UNSW Learning and Teaching Grants and Fellowship Program

Final Report

Grant: Strategic Educational Development / L&T Innovation

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Building Legal Research Skills through the Development of Online Legal Research Modules

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Project Assistant: Yan Liu, UNSW Law (September 2014-May 2015)
Contract e-Learning Developer: Ilma Cave (August-December 2015)

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1. Acknowledgements

Assistance to the project was provided by Susan Engel and Jennifer Starink as subject matter experts. Support and recommendations were given by all the convenors of UNSW Law’s suite of interdisciplinary postgraduate programs and by the teachers of the Legal Concepts Research and Writing (LCRW) course. They offered valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning, development and implementation of the project. Full support was given by the management team in the UNSW Law, from the then Dean, David Dixon, through to the Head of School, Carolyn Penfold, and General Managers, Gemma Nevin, Achamma Kumar and Fei Wong. Debjanee Barua was instrumental in setting up the diagnostic testing system. The finance department of UNSW Law, in particular, Rajinder Cullinan, helped in organising the financial element of the project.

2. List of acronyms used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADDIE</td>
<td>Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCRW</td>
<td>Legal Concepts Research and Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Learning Management System</td>
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<td>LTU</td>
<td>Learning and Teaching Unit</td>
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3. Executive summary

This 18 month project, ‘Building Legal Research Skills through the Development of Online Legal Research Modules’, ran from July 2014 to December 2016. The key deliverable was the development of a suite of online legal research modules, to be implemented in an introductory postgraduate law course (Legal Concepts, Research and Writing (LCRW)) in Semester 1 2016.

The modules were intended to provide a partial solution to the challenges presented by having a cohort of students entering postgraduate law programs (Masters and Graduate Diplomas) without having a formal background in law. The modules were therefore designed with the immediate aim of being integrated into a revised LCRW course, to ensure that students were adequately equipped with the research skills and knowledge needed to ensure they could satisfy the course learning outcomes of their other postgraduate law courses. The modules were also designed in such a way that they could, in the future, be used as a resource beyond the LCRW course (that is, for other UNSW Law courses, and for other Faculties offering programs and courses, where students require an understanding of legal research skills and methodologies).

At the start of the project a project team was assembled (consisting of a Project Leader, Project Manager and Project Assistant), and the ADDIE model of design was utilised to design and build the modules. This happened in two stages.

- In the first stage, the project team started by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the existing LCRW course, the gaps in the course, and the learning needs that needed to be satisfied, particularly in relation to legal research. The project team consulted extensively with a range of stakeholders, both internal and external to UNSW Law, about the design, structure and educational outcomes of the modules, and how they would be integrated into a revised LCRW course. The project team also considered a range of technological
delivery options for the modules, ultimately determining that for sustainability reasons they should be designed in Captivate and be made available via Moodle.

- The second stage involved the development of the modules, with close collaboration between a new member of the project team (the Contract e-Learning Developer) and a staff member with expertise in legal research. The modules were built using a variety of media. Testing and error correction were undertaken prior to the implementation of the modules in the LCRW course in Semester 1 2016. Student behaviour within the modules was then closely monitored. The students and teachers were consulted with as to the effectiveness of the modules and this information was collated and analysed with the view to improving the quality of the modules and the course in future iterations.

This project satisfied the goals that were set at the beginning of the project. The modules were designed and developed on time and within budget. Student feedback from Semester 1 2016 has been positive: all students completed the modules, and many have been using the video resources connected to the modules after the completion of the LCRW course, as they continue with their postgraduate programs of study. In consultations with teachers, there was a sense that the quality of research and writing in the LCRW course had improved from previous semesters.

The modules will continue to be used in future iterations of the course, and interest has been expressed in the modules by staff in the UNSW Business School.

4. Key stakeholders

Project Leader: Michael Handler (Associate Dean (Education), UNSW Law (2013-15))
Project Manager: Thomas Molloy (Educational Designer (e-Learning), UNSW Law)
Project Assistant: Yan Liu (September 2014–May 2015)
Contract e-Learning Developer: Ilma Cave (August 2015–December 2015)
Postgraduate Program Convenors: Andrew Byrne, Alexandra George, Christopher Michaelsen,
Rosemary Rayfuse, Julie Stubbs
Postgraduate Studies Director: Brendan Edgeworth
LCRW Teachers: Audrey Blunden, Janet Chan, Susan Engel, Dominic Fitzsimmons, Colin
Fong, Daniel Joyce, Holly Raiche
Other UNSW staff members: Jenny Buchan (UNSW Business School), Dale Boccabella (UNSW
Business School), Natalie Cujes (UNSW Canberra), Margaret Conner (Student Life and
Learning), Gwyn Jones (Learning Centre), Rose Leontini (School of Public Health and
Community Medicine), Kayleen Manwaring (UNSW Business School).

