

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

BLENDING LEARNING STRATEGY

PART I: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1. Introduction

Griffith University prides itself on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for learning and teaching as a means of achieving its distinctive mission to achieve excellence and to optimise the student learning experience and outcomes. For the most part, this has been an evolutionary development facilitated by FLAS¹ and pioneered by individual academics across all disciplines and campuses. It now seems appropriate to take a more formal strategic view of how to optimise the use of technology in terms of facilitating the goals and objectives of *Academic Plan 3: Learning for Success*.

This strategic statement builds therefore on previous achievements, is informed by current national and international practices and addresses the particular learning and teaching requirements of Griffith University as outlined in *Academic Plan 3*.

2. Definition of blended learning

It is proposed that Griffith adopt the term 'blended learning' as a principal means of addressing the use of ICTs to enhance its learning and teaching activities. In the Griffith context, the following definition will be used to inform policy and practice in relation to blended learning:

Blended learning is realised in teaching and learning environments where there is an effective integration of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning as a result of adopting a strategic and systematic approach to the use of technology combined with the best features of face to face interaction. (Krause, 2007)

This definition encompasses many of the pedagogical approaches and practices already in place at Griffith and provides a mandate for supporting academic staff as they seek to achieve best practice in the integration of ICTs in the curriculum.

3. Business drivers for the use of technology in learning and teaching

The principal business drivers for making effective use of technology in the Griffith context include:

- Enhancing the quality of the student learning experience
- Facilitating leading practice and innovative approaches to learning and teaching
- Providing flexibility of provision to support a diverse student population
- Enriching the campus experience for students
- Optimising opportunities to attract and retain top quality students
- Increasing competitiveness in building new student markets enabled by flexible and innovative program delivery
- Providing cost effective learning and teaching solutions.

¹ Flexible Learning and Access Services, a branch of the Division of Information Services

4. Realigning the learning-teaching-technology framework at Griffith University

Griffith University, along with many other universities in Australia and the United Kingdom, has used the term 'flexible learning' to address matters relating to the organisation of learning and teaching activities. Flexible learning is a broad concept that encompasses: forms of access, participation, content, teaching and learning methods; responsiveness to student needs; assessment methods and choice of resources, all of which can be augmented by the effective use of educational technologies in particular contexts. It should be noted however, that the principles and practices associated with flexible learning concepts at Griffith stand in their own right, irrespective of the use of educational technologies. The Griffith approach to flexible learning is contained in the Policy Statement, *Flexible Learning at Griffith University* (Revised 2007).

Recent thinking and practice supports the fact that the use of technology in association with learning and teaching requires more specific attention with reference to the flexible learning umbrella, hence the emergence of the term 'e-learning' which has been widely used over the past three years in policy documents, but has had mixed acceptance as a term in many academic communities.

The use of technology in learning and teaching encompasses three basic modes of operation.²

Mode 1:

Baseline course administration and learner support, sometimes referred to as 'supplementary mode'. It is proposed that Mode 1 provision be mandatory for all courses and programs at Griffith University.

Mode 2:

Blended learning, leading to significant enhancements of curricula and pedagogy, including enhanced research-teaching linkages, optimised work integrated learning experiences, and an internationalised approach to learning, teaching and curriculum design.

The facilitation of Mode 2 blended learning approaches is the main goal of this strategic statement. Blended learning approaches will vary according to the particular learning and teaching context and according to the pedagogical principles informing curriculum development. The defining characteristic of blended learning approaches is that technology will be used to enrich the quality of the student learning experience through interactive learning activities beyond those attainable through face to face classroom interactions.

