

The web-based lectures were a guide to the readings (just as the face-to-face lectures were also a guide to the readings) with a great deal of specificity, premised upon student centred learning as the most effective way to achieve the subject and faculty objectives. The lectures sought to take students through the readings very closely, posing questions and directing them to those particular passages in the readings which best explained the article or extract at hand and drew their attention to the issues which were the focus of the questions.

Web-based lectures in this way still serve the explanatory purpose of lectures. Arguably, they enhance some aspects of the learning process because they allow students to work through the material at their own pace. They enable a lecturer to direct students comprehensively through an argument, focusing on the crucial issues, showing students how to read a complicated piece of work. Such instruction simply cannot be done in a face-to-face lecture.

How can processes of critical analysis be introduced and taught to students using web-based lectures? The strategy employed built on the question-based explanatory approach. Students were frequently asked to compare and contrast materials or particular arguments and themes from different readings. In doing this, they were often reminded expressly of the analytical objectives of the course.

The teaching strategy implemented in Introduction to Law was designed with the aim of achieving the objectives of the UWS LLB program and the objectives of the subject. The Introduction to Law web page and the web-lectures were characterised by the use of a closely directed guide to readings that posed questions to students. While there was a limited amount of explanation that enabled some overview, summaries and contextual material to be provided, students were required to complete the course readings in order to adequately grasp the arguments and themes addressed in the subject. The goals of critical and comparative analysis were similarly addressed by

posing questions to students, which required them to reflect on the merits of different readings and the implications of different arguments.

The development of the strategy thus represents not so much an excursion forward into the brave new world of Internet technology – the use of technology should not of itself be seen to represent ‘progress’ in teaching. Instead, it is a reflection on what we do, looking back to the rationales and objectives of teaching and learning in higher education. The use of the web was thus not conceived of as a step ‘beyond’ lecturing, but rather as a reconstitution of it in a different medium.

Why teaching matters and technology doesn't: an evaluation and review of web-based lectures

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This paper – a companion to the first – is an evaluation and review of the web-based lectures and the teaching strategy that was applied. The main evaluation mechanism was a survey completed by students in the last tutorial class of semester where 15 to 20 minutes were set aside specifically for this purpose.

The level of student satisfaction was on the whole quite high. Approximately one third of the respondents thought the web-based lecture delivery was very good or excellent, while 60.9% of students thought it was good. By way of comparison with other subjects using face-to-face lectures, the student feedback was very positive: of the 181 comparative comments offered, 72.4% were positive with regard to the web-based program in Introduction to Law in comparison to the face-to-face lectures in other subjects. Overall, the web-based lectures compared very favourably: 69.1% of the 55 respondents who made a direct comparison indicated the lectures were either good and compared well, or very good and better than face-to-face lectures in other subjects.

The positive comments overwhelmingly expressed a liking for the convenience of the web-based lecture, including the ability to work at one's own pace and the ability to access the lectures from home. The negative comments showed a substantial number of responses – 10% of the total negative comments – favouring face-to-face teaching and finding web-based delivery too impersonal.

The evaluation of the Starting Out project suggests that on the whole it was viewed by students as a very successful move into flexible web-based delivery of the lecture component of Introduction to Law with regard to technology as well as teaching and learning. It is also clear that the technology used for on-line delivery needs to be simple and straightforward, easily accessible and economically viable for students. For all this, the results of the student survey are frequently suggestive not of great shifts in student learning or a new-found enthusiasm for Internet-based teaching, but rather of a desire for little more than the convenience of accessing lectures at the time and place of one's own choosing. In this light, can it be said that the project was successful in terms of teaching and learning?

The measure of success to employ is whether students engaged in deep learning, or at least whether Introduction to Law impacted positively on students' approaches to learning which will develop further as they progress through their degrees. The evaluation suggests that the use of the web in no way detracts from that possibility and, more positively, the Internet appears to be a medium which holds the potential to impact significantly on student approaches to learning. But this impact will not be the result of technology. If the key themes of the evaluation were to be drawn together in one sentence, the Starting Out project points to the core conclusion that the most fundamental questions of web-based instruction concern not the technology but the practice of teaching.

