Semester 1, 2021 Teaching Guidance

How we can support student connection, engagement and learning

This guide is designed particularly for courses facilitated in external and flexible delivery modes, however facilitators of internal courses and external-only courses may find some of this advice useful.

In 2020, students were expected to connect with course content, academics and their peers in a variety of ways. Supporting students to learn effectively under the new conditions of 2020 presented additional complicating factors. The underlying purpose of this guide focuses on how, in 2021, we can support our students to:

- engage with content
- connect with staff
- connect with peers
- learn in different modes and conditions.

Student feedback

Given the rapid changes experienced in 2020 and thus far in 2021, engaging with student feedback is critical to both recognising effective practices from 2020, and addressing ongoing concerns. Key messages from students included a desire for:

- clarity and stability of assessment, particularly for assessment requirements and timelines to not change during the semester
- an opportunity to attend campus
- support to address the challenge of staying motivated and engaged in study
- synchronous learning experiences to connect with peers and staff
- clarity and focus in course and site design (students too often found too many recommended resources with no specific purpose, which could be overwhelming)
- improved communication frequency and feedback from course staff to help with the stress of the unknown (particularly around assessment).

Baseline practices for Flexible / External mode

The following approaches to focus areas are recommended in order to address challenges experienced in 2020 by staff and students. The approaches outlined below draw together educational research and tips for success from UQ staff and students to develop optimal experiences for courses in 2021.

Course site design

Effective Learn.UQ (Blackboard) sites:

- are easy to navigate and accessible for the range of students in the course
- provide a welcome message from the course coordinator
- provide contact details for all teaching staff in the course, explaining their role in the course and their communication expectations

- provide clear guidance on the course components, as well as advice on how to get started, and how to engage in the course

- clearly state the aims of the course, why those aims are important to the course staff, discipline, program and students, and how the course is structured to help students achieve those aims

- list support services and provide instructions for how to find help

- provide consistency of experience across courses, including assessment, engagement expectations and site design elements

- integrate student cohorts enrolled in different modes (e.g. external and flexible modes) within a course with explicit discussion of the equity between modes of study.

Support and communication

Supportive course teams:

- provide virtual office hours for students to connect with staff

- communicate regularly with students to encourage engagement and provide support

- clearly communicate expectations for students with regard to what constitutes effective engagement in the course

- ensure processes are in place to gather student feedback and adapt the course in response where appropriate

- explicitly use feedback from previous cohorts to enhance the course, assessment and activities

- clearly state the purpose of learning resources and how they relate to learning objectives and assessment.

Learning resources and learning activities

Successful learning activities and materials:

- reflect an appropriate workload for students that is suitable for the course level and learning outcomes

- present up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline

- clearly communicate how using the learning resources to complete learning activities will lead to achievement of learning outcomes

- include a variety of resources (including media) that are suitable for learners' different learning needs

- use active learning strategies that provide opportunities for student engagement and social interaction, such as peer feedback or assessment with a peer element

- have been updated to reflect dates, times and requirements for this semester.

Assessment and feedback

Effective assessment tasks:

- enable students to clearly demonstrate the learning outcomes for the course (while each assessment task does not need to meet all the learning outcomes, all learning outcomes should be covered by the course's assessment regime)

- promote to students the values of academic integrity

- are consistently supported and scaffolded learning activities

- are preceded by formative activities that give students opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills, and to practice them before attempting summative assessment tasks

- provide equitable options for different delivery modes that are, if not identical tasks, of equal academic standard and comparably measure the same learning outcomes.

System support and meta-learning

For many students, online/self-directed learning is a new mode of learning. To familiarise students with this mode, successful teams:

- use digital tools to organise, plan and reflect on learning and support learners to do the same

- promote responsible use of digital tools through role modelling of appropriate digital use (e.g. personal health, safety, relationships and work-life balance in the digital organisation)

- use communication and collaboration tools (e.g. Zoom, discussion forums, Office 365) to enhance learners' experience.

