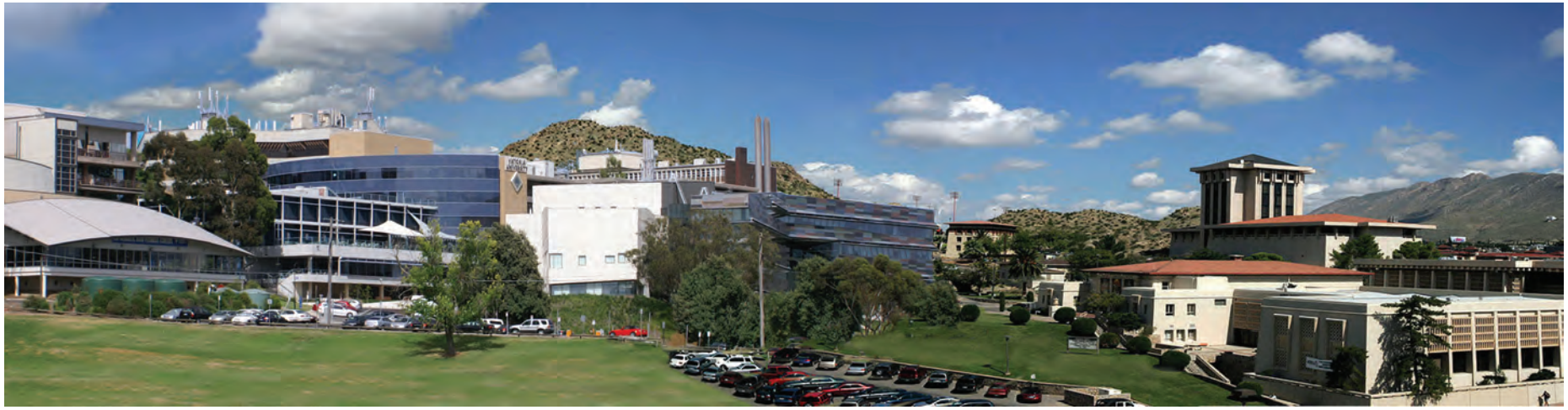

Ten Years of a Global Partnership

Victoria University and University of Texas at El Paso

Ten Years of a Global Partnership

Victoria University and University of Texas at El Paso

Victoria University Footscray Park and University of Texas at El Paso campuses come together

Ten Years of a Global Partnership

Victoria University and University of Texas at El Paso

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Best, G, Hajzler, D, & McLennan, B, 2010, The student peer mentoring program at Victoria University. In S E Evenbeck, B Jackson, M Smith, D Ward, & Associates, Organizing for student success: The university college model (Monograph No. 53, pp. 121-124). Columbia, SC: Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

www.utep.edu

www.vu.edu.au

http://books.vu.edu.au

Ten Years of a Global Partnership 2016

ISBN: 978-1-86272-718-2

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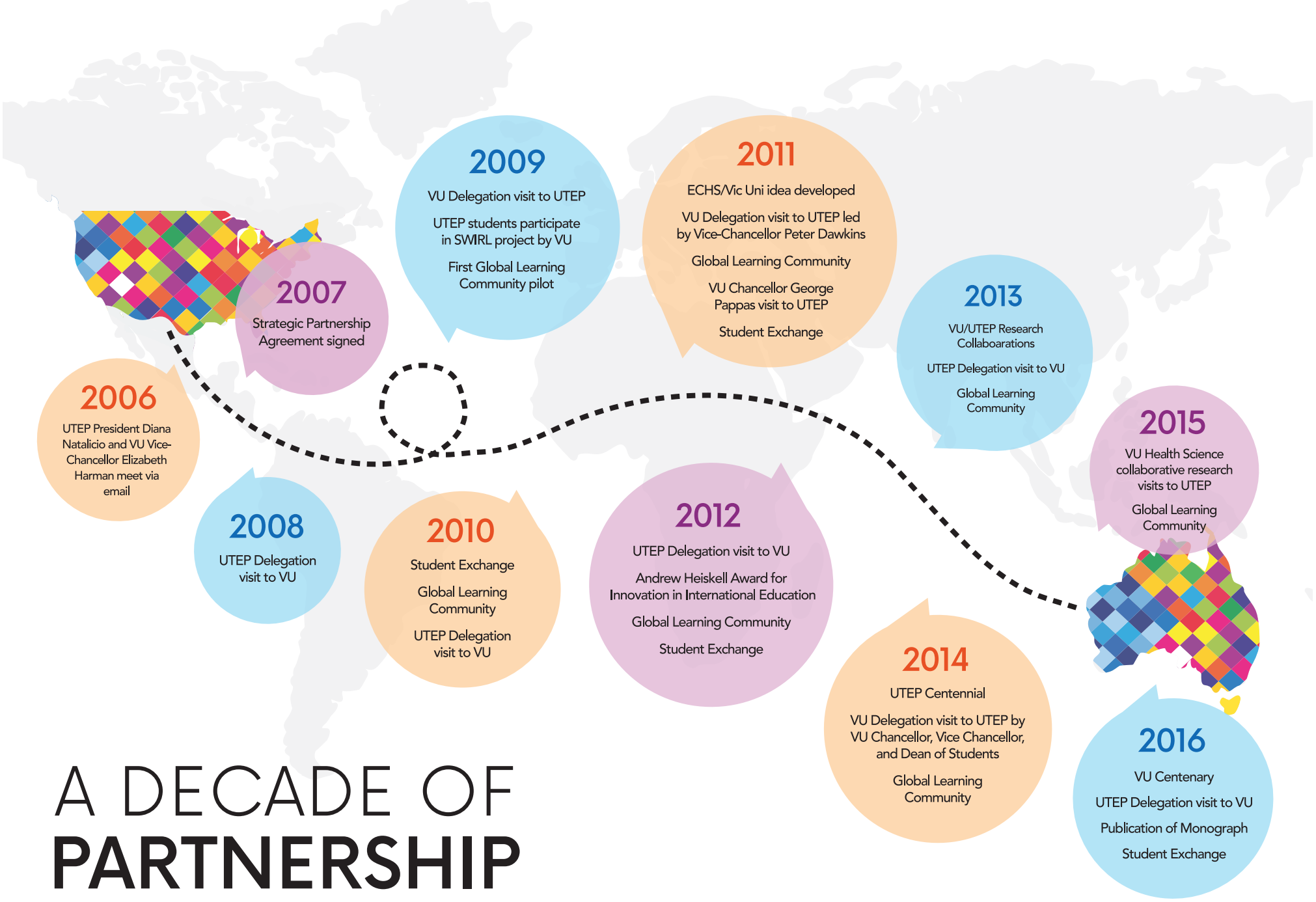

A DECADE OF **PARTNERSHIP**

Victoria University (VU) & The University of Texas At El Paso (UTEP)

Ivan Chavarria (2016)

Ten Years of a Global Partnership

In late 2006, two universities on opposite sides of the world formed a partnership based on their shared mission and commitment to providing an accessible and excellent education experience for student populations of the 21st century. This monograph has been compiled to tell the stories of the people, programs, collaborations, and knowledge building activities conducted as part of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and Victoria University (VU) in Melbourne ten year partnership and is being published to mark the ten year partnership and launched during the VU centenary year, 2016.

This collection of articles, reports, case studies and interviews written over the duration of the partnership highlights the focus on students. The student exchange program, for example, was designed to enable students from low-income families to have a global experience with paid work on campus to accompany their study program. For students who were unable to travel, collaborations with peers via technology in the Global Learning Community and in the Health Sciences Research Seminars provided opportunities to meet with peers across the globe.

The use of technology to establish and maintain relationships has been used extensively to internationalise the student experience and institutional collaborations without the expense of travel. In 2008, for instance, the library collaboration commenced when the VU and UTEP libraries developed a strong relationship of cooperation and shared projects resulting in significant changes at both locations that improved, and continue to provide, integrated educational services to students at VU and UTEP.

A fraction of the knowledge exchange that has occurred over the past decade is captured in this monograph to provide a sense of the work which has been done and lays the groundwork for future endeavors. The monograph is available in both online and print versions.

We acknowledge the staff who have contributed to this monograph, in particular students graphic designer Chloe Watson and editor Ella Salome; as well as the many faculty, staff, and students at UTEP and VU who have made this work possible over the past decade.

In particular, we wish to acknowledge the visionary leadership of Dr Diana Natalicio, UTEP President, along with Professor Elizabeth Harman, former Vice Chancellor of VU, and Professor Peter Dawkins, current Vice Chancellor of VU. This work would not have been possible without their strong commitment to student success and willingness to look beyond their traditional networks for other educational leaders desirous to make a difference for their students.

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Susan Young, Dean of Students, Victoria University

August, 2016

University of Texas at El Paso: www.utep.edu

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University of Texas at El Paso President Dr Diana Natalicio

Victoria University Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Dawkins

Reflections on the University of Texas at El Paso/Victoria University Partnership With:

University of Texas at El Paso President Dr Diana Natalicio
Victoria University Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Dawkins

The leaders of The University of Texas at El Paso and Victoria University have met on several occasions and have built upon their shared commitment to serving their surprisingly similar student populations. Both institutions are committed to educating a 21st century student population characterized by those largely from urban areas representing diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. They lead their institutions with a commitment to access and excellence to make a positive difference in their communities – both local and global.

The following conversations with UTEP President Diana Natalicio and VU Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Dawkins highlight some of their thoughts, goals and dreams for the future.

Initial Thoughts

When asked about her introduction to Victoria University in 2006, President Natalicio reflected back to the first contact made by then Vice Chancellor of VU, Professor Elizabeth Harman, who had been searching globally for institutions with blue-collar student populations that were employing innovative strategies and articulating an overt statement of commitment to that population. As Professor Harman was planning a visit to the US, President Natalicio extended her an enthusiastic invitation to visit UTEP. At their first meeting, the two leaders immediately connected. Acknowledging that they were dealing with very similar issues – despite being halfway around the world from each other – was an exciting discovery for both of them.

After a year or so of communication, President Natalicio and a team from UTEP were able to visit VU in Melbourne. It was the alignment of their schools' missions, together with a real commitment to do something more innovative to serve their students that became the driving force of the partnership. During that visit, there were clear touch points where the UTEP and VU teams discovered they could work together and develop a sense of common purpose, best practices and new ideas. Robert Stakes, an Associate Vice President at UTEP responsible for the University Library, was particularly intrigued with the potential to transform UTEP's library into a learning center modeled after VU's approach. It was energizing for both teams to find kindred spirits half a world away to validate their own missions and visions for enhancing student success. Because both institutions are in environments where neighboring universities with different missions and priorities might regard UTEP and VU's approach with skepticism, it was empowering and refreshing to find a like-minded partner.

When the current Vice Chancellor, Professor Peter Dawkins, took office at VU in 2011, he had already visited UTEP. During that meeting there was

a particular focus on measuring student progress and achieving increased retention and graduation of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. "I took an interest from a policy context as I could see it was a good fit," he said, "but I didn't realize the breadth of the activities and opportunities for collaboration".

When introduced to President Natalicio, he was struck by her amazing presence, warmth and enthusiasm for the partnership. "I had no difficulty in supporting the partnership intellectually and emotionally," he recalled. "UTEP's way of describing access and excellence was the best description I'd heard, and experiencing directly how they achieve both with nontraditional students was more than lip service – the university lives it."

For two institutions on opposite sides of the planet, what shared characteristics of the student population do you see that make this partnership special and important?

President Natalicio: It is the focus on serving low-income, blue-collar students; students who, historically in both of our societies, did not traditionally have access to higher education opportunities that would create for them a pathway to professional lives and prosperity. It's about confronting a rigid set of assumptions about who deserves higher education. There is squandered talent in this environment; there are talented young people with huge potential to contribute to our society and nobody is taking responsibility for creating educational opportunities for them, so why not us? Our shared commitment to those students creates the best possible convergence from two sides of the globe to the same set of values and guiding principles. That proved to be very empowering to people who understand that this is not merely a narrow, regional agenda but rather there is a broad global issue of untapped human potential.

Professor Dawkins: What makes the partnership special is that we feel a great sense of having the same mission, and seeing UTEP celebrate being a leading university while pursuing both the access and excellence agenda helps us to keep to our mission and feel proud about this. Our collaboration with UTEP is different from collaborations with other universities in Australia. There is much we can learn and each time we spend time with our UTEP colleagues we can be deeply reflective about all aspects of our work. In the early days, we learned about student retention, entering students and student exchanges. Then we collaborated on the learning commons and UTEP was able to learn from us. Mutual benefit is important and there's a commitment on both sides.

How has technology enhanced the partnership? What has been the role of face-to-face interactions?

President Natalicio: Both technology and face-to-face interactions have a place. Working around the time differences obviously isn't easy, but being able to use technology means that we can have more frequent contact, not only with telephone calls, but also video communication that can be more appealing and engaging. I think the technology is really helpful in maintaining the continuity of the relationship. But, in the end, it can't substitute for face-to-face meetings for two reasons. First, as human beings, that face-to-face contact is important to us. And, second, those in-person meetings transport us into the context of the other institution. Even though you can look at photographs and remember what the context is, there's nothing quite like being there to understand the way people behave, the way they work, the way they play, the way in which they interact with each other and so on.

