SCD distance & e-learning news

The new SCD distance & e-learning newsletter

Welcome to this first issue of *SCD distance & e-learning news* **which will be published monthly.**

Who's it for?

It's for any SCD faculty or staff with an interest in distance education or e-learning. It aims to communicate about developments and changes in distance and e-learning both within the SCD community and in the wider educational sector. And it aims to provide resources and ideas for faculty and staff involved in distance education and e-learning.

What's in it?

Each month we will include information, stories, resources and news under four topic areas:

What's happening in the SCD?

Current developments in the SCD, including developments in Member Institutions and consortium-wide issues, policy and practices.

Trends and developments in distance education and e-learning

Helping us to keep up to date with the rapidly changing world of distance education and e-learning. We will include relevant items from the Australian and international theological education sector, as well as the higher education sector more generally.

Spotlight on resources

Highlighting resources, tools and ideas for teachers and other staff involved in distance and e-learning.

Spotlight on teaching

Highlighting SCD faculty and staff initiatives in distance and e-learning

Who can contribute?

Contributions from all faculty and staff are encouraged. The *SCD distance and e-learning news* will be a more useful resource with input from a broad range of faculty and staff.

Send your contributions, comments and suggestions to Diane Hockridge, SCD Distance Education Officer at dianeh@scd.edu.au.

Monthly deadline for contributions: first Friday of each month. Next deadline Friday 5 March.

Spotlight on Resources: New Online Learning Resource for Faculty

A new in-house resource for SCD faculty has just been made available online:

Designing an Engaging Online Course.

This is the first in a series of learning modules designed as self-paced learning resources for faculty and staff. It includes resources, ideas and exercises on:

♦ Understanding the online world

♦ Where to start in designing an online course
♦ The 6 essentials for an engaging online course: active learning, critical thinking, collaboration in learning, learning in community, spiritual formation and reflection
♦ Design ideas, tips and resources

To access the learning module you need to visit the SCD Coursework Sandpit Wiki. Click on the "Designing an Engaging Online Course" link in the left-side menu.

If you don't yet have access to the SCD Coursework Sandpit Wiki, send an email to dianeh@scd.edu.au

Trends and Developments in distance and e-learning: Engaging Students in Learning

"Engaging students in learning" is a hot topic in education at the moment.

Traditionally, in theological colleges we have been pretty good at engaging our students. In preparing students for ministry, whether ordained ministry or informal ministry in churches and beyond, we have both desired and needed to engage our students in practical and transformative learning.

Until recently most theological colleges focused on face to face learning, often with a residential component. For a number of years this focus has been changing. Within the SCD, we are seeing the proportion of purely face to face classes declining and an increase in mixed mode or entirely online learning.

Our challenge now is how to continue to actively and practically engage our students in learning using the new technologies available to us.

Following the *core principles for SCD Distance Education* will help us as we work to engage our students by providing high quality relevant distance and e-learning experiences.

How can the SCD Core principles for distance education help us engage our students in learning?

The core principles for distance education were developed in 2009 and are used as the basis for the guidelines set out in the SCD Distance Education Handbook. Here we consider three of the core principles which are particularly relevant to ensuring student engagement in learning:

Principle 1: Learning Design and Delivery

We expect that distance education coursework units and programs

offered by MIs will exhibit quality, integrity, and consistency in both design and delivery. Our distance education coursework units and programs will be designed and delivered to motivate learners, promote meaningful learning, encourage interaction, and build the whole person.

Carefully constructed design and delivery of distance and online learning materials is crucial to getting our students engaged in learning. With the advent of Web 2.0 technology, which more easily enables online participation, collaboration, and contribution, there is a wealth of possibility for course design and delivery.

One of the purposes of this newsletter is to share some of the ideas and experiences of SCD faculty and staff and to continue to build up "best practice" standards for distance and e-learning course design and delivery.

SCD faculty can access the Distance Education Handbook on the SCD Website. Section 3.4 provides guidelines and expectations for the design and delivery of quality distance education within the SCD.

Principle 3: Learning Outcomes

Our distance education coursework units and programs will be shaped by clear learning outcomes that are appropriate to the distance learning environment and that are based on demonstrable and assessable knowledge, attitudes and skills.

In moving to teaching in a non face-to-face environment, it is crucial that teachers consider how the learning outcomes for

each unit can best be achieved in the specific learning environment for that unit.

Teachers have found that students learn and interact differently when they are learning in an online or other non "face-to-face" environment. Teachers will therefore need to carefully consider how the learning outcomes for each unit can best be achieved in the specific learning environment for that unit. Traditional methods of assessment may also need to be modified.

