

Concurrent Session D
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Session 3
Real World Learning Experiences: Blended Learning and Work Ready Opportunities

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Kate Ramzan-Levy is the Faculty Manager of The University of Newcastle's Faculty of Business and Law. Kate has been instrumental in the Faculty's increasing engagement with blended learning as she actively prepares the Faculty for the move to NewSpace in 2017. Kate is a member of the Higher Education Partnerships Participation Program (HEPPP) funded research team investigating the effects of blended learning on university retention and success.

Sarah Tooth is a Teaching and Learning Equity Officer in the Faculty of Business and Law at The University of Newcastle. In this role, Sarah coordinates both the Lucy Mentoring Program, and a Higher Education Partnerships Participation Program (HEPPP) funded research project, 'Investigating the effects of blended learning on university retention and success.'

The University Of Newcastle, Australia has an enduring commitment to equity and social justice. It is a core value, vision and strategic direction, communicated through the University's New Futures Strategic Plan 2016 - 2025, and embedded in policy and initiative.

The Faculty of Business and Law's students' demographics represent the University of Newcastle's diverse student population. The diverse student body includes a high number of students who are in the first generation of their family to attend university, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and/or are entering university at a mature age. The Faculty is committed to supporting students from under-represented backgrounds to enter, graduate and succeed, by optimising their learning experiences.

In 2017 the Faculty of Business and Law is relocating from the University's primary, bushland-set campus to NewSpace, a new \$95 million CBD campus. The move offers opportunities to both grow the innovative teaching and learning approaches fostered within the Faculty over the past 2½ years, and to further cultivate relationships with local industry and professionals. Both a blended learning approach, and a number of the Faculty's external and student engagement initiatives, provide our diverse student body with a rich and varied offering of curricular and extra-curricular real-world learning experiences. The move thus offers opportunities for the further development of strategies and initiatives that support students to achieve.

The Faculty of Business and Law professional staff, working alongside academic staff members, have been instrumental in designing, refining, and implementing real-world learning experiences for our students. This is exemplified in two initiatives: a Higher Education Partnerships Participation Program (HEPPP) funded research project 'Investigating the effects of blended learning on university retention and success,' and the provision of a suite of work-ready opportunities for students, including the Lucy Mentoring Program.

Research Project

The construction of NewSpace has been a catalyst for transforming teaching in the Faculty of Business and Law. The new CBD campus had a design brief that sought to transform the student learning experience, with the focus to be on collaborative, activity-based sessions, augmented by technology. To enable the transformation to blended learning, the University invested in state-of-the-art teaching facility refurbishments at its current campus in 2015, so that the Faculty could prepare for 2017. A key focus has been on evaluating successes and learnings.

With this focus in mind, a research team of academic and professional staff from within the Faculty and across a number of the University's central services is undertaking a 2016 HEPPP funded project. The project aims to investigate first year Faculty of Business and Law students' experiences with blended learning; specifically whether student expectations about learning and access to technology affect their experiences, and whether these factors affect course retention and success. It is particularly focused on first-in-family and/or low socio-economic status domestic students in their first year of study, a group known to have a high attrition from university compared to their peers. The initial findings will be considered in this presentation.

Lucy Mentoring Program

The Faculty of Business and Law offers students a suite of work ready opportunities that provide students with a range of workplace experiences relevant to career interests, and occasions to develop capabilities relevant to career goals. The opportunities include career skills workshops, industry placements, projects, guest lectures, site visits, and mentoring.

The Lucy Mentoring Program is an innovative leadership program matching women studying business, commerce and law with industry mentors. The establishment of Lucy in 2004 was underpinned by a commitment to increase the numbers of women employed in the private, not-for-profit, and public sectors at the middle and senior management level. The program offers Faculty students valuable real world exposure and experiences, and Faculty academic and professional staff the opportunity to meaningfully engage with local professionals.

In 2016, Lucy will include female secondary students. In the pilot program, business and legal secondary students will be matched with University student participants, who will act as mentors. The secondary students will also have the opportunity to spend time with the Lucy industry mentors. Underpinned by the Faculty's commitment to equity, the pilot will invite secondary students who have the potential to attend university, and, if realised, will be in the first generation of their family to do so. The outcomes of the pilot program will be discussed in this presentation.