Online and Open for Business

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Building academic's capacity in eLearning skills and establishing social and tele-presence are the foundation of the Bachelor of Business online program at James Cook University. This session will demonstrate social constructivism pedagogy at work and how to engage students and academics in an online program.

It was important that Business Online was not just another online learning program which placed information online using the internet as a blackboard. The program had to engage, support and build a student's cognitive capacity and academic engagement. The program sought to create an elearning experience for the students through consistency, ease of navigation, student support, orientate students and develop a sense of belongingness. The program is underpinned by Social Constructivism and sits within the BlackBoard Learning Management System (LMS).

The academics endeavoured to create social presence through the establishment of learning communities and tele-presence through online BB Collaborate tutorials and weekly recorded video introductions. Academics in the School of Business had to rethink their educational practice and this sometimes required a paradigm shift from instructionalism to social constructivism design. The aim was to create an eLearning experience for our students to engage with their learning through the establishment of a social and telepresence.

The program worked closely with the academics to build capacity in learning technologies. Through weekly lunchtime hand on workshops called 'Technology Tuesday' different technologies were introduced to the academics and discussion focussed on there application to an educational setting.

The program also identified the need for an online student assistant to support students in the online elearning environment. The Online Learning Developer and the online student assistant assist students with technical issues, test student equipment and online conference with the student. Online student orientation sessions were held in face to face sessions as well as online. These orientation sessions introduced students to the elearning environment, organised system checks and demonstrated how the program would operate.

A recent survey identified that some students were experiencing isolation and missed the interaction with other students. The program is now developing a Facebook group for the students to engage and is also working on how to use the discussion board more effectively to enhance social presence within the online program. This is a work in progress.

Overall the program seeks to create a positive eLearning experience for both the student and the lecturer.