

Welcome

*This
month's theme*

*Sharing
good practice*

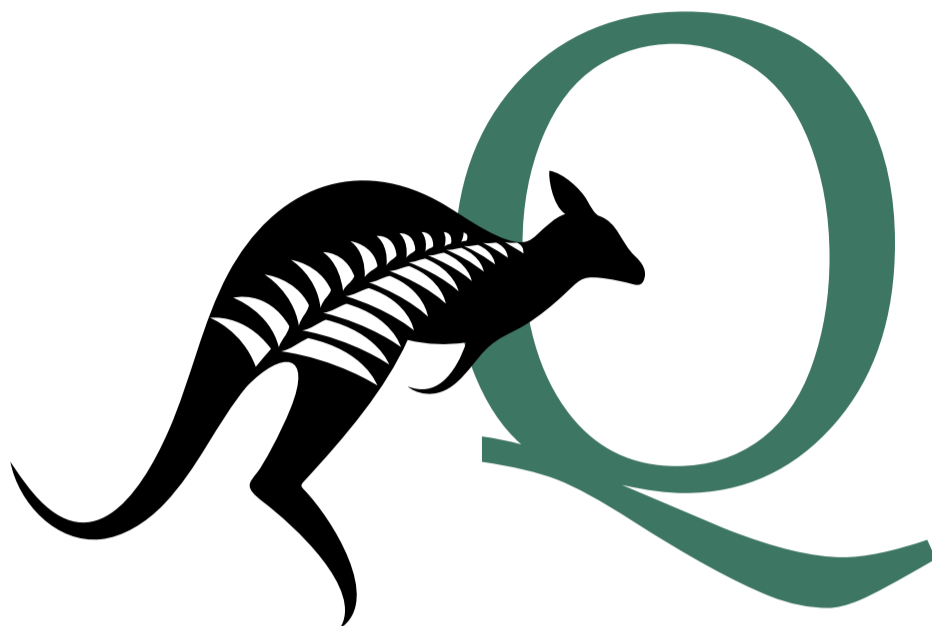
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*For your
information*

*Professional
development
opportunities*

JANZSSA

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Questions & ANZSSA

Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association, Inc.

Welcome

This month we are focusing on online resources, developments and innovation. Thanks to all of the contributors who have yet again showcased innovation and creativity in service provision for our students. There are brief articles ranging from innovation in using Facebook and Moodle, online apps for engagement and outreach, blogs to engage students with each other and ultimately impacting on course choice and career destinations, and reflections on online counselling.

Cathy Stone leads us out with an introduction to her NCSEHE equity fellowship project exploring transition, participation and success through on line environments. This is a fascinating and timely project, and Cathy is keen to engage with members of ANZSSA to enrich this project.

The newsletter also introduces our first key note speaker for the 2016 ANZSSA conference in Auckland in December. The program for which is shaping up well, and the website and call for submissions will be sent to you all soon.

Other developments to note within ANZSSA – we are in the final stages of completing our website overhaul and look forward to launching this to members in the next few weeks. Thank you to everyone who provided feedback on our

communication survey – invaluable input to shaping our website resources and communication tools with you all.

Until next time

Best,

Jordi Austin

President, ANZSSA

5/16

This month's theme is **Online student services**

NCSEHE Equity Fellows Program 2016

Opportunity through online learning: improving student transition, participation and success in online higher education.

A research project in progress

Dr Cathy Stone

The University of Newcastle

Background

Online learning has a critical place in widening access and participation in higher education for a diverse range of students, many of whom are from backgrounds which have been historically underrepresented at university. Thanks to the Equity Fellows Program, established this year by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), I have been funded to undertake research this year that will lead to the development of a set of national guidelines, informed by research evidence, for improving the access, academic success and retention of students in online education. This research project aims to improve not only the transition of students into online higher education, but also their ongoing participation, success and retention. More information about the NCSEHE Equity Fellow Program can be found at the NCSEHE website at: <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/2016-equity-fellows/>

Rationale for the project

There is increasing evidence that online learning is helping to widen access to higher education (Ilgaz & Gulbahar, 2015; Knightley, 2007; Moore & Signor, 2014; O'Shea, Stone & Delahunty, 2015;) particularly where there are open-entry or widening participation pathways into university studies (Shah, Goode, West & Clark, 2014; Stone, 2012; Stone, Hewitt & Morelli, 2013). The flexibility offered by online learning enables students to combine study with paid work, family and other

responsibilities, as well as being more affordable (Park & Choi, 2009). This is borne out by enrolment data from Open Universities Australia (OUA)¹ which enrolls more domestic students annually into online higher education units at its partner universities, than any single Australian university. The table below contrasts enrolments at OUA (OUA, 2015) with the Australian higher education sector as a whole (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2015; OECD, 2012) for specific student cohorts, which are recognised to be underrepresented in access, participation and/or success.

Table 1 – enrolment figures of specific student cohorts

Student cohorts	OUA	Nationally
First in Family	67.7%	51%
Regional/ Remote	44%	18.6%
Disability	6%	5%
Indigenous	2.3%	1.5%

Despite these higher enrolments, continued participation and success in online education is lower. There is strong evidence that students who are first-in-family to enter university are at higher risk of attrition and poorer academic outcomes (Australia Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013; Coates & Ransom, 2011; National Centre for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012;) also that this cohort faces particular challenges in the online environment (Stone, O'Shea, May, Delahunty & Partington, 2015). Across all enrolments, studies indicate that retention is around 20% lower in online programs than face-to-face programs (Greenland & Moore, 2014; Moody, 2004).

