



## The Practical Connection

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From the rapid adoption of online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, learning communities have become abstract, disconnected, and failed to provide effective social interaction and connection opportunities (Martin, 2020). Mindful of the related impact on students' intrinsic motivation and learning, a first-year accounting unit was reimagined and reinvented with a practical connection student centred teaching approach. A student-centred learning environment focused on students understanding the relationship of accounting information and its users, the business world and skilful accounting professionals. Teaching materials, assessment tasks and learning management system (LMS) were transformed to greatly enrich meaningful student connection, motivation, and deeper learning (Turner & Baskerville, 2013). This presentation will showcase aspects of the unit's practical connection approach, specifically highlighting innovative use of technology enhanced learning in the unit to support student development and student voice through peer learning.

To promote purpose, the unit's LMS explains why each topic is studied, relevant connections to graduate attributes, business world and why each type of assessment is adopted (Tharapos, 2021). Assessment tasks were recreated to assist student's development of disciplinary experience, critical thinking and problem solving, and integrated professional, ethical, and personal identity skills graduate attributes (Cloete, 2018). In-tutorial group work case study style discussion and practical Excel questions are used (Villarroel et al, 2018), constructively aligned exam questions adopted, linked reflective tasks developed and weekly topic quizzes, directly connected to lecture discussion, run before weekly tutorials.

Lectures and tutorials are constructed as working relationships with educators and industry. Content is built on a real-world company's financial statements, contain contemporary discussion and practical Excel spreadsheet and MYOB demonstrations that students concurrently work along with on their own and, throughout each lecture, students complete a lecture concepts worksheet.

Technology enhanced learning tools were effectively used to foster student to student collaboration and educator and student relationships. Using Padlet, students work in groups to collaboratively complete tutorial discussion questions. High quality answers are shared in an interactive Padlet on the unit's LMS accompanied with a past student tip. To assist students with their first reflective task, a reflective activity on Menti is undertaken. Highly reflective exemplars are also shared on the unit's LMS with further staff comments and feedback. Personalised emails were used to welcome students, individually reach out and support disengaged students during semester and to provide tailored mid semester feedback that directed students to specific homework and tutorial questions and lecture examples for self-reflection.

Student voice was used as a narrative to promote student connection and collaboration (Matthews & Dollinger, 2022). Past students, as partners in learning, shared their unit experiences in conversation videos which were engrained into the unit's LMS and tutorial activities. In addition, the staff voice was used to explain connective links to subsequent unit's objectives and content.

Early development of professional skills, graduate attributes, and readiness to understand business world transactions must start in a student's initial university year. This informed many aspects of this exemplary first year accounting unit redesign.

Keywords: Authentic learning, professional skills, constructive alignment, students as partners

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