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Springfield campus (with video conference)

*REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT:  
CONNECTEDNESS, BUSINESS AND  
LEARNING:  
CREATING SUSTAINABLE  
COMMUNITIES*

Conference Sponsors

University of Southern Queensland.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE CONFERENCE PREFACE.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PAPER ONE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BUILDING CONNECTIVITY IN THE LOCKYER VALLEY REGION ....</b>	<b>8</b>
KAREN MILLER AND CEC PEDERSEN .....	8
<b>PAPER TWO: WINE TASTING: SHOULD GRANITE BELT WINERIES CHARGE FOR TASTING?.....</b>	<b>19</b>
DR. NOELEEN MCNAMARA .....	19
FRANCES CASSIDY .....	19
<b>PAPER THREE: LOCAL RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON TOURISM: AN ESPIRITU SANTO AND TANGOA ISLANDS, A VANUATU STUDY.....</b>	<b>29</b>
FRANCES CASSIDY .....	29
<b>PAPER FOUR: CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSES BY QUEENSLAND LOCAL COUNCILS.....</b>	<b>38</b>
HEATHER ZEPEL & CHRISTINA JAMES-OVERHEU.....	38
<b>PAPER FIVE: CARBON OFFSETTING BY QUEENSLAND TOURISM OPERATORS.....</b>	<b>48</b>
HEATHER ZEPEL <sup>1</sup> & NARELLE BEAUMONT <sup>2</sup> .....	48
<b>PAPER SIX: MARKETING PLANNING CHALLENGES IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS: A MANAGERIAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK FOR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS.....</b>	<b>58</b>
DR. MICHAEL K. MILLS.....	58
<b>PAPER SEVEN: IF A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS, HOW DO YOU VALUE A THOUSAND MEMORIES?.....</b>	<b>81</b>
BARRIE TODHUNTER.....	81
<b>PAPER EIGHT: REPRIMANDABLE OFFENCES: DEFINING EMPLOYEE MISBEHAVIOUR FOR INVESTIGATIONS OF EMPLOYER DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES.....</b>	<b>91</b>

KIM SOUTHEY .....	91
<b>PAPER NINE: SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN REGIONAL COUNCILS IN SOUTH EAST QUEENSLAND</b> .....	<b>102</b>
DR RENEE MALAN .....	102
PROF RONEL ERWEE.....	103
<b>PAPER 10: PERCEPTION OF SUCCESS IN A NASCENT WINE INDUSTRY .....</b>	<b>117</b>
MEHRYAR NOORIAFSHAR .....	117
CONOR VIBERT .....	117
<b>SUSTAINABILITY AND THE CHANGE IN PUBLIC OPINION: NATURAL DISASTER EMPOWERS JAPANESE CITIZENS</b> .....	<b>123</b>
TERUYO OMURA.....	123
<b>HOW DOES LOCAL RADIO BRING CONNECTION TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES?.....</b>	<b>132</b>
ASHLEY JONES.....	132
<b>STUDENT ATTENTION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN A TWITTER-FRIENDLY CLASSROOM.....</b>	<b>141</b>
MUSTAFA ALLY .....	141
<b>TABLE OF AUTHORS</b>	
Karen Miller and Cec Pedersen.....	8
Dr. Noeleen McNamara .....	19
Frances Cassidy .....	19
Frances Cassidy .....	29
Heather Zeppel & Christina James-Overheu.....	38

Heather Zeppel <sup>1</sup> & Narelle Beaumont <sup>2</sup> .....	48
Dr. Michael K. Mills .....	58
Barrie Todhunter .....	81
Kim Southey.....	91
Dr Renee Malan.....	102
Prof Ronel Erwee .....	103
Mehryar Nooriafshar .....	117
Conor Vibert.....	117
Teruyo Omura .....	123
Ashley Jones.....	132
Mustafa Ally.....	141

## **The Conference Preface**

by Associate Professor Margee Hume

The 2012 *Regional Development: connectedness, business and learning* colloquia at USQ Springfield campus is the initiative of the School of Management and Marketing and the Faculty of Business and law at the Springfield Campus. It is designed to advance the current knowledge in the areas of developing regional and sustainable communities and focuses on the associated areas of connectedness, business and learning.

