



About the Conference

Keynote Speakers

Conference venue

Accepted abstracts

Information

Full Papers

Abstracts

Organizers

Programme

Important dates

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**PBL IN CONTEXT
– BRIDGING WORK AND EDUCATION**

Full Papers

ARTICULATION IN PROPERTY PROGRAMS – AN INTERNATIONAL MULTI-CAMPUS TERTIARY MODEL

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will present program developers and institutional administrators with a program delivery model suitable for cross cultural international delivery developing students from industry through to masters level tertiary qualifications. The University of Newcastle (UoN) model was designed to meet the needs of property professionals from an industry where technical qualifications are the norm and tertiary qualifications are emerging. A further need was to develop and deliver a program that enhanced the University's current program profile in both the domestic and international arenas. This paper is given in three parts, program design, program delivery and strategies to diminish educational barriers.

PART 1: PROGRAM DESIGN

In the evolution of the property field many practitioners have moved into professional/ management roles with primary qualifications from other disciplines (eg engineering, business, finance, management, construction, etc). There is a demand for a higher level qualification that will develop the skills and credentials of these people in the field of property. While programs at the technician and undergraduate levels exist, there is still a largely under-satisfied demand for post-graduate qualifications in this field (Chen 2001).

As described within the program proposal document, a demand for this sort of programs was identified in the Asia-Pacific Region where property and construction is

an important generator of national wealth and infrastructure. The Master of Property program was designed to meet this identified need. As the first group of students has graduated this paper is an opportunity to document the unique model and reflect on the successful structure this Problem Based Learning (PBL) program (Chen 2001).

Pathways

In identifying the need for this program one aspect is the differing qualifications and experiences of the potential student market. The student market includes a majority who possess technical qualifications including associate degree, higher diploma and higher certifications. A further factor is the extensive property expertise held by the potential student group.

To accommodate this diversity there are several pathways to enter this program and the recognition of prior learning is not limited by the following.

Direct Entry

Undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline and a minimum of two years relevant experience in the property industry will lead to entry into an academic orientation program within the Master of Property.

Technical Entry

Technical qualifications and a minimum of two years relevant experience in the property industry will lead to entry into the Diploma in Property offered by the Industry Partner in conjunction with the UoN.

Diploma in Property

A one year preparatory program leading to entry into the Professional Development in Property Program.

Professional Development in Property Program

Eight learning modules leading to entry and recognition of four courses within the Master of Property.

Experiential Entry

Individual assessment of experiential knowledge and expertise within the property industry leading to entry into the Professional Development in Property Program.
Professional Development in Property Program
Eight learning modules leading to entry and recognition of four courses within the Master of Property.

Educational Philosophy

In marketing this program to students, explicit information about the educational philosophy is important in describing the underlying beliefs within the program design. The underlying educational beliefs inherent in this program are student centredness, future proofing and reflective practitioner as outlined below (Chen 2004):

Student Centredness:

Designing and delivering a learning environment that allows each individual learner to achieve their full potential

Future Proofing:

Active learning, developing skills to operate in a knowledge environment (creating, locating, evaluating, applying knowledge)

Reflective Practitioner:

Reflection of professional practice both on and in action

The problem based learning approach adopted by the Master of Property model seeks

to incorporate student centredness, future proofing and reflective practitioner at the educational standard of a Masters program. This builds upon a strong tradition at UoN of over two decades of successful delivery of PBL programs and continues to push the conceptual boundaries of what constitutes a PBL program (Maitland 1991).

PART 2: PROGRAM DELIVERY

Early identification of international educational partners, industry need and the ability to service the program were vital to the successful development of the Master of Property program. The educational foundations of the program rest in educational partners, local tutorial support, international course management, cultural awareness of and in content, online communication fora, with a delivery focus on problem based learning, self-directed study, teamwork and the development of a global understanding and awareness of the international property markets.

The Master of Property Teaching Model identifies the tripartite partners being multinational students, national learning centres and the University of Newcastle with PBL the teaching philosophy of the model that embodies professional, reflective and student directed learning. An important unique feature about this model is the valuable role of the student in sharing their own experiential and industry knowledge in a valued environment (Hogarth and Schroder 2004).

The Partners

The student brings company expertise and an interest in the local property profession. An important role is self-direction, spontaneous collaboration and share knowledge and experience with peers, tutors and course coordinator.

The tutor provides face-to-face tutorial and online support for students enrolled within the study centre. An important role is the negotiation on local project context, provision of culturally sensitive expertise and professional expertise and qualifications within the local property industry.

This is further supported by the Course Coordinator through online resources, hard copy course materials, moderation of projects and marking of assessment tasks. The Course Coordinator provides professional expertise, qualifications and research profile within the global property industry.

The Problem

Students identify a current work-based problem within their own professional practice. This problem is documented and discussed with the local tutor to map the learning outcomes of the solution against the course learning objectives. Documentation takes the form of a student based learning journal with negotiation and moderation by the tutor and course coordinator respectively.

This allows for quality assurance management on an ongoing basis and maximises the student learning through self-direction and industry relevance. A further benefit is the documentation of ownership and maintenance of academic integrity.

A student may select a problem that is greater than the workload required for the enrolled course. In this situation and in consultation with the tutor and course coordinator, a student can elect to undertake a series of stages within a major project that will bridge several courses.