Professor Dawkins: I agree. And, once the face-to-face has been conducted, then we can do more using the technology. The video conferencing is particularly powerful in forging those connections; one video conference which made a big impact on me was the session with VU students who were on exchange at UTEP reporting back to us in Melbourne while experiencing a semester in El Paso.

What have been some of the highlights and successes?

President Natalicio: Something I found extraordinarily impactful was the visit to the Northern Territory, Alice Springs and the surrounding areas because I really didn't know enough about the Aboriginal people. I had learned some from reading, but actually being there was amazing. A former UTEP student, Kia Dowell, was originally from the Alice Springs area. Kia gave me really helpful insights, but again, being there, seeing where they lived, how they lived, was very different.

I was especially interested in VU's commitment to creating opportunities for their students through civic engagement programs in the Northern Territory – the rich set of opportunities it offered. Listening to VU students talk about their experiences led me to think more about civic engagement at UTEP and the diverse pathways to learning. This experience offered me not only a different perspective on Australia but a way of seeing our own work from a new vantage point.

Professor Dawkins: We were very excited when UTEP did so well in the Washington Monthly index. We worked with the Mitchell Institute to look into developing a comparable index for Australia. This is such a valuable resource in America to measure student outcomes in a different way, and it will be a very important aspect of the next phase of our collaborative work with UTEP. Universities such as UTEP and VU need to stand together and make a statement about the benefits to the new generation of university students. We need to identify like universities from other parts of the world who share our mission. I hope this partnership continues and explores other exciting options and maintains great momentum.

What do you see as the value to students? Particularly the student exchange?

President Natalicio: We have developed a program that has one feature other exchange programs don't have – a job. Giving students work experience over the course of a full semester in another culture teaches them a lot about that culture and about themselves. It teaches students a great deal about their own resilience and their capacity to be away from home for a longer period of time, to make new friends, to live in another culture. Australia offers an opportunity for this kind of work/study exchange without having to learn another language. Although I'm a strong advocate for learning other languages, that's a story for another day.

Professor Dawkins: I see the student exchanges as a particularly exciting contribution to the whole global citizenship agenda. Our students do need to be able to study abroad. Many of our students haven't been out of Australia, and with UTEP being such a culturally diverse university, this cross-cultural experience is so important. It was inspiring to hear students speaking about how and what they learned from their time in El Paso.

What do you see as a vision for the future? What is the next big thing?

President Natalicio: One of the things that I worry about the most is ensuring the succession of programs: continuity and sustainability. I was very happy that Peter Dawkins was an enthusiastic proponent – he might not have been. He might've said, "I only want to work with universities in California, or New Zealand, or South Africa" or who knows, but he really supports it. We are delighted that Chancellor George Pappas really embraced the partnership as well.

How are we going to ensure sustainability moving forward? It's not only about money. Money matters and we must constantly think about that and do, but the sustainability of commitment on the part of the people at the institutions may actually matter more.

Professor Dawkins: It will be really good to have time with the UTEP delegation in August this year to discuss possible futures for the partnership as it moves into its second decade. The work that has occurred to date has established a sound foundation that we need to sustain. One idea is to focus on student exchanges for elite athletes and to build an important sporting connection between UTEP and VU, and perhaps identify other potential partners through elite sports.

What is important to share about the partnership?

President Natalicio: I think a lot about trying to recalibrate the higher education narrative these days. One of the really important things to underscore is that within UTEP's access and excellence mission, experiences of this sort are a critical element. Just because they're hard to do doesn't mean they shouldn't be done. Just because they cost money doesn't mean we shouldn't be creative in investing in them. We have to take responsibility for doing them in the most efficient way possible because our students aren't in a position to participate in international experiences without our support – without creative work on our part. In some ways, the real test of an access and excellence mission is the extent to which we do things like this, whether it's study abroad, work/study abroad, internships, or whatever it might be. We have to think about this commitment holistically from the point of view of the student, not as discrete activities, but the intellectual-social-cultural development of a whole person. This is what we ought to be doing to ensure that our students have access to whatever they may need while they're with us, so that when they graduate us with their degrees, they are as well prepared and confident as more affluent students in more privileged settings.

That's a really big goal; you've really got to push hard to make that happen. We, VU and UTEP, can do a lot. We have to build on each other's work. You can't start over every time. So I think this is the real test, whether institutions like ours can sustain programs like this through successive administrations and personnel changes.

Professor Dawkins: We need to continually learn from each other, we initially learned a lot from UTEP in the students-as-staff and student experience, and UTEP has said that they have learned from us around the learning commons – mutual benefit and in the last year collaborative research.

Universities of our kind need to stand up and make a statement on a global stage about our commitment to our mission. We want to know – are there others who could join our global connection? There's the possibility of building an international network and including other like universities committed to our vision of student success.

Liberal Arts Builing at University of Texas at El Paso

Students on campus at University of Texas at El Paso

Voices from the Periphery: The Victoria University and University of Texas at El Paso Global Learning Community

University of Texas at El Paso: Irma Montelongo and Joanne Kropp
Victoria University: Effy George

While traveling for business the Vice Chancellor of Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia, came across an article written about the University of Texas at El Paso. The inflight magazine featured UTEP's extraordinary effort to provide access and a quality education for thousands of Latina/o students in the West Texas, Southern New Mexico, and Northern Mexico regions. What struck the reader most was that the student body at UTEP shared numerous similarities with students at Victoria University. Such was the serendipitous beginning of our collaborative courses. In this chapter, we reflect on the partnership's goal of increasing cultural literacy among students who are themselves often positioned as 'other' in socio-economic and cultural terms in relation to the dominant national culture around them. The University of Texas at El Paso student profile is 76% Hispanic with 83% residing in El Paso County. El Paso County is an economically depressed region; therefore, 81% of students are employed while 64% receive federal financial aid in the form of Pell Grants. Additionally, 55% are first generation college students.

Victoria University is in the industrial west of Melbourne and since its inception has promoted successful participation in tertiary and vocational education among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Since the 1950s the west has been the new home for immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, and since the 1970s it has seen immigrants from South East Asia and, more recently, China, South Asia, and Africa. With almost 50,000 students, over 46% are from non-English speaking backgrounds. As at UTEP, many students at VU are first generation vocational/tertiary students.

The similarities between the universities' profiles and the goal of each to bring the world to students who would otherwise not be able to study abroad because of economic and other barriers led both institutions to seek international partners as a means to enhance the globalization of their curriculum. This led to a sustained dialogue between the two universities and ultimately a memorandum of understanding signed by each institution's Vice Chancellor and Vice President. For UTEP and VU, the forging of international partnerships is integral to their strategic objectives inasmuch as both are committed to engendering "responsible and ethical citizens who use their intercultural understanding to contribute to their local and global communities" (Victoria University 2012). Collaborations were formed across different colleges and departments at both universities. One became the Global Learning Community (GLC), which linked the Entering Student Program at UTEP and the Liberal Arts Program at VU. In addition to the goals of global citizenship, these learning communities aim to increase student engagement with one another, their instructors, and the integrated course content and, in doing so, to improve academic performance and retention.

Course Development and Design

As the academic collaborations between the two universities expanded, our respective Deans suggested that several of the courses that we authors routinely delivered could be interwoven and developed into a synergetic course for first-year students. Early in 2009, we met for the first time through videoconferencing and promptly established a collegial rapport

that culminated in the integration of the first-year VU Liberal Arts course Analyse a Range of Texts (Imagining Australia) and the similarly themed first year UTEP course The US – Mexico Border. Both courses explored themes of identity formation, multiculturalism and nationalism, race and gender. It quickly became obvious that combining the two curricula would provide an engaging learning environment where groups of students who were considered marginal within their respective communities could develop into global citizens with a deeper understanding of the themes of the class as well as of the world around them.

From these initial discussions about the thematic content emerged the title of the project: The VU - UTEP Global Learning Community (GLC). Agreement on the name and content (the 'what'), however, did not indicate 'how' we could create a collaborative course, given that class members were on different sides of the world in vastly different time zones. These issues presented formidable obstacles, and the solution at the time was synchronous videoconferencing, which would at least provide a means of face-to-face contact between two student cohorts.

Aware of the time differences and how they could impact student participation, we decided that the course should be a hybrid, a mix of face-to-face and online learning. We would deliver lectures, tutorials and computer lab sessions in our respective classrooms and then enhance these class components with asynchronous online discussions and assignment collaborations between VU - UTEP students. These student collaborations we thought would foster international dialogue and 'reflective learning' for the purpose of individual 'deep learning' (Kolb 1984; Gibbs 1998; Park & Kastanis 2009). Students would blog, others could comment and then the original author could reflect on their contribution and comment in response to their own critical thinking and that of others. We hoped that this would lead to students learning how to question their own prejudices and open horizons to new ideas and values.

We were aware that many of our students hailed from situations where the ability to travel abroad for academic enrichment was limited if not non-existent; therefore our collaboration became even more meaningful. We soon recognised that we were in the process of creating a space that could significantly overcome the tyranny of distance. If we could not send our students out into the world, then we could bring the world to our students. The next question quickly became how exactly would we do this?

Inter-institutional license limitations on existing VU and UTEP Learning Management Systems (Blackboard) led us to think about building a website containing course information, such as lecture schedules and assessment details, which would be linked to several thematic discussion forums enabled by a Web 2.0 platform such as Blogger.com. During this stage we designed the fundamental information architecture, and this has not changed greatly since mid-2009. A member of UTEP instructional support staff had experience with the open source Ning.com software and proposed it as a more elegant means to overcome inter-institutional license limitations and provide a secure, invitation only Web 2.0 Social Networking Site (SNS). This would be adaptable to the collaborative classes' information needs, and especially suitable for the creation of cross-cohort discussion forums, as well as the uploading of videos, readings, lectures, and student assessment tasks. It also enabled students to create their own personalized pages from which they could communicate with a profoundly individual feel. The facility for students to create customised pages was quite contrary to the institutional Learning Management Systems of the time, which maintained a corporate sameness across the site. This facility greatly helped students to take some ownership and feel more secure, comfortable, and thus motivated to spend more time on the site beyond merely fulfilling assessment tasks.

Once the site was built, we realised that it needed a distinctive inter-institutional branding, and in conjunction with UTEP and VU Marketing, we initiated and collaborated on the design of a distinctive template style for the site (see Fig. 1). This included a header with the logos of both institutions, the title of the collaborative course, a spliced photograph of both campuses, and a clock widget showing the present time in El Paso and Melbourne. The GLC platform was designed for both the uploading of lecture materials and other course information, but more importantly for facilitating discussion and shared learning. The platform had three separate discussion forums: an El Paso and a VU forum, which served to separate course assessment tasks,

and an informal forum open to general discussion, which enabled students to get to know each other better.

Students posted their article summary, film review or brief opinion piece in their institution's forum; however, any student or instructor could contribute comments on the post (the role of the instructor has varied in an effort to promote student participation). The informal forum was a site for both cohorts to share their independent research findings and develop social networks for investigating their own experiences, thereby gaining a better understanding of the cultural tapestry that exists, not just in the one class, but in two classrooms on opposite sides of the globe. Students were encouraged to upload photographs, videos, music and maps, and even links to e-journals or academic and other websites.

Figure 1: VU and UTEP Global Learning Website

The GLC also utilized video conferencing to further expand the students' ability to communicate with one another. These interactions were held early, midway, and at the end of the course and ranged from broad-based discussions to more focused analyses of particular themes. This synchronous and visual communication was especially important at the start of the collaboration because it greatly helped student bonding. Students could see and talk to one another, rather than merely being relatively anonymous online bloggers.

Before the second iteration of the course in 2010, we gave a joint presentation on the GLC titled 'Bridging Courses, Countries, and Continents: The Creation of the UTEP-VU Learning Community', at the 23rd International Conference on the First-Year Experience, in Maui, Hawaii (June 2010). Here we met in person for the first time (another unique if old fashioned form of communication) and designed our second course, *Stories Across Cultures: Mobile Worlds and Politics of Belonging Amongst Diasporic Communities in Australia and the United States*, which combines the Liberal Arts course Analyse Stories/ Narratives with Cultures and the UTEP course University Studies 1301. This is now delivered in alternate semesters.

Figure 2: VU students

Figure 3: UTEP students

At the conference we realised that the course had even greater potential and discussed ways to increase thematic integration and expand collaborative inter-cohort assessment tasks. For the latter goal, we introduced the making of collaborative videos using YouTube's cloud based editing suite. The video makers further communicated on the Ning.com site, on Facebook, or via Skype. The videos are unique hybrids, VUTEP or Mel Paso movies, and are most astounding because students shared and interrogated perceptions of each other. The filmmakers portrayed borderless, globalized conceptions of their chosen thematic content, an indication that they were beginning to think of themselves as part of the larger globe, as entities beyond borders.

We, the instructors, moderated the forums and maintained decorum as well as the course platform. Support for projects requiring technological expertise was facilitated by instructional support services at UTEP and by a very tech savvy Library Officer at VU. Their commitment to the project and responsiveness to students who sought advice for resolving ICT (information and communication technology) issues outside scheduled hours were crucial and inspiring.

