CurtinMobile: Help at students' fingertips

Leeane Robinson, Leah Clapton, Beverley Oliver, Peter Nikoletatos, Travis Quirk, Dic Liew, Royce Townsend, Michelle Rogers, Constance Wiebrands, Jim Elliott and Connie Price
Curtin University of Technology

CurtinMobile is a purpose-built mobile website aimed predominantly at current Curtin students. Based on the evidence in mobile ownership surveys, student retention projects, and models of mobile technology use at other universities, Curtin has developed a mobile 'help at your fingertips' website called CurtinMobile. The aim of the mobile website is to help enable students to easily connect with the student experience 'on the go' by visiting m.curtin.edu.au.

Background information

Curtin University's mobility initiative foresees a way for students to easily connect with all of their student experience and learning needs through their mobile devices. The potential of mobile learning to enhance student engagement has been explored with growing intensity in recent years in higher education literature (e.g. Cochrane, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme & Traxler, 2005). As a result of this growing trend being identified, the first step of the mobility initiative for Curtin University was to create a mobile website known as CurtinMobile. This website is to become the platform for students to engage in mobile learning, as well as a point of access for support and administration services using the convenience of their mobile device.

Before starting the project, Curtin canvassed the wider higher education community (both within Australia and outside Australia) to research the approaches taken by other organisations. Two leading examples in the US are Stanford University and MIT. Stanford has invested heavily through the student led creation of the iStanford iPhone Application (Terribly Clever Design, 2009). The idea behind iStanford was to mobilise Stanford's web-based resources and systems (Peña, 2009). The application (which is a free download from the iTunes App store and is native to the iPhone) enables staff and students to access a directory, campus maps, courses information, athletics news and other events. MIT has a similar set of features available on a mobile website (rather than a native iPhone application). This mobile website lets students use any web-enabled phone, including the iPhone, to access the MIT's Mobile Web site (m.mit.edu). This website has been specifically designed to display in an optimised way for any device the student uses to connect (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2009).

As iPhones are not yet ubiquitous at Curtin University, it was decided to follow MIT's example of having a mobile website, accessible by all web-enabled phones such as the iPhone, Nokia, Blackberry, Samsung and so on. After three months of development and with extensive help from many different areas of the University, CurtinMobile was launched in September 2009. It is accessible from http://m.curtin.edu.au and is the launching point for easy mobile access to key aspects of the Curtin student experience.

CurtinMobile experience

The feature-set for CurtinMobile is expected to continually expand to cater for mobile learning initiatives (including the recently launched student online electronic portfolio – known as iPortfolio). However, for the initial launch, CurtinMobile is heavily focussed on student administration and support services:

- OASIS (Student Portal) – enables students to access their student email, official communication messages, personalised examination timetable and renew library books.
- Maps – enables students to search and browse for building on campus (including photographs).
- News – all the latest news and events at Curtin.

- Library – enables students to search the library catalogue and browse the a-z database list.
- Facilities – includes information on all the eateries around campus, including the daily specials.
- Support – gives students easy access to all support services on campus.
- I.T. – displays how many computers are available in the computer labs (real-time information).
- Transport – includes a convenient schedule of the campus courtesy bus.
- People – enables students to search for staff members.
- Emergency – all emergency contact numbers (including crisis care numbers) .

Figure 1: CurtinMobile homepage on an older feature phone (left) and Apple iPhone (right)
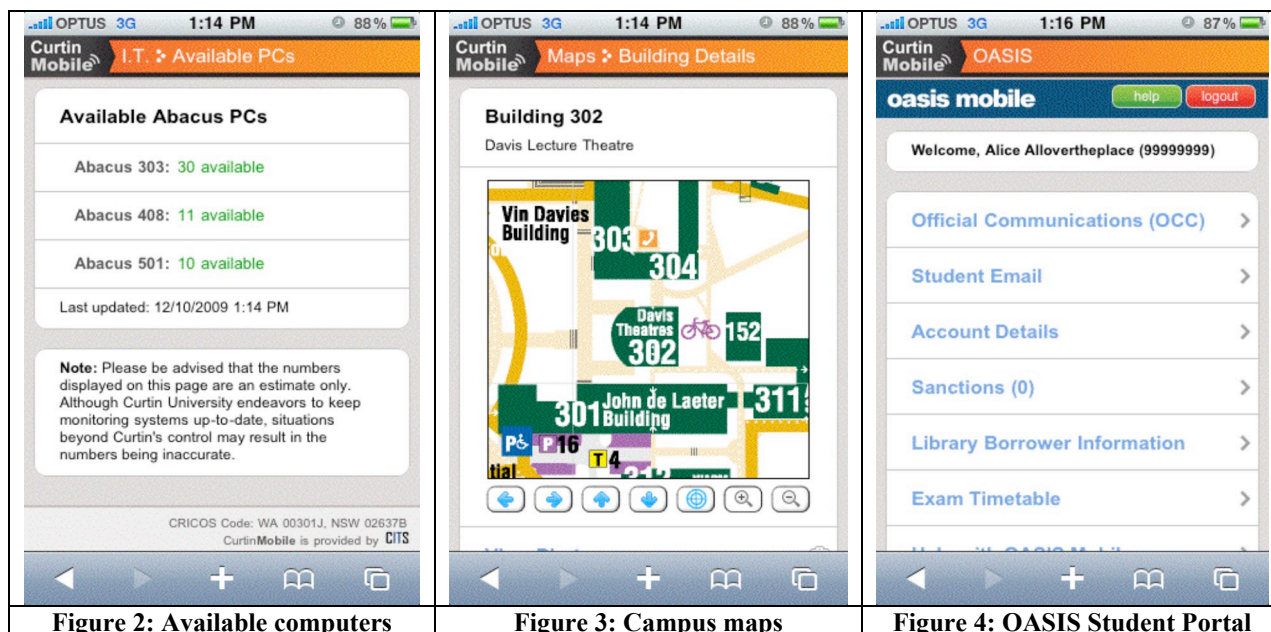
| **Figure 2: Available computers** | **Figure 3: Campus maps** | **Figure 4: OASIS Student Portal** |

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