More than a roof overhead: Developing an innovative blended learning program for the effective delivery of the RMIT Masters of Disaster Design and Development

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Strategic objectives addressed:

'More than a Roof Overhead' aimed to investigate and then develop an innovative blended learning platform for the new Master of Disaster, Design and Development (MODDD), commencing in semester 2, 2016. Due to the nature of the degree and the post-professional student cohort the aim is to deliver the majority of course work in an online environment.

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| Funding scheme	LTIF contestable	
	Program Development Fund	X
	RMIT Vietnam Program Development Fund	

1   Executive summary

More than a Roof Overhead aimed to investigate and then develop an innovative blended learning platform for the new Master of Disaster, Design and Development (MODDD), commencing in semester 2, 2016. Due to the nature of the degree and the post-professional student cohort the aim is to deliver the majority of course work in an online environment. 4 core courses will be offered in both intensive and online mode and therefore, an additional aim of this project was to develop pilot courseware for two core blended learning courses and two online electives that could be replicated across all of the courses in the degree. Working in conjunction with educational developers and with the support of staff from the College of Design and Social Context digital learning team and from the School of Media and Communication, the project has been successful in developing a blended learning platform for two core courses – Shelter and Settlements and Disaster Design and Development – and an on-line platform for two electives – Disaster Resilient Landscapes and Understanding Design. In the coming months the aim is to use the DDD platform already developed, to guide the content and format for all of these courses, and to conduct staff training so that once the program begins there is a level of consistency, intelligibility and replicability across all of the core and electives course offered in the degree by RMIT.

Provide a summary (no more than one A4 page) that describes the project and what was achieved. This will appear on the RMIT website with a link to the final report.

MoDDD uses a combination of online platforms and tools to support its delivery. By combining these tools and using each for its strengths we achieve:

- Increased discoverability for prospective students,
- Potential for students and expert practitioners to make network connections,
- Pervasive teacher presence and social presence during the courses,
- Flexible collaboration, production and sharing tools for students, that function across different devices from browser to smartphone. These tools are supported by RMIT.

The graphic below outlines the MoDDD ecosystem.
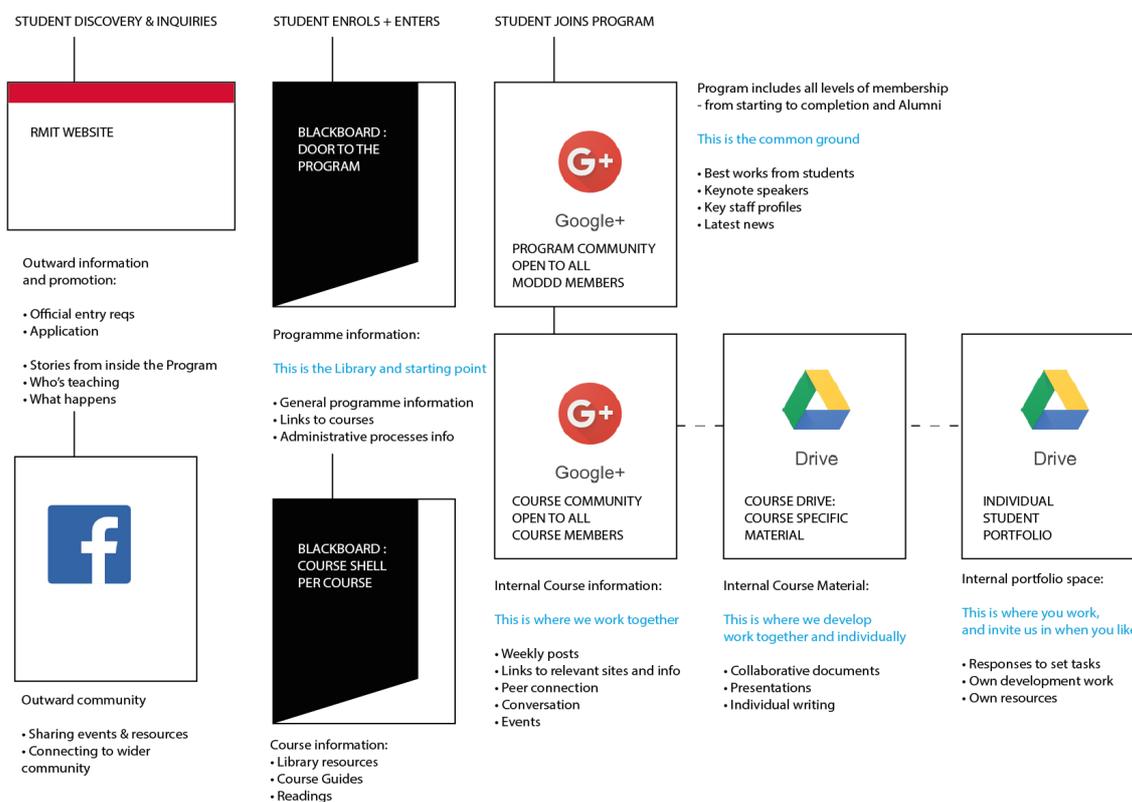
Below is a summary of the tools that will be employed at different stages of program delivery.

