

Overview of the University's learning and teaching context and infrastructure

Context

The University of Sydney is a research-intensive, student-centred, predominately campus-based institution. Its 17 faculties are divided into three college groupings: Sciences and Technology (CST), Humanities and Social Sciences (CHASS) and Health Sciences (CHS).

The learning and teaching system of the University is a devolved one, with responsibilities for its aspects shared amongst schools/departments, faculties, colleges and the centre. Broadly speaking, key responsibilities at these levels are quality assurance of the student learning experience at the school/department level, disciplinary leadership and faculty policy-making at the faculty level, strategic planning and resource prioritisation at the college level and University strategic planning, policy-making, leadership, budgeting and infrastructure services at the centre.

The values underpinning learning and teaching at the University of Sydney are: excellence of students, learning environments and learning experiences; intellectual inquiry; academic freedom; diversity of defensible opinions and values; and integrity and ethical practice in academic endeavors.

Key aspects of the learning and teaching system are annual faculty learning and teaching plans aligned to the University's learning and teaching plan, an emphasis on quality assurance of learning as an everyday part of academic enterprise, a student evaluation system aligned with the national approach to evaluation, an emphasis on research-led learning and teaching, a world-class library, embedded eLearning support aimed at providing a baseline of quality assurance for eLearning, and resource prioritisation for strategic eLearning projects lead by colleges. The University is internationally recognized for its promotion of learning and teaching through funding initiatives: 'Teaching Performance Indicators' the 'Scholarship of Teaching Index', and the 'Teaching Improvement Fund' scheme.

Within the learning and teaching area, eLearning is probably the most rapidly growing area of activity over the last three or four years. At the university level, this activity can be divided into three distinct areas: the roll-out of eLearning through enterprise learning management systems, strategic planning and resource allocation for eLearning projects at the level of colleges, and the development of eLearning alliances with national and international partners. Closely related to this activity is a co-investment approach between faculties and the centre to the development of award programs that are designed to provide a return on the investment made.

Research into learning and teaching is a key part of the University's profile. The university has a track-record in international and national grants for research into learning and teaching, and world-class researchers and publications.

Key facts and figures for 2005 include:

students

- approximately 47 000 students (total number, includes postgraduate and undergraduate, of which about 5,500 students are postgraduate and 9,000 are overseas students studying locally)
- around 36 000 students use the University learning management system (WebCT)
- around 10 000 students use one of two Faculty learning management systems (Blackboard in Faculty of Economics and Finance and the Medical LMS in the Faculty of Medicine)

teachers

- approximately 2 000 teaching staff (75% full time, 25% sessional)
- approximately 6 000 units of study are taught each year
- approximately 2 500 units of study have a dedicated website on one of three enterprise learning management systems (approximately 20% informational, 45% supplemental, 25% blended, and 10% fully flexible)
- growth in eLearning activity indicated by number of unit of study websites on enterprise level learning management systems has been about 33% per annum over last few years.

Infrastructure

- 9 teaching campuses, the furthest approximately 90 minutes south west of the city campus at Camden
- approximately 240 centrally managed teaching spaces (70 spaces >50 seats; 170 spaces <50 seats). AV/ICT technologies predominately only in spaces of >50 seats.
- approximately 450 faculty-owned teaching spaces
- approximately 1380 faculty-owned laboratory rooms: consisting of wet, dry, animal and computer laboratories, supported by over 2200 ancillary spaces
- learning spaces: these include the University library and its branches, 10 Access Centres, one of which provides 24/7 internet access for students, and some wireless-enabled recreational areas in cafes, foyers and outdoor areas
- plans for a precinct model to geographically divide the Camperdown and Darlington campuses into three regions in order to improve the management and support models surrounding learning and teaching spaces
- a centrally-managed, IP based, high performance video conferencing system with a carrier-class bridge

Issues

- understanding the value-add of eLearning in a student-centred, research-intensive, predominately campus-based experience
- identifying ways of providing incentive and support for staff to engage in eLearning development and teaching within a national context about to engage in a research quality exercise
- encouraging ways of integrating eLearning into conceptions of learning and teaching, everyday academic enterprise, and policy formation
- clarifying sustainable ways of integrating eLearning planning and support into the learning and teaching system, library and information services, the campus infrastructure, and operational budgets
- identifying efficient ways of providing enterprise eLearning technology solutions for course development, teaching, and learning and teaching spaces
- developing an awareness of new markets for postgraduate award courses, new income streams, new geographically-dispersed student cohorts and life-long learning needs

For further information:

About an overview of the University <http://www.usyd.edu.au/about/index.shtml>

About learning and teaching <http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/>

About eLearning <http://www.usyd.edu.au/learning/governance/elearning.shtml>

About the library <http://www.usyd.edu.au/about/organisation/pub/library.shtml>

About ITEV <http://www.ITEV.usyd.edu.au>