A recent report from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2014) looking into completion rates of domestic undergraduate students in Australia, shows that of those students who enrolled in 2005, only 44.4% of fully external students (online) had completed their degree programs by 2012, compared with an overall completion rate in the same time period of 72.3%. The completion rate for multi-modal study was 69.5%, indicating that perhaps the lack of any face-to-face contact with the institution is particularly challenging.

¹ Open Universities Australia (OUA) is an education company that specialises in facilitating open-entry online higher education in partnership with 13 Australian universities.

Indeed, much of the literature indicates that the two-fold challenges of understanding e-learning technology, along with a sense of isolation are key issues for online students. Yoo and Huang's US study (2013) found that the technology associated with online learning could be overwhelming for 'novice adult learners' (2013:160). This finding is supported by Ilgaz and Gülbahar's Turkish study (2015) which concluded that the convenience factor of studying online is diminished by negative factors such as technical problems, lack of interaction with tutors and other students, problems with instructional materials and students' own difficulties with time management.

Plan of activities

The following is a list of activities that I will be undertaking across the course of this year and into next year, in order to complete the project by the end of March 2017.

1. Reviewing current research and evidence, nationally and internationally, into factors influencing academic success and retention in online higher education.
2. Conducting interviews with practitioners (both academic and professional) at Australian higher education providers which offer online undergraduate education, to investigate their access, engagement and support strategies, seeking evidence of the impact of these on retention and student success.
3. Conducting interviews at the Open University UK, to compare and contrast its approach and outcomes with what is being achieved in Australia.
4. Undertaking a placement with the Australian Government Department of Education, in order to share knowledge and expertise gained from the project and to discuss policy implications.
5. Collating data, analysing findings and formulating guidelines based on research evidence.
6. Writing up a final report for the NCSEHE, which includes the National guidelines, informed by research evidence, for improving the access, academic success and retention of students in online education.
7. Disseminating findings via distribution of the report, holding seminars and workshops, writing publications and delivering conference presentations.

Intended outcomes

The national guidelines generated from this project will be disseminated widely across the Australian higher education sector; including recommendations to Government regarding policy or funding changes required to facilitate implementation. It is hoped that these guidelines will have sector-wide impact and may even influence the direction that governments and institutions take in relation to online learning, to ensure more students from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds can succeed.

I would welcome any contact in relation to this research project. If any readers would like further information or feel that they may have a contribution to make to this research, I invite you to please contact me at:

cathy.stone@newcastle.edu.au

Cathy Stone is currently employed by the University of Newcastle's Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) as an Equity Fellow, under the NCSEHE's 2016 Inaugural Equity Fellows Program. She has over 20 years' experience in the higher education sector in both on-campus and online environments, working with students and staff, and conducting research to improve student transition, participation and success. Cathy's work as Director of Student Success with Open Universities Australia (OUA) from 2010-2014 gave her first-hand experience of the challenges facing online students, particularly those who have not previously had opportunity or encouragement to consider university and are likely to be academically inexperienced or unprepared. More information about Cathy Stone, including her publications, can be found at <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/profile/cathy-stone>

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Lurking, Liking and Learning: Online Peer Learning at Curtin University

Amanda Smith

Peer Learning Coordinator, UniPASS, Student Transition and Retention Team (START), Curtin University

Facebook has been the most successful online platform used for the **UniPASS** (University Peer Assisted Study Success) peer-learning program at Curtin. This social media platform was selected due to its ubiquity and capacity for push notifications, as well as the fact that students did not appear to be utilising the discussion forum area of the learning management system. The UniPASS Facebook group program rolled out across 11 units in semester 2 2015 from a starting point of 2 units in a 2014 semester 2 pilot, as an 'add-on' to the face to face PASS sessions. UniPASS has continued to develop this viable form of optional online peer-learning support that adheres to the principles of PASS: reduced hierarchy (no academic staff in the Facebook groups space); using trained students as facilitators; reviewing content (not re-teaching); encouraging collaboration; integrating learning skills with content; managed by an accredited supervisor; and program evaluation (Australasian Centre for PASS, University of Wollongong, 2012).

With continual review and feedback from students and PASS Leaders, updates have been made to the program through 2015 and into 2016 in order to increase engagement: a Senior Facebook PASS Leader was recruited (based on expertise and experience with both social media and peer-learning principles), and this staff member then created UniPASS Facebook group Administration Guidelines and trained, monitored and mentored UniPASS Facebook Administrator PASS



Leaders both online and through face to face meetings. UniPASS Facebook groups commenced earlier in the semester in 2016 (start of week 1) thus enabling PASS Leaders to encourage students to join during the first lectures via their mobile phones. In addition, training and guidelines were updated with larger ‘trouble-shooting’ sections and training on support services for referrals where relevant.

These changes have resulted in better trained and prepared administrators who are working as a more supportive team, more responsive to their Senior Leader, and earlier engagement and postings, leading to continued higher levels of engagement from students. A better prepared, organised and supported team creates motivation, which can impact positively on student engagement and learning.