1.1 Discovery and pre-enrolment tools

Outward facing information about the programme will be found on the RMIT website page set up for MoDDD and include programme details, staff information, promotional videos and instructions on next steps.

The Facebook page (which exists and is much visited) is an active community space for prospective students, interested practitioners and future-practitioners. It is a promotional platform and proven dissemination tool for programme information and news.

1.2 Programme tools

At the programme level we will use a combination of a Blackboard programme site and a Google+ programme community. The Blackboard shell will contain all relevant administrative information, resources and links to all other programme spaces such as course shells. The Google+ community will act as the main communication and sharing platform for enrolled students and alumni. This space enables the sharing of news and event information across different cohorts and supports the growth of a MoDDD practitioner network.

1.3 Course tools

At the course level, we will use a combination of a Blackboard shell, a Google+ course community and Google Drive. The Blackboard course site will contain the course guide, readings and library resources. The Google+ course community is the main communication and sharing platform for students in that course cohort. This enables the students to feel a social presence in the course that can otherwise be lacking in the online environment. The accessibility of Google+ via mobile devices and its integration with Google's other tools allows students to be in communication with their teacher and peers across timezones and distance and receive alerts when there is much activity in the course. In Google Drive there will be a resource folder per course, containing all the resources for the course organised per week and activity. Students will also use private folders on Google Drive to create and store their course work, as well as set up a Portfolio folder for learning activities where they collaborate or where they exchange feedback on work-in-progress.

2 Outcomes

During the course of the study a number of key issues have been identified and addressed:

- While there is a number of online learning tools available for course delivery this can often lead to confusion and frustration. One of the outcomes of the project was the identification of appropriate on line learning tools that will be used across all of the courses in the program offered by RMIT.

- In view of the number of on-line learning tools available for teaching staff there is often a lack of consistency in how these tools are used, set up and implemented. In view of this all courses in MODDD will employ the same tools with consistent branding. This level of consistency also applies at the program level.

- The importance of Blackboard with its embedded learning management system was noted by the project team and will remain as the first point of call for all students enrolling into the program. Blackboard, however, lacks flexibility as a collaborative learning tool and therefore, under the guidance of educational developers course delivery will also include Google tools including Google drive, Google Communities and Google hangouts as collaborative tools.

- Course delivery in MODDD will involve hands on learning in partnership with Industry Partners including UN-Habitat, International Red Cross and World Vision. The Google tools identified above were found to be much more useful for industry engagement and as one educational developer noted, once student leave RMIT they may never use Blackboard again.

- It was therefore considered essential that the program and the courses made use of tools that would be much more useful in the field and for communicating with other professionals working in the disaster and development fields.

3   Project outcomes and impacts

The project aimed to develop an innovative interdisciplinary blended learning platform for the new Master of Disaster, Design and Development (MODDD), commencing in semester 2, 2016. As the project was developmental in nature, key performance indicators are not available. The project has however been successful is identifying a framework for learning across the Master of Disaster Design and Development that will enhance students experience and learning in all of the courses.

Key outcomes of the project include:

- Developing a unique, interdisciplinary blended learning model for cross school degrees and courses at RMIT.

- Developing an innovative student experience for future MoDDD students in both Australia and abroad.

4   Dissemination strategies and outputs

When complete (March 2016), the MoDDD ecosystem, will be shared across the university, the disaster and development sectors nationally and internationally.

5   Evaluation of project outcomes

The MoDDD team will develop an evaluation framework to monitor the success of the project against key performance indicators and adjust the framework according to the feedback received from students and industry partners.