CHAPTER 3 : TRANSFORMING LEARNING AT CURTIN

The Transforming Learning at Curtin strategy

Vision: Sought After By Students, Sought After by Employers

In 2013, Curtin embarked on a strategic three-year initiative, Transforming Learning at Curtin (http://www.curtin.edu.au/learningfortomorrow/) to position Curtin competitively in the global higher education market. University-wide transformation through the Transforming Learning program aims to achieve:

- **excellence in the quality of teaching and learning** by substantially improving learners’ on and off-campus learning experiences with engaging and authentic learning tasks, innovative assessment activities and through involving the learner at the heart of learning design. New learning designs will allow tutors to: focus upon higher cognitive processes in face-to-face situations; more readily personalise learning; support more collaborative and learner-led experiences; facilitate team teaching; and initiate innovative classroom approaches. This will ensure learning experiences are more engaging and motivating.

- **excellence by innovating learning and teaching practices through technology-enhanced learning and blended learning modes**. The use of technology-enhanced learning allows access to wider numbers of students both in Australia and overseas. Whether students are studying online, on campus or via distributed learning, we will ensure that a consistent quality and an engaging experience are provided for all. The need to blend different modes of learning and to personalise and enhance quality in the learner’s experience is central to our learning and teaching ethos.

- **excellence in developing intercultural capabilities, recognising diversity and fostering leadership** by considering and ensuring that our unique set of values rests at the heart of our entire course offerings. These values include foci on developing Indigenous cultural capabilities, a recognition of cultural diversity, and development of research and leadership capabilities.

- **excellence and become international leaders in research in teaching and learning**. Our goal is to become an international hub of excellence in teaching and learning research and to provide learners with high quality learning experiences on a global scale. Continually monitoring, researching and evaluating our learning interventions will underpin this aim. Learning designs will be reviewed and enhanced based on data from student surveys and studies, learning analytics and learning experience design evaluation. Through peer-reviewed scientific papers and a dialogue with the teaching community we will inform the evidence-based research in teaching and learning and close the loop between practice and research.
CTL works with colleagues to evaluate, research and improve the learner’s experience through the following practices:

- Gather learning analytics and learner-related data that track the learner’s experience to create a better understanding of higher education best practices.
- Collect and evaluate the research base around the effectiveness of new peer-based and social learning methods and techniques.
- Develop new student placements in industry- and work-integrated learning opportunities to prepare students for the workplace.
- Support the use of Blackboard, the learning management system, and other established technology-enhanced learning tools across the campus.
- Ensure that highly engaging and authentic assessment practices provide high quality feedback in support of learning.
- Continue to innovate our learning spaces by upgrading our teaching spaces and providing flexible learning spaces with state-of-the-art video-conferencing facilities and capabilities to learn with mobile devices.
- Support new cohorts of under-served and independent learners through Curtin Online and MOOCs.
- Open new pathways to learning through UniReady and Open Universities Australia to serve a wider base of students at Curtin and further afield.
- Provide high quality professional development opportunities through the Curtin Learning Institute.

Together, CTL and CLI in partnership with the Faculties aim to transform the learning experience of all Curtin learners into a Curtin Converged model; this includes multimodal, immersive and truly engaging experiences that span on- and off-campus. We will adopt more learner-led approaches to teaching and learning, and champion new advances in educational design. We will share with our learners our values and skills, preparing them for the workplace and enabling them to compete in the global knowledge society.

**Curtin Converged**

Curtin Converged is a new model of flexible teaching and learning focusing on making the richness of the campus experience available to students wherever they are (any campus, any location and on any device), and moves beyond the past dichotomy of online or on-campus modes of study. Regardless of a student’s geographic location, when they enrol at Curtin they will participate in converged learning. The Curtin Converged model employs innovation to improve students’ learning experiences and their learning outcomes through combinations of enriched face-to-face campus-based experiences, online engagement, distributed learning, synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, and MOOCs.

Through the transformation of learning, Curtin courses will be remodelled to ensure they are responsive to the needs of industry globally and positioned to ensure Curtin students are equipped to succeed in the workplace. Prospective and current students will feel valued through their personalised interactions with Curtin. It is envisaged that new markets will be identified, including the establishment of new courses or existing offerings to markets in the GMT + 8 time zone.

With our new model of teaching and learning – Curtin Converged – we aim to:

- become the most sought after tertiary education provider in our time zone
- engage one million learners in higher education by 2017
• provide an innovative, richly interactive, personalised, learning experience to our students wherever they are located and whatever they are studying
• grow the university, and sustain that growth beyond 2017
• exceed student and employer expectations
• become national leaders in higher education teaching and learning.