5. Project objectives, approach and evaluation

Objectives

UNSW Law runs a suite of interdisciplinary Masters and Graduate Diploma programs in areas such as human rights law, criminal justice and criminology, law, media and journalism, and business law. These Masters and Graduate Diploma programs can be taken by students without an undergraduate degree, or formal background, in law. Students undertaking these programs without a law background are therefore required to take a compulsory introductory course, Legal Concepts Research and Writing (LCRW), before taking a number of other
postgraduate law courses (which are also made available to Master of Laws / Graduate Diploma in Law students, who do have legal backgrounds).

One of the challenges that UNSW Law has faced in running these interdisciplinary programs has been to ensure that students undertaking the LCRW course are adequately equipped with the research and writing skills needed to ensure they can meet the demands and course learning outcomes of their other Law courses, as well as the program learning outcomes of their programs. More specifically, by the start of 2014 concerns had been raised about the structure of the LCRW course (which consisted of twenty-four hours of face-to-face teaching) as not allowing sufficient time to be devoted to developing students' legal research and writing skills.

The key objective of the project was therefore to develop a suite of online research modules that would initially form a central part of a revised LCRW course. This would meet two immediate needs. First, it would allow for the more effective teaching of legal research skills than was possible in the very limited face-to-face time available under the LCRW course. Second, it would free up time within the face-to-face hours of the LCRW course to enable more attention to be paid to the development of legal writing skills, and other components of the course.

The creation of the online modules was also intended to have longer term and wider impacts. We wanted to create a lasting resource that our postgraduate law students could refer to, not merely while undertaking the LCRW course at the start of their programs, but also through the duration of their study at UNSW. We also wanted to create modules that were transferable: that is, they could be easily adapted to form the basis of online research components in other UNSW Law programs, as well by other Faculties (in particular, the UNSW Business School) that run programs and courses where students require an understanding of basic legal research skills and methodologies. These longer-term objectives of the project impacted on the choice of software used for the design of the project.

Approach

In summary, the project took place in two stages.

The first stage involved the confirmation that UNSW Law’s Educational Designer (e-Learning) would act as Project Manager, and the employment of a Project Assistant. The Project Assistant then led the team in undertaking a comprehensive learning needs analysis of the existing LCRW course, to identify any gaps and inefficiencies. The Project Assistant also collaborated with the team to work out the most effective technology that could be used for the design of the modules, keeping in mind the need to have them integrated into an existing UNSW Law course and to allow for transferability to other faculties. After extensive consultation with members of several education design teams at UNSW and members of the LTU, it was determined that the modules should be developed in Captivate, so that they would integrate with Moodle (the LMS to which all UNSW courses had been migrated in 2013), and also be able to be viewed on multiple devices. Also in this first stage meetings were set up with representatives of other relevant Faculties (UNSW Business School, UNSW Medicine and UNSW Canberra) to determine their students’ legal research needs and how our modules might ultimately be adapted for their purposes. Further meetings were set up with key stakeholders in Law, including Postgraduate Program Convenors and LCRW teachers, to agree on the design, structure and educational outcomes of the modules.

After extensive consultations with stakeholders we embarked on the educational design of the modules through the end of 2014 and into 2015. The main challenges at this stage involved
working out how to integrate the modules into a revised LCRW course (which was in the process of being radically redesigned to create a legal writing workshop, new, interlinked assessment across the Concepts, Writing and Research components, and an online diagnostic test on entry).

The second stage of the project involved the writing, development and implementation of the online modules. This took place from July 2015. A Contract e-Learning Developer was hired, and she collaborated with a staff member with expertise in legal research to develop the content of the modules in Captivate on a page-by-page basis. Originally we had four quite long modules but ended up breaking them into eight in total, primarily to provide a more effective learning experience for students, but also to allow us to update information more easily (and with a view to the modules being taken up in other faculties). The four areas of study we have focused on are: Legal Materials; Legal Research Strategies; Legal Databases; and Secondary Materials. Several different forms of media were integrated into the modules, including animations, audio recordings, screen capture videos, and videos. Quizzes were interspersed through the modules giving the students formative feedback. We also separated out the formative quizzes at the end of each module and extracted the videos of individual skills in research. Extracting the videos has given the students short, succinct learning resources that they can access at any time in their study.

The testing phase of the modules was reached in November 2015. The modules were tested with Semester 2 2015 students and modified based on their feedback. We started to present the product and update other faculties on our progress (UNSW Business School, UNSW Medicine, and UNSW Canberra).

**Evaluation**

The first iteration of the new LCRW course, including the new online research modules, was run in Semester 1 2016 to a cohort of 37 students. These students undertook the online modules and related assessment tasks up until the end of second week of the course, and were able to review the content of the modules throughout the semester.