A self-learning orientation needs to remain at the heart of any subject which

endeavours to have students engaging in deep learning and to instil in students a desire and capacity for lifelong learning. This is axiomatic in a constructivist understanding of learning: that the most meaningful forms of learning – learning as the abstraction of meaning and learning as an interpretative process aimed at understanding an outside reality – can be undertaken by the learner her or himself.

In this light, two revisions to Introduction to Law can be envisaged, which might go some way towards countering the negative reaction and simultaneously improve the pedagogical aspects of the subject.

First, the self-learning emphasis could be made more explicit. That is, there needs to be a clearer and more frequent explanation to students why there are too many questions without answers, and why the web-lectures differ from the lecture process in other subjects. Second, if the self-learning emphasis is shifted from the periphery to the centre of course design, Introduction to Law becomes as much about the learning process as about the course content. Further, the content of the course can possibly be driven by and derived from the learning process itself.

It is claimed that it is teaching and not technology that matters. While that observation may at first blush seem a little trite, for two reasons this is not so. The first reason is that the attempt in this article has been to give some concrete form to what might otherwise remain an abstract point and in doing so to illustrate the rationale for developing a course in a particular way. The second reason lies in the very fact that the rapid shift to flexible delivery appears all too frequently to be driven by concerns of budgets, technology and marketing – rather than by teaching.

The Internet is a tool that holds great potential for teaching and learning in higher education, but only if teaching and learning remain the fundamental objectives. The questions which need to be asked do not turn on the capacity of the Internet to perform different functions at

ever-increasing speed and volume, but on what we as teachers might best be able to do with the wide range of capabilities new technologies offer.

www.legaeducation.edu: using technology to educate the public

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While the primary focus of any law faculty will always be its law students, the Internet and other new technologies enable law teachers to assume a central role in providing free legal education to the public. Although many schools are experimenting with distance learning and computer-assisted legal education to train law students, the real power of those tools may be their potential to facilitate public access to legal information. Traditionally, educating the general public has not been a primary responsibility of law professors, but today we have not only an opportunity, but also an obligation, to develop computer-based legal education materials for the public.

The provision of legal education to the general public should not be left to the media or market forces. Law teachers should not be so constrained. We could design materials that could be provided to the public for free. Free universal access to basic legal education materials would increase public understanding of the law far more effectively than any materials that could be marketed by commercial providers or delivered by the media.

Finally, law faculty are uniquely qualified, and perhaps obligated, to create public educational materials because they have the expertise and the flexibility to devote adequate time to the project.

The key to the development of useful public educational materials will be collaboration. Law faculty should work in teams with specialists in learning theory and cognitive sciences, software designers, government agencies, and faculty from other disciplines that are related to their field of law. The learning modules that they create might be interactive

tutorials, lectures, or even games that focus on a discrete area of law.

Collaboration in development of the materials is vital for several reasons. Collaboration with software designers and education specialists is important because law faculty will be presenting their material to a new audience.

Collaboration with faculty from other disciplines is important because the law can be made truly accessible to the public only if it is described in context. Finally, collaboration with government agencies is important because their direct contact with the public may be the best source of distribution of public education materials.

Some may argue that it is inappropriate for law faculty to design legal education materials for the general public because it is outside our primary mission – to train our students to be lawyers. But that vision of the law teacher's role is far too limited. Law schools usually expect faculty to excel in teaching, scholarship and service. While our responsibility to our students is primary, it is not exclusive. Development of the materials would be consistent with law teachers' obligation – as lawyers – to improve the quality of justice for all persons and to provide pro bono legal services. Further, when faculty take an active role in teaching the public about the law, it sends a strong message to students that public and pro bono service is an important responsibility for all lawyers.

Finally, development of public legal education materials by faculty could also improve the legal profession by enhancing the public perception of lawyers. Public opinion of lawyers has been low for many years, perhaps because of lack of information, misperception, and misunderstanding.