## **Regional Development: connectedness, business and learning colloquia**

*Regional Development: connectedness, business and learning* conference complies with the academic research conference guidelines as set down by Department of Education, Science and Training, Australia (DEST), and other organisations. For Australian delegates, the Proceedings are Category E, Conference Publications: E1 \* Full Written Paper \* Refereed.

*Regional Development: connectedness, business and learning* also complies with the requirements of the Performance-Based Research Fund administered by the Tertiary Education Commission and other organisations. For New Zealand contributors Proceedings are classed as Quality-Assured Conference Papers (Refereed). All papers have been subject to a comprehensive, double-blind peer review process. All such papers which have passed the competitive review process are accepted for presentation at Building Business Communities: Justice, Performance and Change conference.

By submitting their work for presentation at the Conference authors have assigned to USQ

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### THE CONFERENCE PREFACE

by Associate Professor Margee Hume

*Regional Development: connectedness, business and learning* colloquia at USQ Springfield campus is the initiative of the School of Management and Marketing and the Faculty of Business and law at the Springfield Campus. It is designed to advance the current knowledge in the areas of *connectedness, business and learning in communities* connecting communities has become one of the latest topical areas of research in particular for regional

areas. The rollout of the national broadband network, the increase in the role of social media and digital devices in work and learning and the ability of socially, emotionally and geographically isolated communities to become connected have positioned this area of research as a vital area of investigation . The colloquia brings together researchers in the area of information technology, management , regional development, education and marketing and engages them in discourse related to community and regional development, digital futures, education in regional environments and sustainability.

Community engagement and connectedness is a term that refers to interaction of people with their community and the connectedness of the community as a whole. Community engagement provides the opportunity for social connectedness, which enables people to achieve shared goals in business and societal values. Social connectedness is linked not only to the health of individuals but to the health of communities. It incorporates employment security service provision, job satisfaction and esteem, well-being, economic strength, social stability and sustainability. Community engagement and connectedness mean different things to different people and the term is advancing to include how we connect and the impact of connectiveness and the digital world. Clearly there is a need to enhance connectedness in local communities; it doesn't occur naturally. The aim of this colloquia is to address the many aspects of how to improve, enable and benefit from improved connectedness, learning and build community resiliency and business practice for future development and performance.

This conference expands the research and practitioner focus in the area of connectedness business and learning capturing the new recognition of the changes and public issues for community consumers and business. The set of the papers presented in the proceedings represents works of considered scholarship and have been produced through the process of double blind peer refereeing. Conferences, however, are more than their published proceedings. They represent a valuable venue for formal and informal exchange among academics/ professional / industry / practitioners and community stakeholders. It is through these interactions that we develop both ideas and collaborations that allow us to advance and evolve the important issues and agendas for building sustainable communities.

We thank the Keynote addresses from Dr Mustafa Ally. We appreciate the interest from international affiliates and research higher degree students including:

City University

SEGi University College – Malaysia

Han Chian College – Malaysia

SEGi College – Kuala Lumpur

SEGi College – Penang

SEGi College – Sarawak

SEGi College – Subang Jaya

Far Eastern Federal University - Russia

Proserve Education Management Development Institute (Thames Business School) – Pakistan

EASB institute of Management – Singapore

The Institute of chartered Accounts – Sri Lanka

AEA Training Centre – Mauritius

South Africa Australian Education Centre (SAAEC) – South Africa

College for Higher Education Studies – CHES – FIJI

UUNZ Institute of Business – New Zealand

And finally, the support and contribution from the Australian centre for Sustainable Business and Development. The many contributions to the conference have focused on the overarching theme of building regions and communities and the drivers of connectedness, business development and learning. Many of the authors are working with international and national collaborators in major projects that form the basis of the discussions and research papers presented. We thank the national collaborators for their support and acknowledge the enriched contributions evidenced by the colloquia to support and contribute to the advancing national and international work in the area of sustainable communities. We thank the contributions and interest from the higher research degree students who reside in many diverse international settings.