² These modes were adapted from and informed by the following: Sharpe, R., Benfield, G., & Francis, R. (2006). Implementing a university strategy: levers for change within academic schools. *ALT-J, Research in Learning Technology*, 14(2), 135-151; Curtin University of Technology Flexible Learning Environment Model (Accessed 23.6.07: <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/teach/flexible.html>); and Scribbins, J. & Powell, B. (2003). *The e-learning fan*. (Accessed 25.6.07: [http://gunguns2.gre.ac.uk/PCET/PROGRAMMES/CeITT/CELTRES.nsf/a5ea0e84f025875980256a520002e72f/627430b638c5e89580256c3b006c5e27/\\$FILE/eLearning_fan.pdf](http://gunguns2.gre.ac.uk/PCET/PROGRAMMES/CeITT/CELTRES.nsf/a5ea0e84f025875980256a520002e72f/627430b638c5e89580256c3b006c5e27/$FILE/eLearning_fan.pdf)).

Mode 3:

Online course modules that represent fully online courses and incorporate all the best features of Modes 1 and 2. These will be developed in response to strategic needs of the University.

Mode 3 online course modules already exist at Griffith, for example in the form of external offerings at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The strategic and quality implications of extending the present level of Mode 3 activity need to be addressed as a separate, but complementary exercise.

5. Benefits of strategic realignment

Adoption of blended learning approaches has the following benefits:

- Best fits the current learning and teaching environment and aspirations at Griffith
- Builds on and consolidates existing best practice at Griffith
- Enriches the student experience and learning outcomes
- Enhances formal and informal learning opportunities
- Supports the important goal of accommodating student diversity
- Reflects international theorising and leading practice in this area
- Avoids the 'all-or-nothing' assumptions inherent in current e-learning and online learning approaches
- Optimises the opportunity to secure widespread ownership and acceptance among academic colleagues
- Provides flexibility in terms of implementation at the course and program level
- Supports current institutional strategic directions in learning and teaching, including opportunities for promoting interdisciplinarity, internationalising the curriculum, enhancement of research-teaching linkages and of work-integrated learning
- Complements the existing views of flexible learning while at the same time emphasising the unique pedagogical qualities characterising the blending of face-to-face and technology-enhanced learning and teaching
- Makes optimal use of physical and virtual resources.

PART 2: THE BLENDED LEARNING STRATEGY

1. Strategic intent

The strategic intent is to support the institutional learning and teaching priorities, as outlined in *Academic Plan 3: Learning for Success*, to ensure that Griffith achieves distinctiveness and excellence in its program offerings and in the quality of the student experience and learning outcomes. This strategy contributes to these goals by proposing that blended learning approaches be embedded judiciously in all learning and teaching programs over the next three-year period to enhance further the quality of student learning at Griffith.

In practice, this means aligning blended learning approaches with the strategic objectives and action areas identified as priorities in *Academic Plan 3*, namely:

- Providing an excellent student learning experience that supports student success
- Assuring the quality of teaching programs to a high level
- Providing students with teaching and learning programs that reflect the distinctive Griffith 'signature' experience
- Providing comprehensive support for students as they prepare for lifelong learning and employment
- Ensuring that staff are supported to achieve high professional standards in the provision of teaching and learning
- Providing an excellent campus environment to support the student learning experience
- Developing key policy and supporting statements to inform and support the *Learning for Success Plan*.

2. Characteristics of blended learning environments

An effective blended learning environment at Griffith will be informed by the *Principles to Guide Learning and Teaching at Griffith* (currently in draft form for consultation).

Characteristics of the Griffith blended learning experience will include:

- High priority attached to student learning and pedagogical needs when considering and applying blended learning approaches
- Strategic and systematic use of technology in association with a quality face to face environment to support student learning
- Enhancement and ultimate transformation of existing learning and teaching processes
- Flexibility in terms of implementation at the program and course levels
- Accommodation of diversity in student learning experiences
- Encouragement and nurturing of innovation among students and staff
- Enhanced interaction between students, staff, peers and the community
- Increased capacity for student-managed learning
- Learning that takes place at students' discretion in terms of time and place
- Enriched opportunities for work-integrated learning activities
- Enhanced research-teaching linkages
- Creation of collaborative, distributed learning environments
- A professional team approach to course design, delivery and evaluation
- Targeted professional development, including resources to support blended learning curriculum design and requisite technical skills acquisition.

