

# THE NEXT FRONTIER OF ONLINE & E-LEARNING LEARNING IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

HOW 3 UNIVERSITIES ARE TAKING ONLINE AND E-LEARNING LEARNING TO THE NEXT LEVEL TO DRIVE A PERSONALISED STUDENT EXPERIENCE

INSIGHTS FROM:



# MAKE IT PART OF YOUR UNIVERSITY

TIPS TO HELP YOU STRENGTHEN YOUR  
APPROACH TO ONLINE LEARNING TO  
IMPROVE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND  
ENGAGEMENT

Brochure | Website



Over the past five years online education has exploded across the Australian higher education sector. Technological advancements and changing student expectations have made the online education model an increasingly viable option for learning.

And as the student demand for online learning continues to soar, there is no doubt that the way that we teach and learn is set to transform even more in the coming years.

But does the growth of online learning mean that traditional bricks and mortar learning models will have no place in the future?

According to a recent survey of students by online teaching company Studiosity, 19 per cent of Australian tertiary students think physical campuses will cease to exist within 20 years time.

Similarly, another study by Australian Science revealed 50 percent of students surveyed liked their online course materials, while just over 30 percent said the same about traditional coursework.

With so much change on the horizon, what steps can universities take to ensure their approach to online learning can transform the student learning experience into something which is fulfilling, rewarding and personalised? What's more, how can universities go about creating the perfect marriage of educator engagement and student ROI when rolling-out new online learning models?

To answer these questions, Ahead of the 4th Annual Online and E-Learning Summit 2019, we have compiled three case studies which explore the different approaches three Australian universities are taking to improve student engagement and personalisation of the learning process through innovative online learning strategies.

# DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING MOOCS AT DEAKIN UNIVERSITY TO CREATE A REAL-WORLD LEARNING EXPERIENCE



**Professor Beverley Oliver, Deputy Vice Chancellor Education at Deakin University**

Deakin University promises its students “a brilliant education where they are, and where they want to go” for the jobs and skills of the future, and in the digital economy. A key strategy has been adopting a global platform, FutureLearn, to offer degrees and credentials with greater global visibility. The value proposition in the digital era means that any student from anywhere can have a global experience.

Below, Professor Beverley Oliver, Deputy Vice Chancellor Education at Deakin University shares how her team developed and implemented a full degree platform that was originally designed to offer MOOCs, to create a seamless student experience and better prepare students for the workforce.

## **DEVELOPING FUTURELEARN: A GLOBAL SOCIAL LEARNING PLATFORM**

“Deakin University has four traditional on-site campuses and a fifth campus called the Cloud Campus where 15,000 of our students choose to study online with us. The vast majority of our students use our traditional Learning Management System (LMS) called CloudDeakin.

However, we have also joined a global platform called FutureLearn to ensure our free open courses are not only globally available, but also offer full degrees.

The world of MOOCs has been evolving since 2012 and during this time we have been watching this space with interest. At Deakin, we created our own small MOOC on our own platform a few years ago. From this project, we learnt that many people who sign up and enroll in free open courses don't finish the course unless there is a credential or qualification involved.

We also saw universities in Australia begin to use the EdX platform to offer the MicroMasters concept taken up by many American universities. This concept means the beginning of a Masters is available on a free open platform, but then a student has to go to the university's LMS system to complete their degree.

In our experience, the learning experience on a MOOC is often very elegant and streamlined. Sometimes, when a student goes from a MOOC to finishing their course on a traditional LMS the experience can be quite lacklustre because LMS platforms were designed as a content repositories and to manage learners, not to manage learning.

We chose the FutureLearn as our global platform because the educational philosophy matches what we're trying to achieve. Our aim is to use the FutureLearn platform to offer students a brilliant education wherever they are, and where they want to go."

## THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE FUTURELEARN PHILOSOPHY

"FutureLearn is an elegant, user-friendly platform and underpins our online learning philosophy which is centralised around three key pillars:

- 1. Tell the story.** The FutureLearn story is very much about engaging the learner in small steps in a digital narrative.
- 2. Provoke conversation.** The FutureLearn platform provokes socially engaged learning and this is an area Deakin is very interested in. Based on research with our own students, online learning using a traditional LMS can be a very lonely and isolating experience. As a result, FutureLearn is specially designed for people who are learning online and want to engage and interact with each other.
- 3. Celebrate Achievement though assessment**
- 4. Demonstrate skills:** Students today need to be able to create and curate digital evidence of their achievements and share those professionally on various platforms.

While the vast majority of our students are using the CloudDeakin system, we are creating six fully online courses at FutureLearn. These courses are post-graduate degrees and are designed for mature, self-directed learners. We are using a different model to reinvent online learning, not just replicate what is being done on campus."

## **CREATING A SOCIAL ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE TO BOOST RETENTION**

“At Deakin we have a team involved in using student feedback to ensure our FutureLearn platform meets learner needs.

It is common knowledge across the sector online learners have very high attrition. This is most likely because people who study online are often mature working adults who have family or other responsibilities. We know these types of learners tend to be busy, have many competing interests and are therefore more likely to withdraw from the learning experience in comparison to a school leaver studying on campus.

Through remodeling and redesigning our online learning courses to create socially engaged learning, we are starting to see that attrition rate decrease. Through FutureLearn we are managing to keep our students engaged to bridge the gap and keep them engaged.”

## **LESSONS LEARNED TO DATE**

“One of the biggest lessons we’ve learned to date is learn as much as you can about your online students. It is important to be able to service each student depending on their life and their needs.

For example, we know our students live in every State in this country. They live near large capital cities, but not exclusively.

Our mindset with our current Cloud Campus is to remind ourselves is that our course has to work for a student in Darwin, as well as a student in Victoria which has a three hour time difference.

It is an ongoing journey and we have learned that our Cloud Campus team needs to be ready to respond to students depending on when and how they need help.”

## **DEVELOPING ONLINE COURSES THAT PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THE WORKPLACE**

“At Deakin, we have a strong belief that the outcomes of learning are what should drive our overall strategy. The whole Higher Education sector is now focused on outcomes and making sure our students have the right employability, technological knowledge and skills they need for success.

For example, we know mature working adults have some sort of working or study experience. As a result, our professional practice credentials assess mature workers and students and they can opt in to achieve a micro credential at AQS levels 7,8 or 9 or a Bachelors, Post-Graduate, Diploma or Masters. When we assess our students we offer credit for prior learning.”

# ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH NEW INTERACTIVE AND ADAPTIVE ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCES AT CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY



**Julie Lindsay, Quality Learning and Teaching Leader (Online) at Charles Sturt University**

Charles Sturt University u!magine innovation unit has recently rolled-out an Online Learning Model which consists of 7 elements and makes use of online technologies to engage all stakeholders holistically to ensure a connected learning experience.

Below, Julie Lindsay, Quality Learning and Teaching Leader (Online) at Charles Sturt University, shares the strategies being used across Charles Sturt to design and develop online learning in order to improve the student experience and maximise learner engagement.

## THE VISION: DEVELOPING AN ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

“Our Online Learning strategy at Charles Sturt University is based around the need to provide an engaging online environment. Our focus is on engagement and interaction and this is at the centre of everything we’re doing.

We’re particularly focused on continuing to make the shift from being a distance education provider to being an online learning provider and a champion in online learning.

Online learning has a number of different learning elements and over the past year we have developed an OLM to increase student engagement, address some of the recent attrition issues we have experienced and provide more enhanced subjects and courses.

Our OLM has seven elements, which include:

- Learning communities,
- Interaction between students,
- Teacher presence,
- Interaction with professions,
- Flexible and adaptive learning,
- Interactive Resources, and;
- E-assessment

Each of the seven elements of the OLM are designed to increase one or more types of engagement and combined together in varying degrees of intensity within the subjects making up a course. We are working on implementing these seven elements into subjects and courses.”

## CREATING FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTIVE LEARNING THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORMS

“We are using a number of strategies to facilitate flexible learning online. We’re looking at different subjects and discussing the different elements of each subject with academics. For example, asking what are the learning outcomes?