Cultural Literacy

A prime motive of the GLC is the idea that, for students to better understand their role as active global citizens, cultural illiteracy must be confronted and deconstructed analytically. Cultural literacy refers to the common core of knowledge that literate individuals within a culture share and that forms the basis for textbooks, dictionaries, and even state-mandated curricula. Cultural literacy however, can blindly construct cultural illiteracy, a monocultural knowledge that legitimates the economic and political status quo, thus occluding the knowledge, values, and perspectives that define the identities of vast cultural groups that reside on the margins (Cummins and Sayer 1995). With today's fluid cultural demographics, it is important to confront cultural illiteracy and create intercultural learning communities that take advantage of accessible and culturally appropriate educational and communications technology.

Our inaugural GLC, first implemented in the spring of 2009 in Australia (thus, fall 2009 in the United States), dismantled students' cultural illiteracy by providing intercultural contact and learning. The course linked students at each institution for eight weeks to study colonialism, nationalism, culture, migration, gender and sexuality through a unique intercultural perspective.

This intercultural perspective took as its core the idea that students knew something about their respective nations' history but had rarely applied a critical perspective in order to contest the foundations of hegemonic conceptualizations. Indeed, to disturb the status quo, the first student project was to produce a digital story of how VU and UTEP students imagined the other's nation. For the VU cohort, the imaginings of Australia by some UTEP students were most 'other' to their experience. Especially for recently arrived immigrants, kangaroos, crocodiles and surfing are not part of their social imaginary. For UTEP students the VU imaginings were equally steeped in race and ethnic stereotypes of Latina/os, largely influenced by the bygone days of black and white Hollywood cinema and television, or more contemporary depictions of drug runners and routine homicide (*Breaking Bad*; *The Bridge*).

However, these musings provided a springboard for examining conventional narratives regarding the construction of a national identity for each nation as well as the students' identities and positions within it. Benedict Anderson's imagined political community (1991, 5) and Franz Fanon's (1986) psychoanalytic understanding of the relations between colonizer and colonized became guides for disrupting anachronistic imaginings and forming more nuanced conceptualizations of each nation. The themes of manifest destiny, colonialism, race, the white man's burden, indigenous dispossession, migration and exclusion resonated with both cohorts. National themes such as indigenous dispossession came to be recognized as transnational, if not global issues and thus provided new ground for discussions about the politics of identity, belonging and nation. Moreover, a learning space had been established where our students honed their critical thinking skills at the formative stage of their academic experience.

From the outset, the GLC fostered an intercultural dialogue among students, many of whom are considered other in their respective nations, while developing intercultural empathy led to instances of post-intercultural learning. Strangers had become friends and were learning with each other. Bland stereotypical portrayals of difference gave way to more substantive recognition of difference and sameness, of humans facing all too common human problems.

The initial GLC demonstrated the potential that global learning communities have to expand and empower student educational experience by providing a means for extensive intercultural interaction without incurring the more significant expense of study abroad. Moreover, the GLC provided a space where two site-encumbered groups (it could involve more groups), who would have otherwise not met, came into contact and challenged one another to develop new ways of thinking about global and local issues, thereby confronting and dismantling cultural illiteracy and moving on from sometimes thought-stifling intercultural etiquette.

First-Year Transition and Participatory Pedagogy

In the 21st century, student centered strategies and classroom design, relevant to learning programs for first year students, are the subject of discussion and conferences among educators worldwide. For higher educational institutions, a successful first-year transition aims to develop a positive, caring, self-directed student experience through the implementation of innovative curricula. For VU and UTEP, access and support for student success have become a primary strategy for attracting and retaining students. For instance, both universities have student mentor and other programs to help first-year students navigate their studies and their respective institutions in order to improve and complete their university experience. More pressing for us was the need to accommodate a first year transitional model that effectively engaged students of such diverse backgrounds with programs that were academically stimulating and supportive, while generating a sense of connectedness to university life and community. The creation of the GLC was appealing for a number of reasons. As the following student remarks:

> As a student who had just finished high school in 2010, I was worried and nervous about my first time experiencing university... I've learnt a lot about different religions and complicated situations that everyday people overcome. I also learnt a lot about racism and gender issues that I didn't know existed. This class is also a great way of teaching because the documentaries and films that link to the readings done in class really help in understanding the learning intentions because there are so many classes that don't even do that. The best experience in this class was the conference calls with UTEP where we talked about our cultural and political differences in Australia and America. In the GLC class, you really learn a lot about the world around you.

In an effort to accommodate various learning styles, the GLC incorporates several modes of instructional design. These modes seek to combine on-site and off-site learning support for students. This all-embracing approach helps students develop an identity within their respective institutions and, more importantly a collegiality among peers and with faculty and staff.

Participatory pedagogy (Siemens 2008) is the hallmark of the GLC. Students from the two universities construct dialogue threads on the Ning.com site, and

thus weave a dynamic interconnectedness across borders, characterized by an ever-expanding discourse between diverse voices. Within the institutional setting the GLC serves to displace in part the role of the instructor and challenges traditional classroom-situated pedagogies. Moreover, the GLC instructors provide resources designed to open a heterogeneous space for marginal groups to explore other marginalized cultural groups, as well anchoring these resources in debates that require a critical analysis of various forms of power. As one student put it, "The readings didn't describe but dealt with assumptions about nature, class, gender, sexuality, democracy and relations of power."

Our broad canvas was underpinned by a comparative analysis of how the U.S. and Australia were historically imagined and how these imaginings have been contested by contemporary theoretical interpolations. This stimulated independent and group inquiry as students sifted through an array of information, from the challenging curriculum to the sharing and uploading of music or videos, and online debates. It created a fluid participatory framework that oscillated from the personal knowledge of the individual student to a sharing of information among a network of peers. In short, this learning space engaged a network of peers with the institutional curriculum. Indeed, the transnational conversation facilitated knowledge creation within multiple networks rather than promoting a limited discrete individualistic learning.

Marshall McLuhan's statement that 'the medium is the message', in its least ironic sense, is too absolute, too technologically deterministic. However, new types of communication technology in our experience have allowed messages to be communicated between those who would not have typically conversed. The Web 2.0 communication revolution is very different from letter writing pen pals of the past. Obviously different are the speed of communication and the types of materials that can be shared, and this difference affects discursive content. Web 2.0 discussions often tend to assume a present, rather than a pensive waiting for the next letter to arrive; responses are rapid and give rise to lively debate and reflective musing. Moreover, our discussions stemmed from a curricular context and framing questions that encouraged self-reflexivity and contextualized knowledge.

Kop and Hill (2008) in their analysis of connectivism, as argued by Siemens (2005) and Downes (2008), contend that:

> Knowledge does not reside in one location, but rather that it is a confluence of information arising out of multiple individuals seeking inquiry related to a common interest and providing feedback to one another.

Clearly there is a synergy between the GLC and connectivism as a theoretical framework in that the GLC as a learning process is clustered around shared interests (e.g., age group, course topics, etc.). Siemens describes these groups in terms of communities in which "the clustering of similar areas of interest… allows for interaction, sharing, dialoging, and thinking together" (Siemens, quoted in Kop and Hill 2008). Another theorist of connectivism, described the "learning community":

> as a node, which is always part of a larger network. Nodes arise out of the connection points that are found on a network. A network is comprised of two or more nodes linked in order to share resources. Nodes may be of varying size and strength, depending on the concentration of information and the number of individuals who are navigating through a particular node.
>
> (Downes quoted in Kop and Hill 2008).

However, a singular theoretical stand would be presumptuous of us at present because the answers to many questions remain elusive. For example Starke-Meyerring (2010, p.263) raises fundamental questions about the nature of communication that occurs on such learning platforms:

> We currently know little about the negotiation of identities and subject positions in these networked learning environments—an important question because, after all, challenging and negotiating normalized ways of knowing and doing is no easy feat, as identities and subject positions are intimately tied up in these ways of knowing and acting.

Our emphasis has been on accruing ethnographic data and questioning our formative contention that the GLC promotes learning only when students feel empowered to share knowledge, that is, when they are not overly inhibited for knowledge to be critiqued and reformulated in online forums (blogs). Learning and knowledge is circulated and, as Siemens (2008) argues, "rests in" a "diversity of opinions" and this is combined with the knowledge gained from the institution. What is created is in effect a discursive network of competing knowledge(s), which constitutes deeper learning.

We witnessed this in the early semester project in which students were placed in groups and asked to produce a digital story of how each group imagined the other's nation. Many overtly regurgitated stereotypical assumptions about nation and peoples, and in some cases each cohort found these portrayals offensive. The VU and UTEP students vetted their frustration and anger and discussed possible interventions with their instructors. Both instructors waited to see what would transpire. The ensuing online discussions were forthright but devoid of name calling or flaming. In effect, respect was growing with the loss of anonymity. What transpired was a "robust exercise in free speech" couched in a "collective politeness" (Papacharissi 2004, 270), which culminated in a deep understanding of place, identity and belonging. Students recognized the value of competing discourses and used these multiple sources to construct their own knowledge. As one student commented:

> This subject gave us the opportunity to explore Australia's and (El Paso's) footprint through [set texts] …which positioned us as readers to critically think about our history and what we knew (or didn't know)… the Ning site (web 2.0 platform) enabled an exploration of these themes in depth... [R]eading other students' set work tasks and the discussions which flowed from these enabled me to gain a different understanding of not only the prescribed texts but also allowed other student opinions which at times was [sic] other than my own. Having said that, I came to respect and appreciate the many different ways of understanding.

Assessment

The initial collaborative course, called *Imagining Nations, Imagining Regions: The Making of Cultural Diversity in Australia and on the U.S.-Mexico Border*, was delivered in September and October 2009. Student assessment for the eight-week collaborative course was based on the presentation of an e-portfolio. The e-portfolio collated all the individual student's contributions to the GLC site, whether these were short collaborative films, journal article summaries, book reviews, film reviews, comments on the postings of other students, participation in forum discussions, reflective writing, i-photo presentations or peer group evaluations.

To gauge the impact of the course on students' perception of their own learning and cultural literacy, we ran pre and post course evaluations for VU and UTEP students. When collated, the evaluations demonstrated that both institutional cohorts enjoyed the intercultural experience and felt that they had learnt a great deal, indeed more than they had indicated likely in the pre-course survey. The what and how dialectic had been synthesised, and one student's opinion of the consequence was:

> Besides gaining friends, this was a new experience that most people haven't experienced yet. Even though it was an "experiment", I believe it turned out to be very successful. We learned together and we could ask each other for help. I think we learned tolerance, too, because of so many topics we had to express. Everyone had different opinions and point of views.
>
> (Student Post Course Evaluation, 2009)

Initial and subsequent student evaluations reiterate that the GLC has been most successful in forging new ground for teaching and learning. Students at both universities are empowered to explore and share the unique context of each other's national histories and cultural identities. In fact, the outcome has been the creation of a dynamic e-learning community across borders, which has liberated learner experience from the traditional classroom context and demonstrated the efficacy of a participatory pedagogy.

The GLC has measurably increased student (and teacher) information literacy and improved cultural literacy (Cummins and Sayer 1995). The latter evolved quickly, from sometimes embarrassingly uneducated and stereotypical comments at the beginning of the course, to informed empathetic discussions by the closing weeks. Students begin as strangers from strange lands and end up as friends who continue to communicate by email, Facebook or Ning.com, long after the course has finished. We left the original site up for the following semester and were surprised to find students still using it until we eventually retired and archived it. The group had taken ownership, thus making it a special and memorable site for friends to discuss their lives, future studies and even issues raised in the original course.

Knowing that most of their new friends come from working class backgrounds, many have invited others to come and stay at their home on the other side of the Pacific. Their international learning experience, although not as immersive as a study abroad program, has nevertheless increased cultural literacy and empathy, fostering a desire to one day go and learn more. Indeed several students have done so . However both universities have a large percentage of entering students who share key similarities that potentially impact academic opportunity; these include those of first-generation, minority, and lower socio-economic status. Thus for many students, the opportunity to travel abroad for academic enrichment is almost non-existent, in part because of cost, but also due to family responsibilities or cultural restrictions, especially for women. In an effort to address these needs while providing the cornerstone for first-year transition and success, the UTEP-VU GLC brought foreign lands and cultures to their students at minimal cost.

A research associate at UTEP designed pre and post-course evaluation instruments. The pre-course instrument consisted of an open-ended survey that queried the student on their previous knowledge of their region and nation, as well as their knowledge of the regions and nation of the international partner. At the end of the collaboration, we administered a post-course open-ended survey to measure knowledge gained from the collaboration. Additionally, UTEP facilitated focus groups consisting of 10-12 students who participated in the 2010 GLCs. Individual in-depth interviews (approximately 1 to 1.5 hours each) were recorded and transcribed.

Qualitative coding was ascribed to all data collected in order to identify and establish emerging patterns and themes with respect to the issues assessed.

The issues probed in all of the pre and post-course evaluation instruments as well as in the focus groups consisted of the following:

1. Exposure to multiple cultures and environments
2. Perceived outcomes from participating in the GLC (including student transition)
3. Expanding cultural literacy through structured interactions/academic content
4. Role of technology in enhancing access to global/ multicultural interactions
5. Interest in participating in study abroad

Further we asked students to assess the Ning.com platform as shown in Table 1.