Assessment, Curriculum Review and Learning Transformation (ART 2015)

ART 2015 is a unifying project that operates in partnership with other associated Curtin projects (including Student Retention and Digital Support, Work Integrated Learning, Student Leadership Development, eLearning Technology, Administrative Flexibility and Transforming Learning Spaces); it aims to transform learning within and outside of the formal curriculum. ART 2015 will be enacted through a whole of curriculum approach. All courses at Curtin will be transformed in accordance with need and priority.

ART 2015 will aim to quality assure and enhance authentic assessment, ensuring that our assessment practices are innovative, sustainable, effective and efficient. The Curtin Graduate Attributes will be refined as Graduate Capability statements and agile revised processes of curriculum review will evaluate new markets and draw in work-integrated learning, developing Indigenous cultural capabilities, recognising cultural diversity, and developing research and leadership skills to ensure maximum relevance for learners. There will be a significant focus on supporting the provision of high quality feedback to learners in the context of their study as it is recognised that effective feedback is instrumental in facilitating learning and also an important predictor of student satisfaction. ART 2015 will ensure that quality processes for assessment, including moderation, are able to provide assurance to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and the wider community that appropriate academic standards are being upheld. The process for transforming courses through ART 2015 is described in Chapter 5, Course and Unit Design and Quality.

Curtin’s Teaching and Learning Priorities

The University’s Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Plan (2013–2017) (https://planning.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/restricted/2013-2017_TLSE_Plan.pdf) sets the direction for teaching and learning at Curtin. The plan identifies the objectives to be achieved and specifies the performance targets against which success and progress are measured. The Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), through the University Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Board, have overall accountability for the execution of the Plan. The following are key priorities within the Plan:

• Implement Transforming Learning @ Curtin.
• Implement the Framework for Quality and Excellence in teaching and learning.
• Rollout the Transforming Learning Spaces refurbishment program.
• Strengthen Indigenous outcomes.
• Forge strategic partnerships with pathway organisations and educational partners to increase student options.
• Embed English language assessment and development policy and procedures.
• Develop and implement professional learning programs to assist in the transformation of learning at Curtin and adoption of the Curtin Converged teaching model.
Curtin’s Graduate Capabilities

Graduate employability
Graduate employability is about more than graduates finding jobs – it is about assisting students to develop a broad range of employment-related capabilities, and to be confident about their achievement of those capabilities. There are two main ways to support graduate achievement: first, ensure the overall course curriculum is designed to maximise achievement of the attributes and capabilities most appropriate to related professions, and include opportunities for work-integrated learning (WIL) and authentic assessment; and second, encourage or require students to take responsibility for gathering, creating and sharing evidence of their learning achievements.

Graduate capabilities
The learning outcomes for all Curtin courses are derived from and reflect the graduate capabilities (a subset of our graduate attributes). At Curtin, the graduate capabilities are contextualised, embedded and assessed as learning outcomes in every unit and course and at the level specified by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) (see http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf/in-detail/aqf-levels/). Relevant Standards (Discipline and Accreditation Standards) such as Discipline Standards and Accreditation Bodies also shape course curricula and the development of Course Learning Outcomes. Curtin graduate outcomes are being revised in 2014 and will be available at http://ctl.curtin.edu.au/learning_teaching/graduate_capabilities.cfm.

The distinguishing Curtin capabilities and features of Curtin courses are:

- work-integrated learning, including fieldwork
- leadership
- research
- Australian Indigenous knowledges and perspectives.

Work-integrated learning (WIL)
At Curtin, work-integrated learning is an “umbrella” term used for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum” (Patrick et al., 2008, p.v). Until recently, at Curtin many WIL strategies have been “extra curricula” (offered through supplementary and voluntary student experiences). Highly structured and assessed WIL activities are well established in some courses – for instance clinical placements in Health Science courses – and far less so in others. Integrating more formal assessable WIL activities, and transforming assessment tasks to more closely resemble professional tasks (commonly called authentic assessment) are strategic priorities at Curtin. Development in this area is reported through the Work-Integrated Learning subcommittee of the University Teaching and Learning Committee, which includes representation from all Faculties. See http://life.curtin.edu.au/careers/WIL.htm. For more information on WIL see Chapter 8, Work Integrated Learning, and http://curtin.edu.au/wil.
Fieldwork
At Curtin, fieldwork is an aspect of WIL and is described in the Fieldwork Education Policy. Fieldwork education activities are normally conducted in unfamiliar surroundings off-campus and outside of the classroom requiring an appropriate level of preparation and application. This ensures any fieldwork is conducted safely and with minimal risk to students, staff and fieldwork education partners.

