Student Retention Symposium

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Get connected: creating a novel learning and teaching environment

Yeah, as I said, I’m Christopher Klopper from the School of Education Professional Studies. I am the program convenor for Bachelor of Education Primary program, quite a large undergraduate program that runs over three campuses. So I’m going to give a bit of a programmatic view of some of the innovations that we’ve brought to the program, as I share with you some of the challenges that are involved, and draw your attention to how a [00:23] get connected as part of one of student lifecycles, about getting connected and finding a sense of connection, and how we might be achieving that through creating a novel learning and teaching environment. And again, I’ll also share with you some of the ways in which we are harnessing social media to forward that connection in multiple ways, in multiple entry points for our students.

So as I said, yeah, a large undergraduate program in initial teacher education delivered over three campus locations. And up until 18 months ago the program had been delivered quite distinctly different on each of the campuses. At the end of 2010 the program had been identified at a program focus as a program that needed some attention, and hence we needed to sit down and start looking at how we’re going to address this. And one of the first things that we came about was, we needed to create a brand. We needed to have the Bachelor of Education program as a brand that people could identify with, become a part of, and that we could see that uniform market brand across everything. And so at the bottom of my slide is just one of the skins that we created, each – over the four years we’ve got a different skin, that then gets superimposed onto all our Learning at Griffith sites for all the courses in that program. So all your first year ones look the same, just with a different course code and name, and that takes us through the brand as such.

The challenge for us was, how do we design and develop and deliver an organisation site within Blackboard that’s aimed at enhancing the student experience, aggregating resources, providing academic [01:54] information, and providing teaching staff with the means to easily communicate? Up to now we have been familiar with communicating at a course level. But how do we actually communicate at the program level, particularly when we spread across three different campuses? And so we put a team together with INS and got our heads together and said, “Right, the limitation, I guess, is working within Blackboard.” But we didn’t want this site to replicate a usual Blackboard site. We didn’t want it to be linear. There’s enough studies out there that show us that the current structure, the architecture of what we are using in our learning management system is not exactly a point of connection with our student or our client, and so we needed to create a website-looking Learning at Griffith site – which we did. We spent many, many hours toiling and coming up with different ideas. This is not live, but I’ll just talk through some of the things.
So on your top left, meeting the team, you go in there, and there you find a whole leadership team on the different campuses, there’s our photos, there’s links to each of us, our contact details, down to professional experience learning, because a large component of the four-year degree is a professional experience placement each year. Straight away it goes into entry to your different prac placement offices, a port of call.

What we realised and what I’d heard from the students was, “It’s blooming difficult to navigate around the Griffith University website.” And they wanted a one-stop shop to find things. And this has been our attempt of a one-stop-shop for both students and staff. Student essentials: so if you go to Student Essentials, we’ve got it in an alphabetical order, from things like your academic calendar to the forms, the student forms, to review of grades, to everything there for us, for the student. And then also a number of study resources that are linking again to the students back to library support, student support services, all the different support services. But this is their entry point.

At the bottom which I think is quite a nice little innovation that we’re rolling out – this site only went live this year in February – but what we tried to do is we surveyed students over time to say, what are the types of questions that we ask? What are the things that you are looking for? What do you want information of? And we’ve created a whole series of FAQs under first, second, third and fourth year. And what we are busy doing as well is that we take a video diary of each year: life at one, life at two, life at three, life at four. And I’ll just do a little bit of a Q&A with the students saying, “What do you know now that you wish you knew at the beginning of the year that you can share with the next year level?” And so we’re building that video diary in at the bottom.

The latest news has just got an automatic feed to the Griffith news, and then the post-it notes, I go in and update the calendar entries that they need to do. We try to put the most important things in the middle, like forms, those special consideration forms and things like that, academic calendars and those connections. And so that’s what we’ve done. It’s changed a little bit since I took that screen shot. We’ve also created a staff safe space, and what we’re doing there is we’re building up a historic documentation of the program. So all the documents that we’ve submitted as a team for external accreditation, development transitions, everything is in one space. So if any of us move into other positions or are on ASP or leave, there’s a trail for us and for our students.

Evidence of impact: yeah, well, we now have a one site that’s working across three campuses. There appears to be a good single point at which we can locate resources or provide resources. When it came to orientation day, the different program convenors and first year advisers involved could also put all their information in that one space that we could share. It just makes sharing a lot easier. There seems to be a good sense of communication. The way we use our site is to communicate out to the students. We don’t have it that they communicate back, but we have link with the Facebook and the Twitter account which provides the space for students to comment and respond. And there’s a couple of us that are on that to help them to steer them in the right direction.
Often it’s just, “Have you looked at your Learning at Griffith site? That’s a good place to start.” But it’s been very, very informative.

I have shared this a couple of times now of late, and there seems to be quite a lot of attention and a momentum building amongst other academic staff and colleagues, how they see it could be replicated or used in their different programs. And just to give you an idea, when we went live in February 2012 we had 6,673 hits. And if you consider that we don’t use that as a place for them to communicate, it means they’ve entered that site to actually access information. And there’s only about 1,500 students there. So we were quite happy with that the response of uptake. And that’s where we are.

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