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## **Paper Seven: If a picture is worth a thousand words, how do you value a thousand memories?**

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### **Abstract**

This article examines characteristics and circumstances of postgraduate coursework students who tend to fly under the radar of university support systems and who often experience considerable difficulty in making a successful transition to postgraduate study. The case study described illustrates many of the issues facing postgraduate students studying at a distance, as well as the benefits of a flexible and blended learning model where such issues are addressed through opportunities to experience a face-to-face learning environment as a component of their studies. Problems arise for many students because they have either not undertaken university study for some time, or as is becoming increasingly common, have never studied at



university at all. Either way, such students struggle to understand the learning objectives and expected outcomes of postgraduate study and to demonstrate the skills expected of graduates of such programs. They also are frequently unable to access academic support services because, as mature-aged learners, they predominantly study part-time in off-campus mode. For universities, these problems will be exacerbated by the recent introduction of the new Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the expectations of agencies that administer the AQF that graduates will demonstrate achievement of designated threshold learning outcomes. To explore these issues, this paper examines an academic program model that tries to overcome the problems identified above by combining principles of open learning, flexible learning, distance education and block teaching mode. The findings suggest that an empirical study needs to be undertaken to explore problems of off-campus study for postgraduate coursework students and to determine under what circumstances it may provide optimal learning outcomes.

## **Introduction and background**

In 2005, the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) was developing its new campus at Springfield, located between Brisbane and Ipswich, to complement the main campus at Toowoomba, and a smaller campus at Fraser Coast. Part of the planning included development of new academic programs that would be academically relevant to the prospective new students and commercially sustainable. The Vice-Chancellor outlined a vision that academic programs at Springfield would be “*classic USQ plus*” with innovative program components in keeping with the Springfield campus themes of “career focused and community centred” ([Lovegrove 2005](#)). Programs were selected and developed at both undergraduate and at postgraduate levels to cater for a wide range of prospective students in the catchment area.

One of the proposed programs was the Master of Project Management. Project management had been taught as a discipline at USQ since the late 1980s as part of a Department of Defence contract. By 2005, it had evolved from a strand in the research-based Master of Business to an area of specialised study in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program and a stand-alone Postgraduate Certificate in Project Management. Up to that time, it had only been taught in off-campus mode and the new Springfield campus provided an opportunity to explore an on-campus mode of study commencing in 2006.

## **Background and identification of problems**

Springfield campus is located in a rapidly-growing part of the western corridor of Brisbane. Although located within the city of Ipswich to the west, the main transport corridors lead eastward towards Brisbane. Although transport issues have impacted on the ability to attract undergraduate students from Ipswich, the campus is conveniently located for postgraduate students who tend to be more distributed demographically for employment, and who have access to motor vehicles for transport. Feedback from students participating in the program indicates that approximately 75 percent of students travel to the campus by private vehicle. Postgraduate students tend to be older and therefore have families and jobs, the typical 'earner-learner' ([Stuparich 2001](#)). From the perspective of a postgraduate student, time away from work is expensive, and time away from families is undesirable. Additionally, the need to attend on-campus lectures can incur costs for both travel and accommodation. Student feedback indicates that the majority of students are self-funded with no financial support from their employers. Understanding the constraints faced by postgraduate students, as well as their ambitions and dreams, is important in the design and development of successful academic programs.

To USQ, it was important that the Springfield campus also be an attractive destination for international on-campus students so programs were designed to comply with the requirements of Education Queensland so a CRICOS code (Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students) could be obtained to allow international students to gain a student visa. This mandated a minimum of forty hours per semester of contact time for each course (subject) in the program. From these various considerations, a framework emerged for an on-campus Master's program to meet all of the essential requirements for the key stakeholders. It had to:

- provide approximately forty hours of contact time;
- minimise time away from work and family;
- be least disruptive in terms of how many times it was necessary to travel to the campus;

- not penalise students who could not always attend due to work and family commitments; and
- most importantly, add value to the learning process which could otherwise be done off-campus as an external student.

### **Design of the program**

Based on the above parameters, a program emerged that provided two 3-day on-campus sessions for students comprising elements of flexible ([Beattie & James 1997](#); [Latchem & Hanna 2002](#)) and blended learning ([Bonk & Kim 2004](#)). This minimised the need for travel, avoided the fatigue and concentration problems associated with continuous full-time learning activities over six consecutive days, and provided time for reflection and consolidation of learning between on-campus sessions. Importantly, this model also provided remote, disadvantaged and isolated students better access to campus resources, academic and support staff, fellow students and industry practitioners (*'I could not attend otherwise'* (Student 2012)).

