# Engaging students with ICT choices at Edith Cowan University

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This poster outlines development over the last 5 years, of a range of ICT choices at ECU being utilised to engage and meet the requirements of today's students, over fifty percent of which now classify as Net Generation students. These students arrive at university with expectations of a choice of technologies, flexibility in accessing resources, and 24/7 availability. The challenges of migrating primarily print-based external studies offerings to ECU's LMS Blackboard are also described together with the range of technologies and Web 2.0 utilities now in use at ECU.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) is Western Australia's second largest university with approximately 23,000 students. In 2007 approximately 30% of students were school leavers and the remaining 70% of students commenced university study through alternative entry options (Figure 1).
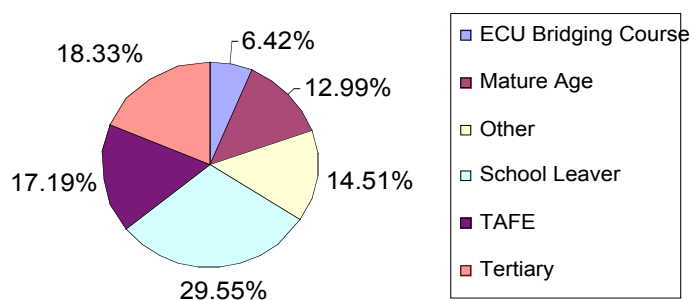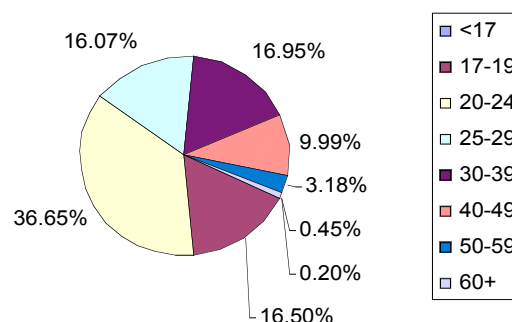


**Figure 1: ECU student admission groups in 2007**

ECU caters to a diverse student population with wide range of learning requirements and ICT needs. New generations of students enter university with the expectations of the 'Net Generation' for flexible and easy access to a wide range of learning technologies (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). ECU students who are living a 'digital lifestyle' have a focus on immediacy; expect support for multitasking, and demand 24/7 information connectedness (McMahon & Pospisil, 2005a)(McMahon & Pospisil, 2005b). Currently, over 50% of ECU's students are under the age of 25 and classify as being of the Net Generation (Figure 2).

To meet student expectations for ubiquitous access to the WWW and online resources, ECU has implemented campus wide wireless network coverage on all campuses to support the increasing numbers of students with wireless laptops and other mobile devices. The university has established Blackboard as its primary Learning Management System (LMS) and since 2006 has implemented Blackboard Community Sites for both learning and research based activities.

ECU supports students through a number of initiatives offering students access to mobile technologies such as laptops and iPods. Some of these are:

- The ECU Advantage laptop programme http://advantage.ecu.edu.au/
- Business Edge laptop programme http://www.business.ecu.edu.au/future-students/business-edge.htm
- iPod Project http://isp.ecu.edu.au/ipod/loan.html

**Figure 2: Students enrolled at ECU in 2007 by age groups**

To support remote and flexible access to learning materials ECU's FlexiLecture offers a range of delivery options incorporating recorded lectures delivered in a range of video and audio options, including podcasts. Tools such as Camtasia, Elluminate and Audacity are used to develop easily accessible reusable learning objects. Lectures can be simultaneously broadcast to a range of locations, both in real time and on demand.

With the advent of Web 2.0 technologies the opportunities for interactivity have increased. Blackboard's Campus Pack caters for some of these requirements with Blog, Wiki and Podcasting tools, however, a range of 3rd party tools are being utilised and embedded into practice to better meet student needs. The availability of a collection of resources in online databases is enhanced by easy to use tools such as Google Scholar, and LAMS learning activity sequences are utilised to contextualise resources in meaningful learning designs.

Further opportunities are being explored including immersive learning environments such as Second Life, in class tools such as SMARTboards and clickers, and 'Turnitin' and 'SafeAssign' to support academic integrity. There are a multitude of ways in which we can offer students more choices in both existing and emerging technologies, however, the educational design of learning experiences is paramount for successful application of technologies in teaching and learning. A range of Educational Design and Flexible Learning support services are offered to staff at ECU by the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

## Blackboard at ECU: Timeline

Edith Cowan University began as a teaching college in 1902. Today it is Western Australia's second largest university with campuses in the Central and Northern suburbs of Perth, and in the regional centre of Bunbury. Currently it has 23,000 students (with 3,000 students from 80 countries) and 1670 teaching staff. Blackboard was installed university-wide in 2003 (after a pilot programme in 2002).

### Approach / Solution

- 'Blackboard Licence' required by academic staff to access their Blackboard sites; creating a critical mass (2002-2004)
- Faculty-based training, support and assistance from faculty Instructional Designers including demonstrations of best-practice sites
- Academic support staff re-trained in online development and development of self-help resources for staff
- Targeted professional development short courses for academic staff, eg. Discussion Boards, Tests & Quizzes
- Flexible Learning Developer Project - providing 'at-the-elbow'/'just-in-time' support and advice for academic staff in all aspects of flexible learning, including use of ICTs
- Online Project - migrating all Off Campus print materials onto Blackboard, digitisation of analogue media resources, and print Readers into eReserve

**2002-2006 - Issues / Problems**

- How to promote an innovation such as Blackboard
- Cultural resistance/reluctance of staff to change
- Supporting staff with poor IT skills
- Supporting champions and early adopters
- Rising student expectations of learning online and use of ICT
- Need to show a return on investment in Blackboard
- Academic support staff orientated to print based development
- Need to keep up with competitors

**2007 - Evaluation / Results**

- All Off Campus units have a Blackboard site with materials in a digital format
- Growth of Blackboard sites and usage across ECU for On Campus and International units
- Growth in staff skills set evidenced by increasing use of various communication and collaboration tools in Blackboard, eg. chat rooms, podcasts, blogs, wikis, community sites
- Growth in student/staff satisfaction with Blackboard

## References

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