Piloting Online Submission and Online Assessment with *GradeMark*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Online technologies are becoming ubiquitous in higher education and present both challenges and opportunities for those involved in learning and teaching. This chapter reports on the research-enhanced implementation of Electronic Assessment Management (EAM) within one faculty of a university in Sydney, Australia. This research was conducted as a qualitative case study. Questionnaires were used to investigate staff and student experiences of EAM, and the researcher's reflective practice made it possible to capture important details of the implementation process mediated through the researchers as participants. The research found enormous potential in EAM implementation for cultural transformation in learning and teaching. The authors argue that the move to EAM is now a viable option for universities. The combination of a rapidly evolving higher education landscape, evidence from exploring both staff and student experiences of engaging with EAM, and the benefits which the transition offers for the professional development of academics make the use of EAM essential for reasons of both pedagogy and efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The use of online technologies has become increasingly prevalent in the higher education sector. Learning Management Systems (LMS) are supporting the delivery of unit content, lecture recordings and electronic reading materials (Johnson, Adams, Cummins, 2012; Reigeluth, Watson, Watson, Dutta, Chen & Powell, 2008), and there are more recent explorations into technology-enhanced teaching, for example through virtual worlds (Dalgarno, Lee, Carlson, Gregory & Tynan, 2011) or networked games-based learning (Connolly & Stansfield, 2009). Still to be fully implemented in many tertiary institutions is the use of online technologies to streamline the submission, marking and return of traditional written assignments – activities which are central to learning and teaching in higher education. In this chapter, we argue that the move to electronic assessment management (EAM) is now a viable option; universities need to examine how it might enhance the student and staff experience. We will highlight the potential this move holds beyond the transition of submission mode from hard copy to the screen, as well as identify the challenges of such a move. A starting point is to scope the current higher education landscape and identify particular features making the move to EAM attractive. Following is a description of a research project that explored the introduction of EAM within the Arts Faculty at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. Here we specifically highlight the implementation process, as this is still an aspect largely missing from the EAM professional literature. Finally, we offer our reflections on the use of EAM, noting key issues that emerged during the research that may provide helpful insights for any practitioners preparing for the move from paper to screen.

BACKGROUND

As is common with other information industries, the university sector is facing challenges brought about by the rapid development and diffusion of internet technologies. As content becomes readily available for little cost, and disruptive global competitors emerge in the form of free massive, open, online courses (MOOCs), there is increasing pressure for universities to articulate their distinctiveness through pedagogy and to ensure the efficiency of their administrative processes. The implementation of EAM provides an opportunity to engage with both pedagogy and administration.

As the *University of the Future* report (Ernst & Young, 2012) suggests, "universities have ample scope to streamline their business and operations" (p. 17). Whilst there are many ways to effect such streamlining, the imperatives are not simply to lower costs. Indeed, the more useful driver is that of improving the student focus –

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