What do the academics want to see happen in their subject? Based on the feedback from these questions we can then build the types of environments and courses to facilitate these needs and outcomes.

One of the main elements we focus on all the time is establishing and fostering learning communities. This involves interactions between students and teachers and looking at how we can help teachers establish an online presence and identity, right through to being a fluent online practitioner and understand emerging technologies that support online learning.

Creating flexible learning for students involves a lot of conversations with academics around the appropriateness of different online learning elements for a particular subject. It is not a one-size-fits-all. It is a flexible model which can adapt in terms of the needs of students.”

## KEEPING LEARNING PERSONALISED THROUGH MULTI-MEDIA TOOLS

“Our Learning Management System (LMS) Blackboard has certain limitations when it comes to creating a personalised student experience. So we’re working within the LMS, but we’re also going beyond it.

We’re scaling up the look and feel of our Blackboard interface by improving the design and presentation of our modules and working on a new discussion forum design and management within this tool.





We also have WordPress implementation happening across the University. It is called ThinkSpace and many subjects are now picking this up and using it as a blogging and journaling tool for students. This is also a tool that works in a professional context because students can export and take information away from this platform to their own WordPress website at the end of the course.

We're also using a number of other Web 2.0 tools to provide interaction, collaboration, sharing and digital scholarships. These involve things like Twitter, Padlet, Ego, Flipgrid and VoiceThread. We are aligning these tools with the need for visibility in online learning. Tools like Flipgrid, VoiceThread and Padlet provide students with opportunities to easily post multi-media and share who they are, what they think and what resources they want to share.

It is also important to note that all these platforms can be password protected. While I tend to encourage students to make things as visible as possible, we still provide students with a choice. Some students prefer not to have work visible, so it is all part of digital censorship and digital fluency.”

## **ENABLING STUDENTS TO SHAPE THEIR OWN ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

“This is a big conversation in the University at the moment. Some students are telling us they just want to get the content, do the assessments, get the degree and leave when it comes to learning. Whereas other students are telling us they want to be collaborative, interact with peers and co-construct knowledge in an active, vibrant learning community.

We're currently in a transition period where we are giving students choices to shape the type of learning experience they want. It is also important to provide opportunities for students to work with small groups. Some of our subjects have 500 students in them which can be very alienating. We're trying to work out how we break down our learning community in smaller groups.

Some areas we are considering are: what is the best learning community size?



How do we create communities within a community? How can we foster good interaction between students? This is where the understanding of the teacher presence to manage additional online tools and discussion tools is very important.”

## **THE CHALLENGE: EDUCATING ACADEMICS ABOUT THE VALUE OF ONLINE LEARNING**

“Apart from the traditional student who simply wants to read a book and write an essay, the main challenge we’re facing is academics not understanding the importance of change to accommodate online learning models.

If they have not had the experience of connected and collaborative learning themselves, it is difficult for them to understand the value. The work we’re doing is to try to affect this shift in academia as much as we can, because it is a big challenge.

To achieve this, we’re providing ongoing support and there is a program that we have to bring subjects into the OLM. We’re running professional learning and we’re scaling up certain courses across the university and taking both a course-wide and subject-wide approach to online learning.”

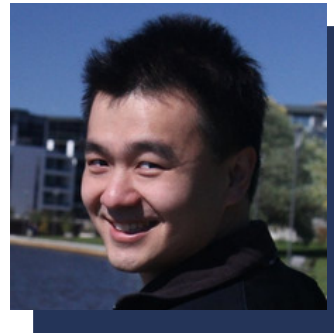
## **RESULTS SO FAR**

“We have done some research on the pilot OLM program and are still processing the results. But we have found that not all elements are equal initially. Teacher presence is a key factor in improving student engagement and that has come through very clearly in the research we have done so far.

Anecdotally I have seen teachers becoming more excited about the teaching process or academics becoming more excited about the online learning process. We are also seeing a shift and enhanced student engagement and better motivation for online learning from academics.”

