Teaching and Learning at the University of Tasmania

At the University of Tasmania, we aim to use teaching and learning approaches that are student-centred and accessible.

One of the ways of achieving this is through flexible approaches to teaching and learning.

What is flexible teaching and learning?

Flexible teaching and learning approaches are:

- learner-centred
- about good teaching and learning practices for all students
- less time and place dependent than more traditional forms of teaching
- ones that increase the learner’s responsibility for his or her own learning.

Example of UTAS practice: Market Day Project – Law

The Market Day Project is an innovative approach to contextual learning and assessment in Consumer Protection Law, using contextualised simulation that requires students to look at consumer disputes from various perspectives. Early in the project students play the roles of consumers and retailers and, in effect, create their own disputes. Later, students act as the lawyers for the consumers and retailers, isolating the legally relevant facts from the role-plays, negotiating with the other disputants, and providing legal advice. Students are required to demonstrate group communication and planning skills, creativity, dramatic skills, analysis, negotiation and written communication skills.

School of Law, Elective unit for fourth/fifth years

Attributes: learner-centred; responsible for own learning; range of learning activities, eg, group communication, role plays, presentation, negotiation, written communication, analysis

Flexible teaching and learning approaches ARE NOT about:

- getting rid of face-to-face contact
- always using technology
- saving time or money
- leaving students to study everything by themselves.
Moving towards more flexible teaching and learning: guiding statements

- At the University of Tasmania, we are aiming to move all of our teaching to be more flexible.

- ‘Good teaching and learning’ and ‘flexible teaching and learning’ are inseparable.

- All students benefit from increased flexibility in our teaching and learning approaches, not just those wishing to study off-campus.

- Flexible approaches to teaching and learning are not something we add on to existing approaches. They involve choosing the most appropriate combination of teaching methods to suit students and the subject.

- If all of our teaching becomes flexible, we will not have separate approaches for distance education students, for each of our campuses, or for offshore students.

Examples of UTAS practice:

Virtual excursions - Geology

In first year geology, the field excursion program (formerly a five-day commitment) has been reduced and supplemented with virtual excursion resources. There are two interactive modules; one module concentrates on basic field procedures and the second on an introduction to the geology of SE Tasmania. These modules make extensive use of video, digital photography and animations and also include exercises, questions and quizzes. These virtual excursions are provided to all students on CD-ROM and are also made available on the department server for access in computer laboratories. Students are given two to three weeks for independent completion of each virtual excursion and to sit a multiple-choice WebCT quiz that tests their understanding of the material.

School of Earth Sciences, First year unit

Attributes: learner-centred; responsible for own learning; increased flexibility of delivery; less dependent on time and place; range of flexible delivery materials, eg, video, digital photography, animations, questions and quizzes; self-assessment using WebCT quiz

Media publishing and broadcasting – Journalism

Edge Radio 99.3FM, broadcasting from the Hobart campus, and a partnership with an independent outside web page service to provide online content, are providing Journalism students with a unique and immediate practical outlet to complement the theoretical knowledge underpinning Radio Journalism and Online Journalism units. These two innovations have successfully provided the basis for a whole new project-based system of learning.
**School of English, Journalism and European Languages, Second year units**

**Attributes**: learner-centred; project-based; exposure to innovative learning activities, eg, providing live-radio input and online content to web page service

**A practical mix of teaching methods**

Flexible teaching and learning approaches use a combination of teaching methods to suit students and the subject matter. This may involve combining lectures, tutorials, workshops, group work, problem-based learning, or practical exercises with other approaches such as:

- online delivery using tools such WebCT/Vista – units using WebCT can be web supported, web dependent or fully online
- videoconferencing
- resource-based learning (for example, using print, audio, CD ROM)
- workplace learning or independent/group projects
- flexible scheduling (for example, summer schools, intensive block teaching).

**Example of UTAS practice: Case studies resources – Medicine**

Integration of learning from disparate sources and problem solving are important learning outcomes for the practice of clinical medicine. In order to assist students in developing these attributes, and to supplement classroom teaching, a CD-ROM has been developed for all third year students in Medicine. The CD provides a series of case studies, which contain questions to aid reflection, information resources and multiple-choice questions on the topic of each case.

**School of Medicine, Third year unit**

**Attributes**: learner-centred; responsible for own learning; resource-based; flexible delivery materials, ie, CD-ROM; range of learning activities, eg, integration of learning from disparate sources, problem solving, case studies; multiple choice questions

**Advantages of flexible approaches to teaching and learning**

The advantages of flexible approaches to teaching and learning are to:

- cater for a broader range of student learning styles
- develop independent and self-directed learning approaches in our students
• improve access to university study for students who live some distance from the University campuses

• cater for students who have family and work commitments

• broaden options for students on each of our campuses as well as nationally and offshore

• open up our courses to a wider market.

**Example of UTAS practice: Virtual tutorials across multiple campuses - Management**

*BMA2/385 Managing Business in the Asia Pacific* is taught across five campuses (Hobart, Launceston, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jakarta). Cross cultural interaction between students is enhanced through creating 'virtual tutorials' using the discussion board feature in WebCT. Students across the campuses are placed in private discussion groups (limited to 20) and asked to answer and comment on open-ended questions designed to facilitate their appreciation of cross-cultural perspectives. Tasmanian students gain the perspectives of students from three overseas countries, and vice-versa. Tutors moderate and assess the discussion.

*School of Management, Second/third year units*

**Attributes:** learner centred; broadens options for students across state and offshore campuses; group discussion; cross-cultural interaction; flexible delivery using WebCT discussion board

**Making the move: what students and staff need**

**Student needs**

Students may need support to use flexible teaching and learning approaches:

- To develop as independent learners
- To develop skills to use IT tools.

**Example of UTAS practice: Scientific Communications Skills resource – Science, Engineering & Technology**

The Scientific Communication Skills resource, developed under a 2002 Teaching Initiatives Grant to the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Technology, supports the integrated teaching and assessment of communication skills within science and engineering course units. The resource contains instructional material for students on written communication skills (the Scribble web site), and on developing and delivering oral presentations (the Babble resource). It also includes practical tools for staff, including assessment criteria, marking rubrics,
and a variety of models and case studies that illustrate different ways in which teaching of communication skills can be incorporated into a unit.

*Faculty of Science, Engineering & Technology*

**Attributes:** learner-centred; responsible for own learning; inclusive of individual needs; range of learning activities; flexible delivery through web-sites

**Staff needs**

Staff may need support to use flexible teaching and learning approaches:

- To re-think the way they teach
- To learn the use of new technologies
- To undertake the re-development of units and courses.

**Further information and assistance**

*Centre for the Advancement of Learning & Teaching*

Phone 03 6226 7251 or 03 6324 3504; email enquiries@calt.utas.edu.au

**Web resources and advice**