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Unsure	
	UTEP	VU	UTEP	VU	UTEP	VU
Easy to Navigate	66.7%	53.8%	33.3%	46.2%		
Effective for Exchange of Ideas with UTEP Peers	73.3%	69.2%	26.7%	30.8%		
Effective for Exchange of Ideas with VU Peers	73.3%	53.8%	26.7%	38.5%		
Effective for Course Materials	60%	53.8%	33.3%	38.5%	6.7%	
Comfortable for Exchanging Different Perspectives	66.7%	53.8%	26.7%	38.5%	6.7%	

Table 1: Assessment Data for the GLC website: UTEP (N=15), VU (N=13)

Conclusion

The global learning community offers a space for students to achieve course goals while better understanding intercultural connections. For our first-year students, participation in the GLC allowed them to experience many different forms of diversity at the initial stage of their college years while providing a collaborative, intercultural environment through which to address a challenging curriculum. Moreover, the GLC provided a prototypical setting for students to consider future participation in study abroad. We argue that the UTEP-VU GLC provides a model for a dynamic first year learning experience that fosters the development of global citizens. Additionally, the GLC encouraged peer assisted learning and we found that students were most willing to support one another in their varied projects and assignments.

From student responses, *Imagining Nations, Imagining Regions: The Making of Cultural Diversity in Australia and on the US-Mexico Border* was most successful in forging new ground for teaching and learning. The importance of reiterating student responses is most salient;

> I believe interacting with UTEP students indeed helped me to achieve my course objectives. Their questions and curiosity about our issues, history, culture etc. made it even more interesting and motivating to research the information myself with the intent of sharing it with everyone. I felt it was a good relationship and we all contributed well.
>
> Prior to taking this course, I had a very vague and incorrect view of Australia…however, with this [GLC] collaboration, I was fortunate to learn many things about the country. It is incredible for me to have realized that our region [U.S.-Mexico border] has noticeable similarities than I would have never imagined.

Although the proposed outcomes of the GLC have been largely student focused, the course has also provided a rich environment for inter-institutional teaching collaboration and therefore international collegiality. UTEP and VU became teaching and curricular design partners, sharing problems and their resolutions, in an ever deepening knowledge transfer relationship.

Addendum: Joanne Kropp

I took over the UTEP-VU GLCs from Dr Irma Montelongo in fall 2013 when she moved to another department in our university. Dr Effy George continued to teach the VU sections. During our first semester working together we made no major changes to the course content or format, except that I added a few readings that centered on the idea of nationalism in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. In the next semester, spring 2014, we made a number of changes, the biggest being the addition of another videoconference, bringing the total to three per semester. We did that because in course evaluations as well as in class the students asked for more face-to-face interaction. In order to facilitate even more interaction, Effy suggested adding another forum on Ning.com where students could have informal chats in addition to the assigned postings in the discussion forum. It had always been possible to communicate one-on-one through each person's personal page, but the chat room opened up the opportunity for groups of students to talk with each other. Students built friendships through their conversations and many continued to communicate after the semester ended using Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. As we continued to teach our GLCs, Effy and I updated our content by adding recent scholarship and articles addressing the themes of the classes.

Due to the solid foundation that Effy and Irma provided, and the tweaking and improvements that Effy and I have added, the GLCs have proven to be a great success. Students are more engaged in these sections than in my other UNIV 1301 sections and thoroughly enjoy interacting with the VU students. The UTEP GLC students bond very quickly with each other and are pleased to have the opportunity to show off their own culture while learning about life in Australia. Attrition and failure rates are lower and evaluations of both the course and the experience are higher than in other sections. Students become interested in UTEP's Study Abroad Program as freshmen and work harder to keep their grades high and start early in their planning to raise money in order to travel to another country to study. They also consider

taking advantage of UTEP's Student Leadership Institute and the Student Enrichment Experience, both of which offer travel opportunities for students who maintain high grades.

These positive outcomes have resulted in expanding the GLC concept of linking courses at UTEP. In fall of 2015 I taught another GLC with VU. I also had a second GLC with Dr Nate Mickelson at Guttman Community College, part of the City University of New York system. Our course focused on the question 'What constitutes a community?' We explored how communities 'imagine' themselves and represent their identity in public spaces. We also examined the theme of gentrification, refurbishing neighborhoods to attract wealthy people and displacing the poorer residents. We used Ning.com, in the same ways as the VU-UTEP GLC model, to provide a virtual space where students at both universities could investigate their own backgrounds and experiences and those of their global cohort for a better understanding of identity formation in different places in the United States.

This GLC had a fourteen-week overlap and both sets of students had the same readings and watched the same films over their respective semesters. This pairing had the advantage of being in time zones that are more compatible, having a two-hour time difference, so we were able to have five videoconferences during our scheduled class times. Each videoconference had a themed discussion derived from our readings and, when possible, a guest speaker. Over the semester the UTEP students worked in teams to present a five minute researched digital public history display that commemorated a local community history project or a proposed project. They chose from local museum exhibits, sets of murals, sets of monuments, local public space projects, state or local parks, historic buildings, artwork, music, poetry or other representations of communities in El Paso. Their assignment was to explain a specific community's history and then show how that community's identity is commemorated. The Guttman College students also worked in teams over the semester and created multimedia portfolios describing how a specific neighborhood in New York has changed over the last 10 to 20 years due to gentrification and/or the migration of new people into a specific community. All of the GLC students posted their projects on Ning.com and discussed them in the final videoconference. The end-of-semester evaluations revealed that students learned more than they had expected to about El Paso and New York, enjoyed learning about commonality and differences when comparing various community identities, and looked forward to traveling in the future as part of their college experience.

The UTEP-VU GLC model has proven to be a highly successful method for engaging students in coursework that expands their understanding of not only other cultures but also themselves. The format can easily be adapted to form partnerships with a wide range of institutions and it is not difficult to plan common themes and shared coursework. The GLCs have been a richly rewarding experience for students and are a joy to teach. I look forward to a continuing partnership with VU and, hopefully, other institutions as well.

Notes

1 Flaming, an often offensive, nonsensical, albeit passionate online response thought to have detrimental effects (Papacharissi 2004).

2 VU and UTEP have established student exchange programs between each institution, and some former GLC students have taken advantage of these, others have gone of their own accord.

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Students studying on campus at Victoria University Footscray Park

Students-as-Staff Victoria University
Rover

The Student Peer Mentoring Program at Victoria University

Victoria University: Gill Best, Darko Hajzler and Belinda McLennan

The Institutional Context

Victoria University has grown from its beginnings as a technical college in 1916 to being one of only five multisector universities in Australia. A multisector university is defined as one that incorporates courses for vocational, further, and higher education. Vocational and further education programs are equivalent to courses found in community and technical colleges in the United States. The higher education sector offers traditional undergraduate and postgraduate bachelor's degrees, masters by coursework, and research masters and PhDs.

In 2009, 55,572 students enrolled at VU, with 47,371 onshore, 20,151 in higher education, and 27,190 in vocational and further education. VU is a commuter university. It has 11 campuses located in the central business district and western suburbs of Melbourne, the capital of the state of Victoria. Melbourne's western suburbs are characterized by their lower socioeconomic status population compared with the east of Melbourne, and its cultural diversity has grown rapidly as successive waves of refugees and migrants have settled in the region. In 2007, 40% of VU's Australian students reported the use of a language other than English at home (Messinis, Sheehan & Miholcic 2008). Many of the students are the first in their families to attend university "and about 75% of students in the University come from families in the bottom half of Melbourne's socioeconomic distribution" (Messinis et al, p. 6).

The University College

The Victoria University College (VUC) was created in 2007 to maximize access and success for its students. The VUC incorporates courses and staff from each of the vocational, further, and higher education sectors, providing nationally accredited courses in English language, access, preparation, transition (transfer), and further education. In addition, the VUC coordinates and runs non-accredited institutional programs and initiatives to support students' English language and learning needs. One of these programs is the Student Peer Mentoring Program (SPMP), which is part of Students Supporting Student Learning (S3L), a wider, new student peer-learning initiative driven by the VUC (McCormack, Best, & Kirkwood, 2009).

The Student Peer Mentoring Program

The SPMP consists of a variety of group-based, face-to-face student peer mentoring programs located within and sometimes across faculties and sectors. One staff member of the VUC has an overall coordination role for the SPMP and is aided in this role by the manager of Counselling Services. The SPMP coordinator in the VUC works collaboratively with staff members to devise, maintain, develop, and assess the programs, including the conduct of student mentor training sessions and student mentor support. The SPMP has evolved through the creative application of evidence-based practice, which in turn has been adapted to meet the characteristics of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. The SPMP focuses on building connectedness between students, their course of study, the institution, and the students and staff therein.

Each individual SPMP is group-based and exists in order to improve students' experience in a specific course, program of study, or transition. Individual programs vary in their structures and durations. The number of programs occurring at any one time also varies. Supplemental Instruction

(i.e., SI, referred to as Peer Assisted Study Sessions or PASS in Australia) is a student peer mentoring model that is likely to increase in the institution after 2010. SPMPs align with Karcher, Kuperminc, Portwood, Sipe, and Taylor's (2006) recommendation that programs focus on both academic and social integration but with differing emphasis depending on the aims, context, and students' needs. Each individual SPMP can be described as being single session, adjunct, integrated, or embedded. Below is a structural taxonomy of student peer mentoring programs coordinated by the VUC. Examples illustrating each type are also included.

Single Session Programs

Single session programs run one time over a few hours outside the formal curriculum. Examples include programs that orient students to a specific University transition, such as articulation or entry into first year. The Chinese Mentor-Guide program, for instance, aims to improve the University transition experiences of students at partner institutions in China who are intending to study at VU in Australia (Best, Hajzler, & Henderson, 2007). The student mentors are Chinese students who have been studying at VU in Australia for six months. The mentors in Australia participate in a live chat on Blackboard with the students in China and exchange practical information and knowledge about studying at VU in Australia. On arrival at the VU campus, the student mentors conduct informal sessions with the new students to help them settle in during their first few weeks in their new environment. The program is supported by a dedicated Blackboard site and a student/teacher workbook with an accompanying DVD in which Chinese students discuss their transition experiences.

Adjunct Programs

Adjunct programs (i.e., Supplemental Instruction in the United States) are connected to specific courses during most of a semester. For example, students enrolled in *Accounting for Decision Making* opt to attend the sessions outside their normal class time. Pairs of student mentors are recruited and selected based on their prior grade in the course and their performance in mentor training. They facilitate weekly review sessions for 10 weeks with a group of students studying the subject for the first time. Student mentors are also available on Blackboard at specified times during the week for live chats with students about the subject and to respond to posted questions.

Integrated Programs

These semester-long programs form part of the formal curriculum for student mentees, in which student mentors participate on a voluntary basis. An example is student mentors in Paramedics who are trained to provide peer support for lower-division Paramedic students in formal clinical sessions. In Paramedics, two integrated programs have been piloted. One is situated within the higher education sector and the other crosses both the further and higher education sectors. Selected student mentors facilitate discussion and guide mentees during weekly practical clinical classes, to assist them with clinical skills, familiarize students with paramedic equipment, and aid the development of clinical judgment (Best, Hajzler, Ivanov, & Limon, 2008).

Embedded Programs

In embedded programs, both mentors and mentees participate as part of the formal curriculum during most of a semester. Student mentors receive academic credit for their participation. For instance, students of the Graduate Diploma of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) choose to do a traditional essay or mentor students in the Certificate III English as a Second Language Further Education course. As a mentor, students conduct practical spoken English language and communication skills sessions on 12 occasions across two semesters. Students also write a reflective journal and deliver a presentation about their experiences.

The VUC's Integrative Role

The VUC plays a critical role in maintaining an overview and understanding of the breadth and depth of student peer learning across the institution

through its Student Peer Mentoring Governance Committee. The VUC's central role is key to the peer program's long-term viability, sustainability, and credibility and guarantees that institutional knowledge of the SPMP and the new, wider S3L initiative are maintained despite inevitable staff and policy changes.

Results and Lessons Learned

Assessment tools vary between individual programs due to their differing aims and requests by teaching staff and the SPMP coordinator to focus on specific issues as a program evolves. However, all the assessment tools focus on the twin elements of social and academic integration to determine how influential the individual programs are on student learning and engagement. Typically, a five-point Likert scale is used, including statements about the mentoring program (e.g., helped my knowledge in the subject, helped my confidence in the subject, increased my friendship networks).

The successes of the SPMP relate to its documented and recognized breadth of impact on student learning. In the Paramedics program in which all students in the specific cohort participate in the mentoring program as mentees, there is no control group with which to compare grades; therefore, assessments focus on the impacts of the program on the students' clinical skills and judgment (Best et al., 2008). In *Accounting for Decision Making*, the impact of the program on students' academic and social integration has been evaluated. More recently, final grades for participants and nonparticipants have also been compared (Hollingsworth, Sng, & Best, 2008a; 2008b). In the offshore to onshore Chinese Mentor Guide program, assessments focus on the impact of the program on students' pre-departure transition issues (Best et al., 2007). For the dual sector program in which Graduate Diploma TESL work with Further Education students, the benefits of the program to mentors' developing teaching skills and mentees' satisfaction with an extra opportunity to practice English language skills have been assessed (Best, Hajzler, Brogan, Judd, & Fitzsimon, 2006). In addition to assessing the impact of the individual programs, mentor training is also regularly evaluated (Hollingsworth, Sng, & Best, 2008c).

