be imported into one site under the umbrella of staff development opportunities.

Promotional activities around the *Blended Learning* courses will highlight the fact that UC staff were involved in the development of the programme, as well as emphasising the fact that staff can work through the courses at a time and pace that suits them.

September 2016 will see the arrival of a new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Deep Saini, at UC. Professor Saini has lauded UC for having *"an audacious academic path … [and] remarkably enterprising, distinctive and bold plans, which are already producing impressive results"*.

Though the *Blended Learning* programme is still in the early phase of implementation, it is hoped that initiatives like this will align well with the university's strategic goals in 2017 and beyond.

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