We assessed the effectiveness of the modules by having the Project Manager moderate the online portion of the course and, in doing so, gather data about student behaviour within the course. This has been collated and analysed with a view to improving the delivery of the online modules. The students were extensively surveyed at the end of the course and this information has also been analysed. We had several one-on-one consultations with the LCRW teachers, as well as a post-course group meeting to ascertain if there had been an improvement in writing and research from previous semesters. As this course was a pass/fail course it was difficult to get empirical data regarding improvement in research and writing skills based on improvement of marks. We used data collected in Moodle to gauge engagement with the materials and were able to ascertain that students were coming back to the online materials after the online portion of the course had finished. From discussions with LCRW teachers it seems that from the final research essay undertaken in the course, the level of research and writing has improved from previous semesters.

The modules were received successfully by students, as evidenced by the generally positive student feedback and by the high rate of views of the modules outside of the course itself (evidence that the students were returning to the modules to do further learning).
6. Project outcomes and deliverables

The project achieved the outcomes set out at the beginning of the project. We have provided a suite of resources to postgraduate law students to use through both in their introductory LCRW course and throughout their program of study. In doing so we have helped ensure that such students have the necessary research skills for undertaking postgraduate legal study. The project has also given the teaching and educational design staff at UNSW Law the opportunity to implement a pedagogical framework that utilises technology as a solution to an educational problem. We have been able to analyse the effectiveness of moving towards a more blended model of teaching and gain an understanding of the process involved in implementing these ideas. This has helped contributed to the momentum within UNSW Law of teachers embracing technology in their teaching and exploring different ways of delivering their classes. It has also been a useful start in the production of a high quality set of online resources for legal research and writing. Through this project, much interest has been sparked in using these online resources both within UNSW Law and across the University.

7. Sustainability of outcomes

The choice of Captivate for the online modules was made to ensure the most sustainable outcome for the project. This is software that can be easily modified by a number of people within the teaching and P&T staff in UNSW Law, meaning that the modules can be readily changed on a semester-to-semester basis, which is particularly important in an area as fast-moving as online legal research. Captivate integrates seamlessly with Moodle and Gradebook allowing the results of assessments to be recorded directly and automatically into Moodle. The choice of Captivate ensured that we could have full transferability within UNSW Law and across other faculties in the University.

8. Evaluation of Outcomes

This project easily satisfied the goals we set at the beginning of the project. The online research modules were designed and developed on time and within budget, and formed part of the LCRW course in Semester 1 2016 as was originally planned. The project has been a success.

There were, however, a number of challenges that needed to be overcome through the project. The first of these was that there was a delay in starting the project due to difficulties in appointing a Project Assistant: finding a person with the right mix of educational and technological skills took us longer than expected. Having a large number of stakeholders (especially given the number of teaching staff and program convenors with an interest in the introductory LCRW course) was challenging, especially in co-ordinating meetings and consolidating feedback. As the online modules required the LCRW course to be radically transformed we had the dual challenge of building the modules and also ensuring they were adequately accommodated within the revised course.

One of the biggest challenges involved the resignation of the Project Assistant in May 2015 at a critical juncture in the project. The Project Assistant had formulated the structure of the modules and had determined the role they would play within the LCRW course but had not started work on the content of the modules. There was a delay in finding a replacement, involving two rounds of interviews to find someone with the appropriate technological skill set to create the modules. The challenge then was to bridge the gap between the work completed by the outgoing Project
Assistant and what the incoming Contract e-Learning Developer needed to accomplish. Because the continuity of the project was disrupted, the development of the modules took longer than anticipated.

The modules, when they went live in Semester 1 2016, had some minor technological issues: most of these were identified as the students went through the course. We had a very open channel of communication between the Project Manager (acting as moderator of the online components of the LCRW course) and the students allowing for these issues to be corrected very quickly.

We hope that the University continues to provide internal funding to allow faculties to develop online course content. Our experience was a positive one, although in retrospect it would have been useful for the funding of the project to have been able to have been spread over a longer period of time, past the first offering of the course, so as to cover some of the work needed to test, correct and improve on the first version of the modules in future semesters.

9. Financial statement acquittal of funds

All expenditure should be reported in whole dollars.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PC - People Costs</td>
<td>38,612</td>
<td>185,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NONPC - Non-People Costs (excl Depreciation)</td>
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<td>10,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHEXMKT - Marketing</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONS - Consumables</td>
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<td>1,921</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRAVEL - Travel</td>
<td>1,652</td>
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<td>ENC - Equipment Non capitalised</td>
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<td>OTHEREX - Other Expenses</td>
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<tr>
<td>OTHEREXIN - Internal Expense</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tr>
<td>Revenue / Budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC - People Costs</td>
<td>38,612</td>
<td>185,465</td>
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<tr>
<td>NONPC - Non-People Costs (excl Depreciation)</td>
<td>10,385</td>
<td>10,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance (not Carried Forward)</td>
<td>1,003</td>
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