The success of the UniPASS Facebook groups is largely based on the procedures and processes set up to monitor the groups and engage the members. Third party analytics software reporting was used to determine the engagement, which included a Facebook group membership of 30% (1091 students) of the total enrolled cohort of the units supported by the groups. Of these members, 68% were active in posting, commenting and liking, and 28% posted – the gold standard for student engagement in a Facebook group from our perspective as it replicates student collaboration in PASS classroom sessions.

Students within the groups told us that they mainly engaged with the groups once to 3 times a week, and over 70% agreed or strongly agreed that they found the UniPASS Facebook groups helpful for their studies in the unit, and two-thirds felt more connected to their degree and Curtin through the group membership (77 responses, UniPASS Student Survey 2015 S2, 449 respondents from a panel of 6721 students). These groups appear to be of value to students both academically and socially.

Students were in general very happy with the resources posted in the group, the quick responses from the administrators (PASS Leaders) and the idea that other students were ‘sharing their load’ and supporting their study. For example, in response to the question, “The best thing about the UniPASS Facebook groups was:” students said:

“Links to helpful resources.”

“Knowing we were all in the same situation.”

“Everyone was trying to help each other.”

“Could easily and quickly discuss with other students.”

“Place to pose questions as we went. Hints and tips with

motivation from facilitator.”

(86 responses)

When asked how we could improve the UniPASS Facebook groups, many students noted that they couldn’t think of ways to improve, which was very positive. Others had suggestions such as more links to interactive quizzes (designed by the PASS Leaders) and would have liked more engagement from other students, while there was a comment about some students being allowed to monopolise the group. Although one student suggested that Facebook was too distracting a platform to use for study, in general, the students suggested exactly what UniPASS management are also hoping for – more students to become actively engaged with the Facebook groups.



UniPASS staff are currently actively working to develop student participation and engagement through careful planning and timing of posts and comments, creation of online activities and re-directing questions to the group. These strategies make our model peer-led and collaborative, as opposed to having one-way communications which might reflect more teacher-centred learning.

We are constantly looking for new ideas and ways to engage students, noting what sort of posts get the most engagement and interaction so that we can do more of them in the future. The next step in the program is to increase the reach of the UniPASS Facebook groups to support more units, and to improve engagement in those cohorts which have proven less interactive. Given the success and value currently placed on online learning, we are confident that we can continue to provide effective and engaging online peer-support for our students.

Engaging Online with Your Students

Carolyn Ballagh

Acting Manager, Residential Education.

Accommodation Services, La Trobe University.

Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in the 25th Anniversary AACUHO Conference, in Sydney. Based on the theme 'Celebrating our Past, Shaping our Future' the 2016 conference, provided an excellent platform for attendees to discuss the many programs and initiatives that have been implemented in student housing.

During the exhibition opening at AACUHO, a colleague mentioned the application of the 'Guidebook App' at La Trobe University, alternatively referred to as Live@ La Trobe. Discussion then ensued about the many features of our Guidebook. I thought it would be interesting to share some of the La Trobe insights about using the App more broadly with the ANZSSA community, and to

highlight key benefits of this virtual communication tool.

Firstly, what is Live@ LaTrobe? Well, Live@ La Trobe is an App that provides a simple way of communicating with students directly via smartphones, iPads or Notebooks. In the USA, there are now over 600 universities using the Guidebook platform as a communication tool. In Australia, thanks to the pioneering work of my colleague Laura Burge (who I am temporarily filling in for), La Trobe was one of the first Universities to incorporate the App as a mobile handbook for our students living on campus.

What makes this communication tool unique?

Guidebook is designed to allow the everyday person (with no coding or technical knowledge) to create a mobile App. As a system, this means that a campus administrator can create updates without relying on the developers to maintain information.



How do students benefit from using the App? Live@ La Trobe has some fabulous virtual advantages, here are a few –

1. Students can find everything they need to know about moving into on campus residences before they leave. A super benefit for any pre-departure students. The Live@ La Trobe Guide even has a section on ‘what to pack’.
2. Related to point 1 - all the information about arrival days, fees and forms and orientation is located in one online space.
3. Students can find important contacts through the click of an icon and it introduces students to the staffing team.
4. The App contains essential information about academic, social and health and wellbeing programs that are available to residential students across the campuses.
5. To help support an understanding of expectations and responsibilities, there is a section on ‘rules and guidelines’ for living on campus.
6. Students can see and plan their entire year through the ‘events calendar’.
7. Campus maps are featured – particularly helpful for those students new to campus.
8. Students can learn more about and connect in with their Student Leaders.
9. As the guidebook is an online platform, students can log in anytime and anywhere to find out important residential information.
10. Significantly, the App is very user friendly with immediate access to residential information. Excellent for providing live updates to students.

What is the vision for the future development of Guidebook? The creators of Guidebook are continually reviewing and expanding the App to improve student communication. One of the newest features is Interact which surfaces the most relevant contact to individual users, encourages social sharing and allows administrators to start public conversation. More details about this addition is available at <https://guidebook.com/event-apps/activity-feed/>

For La Trobe, our students have been able to benefit from the many features of Live@ La Trobe since its inception - the guidebook has now been downloaded thousands of times by our students.