Support and Guidance

Support is available from the Institute for Teaching and Learning Innovation (ITaLI) and teams within your school and faculty. Contact itali@uq.edu.au or visit itali.uq.edu.au/covid-19-teaching-guidance/support.

Students

Students → Engagement with content, Connection with staff, Connection with peers, Navigating different learning conditions

Student Feedback: Challenges

- staying motivated and engaged in study
- coping with a lack of clarity and purpose in course and site design
- overwhelmed by too many recommended resources
- course feeling less valuable than normal semesters' offerings
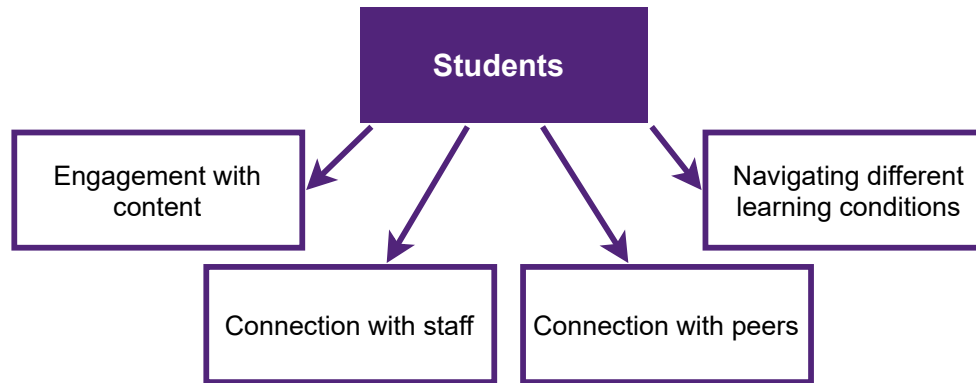
Student Feedback: Desires

- opportunity to attend campus
- connect with peers and staff through synchronous learning experiences
- improved communication frequency and feedback from course staff
- clear assessment requirements that do not change during semester

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Baseline Practices for Digital Learning Experiences

Course Site

- Are easy to navigate and accessible
- Provide a welcome message
- Provide contact details for all teaching staff in the course
- Provide clear guidance on the course components as well as advice on how to get started, and how to engage in the course
- Clearly state the aims of the course, why those aims are important
- List support services
- Provide consistency of experience across the courses
- Integrate multiple cohorts where appropriate.

Support & Communication

- Provide virtual office hours for students to connect with staff
- Communicate regularly with students to encourage engagement and provide support
- Clearly communicate expectations for students regarding what constitutes effective engagement in the course
- Ensure processes are in place to gather student feedback and adapt the course in response
- Explicitly use feedback from previous cohorts to enhance the course, assessment and activities
- Clearly state the purpose of learning resources and how they relate to learning objectives and assessment

Learning Resources & Activities

- Reflect an appropriate workload for students
- Present up-to-date theory and practice in the discipline •
- Clearly communicate how using the learning resources to complete learning activities will lead to achievement of learning outcomes
- Include a variety of resources (including media) that are suitable for learners' different learning needs
- Use active learning strategies that provide opportunities for student engagement and social interaction
- Have been updated to reflect dates, times and requirements for this semester

Assessment & Feedback

- Enable students to clearly demonstrate the learning outcomes for the course.
- Promote to students the values of academic integrity
- Are consistently supported and scaffolded learning activities
- Include formative activities that give students opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills.
- Provide equitable options for different delivery modes that are of equal academic standard.

System support / Meta-learning

- Use digital tools to organise, plan and reflect on learning and support learners to do the same.
- Promote responsible use of digital tools through role modelling of appropriate digital use (eg. personal health, safety, relationships and work-life balance in the digital organisation)
- Use communication and collaboration tools (e.g. Zoom, discussion forums, office365) to enhance learners' experience.