



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
A U S T R A L I A

BLENDING LEARNING STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2018

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Introduction

Blended learning is defined as “the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face (f2f) and online approaches and technologies” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 148). The inclusion of technologies in this definition encompasses a range of computer-mediated and mobile technologies, teaching and learning tools.

TEQSA strongly encourages initiatives within the sector to improve the quality of the student’s experience of higher education, whether this is through more diverse content or the creation of more effective and accessible modes of delivery (2013, p.2).

In addition, ‘[u]nder the TEQSA Act, registered higher education providers are obliged to meet and continue to meet the Threshold Standards’ (p. 8).¹

Blended learning opportunities fits with the following Domains and subsections:

- Domain 2: Learning Environment
 - Section 2.1 – Facilities and Infrastructure – identifies the requirements for teaching and learning facilities and infrastructure, including **information technology**², to ensure facilities are fit for purpose.
- Domain 3: Teaching
 - Section 3.1 – Course Design – identifies course design specifications, learning activities and **learning resource requirements**, consistent with the level of study; and the need for professional accreditation of courses where this is required in order for graduates to be eligible to practice.

Section 3.3 – Learning Resources and Educational Support – outlines the need for appropriate educational support mechanisms, as well as adequate **physical resources and infrastructure that are fit for purpose**.

The adoption of the *Blended Learning Strategic Plan* (referred to as the Plan henceforth) provides The University of Notre Dame (UNDA) with the ability to comply with TEQSA expectations in the Domains identified above and keeps UNDA in step with the practices of the wider higher education sector in providing authentic learning, teaching and assessment opportunities for students.

¹ The *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* (the Standards) sets out the requirements that a higher education provider must meet – and continue to meet – in order to be registered by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to operate in Australia as a provider of higher education (p. 9)

² Bold added to aid readability

The definition of blended learning encompasses many of the practices already in place at UNDA³. Implementation of the strategies in this Plan will not only enable consolidation of UNDA's existing approach to integration of educational technologies into the curriculum, but it will also allow for a more consistent approach.

The use of blended learning, like all other teaching and learning tools and strategies, must be underpinned by the quality assurance frameworks of UNDA and by sound pedagogical principles, academic scholarship and responsive professional development.

Research indicates that the discerning use of blended learning will produce a range of specific benefits for all stakeholders including, but not limited to, the following:

Students:

- Improves student learning outcomes;
- Enriches the student on-campus experience and extends off-campus social learning opportunities;
- Improves capacity of Graduate Attributes to be realised;
- Improves graduate preparation for employment through the development of digital literacies and independent learning skills.

Staff:

- Increases flexibility in delivery and teaching pedagogies and strategies;
- Increases opportunities to provide active learning and Work Integrated Learning (WIL);
- Develops a stronger collegial environment through sharing and reuse of blended learning materials;
- Enables, through learning analytics, early identification of students 'at risk' academically.

UNDA:

- Improves UNDA's capacity to accommodate student diversity;
- Makes optimal use of physical and virtual resources;
- Enables cost effective delivery of quality education.

About this Plan

This Plan supports the *Learning and Teaching Plan 2014-2016* in affirming and developing the strategic goals of UNDA— authentic Catholicity; excellence in academic endeavours; active community engagement; and responsible stewardship

³ In a survey conducted September 2015 by the eLearning Advisory Group, regarding the knowledge and application of blended learning (n = 110), 84% of respondents reported that they had already introduced blended learning activities into their undergraduate teaching.

As outlined in the UNDA's *Strategic Plan 2013-2016*. The three key objectives of the Plan are to:

1. Build institutional capacity to support the use of blended learning approaches;
2. Develop staff capacity to integrate learning technologies into learning and teaching strategies;
3. Enhance the quality and outcomes of the student learning experience.

Each of these objectives is supported by strategies and measures of success, which are intended to also provide a blueprint to guide planning and implementation in each School.

Progress against the Plan will be monitored annually by Academic Council. The Learning and Teaching Committee will be responsible for the implementation of the Plan, and detailed actions to realise the strategies are detailed in a separate blended learning Action Plan.

The role of blended learning in pursuing the Objects of the University

The Objects of the University are:

- (a) the provision of university education within a context of Catholic faith and values; and*
- (b) the provision of an excellent standard of:*
 - (i) teaching, scholarship and research;*
 - (ii) training for the profession; and*
 - (iii) pastoral care for its students.*

Central to the goal of UNDA is a belief in the potential of the whole human person and the opportunity for education to assist in the integration of all aspects of human life and well-being. In particular, blended learning offers opportunities for human development by optimising a variety of curriculum design, pedagogies and learning strategies. It also increases the incidence of social inclusion by addressing the needs of students unable to access traditional campus-based teaching and learning.

The Plan has the potential to articulate the vision, objectives and strategic goals of UNDA (see Table below).