Meeting the learning needs and demands of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population and responding to a complex multisectoral institution have been major challenges. The significant lessons learned have been to create a variety of peer mentoring programs rather than apply a single model. The major strengths of the SPMP are its diversity and adaptability.

The SPMP occurs on five onshore campuses, two offshore campuses, and bridges the further, vocational, and higher education sectors. Staff involvement in a partnership with the VUC has helped to develop a community of practice and increase the program's institutional profile. The receipt of a Vice Chancellor's Award for *Enhancing the Student Experience* in 2006 and SI/PASS Outstanding New Leader Award in 2009 are institutional and national acknowledgements of the success of the overall program.

Conclusion

The creation of the VUC has provided an enhanced opportunity to broaden and deepen the understanding and scope of student peer learning across the University. This has resulted in improved student learning outcomes and has supported staff in their search for strategies to help them respond to a diverse student population.

Addendum: Gill Best

"It is the talents, skills, experience, generosity, enthusiasm and energy of students themselves that are the most powerful yet under-utilised resource at our disposal in enhancing student learning" (McCormack, Best and Kirkwood, 2009)

Since the original article on student peer mentoring was published in 2010, the elements of student mentoring at VU including the program names and structures and the ways that Student Mentors are supported have been developed and refined considerably. There now exists an overarching term for student mentoring programs connected to academic colleges and those which are centrally located within the university's various Learning

Victoria University Footscray Park campus

Commons. Known as Students Supporting Student Learning (SSSL), the term is also the title of the associated work unit, situated within the Centre for Student Success.

Longitudinal evaluation data on the programs' impacts on students' learning and sense of belonging consistently demonstrate the positive impact of SSSL's programs over many years, so much so that they are now an accepted and significant element of VU's suite of approaches used to support students' learning.

Philosophy

The underlying principles and philosophies of SSSL programs remain the same as when the original monograph chapter was written, that is, to unlock the potential for students to learn with and from each other in order to build stronger student academic and social communities and in turn to encourage and improve student success. SSSL's theoretical underpinnings are situated within Vygotskian social constructivism, the social nature of learning being the key to its operations and success and with a strong focus on anti-deficit models of student learning approaches, "focussing on the collaborative strengths of Victoria University's students rather than on students' real or imagined individual academic weaknesses." (Best, 2014 p.249)

SSSL programs employ existing VU students to be Student Mentors providing not only the opportunity to work on campus but to learn as they work, the aim being to provide students with an opportunity to experience 'learningful work' (McCormack, Pancini, Tout, 2010 page 7). That the Student Mentors are paid for their student mentoring work acknowledges the importance of the students' contributions to enhancing students' learning and success and to the positive impact they have on students' experiences of VU. Significantly, in terms of how we wish our Student Mentors to be perceived and understood, their employment is based on the students maintaining and emphasising their 'studentness'. In other words, the Student Mentors are employed to be students, to be "students as students rather than students as staff." (McCormack, Pancini and Tout, 2010 page 8).

Program Models

Organisationally, SSSL programs are either connected to units of study within the academic colleges or provide support across academic colleges from within five campus Learning Commons.

Student Writing Mentors

The Student Writing Mentor program was implemented in 2011. Its inception was inspired partly by the tradition of Writing Centres in the US and more specifically on my personal observation of a student assisting a student with their writing in the UTEP Writing Centre. Over and above reading about Writing Centres and feeling instinctively and philosophically that something similar could be successful at VU, it was my observation of the student at UTEP assisting another student that convinced me that students could help other students with their writing in settings more formal than friends' study groups but less formal than seeing an academic support lecturer. Student Writing Mentors work within what we have named a Writing Space. We began with one Writing Space at one Learning Commons, quickly expanding the program to four Writing Spaces across four Learning Commons. Student Writing Mentors provide assistance to students within each Writing Space venue on a 'drop-in' basis, that is, without an appointment, and where possible and practical Student Writing Mentors encourage collaboration between students, especially when the students are seeking assistance with the same assignment or writing issue. In turn this encourages the broadening of friendship networks and connectedness.

Student Rovers

The Student Rover program was implemented in 2007 and has been implemented across four of the university's Learning Commons. The Student Rover program operates on the assumption that many students find libraries complex and sometimes challenging to use. As students themselves, Student Rovers provide assistance with basic enquiries and to refer where necessary to other services but they do so based on "their own student experience and practical judgement, supported by regular and ongoing

reflective conversations with other rovers and the staff supporting them." (McCormack et al 2010 page 11)

SSSL Program Models Connected to Units of Study

Peer Assisted Study Sessions

Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) are free, regularly scheduled group study sessions connected to targeted units of study. We trialled the first PASS program as far back as 1998 but seriously embarked on implementing PASS in 2003. PASS targets challenging units, and focuses on providing a supportive, student-facilitated, collaborative learning environment for students in targeted units, which is teacher-free. The Student Mentors plan and conduct the weekly PASS sessions. With the students who attend they collectively review the taught content from lectures and tutorials and share the study skills required to succeed. Student Mentors function as excellent role models of the discipline, rather than authority figures. They help students to deepen their understanding and engagement with what has been taught in lectures and tutorials. They help to create a positive group learning environment where students feel comfortable to ask questions and encourage students to build a network of friends who they can turn to for support.

Peer Assisted Tutorials

On visiting UTEP in 2010 I observed UTEP's Peer Leader program in action. My observations of this program were the catalyst for the creation of what became the Peer Assisted Tutorial program at VU. In particular I saw its potential for working where PASS programs were not appropriate. In a typical tutorial there is a lecturer/tutor and the students. In a Peer Assisted Tutorial (PAT) there is a lecturer/tutor and two Student Mentors. In PATs, students who have previously studied and been successful in the unit attend the tutorial to support students with their academic work and their academic skills.

The Student Mentor in a PAT is a student who has recently studied the unit and received a high final subject grade and is understanding and empathetic of the difficulties that students can face. Student Mentors move around the tutorial room sitting and talking with individual and groups of students helping them to understand the work they are engaged with from the perspective of a student who has succeeded in the unit. A Student Mentor might also help to facilitate group discussion, share experiences of assignment writing and general study techniques and general experiences of being a student. Student Mentors also build positive working relationships with the tutor, being able to offer insights to the tutor about topics or concepts that students are finding difficult.

Trident

Trident is a large scale student mentoring program that was developed specifically for first year engineering students studying Maths and Physics but more recently expanded to include other first year units. The program's name derives from its three original elements namely PASS and PATs (each described above) and Study Space. Study Space consists of two rooms situated alongside each other in which a team of Student Mentors are timetabled across the week to be in attendance to assist students with first year engineering units. Trident's three tiered design is intended to increase the opportunities for students to interact across the week, and to build positive relationships with and gain assistance from Student Mentors. For example, Student Mentors working with students in PATs encourage students to seek further assistance and have further interaction with Student Mentors in a PASS or Study Space session to develop their understanding of the concepts being taught in the unit. This increased interaction between peers leads to increased opportunities to build friendship networks, and to less student isolation.

Conclusion

Each program model has been developed in such a way that they can be adapted to suit differing learning contexts and needs. The programs actively situate students in contexts where they can help other students to learn and succeed and to broaden their friendship networks. While we have strong connections and collaborations with other Australian universities, the collaboration between VU and UTEP is an example of how international

collaboration can inspire and enhance student-led academic support and in turn improve student success.

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A Student Writing Mentor at Victoria University

Learning Commons from Library at Victoria University Nicholson Street Campus

An Uncommon Journey: The Collaboration Between the University of Texas at El Paso and Victoria University Libraries in Building the Learning Commons

University of Texas at El Paso: Robert Stakes and Stephen Riter
Victoria University: Adrian Gallagher and Ralph Kiel

Since 2006, the University of Texas at El Paso Library and Victoria University Library have enjoyed a long term relationship in the context of the broader VU/UTEP engagement. Although both libraries had experienced a long tradition of cooperation and consortia participation on a state and regional level, this was the first time either library had undergone a significant engagement with an international partner.

The relationship was moved forward in 2006 with the visit of the UTEP Associate Vice President Information Resources and Planning, Robert Stakes as part of the 2008 UTEP delegation to Victoria University, Melbourne. In the following year, Learning Commons Manager Adrian Gallagher was able to return the visit as part of the Victoria University delegation. This was the start of a relationship that lasted over 6 years and saw collaboration in a number of key areas and sustained by further visits, joint presentations and video conference events.

A key feature of the evolution of the relationship between UTEP library and VU was the way each institution influenced the other in the development of learning spaces, service delivery, and student mentoring roles. The joint development and application of the learning commons was at the core of the relationship between the two libraries. In this context, a healthy exchange of principles, design data and service models was reinforced by video conferencing and visiting delegations combined with student exchanges and joint VU/UTEP programs offered in other parts of the university. This relationship involved project work and service evolution as well as planning for the next phase of learning commons development through an exercise in rethinking the concept and purpose of Learning Commons to ensure a stronger alignment with new curriculum and university pedagogies as well as new technologies and delivery modes. Apart from progressing the Learning Commons, the two libraries have also had the benefit of sharing many systems for delivering online resources. This has allowed the collaboration to be extended to sharing experiences and technical data around the operation and delivery of these systems and online services. In the early stages of the relationship, collaboration was also informed by the exchange of survey and quality assurance data to help identify common issues and strategies when redeveloping spaces or planning new services.

Progressing the Learning Commons

The major point of collaboration and sharing throughout the relationship has been the development of the learning commons at both universities and the consequential enhancements to spaces and service delivery. The Learning Commons is here taken to be the integration of a variety of educational services into a common location, usually the university library, as a key movement for re-invigorating libraries across the world. Apart from rethinking educational service delivery, the Learning Commons also has a strong emphasis on transforming traditional spaces to incorporate a range of technologies and accommodate a variety of student learning styles in an environment sensitive to the social dimension of learning. In part, this concept has been a reaction to the growth of technology and the need for university libraries to maintain their relevance in the age of electronic resources and for universities to serve a new generation of students. However it has also been part of a broader university shift to student centred environments characterized by a "culture of learning that is learning-oriented, learner-centred, flexible, collaborative, university-wide and community building" (Keating & Gabb 2005, p.2).

Both universities were attracted to the learning commons concept due to their shared emphasis on student engagement and retention. The commitment to the model was also driven by the recognition of a common mission to provide excellent and accessible education to students from culturally and socially diverse communities who are often the first in their families to attend university. The changing patterns of use of library collections and facilities were also impacting on this shift to learning space redesign. The shift to electronic resources and the demand for technologies were becoming integral parts of the study experience, and were driving factors in the need to redevelop library spaces.

Learning Commons Experience at VU

From 2005, the redevelopment of physical library spaces at Victoria University has been driven by the Learning Commons concept as a central feature of the University's campus planning strategy. The multi-campus nature of the VU Library network – 10 libraries in 2005 – demanded a staged application of the Learning Commons model often timed with other building developments. Apart from developing innovative spaces to feature new technologies and collaborative learning, all locations feature educational support services and programs provided through collaboration between the Library and a variety of other campus entities.

From 2006 to 2007, three major Learning Commons' were created at the City Flinders Campus, St Albans and Werribee. The City Flinders Learning Commons opened in October 2006 as a new facility on the 15 floor of a high rise building. It became the prototype for further Learning Commons development with a mix of partners delivering educational services including Learning Support, Careers, and Information Technology Services.

The St Albans and Werribee Campus Learning Commons were next developed through large scale refurbishments of existing Library spaces. Both Libraries had undergone a transformation as part of the VU University Library HEIP project in 2005, which redeveloped library spaces to support an extensive injection of technology within the library. The further redesigns developed in 2007 enabled the addition of Learning and Language support, and the University's Careers Service to complete the range of educational support services in the VU model. New discrete learning spaces were built in both Werribee and St Albans to allow the application of advanced 'assisted study' environments supported by Teaching and Learning staff and focussed on supporting students form the TAFE sector.

The Victoria University Learning Commons Building Program climaxed in 2011 with the completion of the Footscray Park learning Commons in February and the Footscray Nicholson Learning Commons in July. Built in concert with extensive sport and exercise science teaching and research facilities, the Footscray Park Learning Commons combines extensive technology, teaching spaces and food outlets in an award nominated building featuring an engaging mix of learning spaces and contrasting interior landscapes. The Footscray Nicholson Learning Commons was developed on what was then a predominately TAFE campus to produce a complete refurbishment of an existing building which unites services within the space through a dramatic laneway split across two floors.