See Distance Education Handbook, section 3.6 Developing Learning Outcomes & Assessment.

Principle 6: Providing for Professional Development and Training of Staff

Teaching and support staff who are involved in development and delivery of distance education programs require professional development specific to that form of teaching and learning.

In a rapidly changing teaching and learning environment our faculty and staff need both formal and informal means of learning new skills and keeping up to date.

A new Professional Development Subcommittee focusing on the use of technology in teaching and learning is being established in 2010 with the aim of ensuring that SCD faculty are equipped to cope with the challenges of teaching in new technologically rich environments.
Stay tuned for more details.

Resources for Engaging Students

♦ The latest edition of Educause Quarterly Magazine devotes a whole issue to this topic and is worth a look: http://www.educause.edu

♦ The new in-house Online Learning Module for faculty: "Designing an Engaging Online Course" is now available at: http://courseworksandpit.wetpaint.com

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Spotlight on Teaching: Len Smith, Emmaus Bible College

How long has Emmaus been offering online learning?

Emmaus has been toying with the idea of online learning for about two years. It really come to fruition early last year when the move to pilot a course of study was mooted. And so we trailed one course during semester 2 2009.

What contributed to your decision to offer online learning for your students?

Emmaus is a 'national' bible college and we felt that we really were not accommodating for those students were unable to travel to bible college for various reasons. So a way to reach those students was to offer 'online courses'.

How did you develop the pilot online unit?

We reviewed a number of online options and decided to used the "Moodle" learning management system. A significant number of larger educational institutions use Moodle as their preferred platform for online learning. The other benefit is that it is a free web program with many activity modules, such as forums, databases and wikis.

What did you learn from the pilot unit?

The best way to pilot an online course for Emmaus was to use a

An interview with Len Smith, Principal of Emmaus Bible College about a recent pilot online unit for Diploma Students.

emmaus bible college
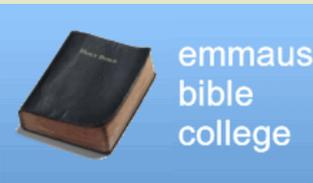
scheduled course with enrolled students. While this option had inherent risks it also provided us with real and immediate feedback.

The benefit we had with the pilot was that all students who enrolled in the course were also enrolled in face-to-face classes so we were able to interact physically with the students when they had any issues or concerns. This was only necessary during the first few weeks as the students became familiar with the online learning environment.

In the early part of delivery we identified that for some students it was just not working. Information could have been better presented and the FAQs could have been made easier to understand. We were able to change these issues very quickly without the need for outside technical assistance.

Where to next for online learning at Emmaus?

This year we will use a blended approach to our online programs. The lesson will be delivered live with feeds for streaming from the net. Online students will also be able to review the lesson at their leisure coupled with class notes. We are hoping that the students that use the live thread will be able to interact with the lecturer using email for questions to which the lecturer will respond in the classroom.

The video downloads will also be blended with classroom notes issued a week prior Both face-to-face and online students will have access to the class notes prior to the lecture so they will be more informed and ready for the lesson.

What would be your top tip for setting up online learning?

I would suggest that *online learning developers* do their homework. There is a lot of good information on the net, and by asking those who are currently engaging in online learning they may very well find that they could save a lot of time in the initial stages. Also, if at all possible, 'do' an online learning subject, this way the instructors get to know and understand the issues involved.

What's happening in the SCD?

Did you know?

- Every SCD MI is either now offering some form of distance education or e-learning, or planning to offer it by the end of 2010.

- The majority of SCD students are enrolled in non face-to-face courses. According to the 2008 Graduate Course Experience Questionnaire results for the SCD the proportions of students were: 39% face-to-face, 37% distance education, 24% mixed mode.

With distance and e-learning on the increase, there are rapid changes in the demands on teachers and learners and in the technologies and teaching methods being used.

The Distance Education Committee, which meets every second month, is one forum where the implications of the changing world of distance and e-learning are considered.

Members of the Distance Education Committee for 2010 are:

- Kristen Cairns, Web & Online Education Coordinator, Booth College

- Len Smith, Principal, Emmaus Bible College

- Stephen Parker, Academic Dean, ACOM.

- Heather Lang, Librarian, BBI

- Josh Dowton, Senior Tutor, Alphacrucis

- Kevin Waldie, Good Shepherd College, Auckland

- Diane Hockridge, SCD Distance Education Officer

- Observer: Margaret Beirne, representing St Andrews Greeek Orthodox Theological College.

These people are good points of contact for any information on distance and e-learning developments, either in your MI or across the SCD.

Newsletter Contributions

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