<i>Objects</i>	Ways in which the blended learning Strategic Plan will contribute [reference to Strategies in the Learning and Teaching Plan are in square brackets]
i. Teaching, scholarship and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Providing a common framework for understanding and implementing blended learning [3.3.3] b. Embedding scholarship, research and learning in the reality of the contemporary world [3.4.1] c. Liberating students from the constraints of their immediate surroundings [3.4.2] d. Providing students with increased opportunities to inquire and investigate the global world
ii. Training for the professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increasing the opportunity for students to stay connected to UNDA while immersed in communities/work places far away from the campus b. Creating and/or reusing the diversity of authentic eLearning tools and enhancing student learning experiences and training for the professions c. Developing student multi-literacy competency, preparing them for both the communication and technology demands of contemporary employment d. Developing student capacity to become self-regulated life-long learners
iii. Pastoral care for its students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Supporting the relationships between the lecturer and student/s, and student to student b. Nurturing the aspirations of individuals by providing them with flexibility and increased opportunities

Guiding Principles

Blended learning at UNDA is guided by the following principles:

- Technology will be used to enhance the quality of the student learning experience, improve learning outcomes and enrich the campus-based experience of students.
- The use of blended learning will reflect leading pedagogical practice and theory in adult learning, and centralise and prioritise pedagogy and curriculum design.
- Good planning and design will ensure curriculum alignment within the unit and the integration of blended learning strategies.
- Blended learning will be driven by the academic community, and supported by the UNDA leadership, and enabled by relevant infrastructure.
- Technology will never be the focus of teaching and learning, it will be the tool that enables, enhances and enriches the teaching and learning experience.
- Blended learning will selectively deliver technology enhanced learning activities to strategically focus and maximise student engagement with active learning

processes. This can free student/lecturer contact time for the more complex and social-constructive aspects of knowledge development.

- Blended learning will be used to promote harmonisation between UNDA's campuses.
- Blended learning will be informed by and supportive of current institutional strategic directions in learning and teaching, including opportunities for promoting interdisciplinarity, internationalising the curriculum, enhancement of research-teaching linkages and Work Integrated Learning (WIL).
- Blended learning will provide increased opportunities for collaboration across UNDA.

OBJECTIVE 1: Build institutional capacity to support the use of blended learning approaches

Strategies

1. Disseminate concepts and practices of blended learning at UNDA
2. Clarify and strengthen institutional governance processes for approval of software and/or tools to support blended learning and align licenses and tools across disciplines where possible
3. Increase the use of all features of Blackboard (Bb) and other educational technologies supported by UNDA
4. Promote amongst academics the value of sharing learning resources for repurposing and reusing
5. Strengthen the technical support for students in their use of learning technologies
6. Communicate to staff and students the availability of UNDA's current educational technologies and process for their use
7. Ensure the physical teaching and learning spaces are equipped with appropriate infrastructure for supporting blended and transformative learning
8. Develop and implement opportunities for scholarship of learning and teaching in blended learning
9. Develop and embed opportunities for research into student-centred blended learning
10. Implement institutional benchmarking against the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-Learning (ACODE) benchmarks.

Measures

1. Availability of educational technologies and range of support services available (including for extended teaching hours and learning technology developers to support academics), staff satisfaction with the services, and response times
2. Availability of resources to guide good practice in blended learning, as indicated by range of staff and other resources available
3. Usage of Blackboard and its Content Management System, as indicated by frequency and functionality
4. Number of shared learning objects developed per annum, and proportion of these that are shared across Schools
5. Availability and satisfaction of students with support for educational technologies, as indicated by range of support services available (including for extended teaching hours), student satisfaction with the services, and response times
6. Percentage of teaching spaces on all campuses that are equipped with audio visual (and/or other technologies as deemed appropriate for the space and that will support best practice teaching and learning)
7. Staff satisfaction with internal professional development opportunities for blended learning
8. Gradual move towards more units being delivered in blended mode (where appropriate)

9. Number of internal and external awards; presentations; journal articles and texts evidencing scholarship of learning and teaching in blended learning and research into student-centred blended learning
10. Outcomes of ACODE benchmarking.

OBJECTIVE 2: Develop staff capacity to integrate educational technologies into learning and teaching

Strategies

1. Provide evidence-based evaluation to support best-practice blended learning
2. Provide professional development support to staff currently using blended learning and to those wishing to explore the option
3. Develop self-access resources for staff professional development including micro-learning, just in time, and, social and informal learning opportunities
4. Undertake iterative improvement in curriculum design and teaching practices and processes in a blended learning context
5. Provide professional development to academics and support staff in the use of Blackboard analytics
6. Information Technology Services (ITS) staff assist with general help questions about Learning Management System.
7. Reward best practice blended learning programs utilised at UNDA.

Measures

1. Proportion of academic staff in each School participating in blended learning professional development (external and internal)
2. Staff satisfaction with internal professional development opportunities for blended learning (including communities of practice and forums)
3. Number of staff participating in Turnitin workshops and the proportion of units using Turnitin
4. Number of visits to the Learning and Teaching Office webpage
5. Number of staff attending professional development opportunities in the use of Blackboard analytics
6. System of IT support in place
7. Number of staff nominating for awards for innovations in blended learning.

OBJECTIVE 3: Enhance the quality and outcomes of the student learning experience

Strategies

1. Provide student support for engagement with a blended learning environment and provide flexibility so that students can stay connected to UNDA in an online-based community during professional experience, WIL or immersion programs
2. Provide flexibility of learning experiences to support a diverse student population
3. Ensure digital literacies are incorporated into the Graduate Attributes
4. Provide students with scaffolded opportunities to apply digital technologies skills
5. Strengthen and/or expand quality assurance mechanisms to cover blended learning practices

Measures

1. Student satisfaction with learning resources
2. Optimal enhanced student learning experience involving blended learning as evidenced by student progress, and other key measures against industry standards
3. Student satisfaction with educational technologies as evidenced by UCE and UES evaluations.