To maximise the value of the face-to-face time, a lecturing model was avoided for the on-campus sessions, and full study materials were provided to the on-campus students similar to those provided to external students who studied completely off-campus. Blending elements of distance education and on-campus study allowed the on-campus students to study independently prior to, between, and after the on-campus sessions ([Council for Higher Education Accreditation 1999](#); [Richards 2002](#)). Students could prepare for these sessions so that face-to-face activities could focus on a collaborative learning environment ([Sheehy 2007](#)) rather than waste time in note-taking.

Industry practitioners were brought into the on-campus sessions to provide an authentic learning environment ([Berge et al. 2004](#)) and insights into professional practice ([Todhunter 2003](#)), and to provide contemporary views of how practice can diverge from what the literature might often suggest. Case studies from practice ([Schwalbe & Verma 2001](#)) formed the basis of collaborative group learning activities during the sessions which often carried over throughout the day and sometimes over the entire three days as a thematic exercise. Industry presenters have indicated that *“workshops allow PMs to present real world situations to*

*students so that they can contextualise the theory they are learning with real life practice”* (Industry practitioner 2009). Industry and government-based practitioners have volunteered over 200 guest presentations to date, providing evidence of the value that they place on this learning model as well as providing opportunities for their own professional development. Students have indicated that they place high value on *“industry practitioners who provide the essential practical side of the learning process”* (Student 2009). Professional bodies such as the Project Management Institute and the Australian Institute of Project Management encourage members to participate, providing evidence of the value placed on the IWM by industry. *“I like the opportunity to answer their questions as I see this as the student trying to map what he/she is learning to the practice in the world of work”* (Industry presenter 2009).

The nature and requirements of assessment items could be examined to allow students to better understand the program objectives and the expected learning outcomes ([Biggs 2005](#)). Open discussions within the workshops revealed a significant lack of study skills, and this led to targeted sessions on development of skills to undertake assessment tasks to achieve the learning objectives ([Oliver 2000](#)). To assist in this regard, specialist academic staff from the university’s learning support office and the library provided information and training sessions which were of value across many courses including those that were not project management related.

A learning and teaching model emerged which was best described as ‘intensive workshops’ ([Davies 2006](#); [Finger & Penney 2001](#)), although this term was difficult to describe in full to those not actually involved in the on-campus sessions ([Burton & Nesbit 2002](#)). Students eventually divided into camps who thought they were too intensive and wanted workshops shortened, and those who thought they were not intensive enough and wanted to extend them over a 12-hour period rather than an 8-hour period each day.

Networking activities emerged that extended beyond the lunch breaks and social and professional networking activities became quite commonplace. From these, learning circles and study groups emerged which added to the value of the intensive workshops as students could continue the conversations commenced in the workshops in other face-to-face environments or in a virtual environment ([Mayes et al. 2002](#)). Industry practitioners took ownership of elements of the curriculum and workshops, and returned on numerous occasions

to continue conversations about the industry themes that they had adopted such as risk management, quality management, stakeholder management and procurement management. Industry practitioners also used the workshops as employment recruitment opportunities and students were made aware of project management positions that were circulated on an informal basis.

Enrolments have trebled over six years (from around 15 initially to more than 50 in some workshops) and approximately 20 percent of all domestic students now choose the IWM. Students have flown in from Perth, Melbourne, Canberra and Singapore to participate because they value the interactive and collaborative nature of the learning environment so highly. In the words of one student, *'If a picture is worth 1000 words, then an intensive workshop is worth 1000 hours of independent reading'* (Student 2012). Intensive workshops provide thousands of mental images and conversations that help students to challenge their preconceptions about what they are learning, and to consolidate that learning as a result of the collaborative and interactive experiences afforded in the face-to-face component. The comments provided by students who have attended the intensive workshops and the improved learning outcomes outlined below suggest that the blended model adds value to the learning experience. Feedback shows that positive 'word of mouth' from past students is a powerful motivation for students to select courses offered in the IWM (*"I could not imagine studying any other way at this stage of my professional and personal life"* (Student 2012)).