One of the distinguishing factors of the Learning Commons approach at Victoria University from most others in this field is its commitment to student mentorship and the benefits students gain from the advice and support of fellow student's acting as mentors. The first point of contact for Learning Commons Services remains the Student Rovers: a student mentoring service recruited and coordinated by Teaching and Learning Staff not reporting to the Library. Beyond the provision of peer mentoring, the rover program has other benefits such as providing opportunities for student employment on campus together with a more 'approachable' level of service presenting as the human face of the Learning Commons. The rover role thus extends to creating a social presence in the Commons by building networks and by establishing friendly relationships with as many students as possible. Apart from the rovers, the emphasis on mentoring was extended beyond 2011 with the employment of Careers mentors, Research Ambassadors and Writing Space Mentors.

When the first Learning Commons was opened at Victoria University in late 2006, a collaborative service model was developed to outline the continuum of service between the different providers and to articulate the levels of specialist skills and expertise deployed to address the range of student learning needs. Although the Library takes the lead in managing the Learning Commons as a facility, each group is free to determine the parameters of their service in the shared space. The partnership relationship is complicated as each of these partners exist as separate organizational units and even though most of these units were initially combined within the same division, they have since shifted into separate portfolios as a consequence of dynamic organizational change within the University. With no formal organizational links between the groups, a full partnership model of independent providers operates within the space and required forums as the 'Learning Commons Operational Group' to coordinate services and address common issues.

The Learning Commons Journey at UTEP Library

The UTEP Library is a modern six story building housing over a million volumes and providing access to over 10,000 periodicals in either hard copy or online. In 2005 it was an example of what people have come to expect of a good library at an institution such as UTEP; that is a well-stocked repository providing access to most of the materials students and scholars needed to be successful and a staff prepared to work with a wide variety of users to meet their needs.

In 2005 UTEP Library leadership began to investigate ways to increase both the Library building's utilization and campus use of digital resources and at the same time support UTEP's commitment to educational access and excellence. What evolved over time was a plan to make the Library building a more hospitable user friendly environment, provide services to support student learning through information literacy instruction and provide access to university student support activities. UTEP's key strategy was to establish the Library as the location of choice for students wishing to access technology to include mass computer labs, high end computer systems, technology enhanced group study rooms and ubiquitous wireless coverage.

These services were to be provided as close to 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as possible. This recognition informed the transformation of the UTEP Library to what latter came to be recognized as a learning commons model. To meet student needs the Library opened a moderate sized computer facility in 2006, saw it immediately fill and remain filled for as many as 14 hours a day. In response to demand they expanded the facility and expanded it again until it now provides access to nearly 300 computers with standing room crowds and high demand times such as the end of a semester. A significant fraction of the computers provide high end services rarely available or affordable for students on their own machines.

The next step in the evolution of the UTEP Library to a learning commons model was an aggressive program to reclaim underused space and transform it into technology enhanced group study rooms. These rooms were created one or two at a time as unused space was identified and funds to purchase technology became available. As each room came online, demand seemed to increase which encouraged the addition of more rooms. Technologies in the rooms include computers, whiteboards, conferencing bridges and video technology. One consequence has been a change in the feel and sound of the building. The quiet somewhat secluded ambiance usually associated with

University of Texas at El Paso campus

libraries has been replaced with the constant buzz of hundreds of students interacting with each other and with technology that promotes the learning process.

At some point in this process it was recognized that students needed more than just access to technology. They needed assistance and encouragement to fully utilize the technologies and resources being made available and to help them become information literate. To achieve this, UTEP has transformed its library subject research specialists into being learning facilitators and moved them from behind reference counters to the spaces where students are engaged in utilizing the resources. These library staff members are supplemented by student workers trained to assist students accessing the technology.

The success of these ventures has led to dramatic increases in demand from units outside the Library to provide services in the Library and to create a true learning commons. "Build it and they will come" doesn't always work at an American university, but "build it where they are and they will use it" has a better chance of success. As a result UTEP now operates a help desk, writing center, math center, after hours career development center, veterans center and other support activities in the vicinity of the learning commons because that's where the students are. As the sophistication of the available technology has increased so has the demand for workshops and instructional activities to increase people's ability to fully utilize the technology.

Collaborating to Deliver the Learning Commons

At an early point in the transformation of the Library to a learning commons UTEP began interacting with VU. The universities came together because of a shared recognition that they were both committed to serving non-traditional students. Both were experimenting with new strategies for improving access and student success and with developing an understanding of how to best serve their student demographic. Both were interested in using the Library as an active player in this enterprise. UTEP had embarked on the path described above and VU was in the process of applying their new learning commons model. Over the past five years VU and UTEP have visited each other and shared philosophies and experiences and remained in constant contact using video conferencing. This resulted in the sharing of design, service management and quality data. A careful examination of where both are now in terms of development and implementation would lead to the recognition that many facets of each implementation are indistinguishable.

Much of the early phase of the relationship was around sharing design data for how to re-purpose library spaces to create contemporary learning environments incorporating technologies and meeting different learning needs. The UTEP delegation of 2008 and the VU delegation of 2009 were great opportunities to share plans, visit buildings and assess refurbishments for moving library spaces towards the learning commons model. Particular attention was paid to the challenge of how to integrate technology and collaborative learning spaces yet retain some spaces for client study. The re-purposing of library space – usually collection space – to allow room for new non-library educational services was an important feature of each learning commons development. As the space was refurbished, new issues would arise around service models and how to work cooperatively across the various service areas which reported to different organizational units in the university. A valuable video conference was held in 2011 when manager representatives from the different service areas (library, learning support, writing centre and careers) attended to discuss the challenges of working together in a partnership model and effectively coordinate services to help ensure a seamless experience for students.

An important success factor in the service models for both VU and UTEP was the role of student employees to assist students in the new spaces. Both libraries exchanged duty statements, conditions of employment and related information to help determine best practice in managing student employees in the learning commons and refining their duties, training and service orientation. Therefore the roles of student rovers at VU and miner guides at UTEP were developed along similar lines as assistants not fixed to a specific service point but moving throughout the library spaces to offer help at the point of need. A direct opportunity to share experiences and participate came as part of the student exchanges between VU and UTEP with UTEP

students being successfully placed in VU Library in 2010 and 2011, followed by a VU student working in the UTEP library in 2010. In order to foster further connections between students working in both universities, a video conference was held for student employees in 2010 which allowed students to discuss their roles and experiences of offering services in the learning commons.

Another part of the UTEP/VU collaborative projects was the sharing of learnings from each Library's quality programs. The initial step was for the Libraries to benchmark their 2008 results of their library satisfaction surveys. The Libraries use different library satisfaction measurement survey tools, LibQual and Insync respectively in the assessment of library services in order to facilitate service improvement. LibQual uses a score out of a nine point scale in the categories being evaluated: Affect of service, Information Control and Library as Place. Insync uses a score out of seven in the categories Communication, Service Quality, Service Delivery, Facilities and Equipment, Library Staff and Virtual Library. Interestingly, the main concern for both libraries in the statistical results was the clients' perceptions of individual and quiet study spaces. This issue was also identified as an emerging concern in VU's 2007 survey trend analysis that indicated while gaps for most areas slightly declined and Library performance has increased, the notable exception was individual seating where the gap has increased over the survey years. Other issues identified in the qualitative comments collected in both surveys were around the need for more computers and a demand for both group and quiet study spaces.

Against the background of developing front line services and innovative learning spaces, the two libraries also discovered that they were using the same systems and facing the same challenges of supporting a collection increasingly dominated by electronic resources. At Victoria University, for example, a key tipping point was reached in 2014 where the number of e-books surpassed the number of print works in the collection. Fortunately the two libraries both used the Innovative Millennium Library System for managing library operations, including the library catalogue. VU library were able to share experience, technical details and expertize about how the Encore search engine functionality was implemented on Millennium and later our early experiences of applying a discovery layer (Summon). UTEP library, on the other hand, had been an early user of the Springshare Libguide product for organizing library support materials in a web format and were able to advise VU Library on their approach. These learnings were successfully applied when a Libguide was used for sharing information resources for the Global Learning Community unit undertaken by both UTEP and VU students. Cooperative work on this unit was also an opportunity to tackle the range of access and identity issues raised by having students from different institutions using electronic information resources hosted across different universities.

The Future of the Learning Commons: Can the University Itself Become a Learning Commons?

In 2013 both libraries engaged in some blue sky thinking to envision whether the whole university might be thought of as an extended learning commons with physical and virtual spaces dedicated to achieving excellent, engaged and accessible education and research. In this future there would be spaces that are designed to support learning and research and the outcomes of the curriculum and of researchers. Clearly the maturation of online education and the growth of mobile devices and their ubiquitous nature will in time decrease the demand for the traditional classroom. This is particularly true at both universities where a majority of students balance school with other requirements. Other research suggests that students choose educational programs based on cost, convenience and reputation. The success of 'for profit schools' in the US, which are often more expensive than not for profits and have less of a reputation, suggests that for large segments of the community, convenience might be more of decisive factor than usually recognized.

To see the university as a Learning Commons it is necessary to draw on lessons learned from two areas, Academic Libraries and Online Learning. We know that students and teachers can interact over the internet but they still need to enter the physical campus to make use of the many flexible and multipurpose spaces based on the learning commons philosophy and

methodology. These spaces can be used for research and learning where there is no specific discipline requirement. Support for the use of these spaces is provided by student peer mentors and learning support staff working with academics to foster and promote creative, collaborative and interdisciplinary learning. Older university buildings can be and are retro-fitted to encompass these spaces and technologies are ever present and used as a matter of course whenever their use is advantageous for learning. Students and teachers use these spaces via mobile technologies and so the latest infrastructure and web content for the mobile online environment is provided behind the scenes.

Modes of learning are blended in a way that is seamless so that not all participants need to be physically present and teachers offer a choice of ways and opportunities in which students will learn. Online is the dominant mode especially for reflection, resources, interactive learning, assessment, experiments and practical lab work; however students and teachers attend the physical campus when it is their preferred mode of learning and teaching at the times of their choosing. Much hands-on practical learning occurs outside of the campus in places of work and in the community.

Learning and research at the university are conducted as partnerships: student to teacher, teacher to student, learning support to teacher, librarian to student, researcher to teacher and so on. The teachers through the various spaces both virtual and physical have responsibility for structured learning and facilitation but also for encouraging and allowing unstructured learning. The roles of teachers and students are less differentiated than now. In these spaces social and intellectual activities are encouraged and it is often difficult to tell them apart. The use of cafes for structured learning is not unusual and sometimes the rooms dedicated to learning resemble cafes, theatres, film studios and other spaces now regarded primarily as social spaces.

So where does the library fit into this new vision of a university? University libraries, and librarians, are heavily impacted by the technological transformation of information needed to support research and curriculums, and learning. The transition to electronic databases of journals and monographs, e-books, digital repositories and the like have required librarians to adapt their skills and responsibilities to these technology platforms. Furthermore the library is as integral and important as ever, managing and organizing the critical mass of scholarly resources that underpins qualitative intellectual enquiry and supports a range of scholarly interactions. The library continues its curatorial role with the development of collections of information resources that are targeted at the areas of learning, nearly all of which are online and hosted externally. Physical items such as books are a novelty and part of special collections. The library also oversees the selection and provides access to a collection of software that is hosted externally. The library has a strong knowledge-sharing role including: managing repositories of research output, supporting and providing access to data sets, managing the publication of peer review e-books and journals, and supporting researchers with information seeking and data management. The most visible embodiment of the library, however, is in the oversight of learning spaces, assisting users with information resources and imparting expertise in research skills development. The librarians themselves also play a critical role in serving the educational community by storing information, accessing information and assessing information.

Beyond the physical library, important questions remain around the online presence of future learning commons services in an environment where both academic support process and learning resources shift online. It can be challenging to reproduce the learning commons model in an online environment as demonstrated in the limitations of web page delivery or service linked via Learning Management Systems. What will be the remaining role for the one-stop human capital invested in learning commons services when the bulk of transactions can be completed through the web? Although there has been some promising contributions from student mentors to online social networking services, it is still unclear how far web based interactive and textual support resources will replace the front line learning commons services currently designed to be the first port of call for those seeking help with the academic environment. Facing this challenge can be seen in the latest addition to the VU Footscray Park Learning Commons: the Innovation Hub. The Innovation Hub is equipped with both software and hardware to enable staff to create and develop innovative learning resources for the VU Collaborate Learning environment. It is staffed by eLearning Designers dedicated to upskill academics developing online content in

advanced educational technologies required for new media and learning object creation. Librarians can also have a role here as the traditional support through information literacy extend to encompass the digital literacies required to both create content in an online environment and aid student learning as it shifts to the online experience.

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VU to UTEP exchange student Nadia Kapri

Early College High Schools /Victoria University: An Accelerated Pathway to Degree Completion

University of Texas at El Paso: Donna Ekal
Victoria University: Karen Charman and Jacinta Richards

The University of Texas at El Paso and Victoria University began their mutually beneficial relationship in 2009, a relationship that had at its core a recognition of similarities in their communities and an alignment of their goals to provide access, excellence and success for the students from their respective communities. An ongoing exchange of ideas and collaborative undertakings from that point provided a rich contribution to the educational capital of both universities.

In 2011, a group of Victoria University staff, including Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Dawkins, visited UTEP and were introduced to the Early College High School (ECHS) program in El Paso. The potential for Victoria University to also work with its local schools to provide enabling educational pathways for students in our region became increasingly apparent as we saw the multiple ways in which the program was successful for the students in UTEP's community. This influence has continued to be acknowledged in the work VU has done in this area in the last three years. Below is an excerpt of a paper (Richards, 2015) presented at the 2014 Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention & Success (STARS) conference, Melbourne, Australia.

