# GETTING ONLINE: THE CHALLENGES FOR ACADEMIC STAFF AND INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS

## SUMMARY PAPER

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**Abstract**
*A number of factors have made the push for universities to move online both inevitable and urgent. The implications for teaching and learning are far reaching and include both opportunities for enhancing the quality of student learning and threats to the values underlying higher education. Maximising the opportunities and minimizing the threats of 'getting online' pose challenges for academic staff and institutional leaders alike. Academic staff have to change their roles and develop new skills and ways of working. Institutional leaders have to create a culture that encourages and supports these changes.*

## Background

Universities around the world are moving rapidly to incorporate information and communication technologies (ITCs) into all aspects of their core business of teaching and learning (Bates, 2001; Ryan, Scott, Freeman & Patel, 2000). In Australia, as elsewhere, this interest in technology has been prompted by a number of factors, including:

- The spread of ICT into all aspects of economic and social life
- Demand from students for more flexibility in how they learn
- Competition from non-university players for the education market
- Enthusiasm of early adopters
- Possibility of cost savings by moving online.

## Implications for Teaching and Learning

The move to exploring the possibilities which ICTs and in particular, the World Wide Web, offer to education has a number of implications for teaching and learning in higher education. A positive view of ICT is that it offers great opportunities to enhance the quality of learning by providing exciting and challenging learning environments and the opportunity for increased interaction and collaboration between learners (Chickering & Gamson, 1996; Herrington & Oliver, 2000).

A negative view is that ICT may undermine the values that underpin higher education in particular the role of the teacher as knowledge expert and the importance of the teacher-student relationship for effective learning (Gilroy, 2001; McCombs, 2000).

## Opportunities

The opportunities that ICT presents for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning include:

- Providing encouragement for staff and students to reflect on how they teach and learn
- Applying theory and research on learning and the principles of good instruction to designing online learning environments
- Making teaching (and learning) more visible and public
- Encouraging collaboration and team work among staff (and students)
- Offering greater access to learning for more people
- Increasing the skills and status of university teachers.

## Threats

The threats that ICT presents for undermining the values of higher education include:

- Reinforcing and entrenching a content-driven, transmissive approach to teaching and learning
- Depersonalising the teaching and learning experience
- Undermining the traditional role of university teacher as knowledge expert
- Presenting education as a commercial enterprise to the detriment of its social and intellectual goals
- Taking control of education out of the hands of academics
- Destroying what we really value about teaching and learning.

## Challenges

Maximising the opportunities and minimizing the threats that ICT represents for higher education poses a number of challenges for both academic staff and institutional leaders (Bender & Gray, 1999; de la Harpe & Radloff, 2001; Entwistle, 1998; Jackson & Anagnostopoulos, 2001; Kember, 1998; Marton, Dall'Alba & Beaty, 1993; McLoughlin, 2000; Ryan, 2001; Salmon, 2000).

For academic staff, these include:

- Reflecting on, and if necessary, changing conceptions of teaching and learning
- Understanding the process of learning
- Focusing on the pedagogy, not the technology
- Developing new skills and ways of working
- Engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Being brave and bold.

For institutional leaders, these include:

- Developing a vision of what the enterprise of higher education should be
- Championing that vision and communicating it to all stakeholders
- Setting a realistic agenda for change
- Creating an environment in which change can happen
- Managing the change with skill and empathy
- Taking risks and (sometimes) going out on a limb.

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