Learning and Teaching Investment Fund final report

I Love Blended Learning

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Strategic objectives addressed:

This project contributes to achieve the academic component of RMIT's Strategic Plan by addressing the following objective of the Academic Plan 2011-2015; "to make a difference to the lives of our students" as specified in GOAL 1- THE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND DESIGN, Priority 1 - *Transformation of the student experience* (Page 2): leveraging 'Information Communication Technology to improve the use of online learning, communication and services (including cloud computing and personal mobile devices) to enhance the learning outcomes of all students, regardless of location, and as a means of connecting students with educational resources, educational experts, industry partners and each other'

Internal order number:

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Funding scheme	LTIF contestable	X
(please type an 'X' in the correct box)	Program Development Fund	
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Page 2 of 9

1 Executive summary

Blended learning – the combination of face-to-face and online learning – is a current trend in higher education. The consolidation and current expansion of this mode of learning has been driven by a twofold process based on the development of educational tools such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), and the adoption of non-educational tools such as social networking sites for teaching and learning. It is predicted that in the long term this current 'blended learning revolution' will eventually transform the ways educational institutions work (Horizon), which will have to adjust their traditional structures to the flexible dynamics introduced by this trend.

In the context of design education, the development and adoption of blended learning practices has specific characteristics. Literature and reports on this matter have shown that although the use of LMS is lower than in other disciplines, there is a wide adoption of non-educational tools and platforms for the purpose of teaching and learning. These findings suggest that blended learning – in the specific case of design education – is not based in the methodical use of educational systems, but is diffused in the everyday teaching and learning practices of educators and students. This particular approach to blended learning represents a difficult challenge for the future of design education. For analytical purposes this challenge can be defined as a need for developing, firstly, an empirical understanding of current practices of blended learning in design education; and secondly, for facilitating spaces to share previous experiences and activate blended learning practices. Seen from a design perspective, these challenges can be reframed as an opportunity to envision future institutional structures accordingly to current blended modes of teaching and learning.

The project I Love Blended Learning is a research initiative funded by RMIT University aimed at overcoming the challenges that the blended learning revolution represents for design education, and at the same time at taking advantage of the opportunities opened by these challenges. I Love Blended Learning involved three main action areas: one for inquiring about current blended learning practices; one for activating blended learning in design programs; and one more for envisioning future scenarios of design education. Firstly, the project conducted inquiry in current blended learning practices in vocational and higher education design programs in the College of Design and Social Context. Through surveys and interviews, the project asked teachers and students about the use digital devices and platforms as part of their teaching and learning activities. Secondly, the projects facilitated a series of academic spaces, namely lectures and roundtables, where design educators shared their experiences using blended learning in their teaching practice and held conversations about the potential adoption of new digital tools – particularly LMS, social media, productivity apps, virtual reality and tablet computers – in these practices. Apart from these spaces, the project team elaborated a 'blended learning toolkit' recommending a series of digital tools for design education. The project concluded with a series of multiple stakeholder engagement workshops, where design students, and academic and professional staff from different areas of RMIT collaborated to 'prototype' future scenarios design education and future learner journeys of design students, both – scenarios and journeys – based on the development and adoption of digital technologies.

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Save Date: 12/04/2017
Page 3 of 9

2 Outcomes

The project involved the participation of 15 Design Programs of the College of Design and Social Context (see Table 1).

PROGRAM	STAFF	STUDENTS
BH104 Bachelor of Industrial Design (Honours)	14 / 44	400
BH115 Bachelor of Interior Design (Honours	12 / 32	325
BH103 Bachelor of Fashion (Honours)		
MC231 Master of Innovation and Technology	5	
MC080 Master of Communications		
AD020 Associate Degree Interior Design and Decoration		
AD007 Associate Degree in Design (Furniture Design)		
C5333 Diploma Interior Design and Decoration		
AD0022 Associate Degree in Graphic Design		
C5316 Diploma of Graphic Design		
C6127 Advance Diploma of Graphic Design	134	200
C5322 Certificate IV in Design		
C5325 Diploma of Visual Merchandising		
C5329 Diploma of Product Design		
C6136 Advance Diploma of Building Design		

Table 1. List of programs participating in the project I Love Blended Learning and number of staff and students in each program.