To have a closer look at the application of the Guidebook at La Trobe, please visit Live@ La Trobe at <http://guidebook.com/app/LTU/> or access the Guide on your desktop via <http://m.guidebook.com/guide/14776/> For any questions about Live@ La Trobe please email c.ballagh@latrobe.edu.au

In summary, Guidebook/ Live @ LaTrobe is an effective and dynamic online platform for showcasing what’s happening in residences.

Special thanks to Jordan McArthur, Senior Manager of Content at Guidebook for his contribution to this article.

Next Month’s Theme: Student Finance

Members are encouraged to submit contributions about services and initiatives that enhance financial literacy.

Any piece, big or small, would be very much appreciated. Please send all contributions (including photos) to ANZSSA@vuw.ac.nz by Wednesday 25 May 2016.

Are there any exciting programs or initiatives you are engaged in at your tertiary institution? Spread the word! We'd love to hear from you.

Please send all stories to: ANZSSA@vuw.ac.nz

University of Auckland – Faculty of Engineering Student Engagement Team

Chris McClymont

Student Experience Adviser

In 2015 the Engineering Student Engagement Team at the University of Auckland launched a blog written by students in their second year of the Bachelor of Engineering degree.

The “Part II Student Editorials” are written by nine students, each one representing one of the nine Engineering specialisations offered by the Faculty. The blog came about as a response to the demand from first year students for information about the specialisations.

In their first year, our engineering students study a general programme that covers elements of all nine specialisations, and towards the end of that common year they must select their top three choices. Taking into account their GPA from the common first year and demand for places in each programme, they are assigned a place in one of the nine specialisations.

The Faculty provides a lot of information to guide first years in this choice, including online information and seminars, but what was missing from the process was a way for them to hear from their fellow students about the specialisations.

The idea of a blog was appealing, as it provides a platform for students to share their experiences directly with other students in an accessible way that, unlike seminars, can be cached for future use.

The call for applicants to the blog was put out via social media and direct emails to second year students, and the response was fantastic – dozens of students were keen to take part and share their experiences with their fellow

students. A real theme of their applications was the desire they have to give back to the Faculty by ensuring that first year students are selecting the right specialisation for them, and that the smaller and less well-understood specialisations get the same consideration and attention as the larger, more well-known ones.

The nine students that were chosen to represent their specialisations came from a range of diverse backgrounds and perspectives, but all shared in common an enthusiasm for their specialisations and a desire to help inform and guide first year students.

After receiving training from the Student Engagement Team regarding writing guidelines and standards, the bloggers started posting regularly halfway through semester 1 – about two posts went up per week of semester, giving each blogger about four posts over the course of the academic year. The Faculty promoted the blog via the University website and the Faculty's Facebook page, and readership was relatively consistent. However, the true test of the blog's usefulness to students came at the point of the year – around September and October – when specialisation choice starts becoming a reality for our 800+ first year students.

The Engagement Team made an extra effort to publicise the blog during this time, with announcements in first year classes, direct emails, and mentions of the blog during specialisation seminars. This extra promotion, combined with the hunger first year students develop for information about the specialisations during those months, gave an enormous boost to the readership. Although visitor numbers were high, the real evidence that first year students were finding the blog useful was the average length of their visits: at nearly 3 minutes 30 seconds, the average reader was visiting multiple times and reading the posts from start to finish. This might not sound all that impressive, but across the blogging world a visit of less than half that time (96 seconds - about the length of time it takes to lightly skim a page of text) is considered a triumph.



After the selection process finished, the blog wrapped up with farewell posts from our writers and, as expected, readership dropped away considerably. However, to our surprise there was a second surge in readership in early 2016, after the release of summer school results and the final allocation of specialisation places. The numbers were especially high for those less well-known specialisations – no doubt a result of those students that didn't get their first choice and were scouring the web for more information about the specialisation they had been allocated. This second life of the blog not only increased its usefulness but revealed to our team an information gap that needs to be filled in future allocation cycles.

Overall, the blog experience has been very positive and, apart from providing important information to students, it has given Faculty staff an extremely useful insight into life within the nine different specialisations and served as a reminder that, although our 2,900 undergraduates are studying the same degree programme, the impact of their specialisation on their student experience is enormous.

Recruitment for the 2016 blog has started, and to increase engagement and dialogue between the writers and the first year students, this year's blog will be complimented by a Facebook page where students can leave questions and comments for the bloggers.

You can find the 2015 blog content here:

<http://www.engineering.auckland.ac.nz/en/for/currentstudents/part-2-student-editorials.html>

UNE Students are 'Moodleing' their Career Paths

Julia Perryman

Senior Careers Officer, University of New England

When faced with the task of providing career development services to a dynamic cohort of students that are located across the globe, the task seemed too big to contemplate! Moodle became the answer.

The University Of New England (UNE) is renowned for distance education, with over 80% of the student cohort being off-campus and learning online. We were one of the first universities in Australia to provide online study for all courses, with both on- and off-campus students having to access learning material, lectures and submitting assessment tasks via Moodle, an online Learning Management System.

With traditional methods of career activities being face-to-face, the team of two staff needed to be creative in their presentation to ensure as many students as possible could access the service. Phone consultations were introduced to accommodate off-campus students, more recently Skype consultations have become popular, especially with students who choose to study overseas and workshops were transformed from being physically present to virtual classrooms via Adobe Connect. But this did not solve the issue that many students are missing out on empowering career information.

