Victoria University Blended Learning Strategy

Vision Statement

This strategy aligns with VU's Design Aspirations as they relate to student success, the offering of quality, contemporary courses with a unique VU Bend, and connecting deeply with industry. In doing so it imagines a future where VU courses and the staff that provide for them are renowned for their contemporary and creative approaches to pedagogy, technology enhanced learning and teaching, and high levels of student engagement and success.

Aims

- To enhance student access, experience, engagement and outcomes through an effective blend of face to face and digitally enabled learning opportunities.
- To apply and maximise blended learning opportunities in making our offer to students flexible across pace, place and mode.

Principles

Implementation of the VU Blend has a number of underlying assumptions and principles:

- Blended learning is established on a number of recognised pedagogic techniques, models and skills.
- Blended learning approaches should be selected that are appropriate within the context of the discipline, and at the whole-of-course level to ensure consistency in student experience.
- Learning materials should be fit for purpose and may include open education resources and materials developed internally.
- The VU Blend should optimise the impact of any face to face contact time.
- The VU Blend should enable flexible and mobile access to teaching and learning resources.
- The VU Blend implementation will support students and staff in the development of their digital literacies and identify other contingent work needed to ensure its success.

These principles are based on a tripartite relationship between capability, infrastructure and learning assets:

Capability

Infrastructure   **Learning Assets**
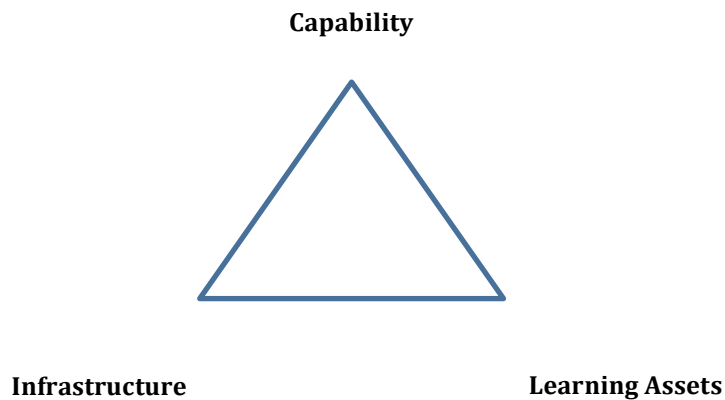
Outcomes

Successful implementation of the VU Blend will achieve a number of outcomes for students, staff, and the University.

For Students:

- Provides a learning experience that reflects contemporary uses and applications of technology.
- The ability to access interactive, networked and creative learning opportunities on and off campus.
- Improves and extends digital literacies.
- Enhances student engagement.
- Enables the increasing use of mobile technologies for learning.

For Staff:

- Reduces the amount of repetitive teaching
- Opens opportunities for the use of publicly available content and resources.
- Provides access to data about student learning and engagement.
- Improves and extends digital literacies through engagement with authentic formal and informal professional development.
- Assists in the provision of greater consistency and responsiveness in the experiences of students.

For the University:

- Brings the institution up-to-date in the use of digital environments.
- Affords the opportunity for collaborative creation and sharing of resources.
- Develops a greater capacity to gather and utilise learning analytics data.
- Facilitates the potential to attract and retain students thorough the use of blended learning as a differentiating core teaching and learning strategy.
- Investigation of a Wow! factor to promote the VU brand and proposition.

Deliverables

The main deliverables from the VU Blend strategy are transformed units of study that reflect modern flexible learning opportunities for students. This in turn should lead to increased satisfaction, retention and throughput. As satisfaction increases it is hoped that net promotion and enrolment will also increase. The specific interim deliverables are:

1   The VU Blend Overall

1. Evidence of increased and effective use of blended learning strategies across VU with 100 units in blended mode by 2017 and all units in blended mode by 2020.
2. Evidence of leadership for the VU Blend in each College.
3. Evidence of consistent, pedagogically sound learning design.
4. Evidence of staff and student involvement in the identification, review and ongoing evaluation of the VU Blend.
5. Incorporation of the Minimum Online Standards as appropriate.

2   Staff Support, Development and Communications

1. Recruitment of central and College staff to support the VU Blend and inducted and integrated into a teams with appropriate reporting lines.
2. Regular information, development, practical and celebratory sessions to, by and between Colleges, central teams, students and the wider University community.
3. Identification and promotion of exemplar/champion units, courses and teams.
4. Templates, guides and FAQs developed for inclusion in a comprehensive and well maintained online presence for staff and students (web sites, blogs, etc.).