# USING DATA TO CREATE A MORE PERSONALISED LEARNING EXPERIENCE AT SCALE AT **THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY**

Brochure | Website



**Danny Liu,**  
Educational Innovation  
Team Leader at the  
University of Sydney

The Student Relationship Engagement System (SRES) is open source web-based software that allows teachers to easily and efficiently collect, analyse, and act on student data to personalise student support and feedback.

By effectively using the SRES, the staff at the University of Sydney are able to better support individual students based on their performance and engagement, regardless of class sizes

Below, Danny Liu, Educational Innovation Team Leader at the University of Sydney explores the benefits of SRES and the steps other universities can take to use student data effectively to improve the way they are interacting with them on online learning platforms.

## **THE VISION BEHIND SRES**

“Research tells us that engagement is a big factor in a student’s learning success. There are several factors that play in student engagement but the important areas are staff-student relationships, providing feedback for students, the ability to support students and the student perception of how supported they feel.

creasing class sizes and other workload impacts. Teachers are a vital part in student success and while there is a lot of data out there that teachers can use to improve the way they are interacting with their students, it is difficult to collate or use the right data to improve engagement.

Research also tells us that teachers do not have the tools they need to reach out to students in an online learning context. This is the primary reason the University of Sydney created SRES as it aims to help teachers meet these needs.

The aim of SRES is to create a personalised support and feedback platform for students and teachers alike, to drive student engagement and learning outcomes. Its vision is to help teachers build connections with students, so students feel like they are supported and can improve their learning.

Most teachers are quality educators, but they are time and information starved. If we can help teachers to bridge this gap and get the right information about their students and act on this information in an efficient way, in turn, the teachers can be more valuable to students.”

## **USING STUDENT DATA TO CREATE A PERSONALISED LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

“To succeed in online learning it is not about the data or the analytics. It is about having the right data in the right place at the right time. The SRES platform helps teachers to collect and curate data. Every teacher’s need for this type of information is different, depending on their learning design. So the system itself helps teachers to take the data they choose and then use it in various scenarios.

For example, wouldn’t it be great for a teacher who’s interacting with a student to know when they last logged on, how they did in their last three tests and how often they are turning up? Bringing out relevant data in this way helps teachers make interactions more meaningful. The aim is that it will help teachers use the data in the right context to help the right students.”

## COMMUNICATING THE BENEFITS TO TEACHERS

“At the University of Sydney, we are finding that the staff themselves are selling the SRES to their colleagues. They are strong proponents of the SRES because they can talk first hand about the benefits and results.

Most of the engagement is driven by the staff, but we also do workshops around how to use the SRES. But we are finding the most powerful approach is for us to engage staff and help staff on the ground share their stories about how they are using SRES and in turn, how to help them support their colleagues in how to use it.”

## ROLLING-OUT NEW DIGITAL PLATFORMS TO IMPROVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

“We are moving towards a new LMS called Canvas and the whole university will have transitioned to this platform by the end of the year. As part of the University’s strategic plan, our goal is to transform the learning experience for students and make it more interactive, engaging and meaningful. Canvas is a great catalyst for this process.

Throughout this transition we are working with academics and they are using it as an opportunity to rethink how they use the online space with their students. Canvas itself is quite user-friendly and visually appealing and it is allowing our academics to build much richer resources to provide students with a more interactive and collaborative experience.

Based on our pilot project so far, students love the new LMS. They can engage more easily with academics who are equally enjoying the new platform. It is driving our academics and students to think differently about how they are using the LMS and engaging with each other, as opposed to using it as a repository of files.”

# INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

If you're interested in learning more about how to effectively harness online and e-learning strategies to transform and personalise the student experience, then join us at the Online and E-Learning Summit 2019

The event, held in Melbourne on the 7th-8th of May brings together over 30 online and e-learning experts from the likes of Stanford University (USA), UNSW, the University of Sydney, ANZ, Monash University, Deakin University, Charles Sturt University and the Department of Education

For more information visit <https://onlineandelearning.iqpc.com.au/> or call +61 2 9229 1000 or email [enquire@iqpc.com.au](mailto:enquire@iqpc.com.au)



4th Annual  
**Online &  
e-Learning**  
Summit 2019