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The project I Love Blended Learning delivered 5 Lectures, which included participation of 7 speakers and were attended by approximately 111 participants including academic and professional staff and students (see Table 2)

LECTURE	SPEAKERS	PARTICIPANTS
'Slack' lecture	1	28
Incite/Insight lecture 1	2	20
Incite/Insight lecture 2	2	18
Incite/Insight lecture 3	2	24
Incite/Insight lecture 4	2	21

Table 2. List of lectures delivered and number of speakers and participants involved.

The Future Scenarios of Design Education were opened by three RMIT Senior Executives and involved around 63 participants including academic staff from design programs; professional staff from areas of Learning and Teaching, Digital Learning, and University Library; design students and design practitioners (see Table 3)

WORKSHOP	SPEAKERS	PARTICIPANTS
Future Scenarios of Design Education	Martin Bean CBE. Vice-Chancellor and President of RMIT	25
Future Scenarios of Design Education	Professor Paul Gough. Pro Vice-Chancellor Design and Social Context and Vice-President.	20
Future Scenarios of Design Education	Professor Richard Blythe. Dean School of Architecture and Design	18

Table 3. List of workshops delivered and number of speakers and participants involved.

3 Project outcomes and impacts

The project delivered findings, outcomes and insights in each of its three areas: inquiry, activation, and envisioning.

The inquiry about blended learning blended learning confirmed findings from previous studies and took them further by providing details about digital tools and devices utilised in design education. The surveys and interviews confirmed low levels of engagement with LMS – namely, Blackboard – among teaching staff in higher education programs. Interestingly, teaching staff in vocational education programs reported a higher engagement with the same system. Findings from surveys and interviews also showed a general use of the Google Suit for managing different aspects of teaching and learning; extensive adoption of social networking sites and productivity apps in vocational and higher education programs; and increasing interest in virtual reality. In terms of devices, the inquiry found that teachers prefer computers and laptops for undertaking educational activities, tough most of participants reported preference for mobile devices for conducting some specific activities. As in previous studies, designs students reported high levels of mobile devices ownership, and a general expectation of using these devices in both directed and self-directed learning activities.

Concrete outcomes of initiatives aimed at activating blended learning across design programs are difficult to quantify, although their potential impact on future learning experiences can be calculated. The lectures included nine speakers, including design academics, program managers and design professionals; and were attended by academic and professional staff of several university areas. In the lectures, speakers and attendants share their blended learning experiences and expertise, and discussed some of the challenges faced and strategies

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Save Date: 12/04/2017
Page 5 of 9

implemented when trying to adopt digital technologies in their teaching practices. In addition to the lectures, the project delivered roundtables about virtual reality, tablet computers, and productivity apps, where academics discussed potential learning activities using these tools. The toolkit elaborated as part of the initiatives to activate blended learning in design programs, included a review of 40 educational and non-educational digital tools, each of them accompanied of a short explanation of how they can be adopted and adapted for conducting blended learning activities. In order to facilitate the activation of blended learning across design programs, these toolkit will be available to all teaching staff in design programs, in both printed and digital format.

The results obtained from the multiple stakeholder engagement workshops ran to conclude the project, consist in a series of insights about the future of design, specifically about how learning activities can change through the incorporation of digital technologies, and how these future learning activities will shape a new learner journey facilitated by new institutional dynamics. The project delivered three workshops, and involved around 50 participants including academic staff from design programs; professional staff from areas of Learning and Teaching, Digital Learning, and University Library; design students and design practitioners. Each of the three workshops started with an introductory 'provocation' made by senior executives, namely the RMIT Vice-Chancellor and President; the RMIT Pro-Vice Chancellor and Vice-President of the College of Design and Social Context; and the Dean of the School of Architecture and Design. The workshops were facilitated using (and adapted version) the Lego Serious Play method, which revolves around the idea of 'making' and sharing stories that are based on and represented through physical models built using Lego bricks. Initially, participants worked in small groups to make stories envisioning future scenarios for five different learning activities: 'tutorials and consultations'; 'self-directed learning'; 'representation of ideas'; 'stakeholder engagement'; and 'reflective learning'. Afterwards, they moved to imagine the journey of a future design student throughout these learning activities.

When sharing their stories, participants envisioned scenarios where the learning experience of students is improved by the use of digital technologies, but also by the richness of face-to-face education. In these scenarios, learning processes are facilitated by universities, but they can take place at many different places and involve many different people. The learner journeys that participants imagined where characterised by the diversity of students' background, lifecycle stage and learning goals; and by the flexibility of educational and institutional structures.

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Page 6 of 9