3   Systems and Infrastructure

1.   Identification of adjunct and supporting projects including analytics, Wi-Fi and learning spaces for alignment with the VU Blend.
2.   Refresh and further development of VU Collaborate and attendant technologies as required.

4   Governance, Accountability and Evaluation

1.   Implementation plans agreed with each College and signed by Deans and the DVCA Provost.
2.   VU Blend accountability, budget, reporting, risk and evaluation frameworks developed with monitoring and reporting cycles established.
3.   Representative cross-portfolio body established to manage strategy, policy and operations of the University's centrally supported educational technologies.
4.   Internal grants and awards with opportunities for research and scholarship aligned to the VU Blend.

5   Investigate the development of a Wow! Factor for New Students

1.   Wow! Factors assessed and if appropriate, implemented in 2017.
2.   Associated communications and evaluation plan in place.

Challenges

Any transition process brings with it challenges in infrastructure, changing practice and capability. There are also challenges inherent in any curriculum and pedagogical models, including the status quo.

Blended learning places responsibility on the learner to work independently and students may not always be predisposed to the required self-regulation and management, or be immediately comfortable with technology based learning. Appendix 1 describes some approaches to blended learning.

Establishing best practice in blended learning requires careful choices about what materials, tools and approaches are utilised. It implies that unit and course redesign is required in order to optimise the blended learning approach, supporting techniques and curriculum organisation. This requires professional agility and development as well as the rational application of resources, along with local and institutional leadership.
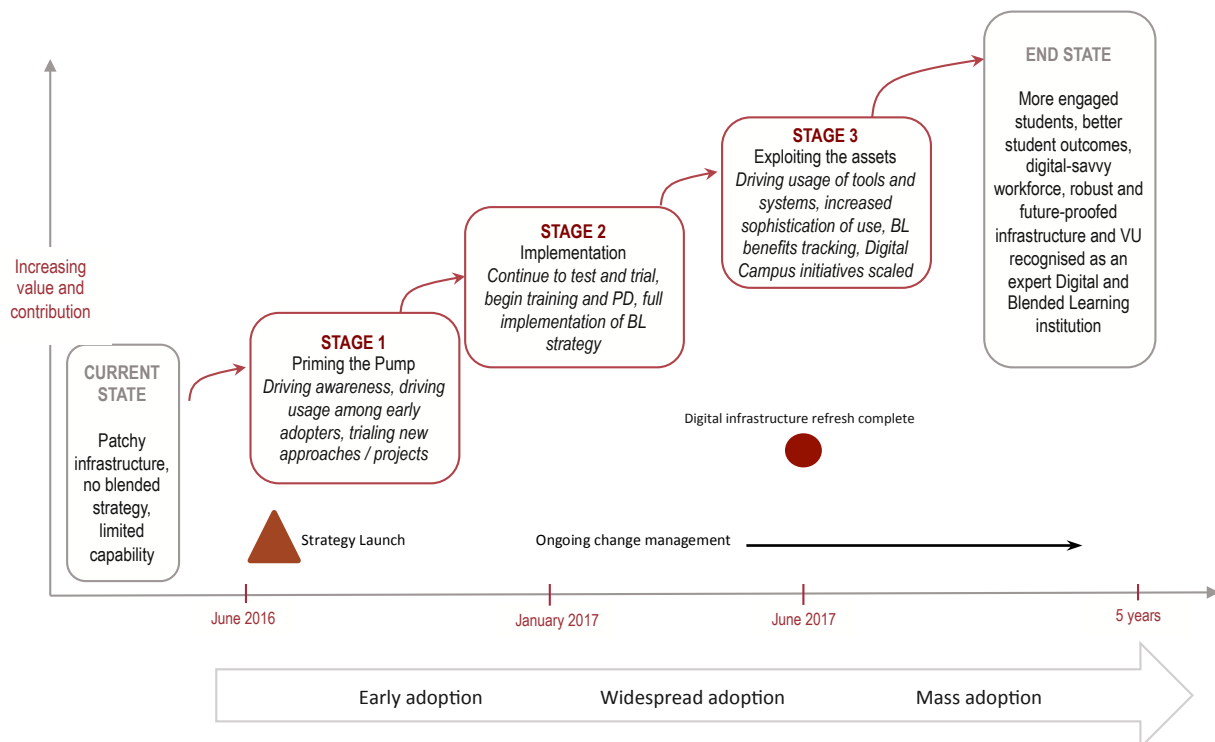
There are also technological challenges for the institution and the user to ensure access to supporting systems, tools and infrastructure. Particular infrastructure challenges within the current VU operating environment include:

- The need to put learning analytics data in the hands of students and staff. This requires making operational the VU Collaborate (Brightspace) analytics module amongst other things
- The need to create a website that more strongly encourages students to enrol at VU and within that a creation of resources pages that encourage staff to access and use resources for blended learning
- Greatly improving the technology infrastructure for students and staff including Wi-Fi, Hardware and data access
- Greatly enhancing the learning space infrastructure to create modern learning environments for structured and unstructured learning
- Increasing the productivity and efficiency of VU as a whole through a systemic review of practice including the appropriateness of academic workload models for a future blended environment

Project and Risk Management

Work needs to proceed quickly but carefully and stakeholders and community needs to be able to see evidence of early success before the end of 2016. A detailed risk matrix will be developed and maintained and then used as a working document.