### **Evidence to support the program design**

Face-to-face teaching is an expensive service to provide. Apart from the forty hours of contact time, there is considerable time required to prepare materials and resources for workshops. The additional costs of face-to-face teaching can only be justified on a financial basis due to additional enrolments which occur as a result of the workshop offerings, or on an educational basis due to improved learning outcomes ([Kretovics & McCambridge 2002](#); [Meyer & Scrivener 1995](#)). These outcomes are difficult to substantiate in a quantitative manner and qualitative data has been primarily used to date to ascertain and justify the value of the on-campus model

<[http://tlu.fbe.unimelb.edu.au/papers/academic\\_resources/Intensive%20Teaching%20Adv%20and%20Disad.pdf](http://tlu.fbe.unimelb.edu.au/papers/academic_resources/Intensive%20Teaching%20Adv%20and%20Disad.pdf)>.

Surveys of all students attending the workshops have been critical for reflection on the value derived from the workshops for staff and students, and for identification of issues of concern to students. The feedback has been used to refine the model over the six years it has run, and to provide an optimal balance between various activities that students see as adding value in order to justify the time and the expense involved on their part to attend. Many of the students are self-funded and incur costs to attend as a result of taking leave without pay ([Stuparich 2001](#)), or consuming other forms of leave. Employer-funded students prefer to attend workshops during normal working hours, while self-funded students tend to prefer weekends to minimise costs. It is a delicate balance to consider the concerns of all student cohorts.

Student comments are mostly positive although the model does not suit everybody. Students who are highly-independent learners ([Marchant et al. 2002](#); [Moore 1973](#)) tend to become frustrated by the slow pace when fundamental issues are explored for the benefit of students who are new to the discipline of project management. International students struggle with the intensity of the discussion and the requirement to concentrate over a full day in a language that is not their native language.

Continuous workshop evaluations provide evidence of deeper learning ([Biggs 2003](#)) which manifest in improved learning outcomes. Overall students place a high value on the workshops as indicated in table 1 which shows the overall score on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) for a range of courses over 2011 and 2012 across various disciplines for the overall value of the intensive workshop that they attended.

**Table 1: Student rating of 'Overall value of intensive workshop' for a range of 3-day intensive workshops**

Course #	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	Course 7	Total
Course code	MGTxx xx	MKTxx xx	MGTxx xx	ACCxx xx	MGTxx xx	MGTxx xx	MGTxx xx	
No. of respondents	14	9	25	11	26	9	27	121

<b>Rating out of 5</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>4.89</b>	<b>4.36</b>	<b>4.55</b>	<b>4.31</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>4.52</b>
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(Legend: MGT=management, ACC=accounting, MKT=marketing)

Because of the inclusion of sessions by specialist academic staff on learning skills and on how to find relevant resources for assessment activities, students who attend the on-campus workshops appear to achieve higher learning outcomes than those who study independently. Table 2 suggests measurably higher levels of retention and progression than those in external mode using data from a core project management course that has been run in intensive workshop mode.

**Table 2: Progression rates for core course (students gaining a grade of HD, Distinction, Credit or Pass**

<b>Core course</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Progression - EXT</b>	71.58%	75.25%	77.13%	79.10%	86.67%	<b>81.83%</b>
<b>Progression - IWM</b>	75.00%	85.00%	89.36%	78.78%	94.29%	<b>87.89%</b>

**EXT** – Students enrolled in external mode. **IWM** – Students enrolled in IWM mode

## **Conclusions**

This paper has highlighted issues that suggest postgraduate coursework students face considerable challenges because of their personal circumstances and because of the modes of learning that they tend to adopt in order to achieve a balance between the competing demands on their time. Such students tend to study part-time and at a distance where flexibility is important for balancing those commitments. The paper has examined a learning and teaching model that has evolved at an outer metropolitan university campus in an attempt to address the needs of postgraduate students, built around flexible and blended models of learning. Learning outcomes suggest that the intensive workshop model is an effective one for the cohort of students, but data collection and analysis to date is inadequate to draw meaningful conclusions at this stage. More rigorous analysis of existing data and collection of additional data are required to fully explore the implications of the intensive workshops in relation to learning outcomes, and this is proposed as the next stage of the evaluation of the model.

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## **Paper Eight: Reprimandable Offences: Defining Employee Misbehaviour for Investigations of Employer Disciplinary Practices**

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