The property industry relies heavily on the transfer of knowledge from the divergent fields within the industry itself. This is recognised through the entry pathways, the communication model and further reinforced in the teaching model.

Communication within the Master of Property is about placing value on the contributions of each partner and acknowledging the cultural and linguistic diversity of

this communication process. Through the shared cultural knowledge of the student and tutor many communication barriers faced by more traditional delivery simply disappear.

The communication model facilitates the tripartite partnership through the strong partnership between the local tutor and the course coordinator and the developing relationship between the student and the tutor. This partnership is one of mentoring, encouragement and reflection.

The communication role of the course coordinator is one of moderator, being one that oversees and monitors rather than dictate or direct.

The Reflective Journal

This journal provides a flexible manner of diarising a project or a series of stages within a major project. Where a student elects to complete a range of projects the reflective journal will commence and end with the each project. A variation is where a student elects to complete a series of stages of a major project and in this case the reflective journal will begin with the first stage and continue until the last stage is complete.

Spontaneous Collaboration

Once again many students enrolled in a course remote from the accrediting institution may find it difficult to collaborate with peers. The Study Centre offers an opportunity to meet fellow students, share resources and utilise the resources of the Centre.

PART 3: STRATEGIES TO DIMINISH EDUCATIONAL BARRIERS

In designing educational programs the removal of educational barriers that emerge through blended and distance delivery in a multi cultural educational environment is a worthwhile goal. In pursuing this goal ongoing achievements will result in a reduction of the educational barriers.

In enrolling students from a diverse cultural background with technical qualifications and/or extensive work experience there are a number of educational barriers to be overcome for all students to successfully progress and complete the program. These barriers disappear when the following mechanisms are employed: individual student pathways, tutorial support by qualified peers, enculturation into tertiary practice, assessment tasks that recognise cultural norms and values, and finally that value is placed on the experiential knowledge, cultural practices and belief systems of the students.

Individual Student Pathways

Each student is assessed and their pathway into the Master's program is identified on an individual basis. As stated earlier there are three major pathways, direct, technical and experiential entry, however, individual assessment of recognition of prior learning and experience allows the student to gain a greater benefit in undertaking the program. The students gain in life long learning and experience in relation of their personal starting point. An assumed common starting point is often a barrier to the enrolling students who bring differing levels of industry and experiential knowledge. Therefore each student undertakes a individual learning pathway to an accredited standard.

Tutorial Support by Qualified Peers

The tutors at the Study Centre provide culturally sensitive expertise and professional property expertise and qualifications within the local property industry. This expertise facilitates the student's development and negotiation of the problem to be examined. One barrier to delivery at a distance is the application of foreign legislation in a

learning environment at odds with local practice. Within the Master of Property the tutor facilitates application of local legislation pertaining to the student project and this in turn continues the development of local industry knowledge for the student. This is of particular relevance in the property industry where the property legislative process is country and region specific.

Enculturation into Tertiary Practice

At times a barrier to education can be the different teaching and learning styles offered by the course coordinators within a program. The Master of Property offers an integrated PBL teaching method, student centred learning and selection of every problem, a staged process of investigating and resolving (where possible) the problem and the recurring theme of the reflective journal. After initial acquisition of the learning culture students are immersed within this process for the whole of program.

Assessment Tasks

In recognising the differences in educational epistemology, the Master of Property offers students an opportunity to submit assessment tasks in a format suitable to their own cultural norms and values under approval of the local tutors. In endorsing this process the University is recognising the cultural knowledge of the student and tutors as a local cultural authority while retaining the assessment of academic learning as the responsibility of the University.

Valuing the cultural knowledge in the cultural norms and values further emphasise the tripartite relationship between the partners. The assessment process builds and strengthens this partnership throughout the program.

The Study Centre

With a Study Centre located within the country of delivery there is an opportunity to deal with administrative tasks and processes in a timely manner. As the Study Centre staff become more familiar with the University's policies and procedures the benefits of having a local Study Centre continue to grow.

This is a major benefit in the local marketplace. Within a blended model of delivery in providing a local study centre an additional benefit is the provision of administrative services by a local culturally sensitive education provider. This allows prompt solutions to often tedious paperwork and allows a speedy turnaround for administrative processes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, an example of the successful design and delivery of a program that meets the needs of the student market, the property industry and the accrediting authorities is the work undertaken by a recent graduate (Cheong 2004)

"The property business faces many challenges in its quest to provide value to its stakeholders. For a profit-making organization, Economic Value and the achievement of Key Performance Targets should be combined for sustained value creation. This paper presents the means to identify sustained value creation methods and processes, and the means to measure these, for a property business company.

For the organization undergoing change, it must improve shareholder value by tailoring the new business processes to match market requirement and putting in place a suitable system of measurement and appraisal of success. Since the business of adapting the organization to the constantly changing environment and operating conditions requires significant change, or transformation, in individual behavior and institutional culture, every member and the organization must be

appropriately directed to contribute and aggregate efforts along the right direction in order to achieve targeted objectives."

In the above executive summary, the graduate exemplifies the acquisition of deep learning and demonstrates a change in belief systems from the entry point to graduation therefore, confirming the successful design and implementation of a Master of Property program to meet an international industry need through blended delivery.

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[◀ Back](#)

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