A clear and present risk is that materials are created and provided online for students to engage with without taking into account a corresponding need manage the overall workload on students and staff, leading to what is commonly called a 'course and a half'. Blended learning should not involve extra work. The best way to avoid this is to design the unit or course from scratch but in the absence of this, a staged approach is often advocated whereby technology and resources are provided to replicate in-class resources for use online, followed by enhancements to the blend where more significant changes to pedagogy are applied, before a transformation to the blend through requiring students to meet learning outcomes out of class. Similarly, a whole of institution staged approach may be represented thus:

Increasing value and contribution

CURRENT STATE
Patchy infrastructure, no blended strategy, limited capability

STAGE 1
Priming the Pump
Driving awareness, driving usage among early adopters, trialing new approaches / projects

STAGE 2
Implementation
Continue to test and trial, begin training and PD, full implementation of BL strategy

STAGE 3
Exploiting the assets
Driving usage of tools and systems, increased sophistication of use, BL benefits tracking, Digital Campus initiatives scaled

END STATE
More engaged students, better student outcomes, digital-savvy workforce, robust and future-proofed infrastructure and VU recognised as an expert Digital and Blended Learning institution

Digital infrastructure refresh complete

Strategy Launch

Ongoing change management

June 2016   January 2017   June 2017   5 years

Early adoption   Widespread adoption   Mass adoption

Appendix 1   Blended Learning Models and Pedagogies

There are many definitions of blended learning as well as the pedagogies and techniques that support them. What follows are some examples. VU will build its own catalogues of examples in practice over time.

Blended Learning Models

The most common definition of blended learning involves the use of online learning combined with face-to-face experiences. Some universities suggest that 30%-70% of the learning should occur online for it to be considered 'blended'. Victoria University is not mandating a ratio but regardless of the amount of online or on campus learning activity, the goal is to provide students with an integrated learning experience in which students have some control over the **time, place and pace** of their learning. There may also be opportunities to personalise learning through a choice of paths through the learning process. Within these general requirements, there is a wide range of blended learning models and approaches, often broken down into a typology of six primary models:

1. Supplemented face to face models

In this model, otherwise known as a 'face to face driver', on campus learning is the primary mode of delivery. Online components are used to support students in completing the required work.

2. Rotation models

Rotation models involve a schedule that requires students to rotate between modes of learning on a regular basis and can involve students rotating between screen and physical learning environments either within or between classes. The common feature is the set schedule in which the online and on campus components are used in sequence to reinforce and/or extend one another.

3. Lab models

Lab models involve all of the learning activities in a screen-based or online environment, but on campus. A teacher provides support and guidance for students as they progress through the activities.

4. Flex models

Flex models primarily involve online learning activities that allow students to pursue learning at their own pace. On campus support, such as tutorial groups or other methods of small group and individual instruction is provided by teaching staff to supplement the online components. The key to this approach is that as student progress the support to achieve the learning outcomes is adapted in order to meet individual or group needs.

5. Self-blend or a la carte models

These models involve a series of activities delivered as both online and on campus experiences, so that students can select the option that works best for them at any given time. Some elements of on campus activity may still be required of all students, but these are limited, as they are in online-driven models.

6. Online-driven models

In online-driven approaches, the learning primarily occurs online, supported virtually by the teacher. All the expected activities, including peer supported learning, readings, practical work and teacher guided learning, occur in the online environment. Additional on campus sessions may be used to provide additional support – for example, periodic workshops.

It should be noted that blended learning is not simply moving current teaching materials online and expecting students to engage with them. It is a fundamental shift from lecture based instruction to student centred learning where technology is used to support active student learning rather than being seen as an end in itself.

Blended Learning Pedagogies and Techniques

The key here is to choose applications, techniques and content that encourage and incentivise student engagement. We will build our own collection and showcase of examples over time. As well as a wide variety of freely available resources and support materials available online, instructional materials for staff may be accessed such as the excellent blended learning essentials MOOC from FutureLearn – a 20 hour course over 5 weeks.