

## Exemplar 1

### Course area: Accounting (Occupational Health and Safety)

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This Exemplar illustrates the importance of the way you manage the module (e.g., announcements, promotion, providing 'to do' lists for students, the ways students are grouped).

We<sup>5</sup> have been running a mandatory 10-hour module in Occupational Health and Safety, one of a suite of Accounting modules. Up until this year, the course had been only available face-to-face. Because it only ran for 10 hours, it was causing us some difficulties. It was always hard to timetable, particularly for evening students. We have traditionally run it one night per week over three weeks. It meant that it was difficult to let students know when to turn up and, when they'd finished it, they had nothing else to do for the rest of term. They couldn't pick up another subject.

Because of the problems we were having in offering this module, we decided to offer it to our evening students online. It was an opportunity to see how our students would cope. We figured they would have the computer skills and the necessary commitment to do it. Running it online also gave us a chance to try out online. We would get to see what the advantages and disadvantages were, and what we should do differently next time.

We started with an existing online module, developed as part of TAFE NSW learningware for Administrative Services. We worked through the module online, and saw that it had a lot of benefits. This semester, we've offered it to our evening students.

We started out with an information night. It lasted about an hour, during which students received a tailor-made guide covering how to study online and what was required.

About 40 students came to the information session, and around two-thirds of them finished. Of the rest, some never logged on, or logged on but found the going difficult, like the student who commented:

*'Sometimes I wondered if I was doing well, feeling like I was looking at the wall that answers nothing.'*

5 To make the account easier to follow, the term 'we' is used throughout the account. Both interviewees contributed to the discussion, Suellen from the perspective of Head Teacher, and Druanne from the perspective of the teacher who actually facilitated the module.

But most of the students who finished were very positive. They liked the module's flexibility, and found it interesting. Their reactions included comments such as:

*'I'd be happy to do any of my subjects online, as long as there was a teacher we could see if we were having difficulties understanding.'*

*'It was good that you could study it at your own pace and at times that suit you.'*

*'The thing I liked was the time factor, and I could always pick up where I left off.'*

We've certainly learnt some lessons in the process. One of our difficulties was that we failed to let our evening students know when they enrolled that the module would only be available online and that there would be an optional information session. The result was that a lot of people probably didn't hear about the information session. Next semester, we will let everyone know up front, and we'll make the information session compulsory.

All of these students have to do Business Computing, so they should have the basic computer skills necessary to access and use the module. What we're looking at now is whether to incorporate the Occupational Health and Safety module into Business Computing, or to require them to do Business Computing before they do the module.

Right through the module, we attempted to keep in touch with the students. For example, we sent out emails asking them how they were going. We got quite a few emails back, and were able to help them with a number of issues.

We used the *Janison* platform to track students. One mistake we made was to divide the students up into two groups on *Janison*. This was a manoeuvre to fit within TAFE class-size and teaching hours rules, but it created some difficulties. You had to keep switching between the two groups to have a look at everyone. In future, we'll have just the one large group for each facilitator.

There was an optional chat session held one evening each week, but it didn't get a great response. Next time, we'll handle that differently. One session every two or three weeks is enough, but beforehand, we'll sent out an emailed announcement. In other words, chats will be less frequent but better promoted. The teacher can use the extra time responding to emails.

The busiest time for emails was close to the final date for assessments. Emails were flying back and forth! With *Janison*, students have to indicate that they've completed the module before we can send out the assessment tasks. This requirement was in their guidebook, but lots of them didn't do it. It meant we had to chase them up by email. Next time, we'll use a check-sheet on the front of their guide, and use bold print, to emphasise things like this they have to do.

One concern about the module is the amount of time required. Even though this was only a 10 hour module, it took a lot of time to run, partly because it was new for us. I [Druann] was finding that I was doing something every day. It took a lot of time to respond to all the emails. Even at home at the weekend, I'd go in and check their emails so they weren't left hanging with a query that I could answer. But it all takes time!

Partly, this problem comes from not managing expectations. Next time, we'd make it clearer that responses to emails won't be instant. Students should expect turn-around time for emails to be a few days. They should be told to expect delays.

Next time we run it, it might be worth getting everyone to be assessed together on campus. As it is, with students submitting assessments from home, you could question validity. If someone knows someone else, it's too easy to share answers around. In areas where there are licensing requirements, you need to be completely confident that the student submitting the work is the one who did it.

### Comments on our own learning...

I [Druann] did the *Introduction to Teaching Online*. It consists of a day-long workshop along with seven weeks of online learning at home. I've just finished that, and found it very interesting.

We have also learnt from the Institute's online facilitator. He's been great. He's given us one-to-one coaching, shown us examples, and provided a lot of time to help us develop the materials. He got us online and has us putting the material on *Janison* for us. He also encouraged us to play. For example, we took part in a chat session, just playing around and exploring.

Having someone like that was really helpful. It meant that if you got stuck, you could call him and get instant help. For anyone thinking of going online, you need that kind of back-up. But of course, with budget limits, I'm aware that that isn't always possible.

One thing about online teaching we're really excited about is that you're not restricted to local teachers. One of the teachers who taught one of our modules is based in Victoria. Delivering online means you can get the best people from the industry, and you're not restricted—they don't have to come to your Institute to deliver.

Overall, online teaching gives you a lot of flexibility. You're not limited to nine to five. You can log on any time, day or night.