> *…Victoria University has a partnership arrangement with the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) which, like Victoria University, is located in an area of economic disadvantage with a good proportion of students from NESB and LSES backgrounds. The success of the Early College High School (ECHS) programs in their region to both provide increased access for students as well as increased success through co-enrolment in school and college, prompted us to explore the possibilities for our region.*

Ideas, however, can rarely be transported unchanged from one context to another without needing to acknowledge and accommodate some differences. Unlike Texas, the Australian Victorian secondary school system does not allow for the concurrent study of tertiary and secondary programs in such a fulsome way as allowed in the United States. Although this does not preclude change in the long term through work with the Department of Education, it did necessitate seeing and acknowledging differences in the educational contexts in the short term. However, the drivers for Australian students are also not identical to those of Texas and so a greater emphasis on transition- including building aspiration and preparedness- and less of an emphasis on financial imperatives and acceleration goals emerged in the VU Early-Uni Pathways (EUP) program.

While all agree this accelerated educational pathway is not the choice for all students, it has certainly been demonstrated that it is the right pathway for many. Offering multiple opportunities to continue higher education is what UTEP and VU are all about, as they realize that their 21st century student population represents students from many different backgrounds and walks of life who benefit from this innovative partnership that promotes access at all levels to higher education for the students of their regions.

In the Beginning in El Paso

In the summer of 2008, a new high school opened its doors in El Paso, Texas. With a small first entering freshmen class of only 125 students, it did not seem as if it would have much of an influence on the local educational setting, much less impact educational opportunities on the other side of the globe. But, that first class at Mission Early College High School set the stage for some amazing educational success stories to follow both in El Paso, Texas, and Melbourne, Australia.

The concept of Early College High Schools (ECHSs) began in 2002 with support from foundations such as Bill & Melinda Gates and organizations such as Jobs for the Future. The idea was to create an environment where high school students could receive their high school diploma and associate degree concurrently by taking a mixture of college and high school classes.

This preparation for college has proven to be success in the United States with no fewer than 230 early colleges educating more than 50,000 students across 28 states. The data suggests that the concept works on a national level.

- 90% Early College High School students graduate from high school vs 78% from traditional high schools nationally
- 94% earn free college credit while in high school
- 30% nationally earn an associate's degree or other post-secondary credential while in high school (Jfforg, 2016)
- Early College students have a greater opportunity than their peers to enroll in and graduate from college. They also appear to be on a different academic trajectory, with early college students earning college degrees at higher rates than comparison students. Early Colleges appear to mitigate the traditional educational attainment gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students. (Airorg, 2016)

This last point is of particular interest to us at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) where approximately 50% of the students come from families whose annual income is in the bottom quartile nationally and 53% are first generation college-going. Early College High School provides them with a no cost pathway to earning an associate's degree that is, in most cases, fully transferable to a degree plan at UTEP, thereby, covering up to half the costs in tuition and fees of earning a bachelor's degree at the university.

First Contact at UTEP

The first introduction to ECHS students at the University of Texas at El Paso was a phone call in January of 2010 when the assistant principal at the first ECHS in the El Paso area, Mission Early College High School, contacted UTEP to find out what she could do with the 23 Mission ECHS students who were going to graduate with their associate's degree from El Paso Community College (EPCC) at the end of their junior year of high school. In the beginning, no one really knew what to do because this situation had never occurred to any of the key educational personnel involved in establishing the ECHS concept in El Paso. Turns out, this very first group of students not only were going to meet the institutional goal of earning their associate's degree concurrent with their high school diploma, they were going to do so a full academic year prior. Students who complete their associate's degree prior to graduating from high school are now referred to as Accelerated ECHS students while those who complete their associate's degree and high school diploma concurrently are referred to as Traditional ECHS students.

A meeting of Mission ECHS and UTEP personnel was quickly arranged to determine next steps and one of the first major issues discovered was that since these students had not yet graduated from high school, they were ineligible to apply for federal need based financial aid that most students in the region used to pay for their university tuition and fees. Without this support, almost all of these students would be unable to continue their higher education for the next 12 months prior to high school graduation.

That seemed an unacceptable option to UTEP's president, Dr Diana

Natalicio, long a champion of El Paso students and known for supporting innovative solutions to hurdles that faced the region's student population. She encouraged development of a solution to allow these students to continue their education at UTEP while concurrently completing their high school diploma. Six years later, over 600 Accelerated ECHS students have been able to continue their higher education at UTEP through the Accelerated ECHS Students Scholarship that provides scholarships for tuition and fees for up to nine semester credit hours for up to two semesters at UTEP. The data shows that these Accelerated ECHS students are completing their baccalaureate degrees in greater numbers, in shorter time periods, and with higher GPAs than their Traditional counterparts. Additionally, they are going to graduate school at higher numbers with the first ECHS student to receive her master's degree from UTEP as one of those original 23 students from Mission ECHS.

Evolution of Types of Early College High Schools

Overall in the community, there has been an evolution of the types of early college high schools established and operated by an exemplary cooperation between the region's independent school districts and the El Paso Community College. This partnership began from the first established school that accepted its first cohort of freshmen in fall of 2006 to the most recent, and eighth ECHS in the community that opened its doors in the fall of 2015. All of the ECHSs in the community are operated as a high school in the independent school district in which they geographically reside supported by collaboration with El Paso Community College that credentials the teachers in the Dual Credit classes that make it possible for students to jointly earn their high school diplomas and associate's degrees. Dual Credit, as defined by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), is "a process by which a high school [student] enrols in a college course and receives simultaneous academic credit for the course from both the college and the high school." (2016).

The first four ECHS campuses in the El Paso region were established as stand-alone schools on El Paso Community College campus grounds in fall of 2006 (Mission), fall 2007 (Valle Verde), and fall 2008 (Northwest and Transmountain). There was great advantage to this model as students and teachers could walk across the parking lot and, therefore, have access to classes at both the high school and college campus. The next two early college high schools were built also as stand-alone campuses but not on community college campuses in the fall of 2010 (Cotton Valley) and the fall of 2012 (Clint). Cotton Valley presented its own unique twist on the model through a collaboration of three smaller independent school districts who each were interested in providing the early college pathways for its students but did not have a student population large enough to support one individually.

The latest model of early college high schools in El Paso is with the two newest campuses establishes in fall of 2014 (Burges) and fall of 2015 (Socorro). These two schools are a school-within-a-school model where the early college high school cohort is housed separately but integrated on the larger traditional high school campus.

The evolution of these types of Early College High School demonstrates but one of the characteristics that make this educational pathway so successful in this UTEP / VU Global Partnership – adaptability – while remaining true to the original intent of providing students who are traditionally under-represented in higher education with a pathway that promotes both access and excellence.

Categories of Access

Access and Excellence have long been ideals to live by at the University of Texas at El Paso encompassing in just two words the philosophy that this regional university holds as a promise for its students. The concept of access can be broken down into four categories that more fully allow the discussion of what kinds of access.

Aspirational/Expectational Access

To a largely first-generation population, the aspiration of going to higher education is not to be assumed. The collaboration of educational partners in the community from K-12 through community college along with the university to instill the vision of pursuing higher education opportunities is

important. The ultimate goal is to turn this aspirational access of "I think I can" to Expectational Access or "I will".

Academic Access

Once the goal of continuing higher educational pursuits is established, it is imperative to provide a strong educational structure that provides students with the academic skill set to be successful in a higher education setting. Again, a partnership among K-12, community college, and university personnel is the platform on which these academic successes are built.

Financial Access

For a population residing in a county with one of the lowest per capita incomes in the United States, the ability to support the cost of higher education is a constant concern. Keeping tuition and fees low, providing student employment on campus, and offering financial literacy information are but three of the ways UTEP focuses on keeping higher education within financial reach.

Participatory Access

There are a number of other hurdles that can get in the way of a student's success in higher education such as transportation, child care, health, and family responsibilities. Providing students with support structures and pathways to address these "life gets in the way" issues can be the difference between attending school or not.

Early College High Schools help all these categories of access. Students apply to Early College High Schools in eighth grade and the conversations about attending them begin before that. Students are encouraged in elementary and middle school to think about higher education through early college pathways building that Aspirational to Expectational Access.

The state of Texas requires students to test as college-ready in order to take Dual Credit coursework, so, for early college high school students, that means testing as college ready as early as 8th or 9th grade requiring students to build their academic strengths at an even earlier stage thereby building Academic Access to college level coursework.

El Paso Community College is the institution that credentials all the Dual Credit teachers in the region, thereby providing students with college transcripts documenting their college level coursework. They do not charge students for tuition and fees for these courses, receiving only formula funding match from the state of Texas for these semester credit hours. Receiving an associate's degree through Dual Credit saves a student over $5,000 USD in community college tuition and fees or over $16,000 USD in the equivalent of what the same number of credit hours would cost at UTEP clearly making Financial Access an important consideration.

And, finally, because Dual Credit courses are offered during high school hours, many of the potential hurdles to higher education are mitigated through school districts support such as transportation to campus and available child care.

The Jump across the Ocean

In the summer of 2011, during the visit to UTEP by the Victoria University team, Dr Donna Ekal, associate provost in the Office for Undergraduate Studies, made a presentation about several of UTEP's student success partnerships and efforts, including Early College High Schools. The potential of the ECHS model was immediately embraced by the Victoria University team, including Vice Chancellor Professor Peter Dawkins, who saw how this reaching from the university to the high schools could also benefit their rising student population. During the next 12 months, members of the VU delegation consulted with their colleagues, explored opportunities, and determined that a VU interpretation of the Early College High School framework was indeed a possibility.

The following year, during the summer of 2012, Dr Ekal was a member of the UTEP team who travelled to Victoria University where she presented to several audiences about the Early College High School story in El Paso with special emphasis on the partnership of key educational personnel and the benefits to students. In the intervening years, VU and its educational

partners developed the concept of Vic Uni providing a pathway for area high school students to begin the journey to a baccalaureate degree while still in high school.

The Australian Context

In the broader Australian educational, social, economic and political context, the government, after a major review of Australian Higher Education, in 2009 required universities to accommodate the needs of a more diverse cohort of students, setting a target of 20% from a base of 15% of enrolment to be students of Low Socio Economic Status (LSES) by 2025. To achieve this universities needed to examine their current practice including the ways they attracted, supported and enabled more non-traditional students into university. Studies showed that more diverse students can enter and succeed but universities need to change and improve their practices to achieve this. The challenge is for universities to find creative ways of both widening the participation of these underrepresented groups and to better ensure that there is an enabling context that supports success for students from all backgrounds. Victoria University saw the Early Uni Pathways program as one of the approaches to achieving this.

In 2012, a year after visiting UTEP, the Vice Chancellor initiated discussions with schools in the west of Melbourne with predominately LSES student cohorts, and a commitment to a collaborative program that supported the transition of non-traditional students from school to university was made. In the Australian context, students traditionally complete their secondary education and receive a numerical Australian Tertiary Admittance Rank (ATAR) on the basis of their year 12 study which in turn determines which courses they are eligible to enter across Australian tertiary institutions. This ranking system, although offering a ready way of characterising students' readiness for university has increasingly been seen to be less of a direct indicator of success than thought, especially for non-traditional students who do not share the academic capital enjoyed by traditional students.

The potential of an early university pathways program was to offer a different way of accessing higher education, less reliant on the ATAR score and more from proven study outcomes in a tertiary setting. In 2013, government funding in the form of a Higher Education Participation Program (HEPP) Partnership grant was made available to Victoria University to develop a schools university program to address issues of access and success for students from LSES backgrounds.

The project objectives included:

- Developing, in collaboration with partner schools, a sustainable model to encourage and support students from local secondary schools who are traditionally underrepresented (low SES) in Higher Education to both build and realise their aspirations for tertiary education
- Supporting scaffolded transition into the first year of a higher education degree to not only provide access for these students, but to better ensure success and completion
- Improving student retention and progression outcomes of low SES students from non-traditional backgrounds through the provision of opportunities to build academic readiness
- Building collaboration between school and tertiary sectors to better enable shared and coherent approaches to supporting students through educational transition. The program is the driver for partner institutions to work together and with the university to develop an integrated academic program to achieve this
- Assisting in demystifying higher education for parents of students in low SES schools
- Developing a unique and innovative program building on and customising successful past practice in academic support and transition strategies to better ensure successful outcomes for students

High School students on campus at Victoria University

Developing the Program

In developing the EUP program, VU drew from its own long tradition in developing and running transition and foundation courses where students are placed at the centre of the learning experience. The learnings from that work with students from a range of backgrounds was successfully taken up in the development of the EUP. Student-centered learning that allows for the co-construction of knowledge was a hallmark of VU's early transition work and this was incorporated into this new program. This approach speaks to the school educators and has become a means to more authentically create a school and university shared space.