To strengthen this argument, a student based survey highlighted the need for more access to career information, it indicated that the majority of students stated that they did not know there was a career development office at UNE, available for all students to access. This ignorance could have been for a number of reasons: 1. Being that we were bannered under Student Support and Retention and not seen as Careers; 2. Hidden in a central administration block on campus in a large staff population; or 3. Students not wanting to be aware that they need to apply for employment before their course completion – many see that they don't need to do anything while studying, and will only start to seek opportunities after they have graduated or some even expect that they just 'walk into a job'.

So, what could we do? Having two staff and being required to meet with students daily for consultation left little time for creative planning. Bound by budgeting restraints with no funding available for any careers activities also

Your progress ?

UNE University of New England

Career Development

Your career can often evolve in unintentional ways, so with the assistance of the Careers Officers and the careers programs at UNE, we aim to assist you to 'gain the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to manage their life, learning and work in self-directed ways' (Canadian Career Development Foundation, 2002).

UNE Career Development

News forum

Graduate Opportunities 2017 ebook

graduateopportunities.com

UNE University of New England Career Development

Graduate recruiting season is upon us and whether you're graduating next year or down the track a little, it is a good time to start researching employers, career advice and your future options. This year we are pleased to be teaming up with the team at Graduate Opportunities (GO) to bring you the new university GO 2016 ebook, full of information on upcoming graduate programs as well as career advice from university careers advisors around the country. Best of all, this is a free download for you, and you can even print off any or all of the pages to keep as a handy reference at home.

Download it free here:
www.graduateopportunities.com/GO16-UNE

created a problem in itself, as we could not purchase any commercial resources to assist. We needed to think outside our normal boundaries and think 'like a student'.

The careers staff were already familiar with Moodle as they administer Work Integrated Learning units through the learning management system, so after some consideration, it was decided to experiment and build a Moodle unit based on self-awareness for Career Development. The unit is structured with base career development material, course choice, majors, resumes, applications, interviews, etc, but also has separate modules for students to access information that is more relevant to their study pathways. These modules are based on the School that they are connected to at UNE (eg School of Education, School of Humanities), allowing the student to access information that is more relevant to their own ideas. The unit is entirely self-propelled, with no assessment or requirements needing to be met. There are 'touch points' for students to contact a career staff member and submission points for students to submit resumes and applications for assistance. We hope to extend this to include some interactive group activities as well.

The full student cohort has been enrolled into the Moodle unit, a mammoth effort in itself by our Moodle Information Technology (IT) staff, causing some IT

issues as we have many thousands of enrolments and this will continue to grow each trimester as each new student is added. As students complete their studies, they will automatically fall out of the unit, but the beauty of Moodle is that if they come back to post-graduate study, or do another degree in the future, their access will pick up where they left off. It can evolve as the student does – perfect for career development.

It has been interesting to follow students comments about the unit and also that only around 20 students have requested to be withdrawn from the unit as 'it is not relevant'. Comments have been positive and include: 'Thank you - this sounds excellent - look forward to trying it out'; 'Thank you for your email. I will definitely take advantage of your offer of support in the coming years and the online Moodle unit.'; 'Very good information.'; 'Cheers thanks so much in advance for all the future support'

It is envisaged that the unit in Moodle will continue to evolve and change with the dynamic platform of career development. But it seems that at the moment, students are happy to be part of a very large career development project and the UNE Career Development team finally have a high profile both on- and off-campus.

Themes of ANZSSA 2015 conference in practice

Emma Rowbotham and Rinnie Bruinsma
Learning Advisers | Ngā Kaiārahi Ako
Student Learning | Te Taiako
Victoria University of Wellington |
Te Whāre Wananga o Te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui

Drawing on the main theme of the ANZSSA 2015 Hobart conference, “Visible, viable and valuable student engagement and development”, a trial was started to enhance our connection with students, increase the visibility of Student Learning, and to further the development of independent, self-reflective learners. Under the principles of ‘just in time’ and ‘just for me’, participants in a notetaking workshop were invited to sign-up for a follow-up email, to help them evaluate their own progress on note taking half way through the trimester; a time when getting this skill right is essential for student success.

The 50 minute workshop ran in the second week of trimester 1. Students were introduced to various note taking techniques and asked to evaluate their own confidence and practices. Below is one example of the questions used for evaluation:

1. Overall, I feel confident about my note taking abilities

Definitely no (everyone seems to be writing things down except me!)	Not really	Not sure?!	I guess I’m alright	Feeling good
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A follow-up email was sent around five weeks later, with the purpose of getting the students to self-reflect on how their skills had or hadn’t progressed, as well as how confident they were now feeling. Additional questions were put to the students to analyse the reasons for their progression and to reflect on how their note taking skills could still be improved. Finally, the message included various links to online resources and other Student Learning workshops that may be of benefit for these students. We also asked the students to share any useful resources they may have come across (YouTube clips, annotation software, etc).

The trial invited but didn’t stipulate the need for feedback to the follow-up email. As a result, the group participants (around ten students) have not replied and we are currently unable to gauge the impact of the email. Nevertheless, the intention is to create independent, self-reflective learners and a reply was not essential. It has become clear from the various presentations at ANZSSA 2015 that there is a need to connect with the students in a timely and personalised manner to help them thrive.

