Online assessment at CSU: Snapshots in time

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This poster proposal uses snapshots in time to follow the progress of online assessment at Charles Sturt University. Snapshots into the scholarly use of learner oriented online assessment are described from the findings of a University wide research study. The author reflects on snapshots in time that have led to a personal understanding of the complex integrated network of responsibility in online assessment that involves academics, ICT support services, educational designers and other divisions. This understanding has led to the formation of new frameworks for managing online assessment and, more broadly, online learning. These frameworks are contributing to ongoing development in tools, processes, procedures and policy as the University absorbs the impact of increased access to online learning as the result of the introduction of a new, open source, learning management system.

Since 2003 the author has been involved with a variety of aspects around online assessment. In the position of Learning Media Lab Coordinator/educational technologist the author has played a number of roles: from working with developers to design, develop and test the software; to providing professional development programmes and supporting documentation; and consulting with academics and educational designers around appropriate use of online assessment technology and embedding this in the subject/course experience. As a result of this wide-ranging responsibility the author has been in a position of supporting at the operational level when key/critical incidents occur. Taking the opportunity to reflect on these and feeding back into the appropriate operational areas has led to the development of new frameworks, such as the Bridge Support Framework (Buchan & Swann, 2007), and identification of emerging models of integrated support of the University's new Online Learning Environment. In all this, the critical reflective process is grounded in a concern for ensuring that the learner experience is kept uppermost in designing and supporting our online learning environment (Buchan, 2008b).

The rapid increase in use of the available technology (Figure 1) does not necessarily mean that it is grounded in sound pedagogy. A research project funded by a Scholarship in Teaching grant has helped to identify a variety of scholarly uses of online assessment at the University (Buchan, Swann & Wilkinson, 2008; Swann, 2008). The study found that the use of learner oriented online assessment (Keppell, 2006) to enhance student learning is widespread across the University in all faculties for both internal and distance students. The study primarily targeted the use of the University's own online multiple choice quiz tool (OASIS), although the findings showed that some staff and students are familiar with quiz tools from other institutions as well as those associated with textbooks. It was found that across the faculties online multiple choice assessment tasks were designed to serve both formative and summative purposes. There was a variety of configurations of quizzes ranging from single submission tests for summative purposes, to multiple submission formative revision or self-assessment tasks.

Online assessment is being used in other divisions to enhance student learning. For example, the Library uses online assessment in their IL (Information Literacy) tutorials. These are collaboratively developed with subject coordinators and administered via OASIS. Student Services staff use online assessment tools in their Study Skills subjects. Sharing this understanding and awareness of the widespread current and future use of online assessment across the University is important in grounding this growth area in ICT in sound pedagogical principles.

Another aspect of online assessment which emerged during the course of the research was tracking the development and upgrade of the online assessment software and associated support processes in response to user requirements. User feedback has been used to develop processes and guidelines for socially responsible online assessment (Buchan, 2008a). These guidelines continue to be shared via professional development activities such as Foundations of University Learning and Teaching (FULT), Tertiary Teaching Colloquium (TTC) and activities led by the CELT professional development team and educational designers. As a result of ongoing changes in the software and processes, partly as a

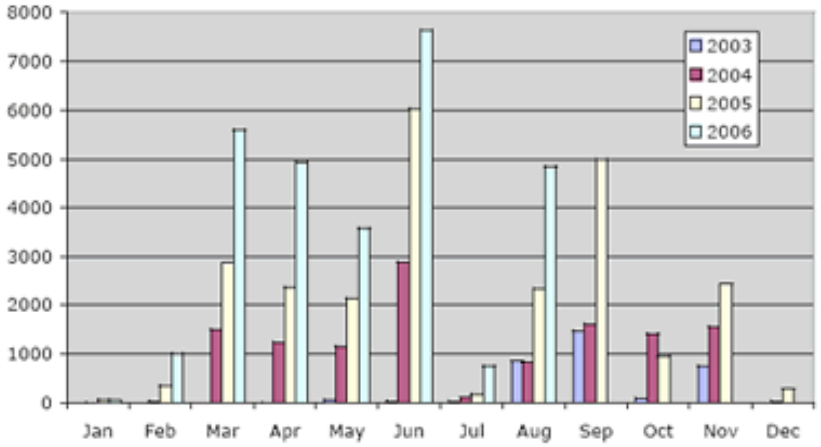

Figure 1: Growth in the number of individual [online assessment] test submissions. (Data includes multiple submissions by single users) (Source: Buchan & Swann, 2007, p.410)

consequence of the move to Sakai (*CSU Interact*), continual updates are being made to online Help resources for staff and students. At a broader level, the frameworks developed for online assessment are informing the ongoing implementation and growth of the University's Online Learning Environment.

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