Bringing learning to regional communities: designing the game

Barbara Cram

University of Canberra, ACT, Australia, Barbara.cram@canberra.edu.au

ABSTRACT

It is widely recognised that people living in regional communities face educational disadvantage. In Australia, a Review of Higher Education in 2008 recommended a university participation target for regional residents of 20%, half the national target [3]. Current low participation rates are linked with lower socioeconomic status and with lower levels of education and occupation in regional towns [1]. Without intervention, this cycle perpetuates [10]. Regional development is thus a major initiative for the current Austalian Government, with significant funding proposed for programs that bring educational opportunity to non-metropolitan communities.

This interactive session addresses five major inhibitors to participation in higher education for regional residents: aspirations to engage in educational studies; access to technology; access to academic support and enabling programs; access to learning resources and access to meaningful career pathwayws. Participants will be encouraged to share existing institutional approaches to regional outreach and to critically review the design of their own regional delivery game.

BACKGROUND

Following the Bradley Review of 2008, the Australian Government set a national target of 'at least 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds having attained a qualification at bachelor level or above' by 2025. In recognition of the educational disadvantage faced by people from low socio-economic status backgrounds, including those from regional communities, the Government set a national target of 20 per cent of higher education undergraduate enrolments from this group by 2020 [3]. The University of Canberra has been awarded a Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund grant[1] to investigate strategies to enhance higher education participation and learning outcomes for regional and low socioeconomic status (SES) communities in the S-E Region of NSW [4]. In collaboration with TAFE NSW - Illawarra Institute, government agencies, regional communities and business and industry partners, the project 'Entry Pathways to Enhance Regional Participation' is addressing several national objectives:

   a. Increasing educational *aspirations* and *access* to post-compulsory education
   b. Enabling *wider participation* through creation of pathways from school to further and higher education
   c. Maintaining *educational achievement* for all Australians through access to learning resources, appropriate learning support, academic skills development and educational technologies
   d. Supporting *social inclusion* and minimising exclusion for regional communities and Indigenous communities
   e. Promoting *community participation* in social inclusion strategies.

DESIGNING THE GAME

For educational managers, teachers and designers, the task is to design cost-effective higher education programs for delivery to regional residents [3] [9]. Success factors include include: planning for sustainability [8], incorporation of 'good practice' technology-supported educational design [2] [5] [6] [7] and inclusion of specific strategies to enhance the access, participation and success rates of regional students who are educationally disadvantaged [3] [9] [10

Table 1 outlines the design framework for this task.

Table 1: Elements of the regional design framework

Task	Description	Objective
Design of teaching, learning and assessment strategies	Application of educational design principles	To increase student *aspirations* and *access* to post-compulsory education
Selection of suitable technology support	Investigation of technology options to support off-site teaching and learning	To enable *wider participation* in regional areas
Learning support strategy	Design of academic support components: e.g. enabling programs, access to local learning resources and workplace experiences	To optimise *educational achievement* for enrolled students

---

OUTCOMES

The presentation demonstrates how a multidisciplinary team has applied the regional design framework to develop off-campus delivery programs that incorporate:

a. creation of cross-sectoral pathways
b. application of educational design principles to enable wider participation
c. incorporation of academic support components that connect locally available learning resources, local libraries and regional workplace experience
d. application of existing and emerging educational technologies – including lecture recordings, Moodle site, e-Resources and local infrastructure including TAFE video-conferencing facilities – to bring learning into the community.

The framework creates a structure for the conference session, which will include open and critical discussion between session participants.

REFERENCES

1. Australian Government. (2010). *Regional participation: The role of socioeconomic status and access*. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).
2. Bennett, S. Harper, B. & Hedberg, J. (2002). 'Designing real life cases to support authentic design activities', *AJET*, vol 18, no. 1, pp. 1-12.
3. Bradley, D., Noonan, P., Nugent, H. and Scales, B. (2008). *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report*, http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Pages/ReviewofAustralianHigherEducationReport.aspx
4. Cram, B. (2010). *Raising participation rates in post-compulsory education: Perspectives from a regional project*, AVETRA 2010 13th Annual Conference, Adelaide, QLD, 8-9 April 2010.
5. Herrington, J. and Oliver, R. (2000). 'An instructional design framework for authentic learning environments', *Educational Technology Research and Development*, Vol. 48, No. 3, pp 23-48.
6. Laurillard, D. (2002a). *Rethinking university teaching: a conversational framework for the effective use of learning technologies,* 2nd edn, RoutledgeFalmer, London.
7. Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* 2nd edn, RoutledgeFalmer, London.
8. Skelton, A. (2005). *Understanding teaching excellence in higher education: Towards a critical approach*, Routledge, London.
9. Universities Australia (2008). *Advancing equity and participation in Australian Higher Education*, Action Plan, Canberra. Available from: http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/
10. Vinson, T. (2007). *Dropping off the edge: mapping the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Catholic Social Services Australia. Summary available from http://www.australiandisadvantage.org.au/pdf/summary.pdf.

BIO

Barbara Cram is an educational designer with over 20 years experience in vocational and higher education. Barbara's research interests include student self-assessment, online educational design, cross-sectoral design and VET-HE pathways. She is currently the project manager of a Diversity Fund project that is investigating strategies for enhancing access, participation and success of regional students in higher education.

Topic: Widening access and increasing participation

Session type

Concurrent sessions are short presentations around work you have undertaken or topics you have explored. They are conversation starters, providing enough information to encourage the audience to engage and seek further information. Presentation submissions should include EITHER a full paper to be blind peer reviewed OR a 2-page abstract and short speaker bio of 150 words or less. Accepted papers will be included in the conference proceedings; however writing a full paper is not a requirement.