In future we may also look into incorporating first names in the sign-up list to allow for the emails to be even more ‘just for me’. It may also be worthwhile to further examine methods to evaluate the effects of the follow-up exercise.

This section is for little tid bits or gems of information that could be helpful for ANZSSA members.

Please send all FYIs to ANZSSA@vuw.ac.nz

Reflections from 2 online counsellors in Australia

Observations of an online therapist

Kellie Cathcart

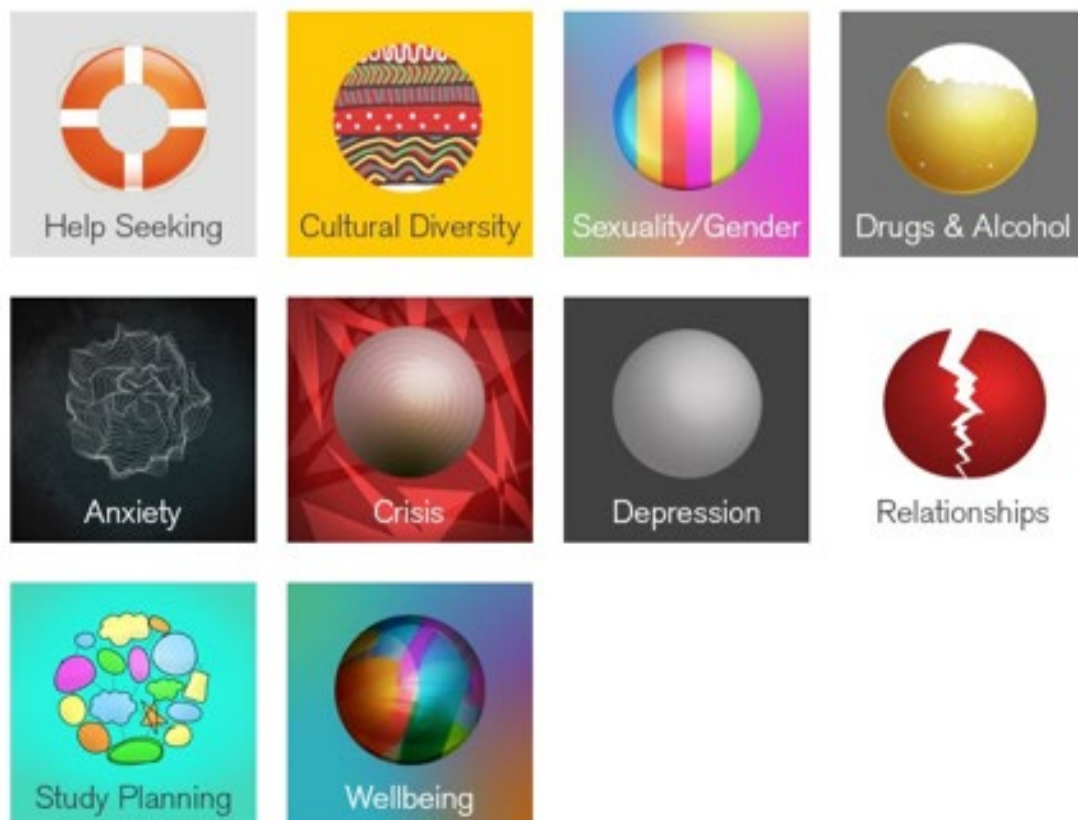
Online Counsellor, University of Newcastle

When I meet people for the first time and tell them what I do for work I get a mixed response. I'm sure all counsellors get a similar reaction to this. Some people shy away for fear that we are analysing them and others start sharing their life story, and for hairdressers I meet they tell me it's the same as what they do. Before I became an online counsellor there was comfort in meeting another counsellor because you knew they understood and there was an instant bond. Now when I meet other counsellors and tell them I am an online therapist I am met with mixed emotions again. For some there is excitement and an eagerness to learn more about it, for others a disbelief

that it's a real position and can actually work, and for a few, an instant bond because they too are an online counsellor. So like any good counsellor I'm keen to dispel the myths of online work with clients and thought the best way to start would be in sharing my experiences and observations of my work.

Firstly let's dispel the first myth that online therapy is just exchanging e-mails or referring students to self-help CBT programs online. Here at the University of Newcastle I am responsible for delivering three different modes of online services to support students seeking counselling. The first mode is a blog which provides weekly posts on issues relevant to a student's wellbeing and success. It also is a place I review online resources and applications and students can retrieve information about a range of different resources and mental health issues on demand. The second is one hour drop-in skype sessions, offered 5 times a week. These don't require an appointment and can be used to answer quick questions or link students to resources to help them with self-help options. The final mode is through booked individual appointments which

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are offered via Skype (text or video chat), BlackBoard Messenger (text) or e-mail. Online therapy is about providing a range of alternative options to traditional face-to-face therapy.