Leadership
Leadership development is a core component of students’ Curtin University experience. It will be enacted through co-curricular student leadership programs based on the Social Change Model of leadership. Within curriculum it will be present as a student leadership unit and/or modules within a unit. Student leadership development at Curtin is established by a centrally coordinated and integrated approach providing leadership opportunities to students through a range of programs available regardless of mode or location. Students will collect evidence of co-curricular student leadership activities for employers through Curtin Extra. Further information about student leadership development is available at the Curtin Leadership Centre website http://unilife.curtin.edu.au/community_leadership/curtin_leadership_centre.htm.

Research
All undergraduate courses will ensure that graduates develop the capabilities required to conduct research under supervision. Learning experiences and assessment will assist students to locate and critically analyse sources of information, design and conduct research, and communicate the findings of their research in written and other formats. Information for students on conducting research at Curtin is available at http://www.curtin.edu.au/research/conduct-research/, and an introduction for supervisors of research students at http://odu.curtin.edu.au/supervising_hdr_students.cfm.

Diversity and inclusivity
The University recognises, respects and values the diversity of its students and staff and the Curtin community. Curtin has an ongoing commitment to foster and promote transnational education and globalisation of the curriculum whereby learners can access and engage with activities regardless of their cultural background and place of origin. The Diversity Policy outlines the expectations and responsibilities for both staff and students http://policies.curtin.edu.au/. Note especially sections 5.1 and 6.1.

Further information, including all of Curtin’s relevant policies and procedures, can be sourced on the Transnational Education Developing Leadership Capability website http://tne.curtin.edu.au/.

Another resource customised for the Curtin environment is the Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity Practice Toolkit which provides practical tips and tools for working with people from a diverse range of cultures and can be found at http://odu.curtin.edu.au/cdip.cfm. It contains professional development strategies and information to help staff and students to include, develop and monitor inclusive practice strategies.
Australian Indigenous intercultural capabilities for students and staff

Indigenous cultural competence – or the preferred term, ‘capabilities’ and associated ‘Indigenous knowledge’ – is defined as:

... student and staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary realities and awareness of Indigenous protocols, combined with the proficiency to engage and work effectively in Indigenous contexts congruent to the expectations of Indigenous Australian peoples. (Universities Australia & IHEAC, 2011b, p. 6)

At Curtin, developing the skills of non-Indigenous students to engage effectively with Indigenous people and issues is a major focus. The University is also increasingly recognising the importance of developing these skills in non-Indigenous staff, in order to not only be more effective teachers and researchers, but also to improve the cultural competency of Curtin more broadly – a competency that universities across Australia have been increasingly called on to demonstrate (Bradley Report, 2008; Universities Australia and Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, 2011).

Though Curtin has a number of successful initiatives occurring in this space – for example, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies’ Ways of Working with Aboriginal People for staff; Indigenous Cultures and Health (ICH) 130 for all undergraduate Health Sciences students (Flavell, Thackrah, & Hoffman, 2013); Intercultural Indigenous Leadership Program for staff; Noongar Dandjoo, an Indigenous current affairs production through Department of Media, Culture and Creative Arts; as well as many other school based initiatives – it is working on creating a framework that links learning outcomes from these discrete initiatives to an overall university Indigenous learning strategy. Further, there is a need to articulate skills and attributes along the developmental journey towards fostering cultural competence, so that student teaching and learning and staff professional development initiatives can be more effectively planned and implemented.

In response to the need for an articulated framework, the Indigenous Cultural Capabilities Framework (ICCF) project began during 2013 and is developing a conceptual and practical blueprint to identify the Indigenous cultural skills, attributes and capabilities Curtin seeks to develop in non-Indigenous staff and students. Drawing on current movements within Indigenous learning literature arguing for the development of capabilities rather than competencies, the ICCF will be a guiding framework where Indigenous cultural capabilities are identified and mapped over a continuous learning and progressive journey. The ICCF is being developed in partnership with the Centre for Aboriginal Studies and is guided by an Indigenous and non-Indigenous Project Reference Group, as well as being heavily informed by consultations with key Indigenous and non-Indigenous Curtin staff.

The outcome of the ICCF is that it will eventually form an “umbrella” for specific University-wide and school-based Indigenous initiatives to be mapped against, allowing the learning and actions of staff and students in Indigenous cultural capabilities to be identified. The ICCF will assist staff to develop and improve University-wide policies and initiatives, including curriculum development. The Faculty of Health Sciences have already done significant work in their curriculum with the common core unit named earlier (ICH), which all students enrolled in a health science course are required to study. As part of the strategic plans for curriculum over the next few years, all faculties will develop an equivalent unit for their undergraduate courses.
For further information about:

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**Chapter 3 References:**


