Creative arts futures portal

Associate Professor Shane Hulbert
School of Art, College of Design and Social Context

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Strategic objectives addressed:

Improving the cohort experience in online learning through the development of an innovative whole of program approach to creating an online presence.

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Project leader contact details:

Email: shane.hulbert@rmit.edu.au

Phone: 0423 747822

Project team members:

- Ms Angela Clarke
- Dr Kristen Sharp
- Association Professor Peter Ellis

Funding scheme	LTIF contestable	
	Program Development Fund	X
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1   Executive summary

The Creative Arts Futures Portal was designed as a whole of school approach to connecting students through a meaningful online experience. Recognising that our students come to us as experienced digital learners, through consumer available devices, software and websites, this project sought to compliment those experiences through the use of comparable and connected online tools and approaches.

In addition to this, the Portal aims to support students in connecting to relevant industries, developing skills in enterprise formation and establishing dialogues with key persons and organisations within the arts.

The Portal has three key priorities:

1. Design and develop a digital portal for students across the school, acting as a digital curation toolbox to connect courseware, professional development tools and digital resources.

2. Design and develop a series of online courses in Art History and Theory (AHT). These courses have global offerings and are also part of the school's university elective courses.

3. To develop a resource for students with a broad range of material and links, including:

    a. Access to online courses offered with the school, with the ability to preview course content and link to course outcomes.

    b. Access to e-learning portfolios for creative practice.

    c. Select scholarly content from existing publicly accessible photo and video depository sites, for example Youtube, social media sites, and the skill building site Lynda.com.

The project outcome consisted of the development of the Portal site, an open access html website with an accessible content management system, and levels of access and release. The site is accessible to anyone, with various levels of access depending on their status within the school:

Level 1 (restricted): Assigned project development staff

Level 2 (restricted): School academic and professional staff

Level 3 (restricted): Students currently enrolled

Level 4 (login): Levels 1 – 3 and registered users (anyone)

Level 5: General public access without login (limited content)

The site includes access to a range of material, including, but not limited to; enterprise formation and employability, work integrated learning resources, curatorial and exhibition support, peer mentoring and support for student directed learning, access to professional networks, connections to alumni, online course access and materials, online lectures, online workshops and curated links to relevant external sites and online resources.

The Portal is supporting the school in it's mission of developing autonomous, technologically competent and highly employable graduates able to make significant contributions to arts and culture industries around the world.

2   Outcomes

The project outcome is a website accessible by all students within the school, as well as external stakeholders, and general public. Levels of access exist. There are 1200 students in the school, however it is envisaged that the website will be most relevant to UG and PG students, approximately 800.

Due to delays and project changes (see below) no courses have been completed so as to be able to indicate CES data.

There are currently no scholarly papers forthcoming however, there are of course, plans to write a paper.

3   Project outcomes and impacts

3.1.1 Project outcome – early data for AHT viewing statistics

The project website is in the final stages of completion, therefore the following data relates to lectures delivered online through Blackboard in Art History and Theory 1, with an enrolment of 186 students.

To date, three fully online lectures have been delivered to students.

Viewing rates, based on completion statistics through Vimeo, suggest higher than expected demand and satisfaction. Between 99% and 76% of enrolled students are watching the videos, with a majority of views happening on the day prior to the tutorial class. Approximately 20% of views are happening two or more days before class, and approximately 10% after the scheduled tutorial.

While we do not keep attendance data, staff have anecdotally confirmed that online viewing rates exceed face to face attendance.

3.1.2 Project impact – student responses for AHT lectures

While it is too early to gather GTS or OSI data, a preliminary survey has been completed. The survey saw a response rate of 24%. The following numbers relate to specific questions about online course content and delivery.

7% of respondents watched online education videos several times a week (ranging from TED talks, through to Lynda.com). 34% watched once a week, with 45% watching sometimes, and 13% never watching online education videos.

95% of respondents thought the online lectures were clear and well presented, and 97% felt that having the lecture divided into four specific sections enhanced their learning and understanding. 68% watched the entire lecture in one sitting. 82% found the combination of online lecture and face to face tutorial effective, and 92% happy to watch more online lectures like these in the future.

Finally, 55% said they would prefer online lectures, 11% would not prefer online lectures, and 31% were undecided.

3.2 Project impact – Student focus group feedback

Timely focus group feedback allowed for changes to be made to the site, specifically organisation and navigation, with a shift in emphasis from browsing to searching. In particular, students felt there was 'a lack of definition in section headings' and a 'lack of personality' with the site, suggesting that the design was a 'little corporate in aesthetic'. Despite this, 80% of students found it easy to complete the given scenarios, and 80% felt that information was in the right place. 60% found the site interactivity engaging and 60% also through it was appropriate for an art school website. 60% of respondents thought the site would help then with their studies, while 40% were unsure.

3.3 Disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages

 The site is, by its very nature, interdisciplinary in design. It is too early to tell what kind of linkages will emerge.

3.4 Project issues

Overall, there was one key issue that delayed this project. Originally the site was planned for implementation through the new Blackboard version, however this was delayed, and the project was then added to the Global Learning by Design framework, and scheduled for internal development through the web team and a Drupal site.

While recognising the ongoing complexity of developing and managing secure, on brand sites, it is my view that this is unsustainable into the future, and restricting innovation. Staff and students have resources and skills in broad areas of engagement, which if supported, would allow for far more platforms to be developed that are commensurate with our students' digital experiences.

4   Dissemination strategies and outputs

The outcomes of this project will be primarily distributed through the portal.

There is an anticipated paper to be developed resulting from the outcomes of this project (once completed).

5   Evaluation of project outcomes

Evaluation will be considered in relation to the projects key objectives, and questions arising from those objectives:

To what extent have the intended outcomes been achieved?

The project is (will be) a success overall. Early indicators suggest that students are embracing (to some extent even expecting) effective and accessible online tools commensurate with their experience as digital consumers. The use of professionally made, scripted and studio filmed HD videos has been met with broad encouragement by students, as has the early focus group meeting on the overall website.

What measures, if any, have been put in place to promote sustainability of the project's focus and outcomes?

Critical to the ongoing success of this project will be content. While it is relatively easy to curate existing content into the Portal, the real success will come from RMIT School of Art content. Seeing (and understanding) how successful the AHT lectures have been, the school is now exploring ways of creating meaningful online content that other staff are able to contribute into.

What lessons have been learned from this project and how might these be of assistance to other institutions? (or school's within the university).

The overall lesson is reduce the use of Blackboard as a content delivery tool and use it for what it is best at – the management of learning. Encourage staff to develop online content and delivery platforms that align more closing with consumer platforms.