One of the most common questions other counsellors and people in general ask me is “Do people actually use the service?”. The answer is yes, I get a mix of students who make contact. There are those students who have contacted the face-to-face counselling service but have elected to use online counselling rather than face-to-face for a number of reasons. There are also students who make contact with online services because they are geographically located somewhere there are no other UON counselling options. There are also quite a few who make contact who are not sure if they want to see a counsellor or need to and this gives them an option to try it out. Similarly there are those who say they wouldn't see a counsellor but find that using online therapy is different as you don't have to see the person. Last year we had over 10,000 hits on the blog, there were more than 100 contacts across the 3 hours drop-in's that were offered during the weeks of each semester and the individual number of client's I had sessions with and the average number of sessions was similar to my face-to-face load. So the answer is definitely yes, people do use the service.

The second most common question I get is “How does it work? How do you get people to share with you and understand how they are feeling?”. Initially I was concerned about how I was going to develop rapport with students via text, not so much video chat because I could use the visual, audio and body language cues. What I discovered is that I actually use more of those basic counselling skills in written text. I can still use minimal responses, reflection of content and emotion, questions, summarising and checking that I received the intended message. I often get richer, more in-depth responses from the students in text than I do in video chat or in face-to-face sessions. Some of my students actually comment on the therapeutic benefit of just writing it rather than saying it. There is also the added benefit when working with international students of being able to use translation software and increase the clarity in communication and rapport and understanding with this client group.

Another question I am asked is “How do you do exercises with them? Teach them mindfulness or relaxation skills, or work together on CBT skills where you need visual aids?”. The great thing about online therapy is that I can attach a file or paste a link to resources quickly during the session. The student can be looking at the file at the same time I am and we can work through it together.

When I'm teaching mindfulness I can get them to do an exercise just by typing the instructions over time. If I want them to practice a relaxation or breathing strategy I have them download the audio of the web or an app. Given they are already using technology to communicate with me it feels like an extension of that process and they are mastering and practising the skill in their environment rather than having to transfer it outside of the therapeutic environment to their own. I have also been able to collaborate on mind maps, pros and cons lists, hierarchy of fears and other therapeutic aids using word documents that we upload and exchange and send back and forth between us. It sounds a little clunky when I am writing this but to be honest it works well and the student has it with them and can reflect on the process and the whole session log at a later date for a reminder. This reminder is particularly good, according to students, when they are in distress and can go back and read what we covered during the session.

A lot of colleagues ask me “Aren't you worried about students who might present who are in crisis or indicate they are having suicidal thoughts?” My first response is ‘of course I am, aren't you worried about this when you see them in person?’ Yes I am limited in that I can't detain them physically but I am no more limited than the phone counsellors at Lifeline or the Suicide Call Back Service and these services have been operating for quite a while with success. In fact, there are benefits in working online with these students as they are more likely to share these thoughts and plans with someone anonymous as it decreases their inhibitions and increases sharing. I can refer to the same services as when I see clients face-to-face and I can make the same safety plans. Can I guarantee safety? No, but can you guarantee safety in face-to-face encounters? I do have the added benefit of being able to get access to the address of the student if needed without them having to disclose it but I haven't had to use this feature despite having had students contact in crisis.

My final observation I'd like to share isn't something that people often ask me but that I wish they would. It's about my experience of offering online therapy rather than the clients. You see I love what I do, I love being able to reach out to students who wouldn't necessarily come in and seek counselling. I love offering students who are living off campus or are away on a placement the opportunity to feel connected to the UON community even when they are geographically isolated from it. I love hearing from students that “it's great to see someone at the university meet us at our level and with the technology we like

to use”. When I started the career path to become a Psychologist all those years ago online therapy wasn’t an option, in fact Facebook didn’t exist and we were still all using dial up internet. During my studies I learned about different schools of thought, different models of therapy and advances in treatment of different mental health disorders. I never dreamed I’d get a chance to be part of advancement, but here I am! I am developing different pathways for students to access support and help for their wellbeing, collecting evidence for the effectiveness and use of this, and sharing the knowledge with my peers. So not only do I get to help the individual but I get to contribute at the wider community and professional level. What an amazing opportunity that is.

So don’t be afraid to try something new, to offer a student a different pathway of accessing information and help. You have all the basic counselling skills and once you get the hang of it, adapting them to text or using video streaming isn’t so scary. You never know you might just find yourself loving what you do all over again.

E-counselling Musings

Cheryl Jones

University of Tasmania

Often I am asked with a great deal of curiosity ‘what is e-counselling?’ and ‘Does it work?’

Other responses can be [often with a shrugging of shoulders] ‘Oh I email students all the time...I spend my day responding to student emails what is so special about e-counselling?’ to ‘online counselling isn’t possible! You can only do counselling face to face’ and ‘the client has a copy of what we talk about? Really?’ [quick intake of breath!]

So e-counselling – what is unique about it?

Imagine you are reading a drama script. Firstly the playwright sets the scene. This is done through a description of the set, the scene or context, as well as the atmosphere. This establishes the tone for the events within the play. Written directions guide the actors in the play - where they are in relation to each other, where they are on the stage on and where they are moving to/from, who comes on when from which side, what movements/facial expressions accompany their lines and who they interact with. Sometimes the playwright will include a word on vocal delivery to further build the mood.

A Drama script is not like a novel or a poem. It is a different way of using words to communicate passion/joy/sadness/fear –it is a deliberate form of writing in a specific format – just google drama scripts and see how many guidelines pop up re formatting, characterization, directions, etc. Skill and time are required to craft a play that will create a world for the actors and the audience to enter and if the playwright is successful, the world carries a sense of reality and genuine. A drama script has a particular purpose.