3. Indicators of success

There are several ways in which Griffith will know that it has succeeded in fulfilling its strategic goals for blended learning, including:

- Blended learning becomes an integral part of all curricula by 2010
- Academic staff confidently integrate ICTs into curricula in a manner consistent with course and program learning outcomes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels
- Students graduate with confidence in their capabilities to use ICTs for enhancing lifelong learning
- Students are attracted to Griffith because of its reputation for providing a 'high-tech' enhanced learning experience
- Links with local, national and international communities are optimised and dependent on the effective use of blended learning approaches
- Innovative approaches to developing teaching-research linkages emerge through the application of blended learning
- Blended learning approaches are recognised as being integral to the Griffith vision of engagement through public scholarship.

4. Goals for the Blended Learning Strategy

- i. To systematically embed blended learning approaches in the teaching and learning activities of all programs by 2010
- ii. To develop a campus environment capable of supporting blended learning
- iii. To nurture and extend staff capabilities in the applications of blended learning
- iv. To extend the University's quality assurance framework to support blended learning approaches

Goal i To systematically embed blended learning approaches in the teaching and learning activities of all programs by 2010

- Academic staff and relevant support staff to have an informed understanding of the conceptual and pedagogical implications of the application of blended learning in curricula
- Academic staff to be competent in documenting and explaining the rationale and applications of blended learning in course and program design, including expectations for, and impact on, the student learning experience and outcomes
- Curriculum documents make explicit statements on the means by which the strategic priorities of teaching-research linkages, work-integrated learning and internationalisation of the student experience are enhanced by blended learning approaches
- Program profile plans to have clearly articulated statements on strategies for embedding blended learning approaches

Goal ii To develop a campus environment capable of supporting blended learning

- Provide both physical and virtual environments for collaborative and individual blended learning activities
- Ensure that access to a rich array of learning and information resources is seamlessly integrated within the learning and teaching environment

- Ensure that all students have access to skills training in information handling and the use of ICTs within their disciplinary and program contexts
- Provide cost effective technical infrastructure to support blended learning approaches
- Further develop and maintain a flexible and responsive learning management system
- Reassess the potential for the local production and reuse of learning resources
- Further develop and maintain high quality blended learning tools and services
- Assess the feasibility of incorporating social networking tools into the blended learning environment

Goal iii To nurture and extend staff capabilities in the use of blended learning

- Develop communities of practice to promote the discussion and scholarly exchange of innovative strategies and to provide feedback on best practice in the use of blended learning approaches
- Further develop an institution-wide system for rewarding innovation and good practice in the use of blended learning
- Develop and embed opportunities at all levels in the university for research into student-focused blended learning
- Ensure optimal support from FLAS and GIHE for academic staff in being able to incorporate blended learning approaches into curriculum design, development, delivery and evaluation. This includes development and dissemination of professional development resources on pedagogical and technical implications of blended learning approaches
- Foster collaboration with other universities and the Carrick Institute in order to extend the knowledge and understanding of good practice in blended learning approaches

Goal iv To extend the University's quality assurance framework to support blended learning approaches

- Develop a series of indicators and measures for institutional success in terms of embedding blended learning in the student learning experience across programs at undergraduate and postgraduate level
- Develop and incorporate quality assurance mechanisms and measures related to blended learning as an integral part of the University's learning and teaching quality assurance framework
- Revise the student evaluation of teaching and course instruments to include questions on the impact of blended learning activities

5. Organisational and management implications

In order to fulfil the goals and objectives of the *Blended Learning Strategy*, the following factors require attention:

- Ensure the cohesion and effectiveness of all organisational units supporting the academic community in developing blended learning approaches
- Ensure that budget reviews and provision are aligned to enable sustainable blended learning approaches
- Ensure alignment between the University's institutional *Blended Learning Strategy* and the strategic plans of groups and divisions

- Ensure the effective integration of teaching and learning activities with administrative services

6. Review

The *Blended Learning Strategy* will be reviewed at the end of 2009.

7. Selected references on blended learning in higher education

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Kerri-Lee Krause. 10 October 2007