E-counselling shares common threads with the writing of a script.

Firstly, the therapist/counsellor sets the scene, for example

CJ: Hello Jane (smiling in greeting). Just a few housekeeping details (mentally checking items off!) to begin with ... This is a LO..O...O..O..O..NG email ... so please take as many breaks as you need when reading it.

I have replied to your email below. You will notice that I have responded within the text of your email. This way of responding [hopefully!] gives the text a sense of flow of conversation ... (replying in a separate letter for example, would be a different experience). I have also indicated the beginning of my responses with my initials. You will probably come across some odd punctuation as well ... [square brackets] are used to indicate a thought, idea, or reflective moment as I respond ... (semi-circular brackets) usually indicate sharing information.

I have drawn up a chair beside me for you, as a reminder to me that we are having a conversation. I am smiling as I welcome you and invite you to take a seat ... my tone is warm and gentle...

CJ: Hello Jane, my name is Cheryl (smiling in welcome and indicating a comfortable chair)

In my introduction to Jane, I have provided some information that will help her to read the therapeutic email. I have used the text ‘to paint a picture’ that creates a multi-layered response ... typing ‘LO.... O.... O.... O... O.. NG’.. for example, conveys more information to the reader than just typing the word ‘long’.

The dialogue in e-counselling is also set out clearly following a specific format. Asynchronous email is more of a conversation - a dialogue, rather than replying in separate emails with little connectedness (except content). I guess it would be similar to having a face to face conversation where one person speaks for 5 minutes without interruption and the next person speaks

for five minutes and so on, but with very little sense of connectedness between two people.

In e-counselling, the therapist works to build rapport by placing him/herself in the client's world by writing responses within the text of the client's email; the email then becomes a dialogue very similar to two people being in a room and sharing a conversation.

Jane: it's always busy at home...mum and dad...I have three brothers and sisters...and of course there are the pets that are part of the family....and we all like to do stuff together.....

CJ: as I read your description I can picture a whirlwind of activity... [I am leaning forward in my chair in anticipation and curiosity for what may follow].

Jane: When I left home, I left everything...I am very close to my family...it's my first time away from them and it's been like I've been wrenched out and dropped on another planet...with no-one who cares .. and I just feel.....alone.....'

CJ: I am hearing that this decision was one that took a LOT of courage and ... cost a great deal emotionally. [Feeling sadness as I read your words].

My response acknowledges Jane's description of what is happening and acknowledging her feelings as well as drawing an image of what Jane might notice in my body language if we were in the same room. I am being drawn into her world and I am there with her.

This very purposeful way of writing requires the therapist to be present to the client's words and also in their own responses. When I am with a face to face client, what facial expressions do I use? what is my body language like? What is my tone of voice? As you can see, to engage at this level of writing requires the therapist to be very aware of the use of presence in writing; a skill that is learned through self-reflection and awareness. The skill of using presence in therapeutic emails also informs the face to face practice as the therapist builds an awareness of the online use of self and translates this to face to face practice... which in turn informs the e-counselling skills..... if you can follow what I mean...one form of practice informs the other.

The same skills that we learn as counsellors – building rapport, being genuine and respectful and empathetic are the core principles of face to face counselling and also within e-counselling. E-counselling is a reflective process for the client and the therapist. Unlike face to face counselling when there may be many threads and emotions beneath the story, e-counselling gives a

reflective space for the client to write the concerns out and to reflect on what has been written:

Client: I have taken rather a lot of time to think about things and write them down but now that I have done that, I feel better

Additionally, ... the script develops a voice that responds empathetically – a response that can be read and re-read ... like a talking journal or the client and the therapist working together to create the client's own self-help book.

So in answer to those who want to understand more about e-counselling, it is a deliberate process of responding reflectively, respectfully and empathetically to a client in writing. It is a skill that requires both self-awareness and reflection on the use of self. It is a specific skill for a specific context. ...and yes, from anecdotal evidence, e-counselling can be as effective as face to face counselling [smiling encouragingly].



Get to know the keynotes: Social Media Guru Eric Stoller

**ANZSSA Conference 2016: Inspire, Innovate, Involve:
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**Noho Marae and preconference workshops at Unitec,
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We are very excited to have Eric Stoller as a keynote at the 2016 ANZSSA Conference in Auckland. Eric will be facilitating a pre-conference workshop at Unitec on Sunday 4 December, and his keynote will be a feature of the conference programme at AUT 5-7 December.

Eric Stoller teaches organizations and educators how to use social media for learning and engagement and is an advocate for teaching students about a positive digital presence. With a background in student success, academic advising, wellness, and communications, Eric focuses his energies on educating clients and captivating audiences.

As the Student Affairs and Technology blogger for Inside Higher Ed, he generates conversations, answers questions, and provides insight about a variety of "tech topics." Living in London and working globally, he drinks a lot of coffee, enjoys running, and spends his time writing, speaking, and thinking about social media, digital identity, and education.



Connect with Eric at <http://ericstoller.com/work> and <http://twitter.com/ericstoller>

Also see: <https://www.insidehighered.com/users/eric-stoller>

For any queries in the meantime, you can contact me at adow@unitec.ac.nz

He i konā mai - goodbye for now,

Ally, Conference Convenor

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