A unique program architecture was developed involving four layered and integrated streams:

- Curriculum to Curriculum alignment (senior secondary school study with University units)
- Student to Student support (involvement of university peer support program)
- Teacher to Teacher collaboration (school and university teachers, and curriculum advisors)
- Institution to Institution alignment (collaboration to build an integrated approach)

The program was informed by the following principles shared by the schools and the university:

- Focus on university access, transition and completion for students who are currently under-represented in tertiary education
- Focus on building student capacity to engage in university studies
- Focus on utilising capacity within secondary schools rather than requiring new facilities or programs such as are seen in some ECHS models (US model)
- Flexibility to ensure adaptability to a variety of schools
- Commitment of schools and the university to work collaboratively to overcome policy and funding challenges, keeping the student as the central focus
- Integration sufficient to ensure students see themselves as members of a school and university community
- Provision of financial incentives for students to complete a degree

The Program

The EUP program is comprised of Year 11 and Year 12 (two final years of Australian secondary schooling) components:

Uni-Link

Uni-Link is a Year 11 program of 3 hours a week for 10 weeks on campus, which introduces students to tertiary study and promotes their development as independent learners and as members of the university community. The unit is structured to reflect the university systems of student engagement such as lectures, tutorials, learning management system and library databases. The academic content developed for this unit of study was documentary photography. This consisted of the history of documentary photography and the ethical debates surrounding the enactment and subsequent uses of photography to document. The unit culminated in students working in small groups to represent a story of an individual from the local community through photograph and text to be exhibited in a public setting. Students were also required to complete a short academic essay around the ethics of documentary photography. The curriculum approach underpinning this unit is what William Pinar describes as curriculum as complicated conversation, "Because each conversation is distinctive—that is if it is enmeshed in the moment and expressive of the distinctiveness of those participating—it may not congeal into a conclusion" (Pinar, 2012). Meaning the threads of what is explored in tutorial discussions, the varying degrees of participation from

one week to the next is not indicative of what is occurring for each student who attends the program.

Attentiveness to the student and their sense of place in the university is as significant in this program as the acquisition of academic capabilities. Students were attuned to the differences between secondary and university learning environments noting a distinct difference in their pedagogical relationship with the academic when compared to the secondary school teacher. The learning experience introduced students to lectures, tutorials and fieldwork and supported their learning in a university context by introducing them to university systems—on-line learning in a university learning management system, university communication systems and a university student management system. It involved ongoing interaction with university mentors and use of the library network and other support resources. The content of the learning unit was designed by university staff but informed by the school teaching staff who prioritised independent learning and university approaches to learning, including introduction to learning and applying theoretical concepts. Yearly reviews in 2014 and 2015 have resulted in improvements and enhancements of the original teaching program and approach. Students also receive a non-award university unit and preparation for continued university study in Year 12.

Uni-Study

Uni-Study is a program that enables Year 12 students to select and enrol in a unit of study from a selection of first year undergraduate degree units offered at Victoria University (with no tuition fees). This allows students to have an authentic study experience together with other enrolled university students from mainstream first year. These units of study are recognised by the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) as contributing to the student's ATAR score. Upon successful completion of their unit of study, students gain advanced standing for the units passed and guaranteed placement into their first year university course in the following year with a base line ATAR score.

Both programs are embedded in an engagement framework which includes support from university peer mentors, academic support staff and the EUP team.

What has Victoria University Learnt from the Early University Program in its First Full Year?

The Victoria University program is still very young and there is limited outcomes data to work with. In Year 11, 2014, three schools were involved. 41 of the 47 students finished the course with four withdrawing early and two who did not finish their assessment. All completers were successful in passing the unit. In Year 11, 2015, 116 students from nine schools were involved. 106 finished the course and were successful.

The Year 12 program pilot in 2014 was limited to eight students and one university unit as a proof of concept. All passed their single university unit and six went onto take up university studies in 2015. The other two were taking a year out and it is uncertain at this point if they will take up studies in 2016.

The full Year 12 design is only one year old but semester one results indicated 50% of the 24 students achieved a credit or higher result with 25% of the remaining achieving a pass. Second semester unit results are not finalized. At this point we do not yet know how many of these have gone onto university study for 2016.

In 2016, 13 schools will be involved with potentially 260 students participating in the Year 11 Uni-Link program and up to 120 students in Year 12 (the latter is difficult to estimate because of timetabling and student course design).

Research

Research to date has involved a mixed-methods approach targeting the views of students, teachers and leaders before, during and after the program. It also looks at the policies, practices and history of the institutions involved and attempts to identify the contributing factors of the design, practice and outcomes of the project in the success or otherwise of the project.

Initial interviews surfaced students' lack of experience of university study; a fear that they would be seen as 'kids' by the other university students although they were in separate classes; various levels of concern that they may not cope with the expectations; various degrees of feeling ready; hesitation and

excitement about attending a university campus; worry that it was outside their comfort zone and concern with working with strangers from other schools.

Post interviews generally displayed considerable confidence in their ability to navigate the university itself and pride in getting to know it through their projects in a way they had not envisaged (university collaborations with the community); an enjoyment in working with and getting to know students from other schools; an excitement about the learning program itself and how university was different to school but also seeing strong links with some content and skills covered at school. Students professed that the program took away their 'fear of university' and reinforced or strengthened their desire for a university education.

The program also authentically alerted students to the impending transition from secondary school to university. Students were able to see the real differences between learning in a university context as opposed to school. As one student commented "No one is telling you what to do and in a way that is scary." The program is able to alert students to the nuances of the culture of university. Teachers of the university program as well as contact staff and leadership of the three schools were also interviewed before and after the Year 11 and Year 12 programs. From these and student inputs, issues are currently being teased out and some interesting insights are emerging. Of the 41 Year 11 students from 2014, 15 took up Year 12 university subjects in 2015 and others were at pains to say that although a university unit did not fit their Year 12 schedules they would resume university studies in 2016.

Findings

The study reinforced our original notions that:

- A shift in student identity can be made in this time, and can act as an indicator of success
- There are distinct benefits in building on institutional experience in curriculum design for transitioning students
- There is an awareness of the importance of bringing the higher education habitus closer to the familial/school habitus of the students (Bordieur, as cited in Thomas, 2002 p.438)

It also gave rise to new considerations that need to be further integrated into future models:

- An identified need to integrate students' university study into their school load more successfully and overtly
- The importance for students to find commonality between their school work and their university work
- The positive role of student mentors in the learning experience for the students
- The importance of supporting students in their academic skills, especially in the various Year 12 studies
- The potential to have university and school staff work together on course advice

Most importantly, the pilot taught us that the interface between schools and the university is more important than what happens in either institution. This locale is rich with potential but it has to be truly transformational to create real opportunity for individual students. As Liz Thomas (2010) states, there are a wide variety of reasons institutions may wish to increase diversity including funding, new markets, social justice, policy, and staff commitment. However, institutions can respond to student diversity in different ways. Thomas (2011, p.10) notes:

> the idealized types are: altruistic (no institutional change), academic (little or no change), utilitarian (special access and additional support mechanism) and transformative (positive view of diversity resulting in institutional development).

Continuous review and evaluation contribute to the ongoing development and success of the Early Uni Pathways program. Findings of the 2014

HEPPP EUP Evaluation (Victoria Institute, April 2015) state:

- The Early University Pathways project established an efficient and ongoing partnership with schools participating in the first phase of the implementation.
- The collaboration between Victoria University and the partnering secondary schools is enabling the development of shared and coherent approaches to supporting students' transitions to university.
- The 'Uni-Link' program is enabling students to gain important aspects of academic cultural and social capital. Students started developing university student identity and self-belief in their capacity to succeed at the university.

Victoria University has still much to learn to build on these very early attempts but an approach such as the early Uni Pathways program that includes co-enrolment and the creation of a school to university space to build an interface that supports successful transition has much to offer our broad community of schools, students and university. We will also continue to learn from UTEP's more mature program and their findings around the part Early College High Schools and the university's accelerated pathway to degree completion. It is an exciting new space for Victoria University.

Shared Conclusion

We see the transformative response to student needs as the real challenge in our work going forward in both locations. Universities need to respond, adapt and co-create the transitional interface in ways that recognize and value the students' knowledge and their position in the learning experience. These are students whose learning and home experience have shaped their views and who do not necessarily see university education as their future; who have commitments to school, work and family; who may be positioned to find university learning as very different and potentially irrelevant and may rely less on their family social capital and more heavily on the support of their schools for shaping their future.

They are also students who bring a different type of capital and learning characteristics. The same assumptions we make about first year students may not apply to students who have not traditionally expected to attend university. We have to not just work around these characteristics but embrace the reality and work with schools to create a path for these students to access, and be successful in university learning. This emerging third space in the educational experience of students is one that Victoria University and The University of Texas at El Paso will utlise in building the effectiveness of this and other programs for our student populations who, while so far apart geographically, have much in common.

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Early university program photoshoot

Students on campus at University of Texas at El Paso

Internationalising Learning in the Workplace and Community: Students-as-staff on Global Exchange

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Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia, has a range of curriculum initiatives that aim to develop rounded students who have a solid discipline-specific knowledge, transferable graduate capabilities and who can demonstrate an overall career-readiness. VU also believes in the benefits of an internationalised curriculum which encourages students to demonstrate international perspectives, an awareness of culture and highly developed intercultural communication skills. The University of Texas at El Paso aims to educate students to be leaders who will make significant contributions to their chosen professions, their various communities and the world. Like VU, UTEP explicitly values diversity and encourages students to gain global experiences through international study opportunities—including through a combined study and students-as-staff exchange program with VU.

This paper focuses on the cultural aspects of VU/UTEP students-as-staff exchange program including international knowledge, intercultural competence and intercultural communication skills. Students from VU and UTEP responded to a series of online questions concerning cultural awareness, cultural differences and international perspectives and these will be used in a consideration of the VU/UTEP students-as-staff exchange as a model of internationalised curriculum that is effective in increasing cultural awareness and developing intercultural skills.

Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia, has a partnership with the University of Texas at El Paso, in the United States. This partnership, initiated in 2006, was predicated on the similar missions of the two institutions as well as notable comparable characteristics in the student cohorts: both institutions aim to provide excellent and accessible education to students from culturally and socially diverse communities who are often the first in their families to attend university. Both universities, too, take explicit responsibility for enhancing the employability of their students and have developed creative ways of developing students' confidence, employability skills and professional networks. The VU/UTEP partnership provides a model for internationalising education which is achieved through staff and student visits, technology-supported exchanges of ideas and programs, shared curriculum as well as collaborations in key research areas. This partnership has given rise to the VU/UTEP Student Employment and Exchange Program, an important initiative in this perhaps unlikely international relationship. This paper focuses on the cultural aspects of VU/UTEP exchange program. Students from VU and UTEP responded to a series of online questions concerning cultural awareness, cultural differences and international perspectives and these will be used to consider the VU/UTEP Student Employment and Exchange Program as a model of internationalised curriculum that is effective in increasing cultural awareness and developing intercultural skills.

Amongst the collaborations between the two universities, the Exchange Program—most often called the Students-as-Staff Exchange Program—is particularly effective in achieving an internationalised learning experience for students. Participation in the program provides students with concrete evidence of what one student in a 2011 survey calls "proof" of their ability to relocate, adapt and be an excellent worker. The programme is culturally and emotionally rich as well as highly practical in its combined focus on work and learning through work in a discipline-related area that occurs in a cultural context that is different to the students' home culture. The Students-

as-Staff Exchange Programme provides an opportunity for work experience in a foreign context that emphasises developing students' intercultural skills as a part of a broader sweep of discipline-specific employability skills, professional networks and personal development. It is a widespread assumption underpinning student exchange programs that encountering the unfamiliar and establishing new networks enhances one's human capital in a manner not possible 'at home'; further, it is assumed that the resulting increase in human or cultural capital will positively impact on graduates during the recruitment process (Messer and Wolter, 2007). This discussion does not interrogate those assumptions. Rather, it seeks to capture student motivations for participating and student self-assessment about the cultural impact of the exchange.

Both VU and UTEP have diverse student cohorts. Students are already exposed to cultural diversities and differences—ethnic, religious, linguistic and educational. UTEP has 23,000 students approximately 75% of whom identify as Hispanic and who predominantly come from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. The UTEP student cohort is arguably more bicultural rather than Melbourne's multicultural one. Victorians come from more than 230 countries and speak more than 200 languages. VU's Annual Report 2008 notes that over 40% of students self-identified as Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)—a category used in Australia which recognises that not all international students are NESB and not all local students speak English at home. El Paso in Texas might be differently diverse—the ratio of UTEP student demographics based on ethnicity for 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 are fairly consistent, with Hispanic students comprising the single biggest cohort (77.45% in 2010) (UTEP, nd). Especially in combination, the cohorts of both universities offer a rich opportunity to explore culture and to learn how to work with difference.

Background

The need for Australian universities to think creatively about providing learning opportunities for all students in order to develop the professional and personal capabilities that contribute to graduates' overall employability has intensified with the Global Economic Crisis and increased competition for work placements and industry engagement from other universities and educational institutions. VU's approach to developing employability skills in undergraduate students is varied and is supported by its Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC) Policy which aims to increase interaction between students, industry and the professions with a view "to deepen[ing] students' knowledge of practice in realistic contexts" (VU, 2011: 3). LiWC includes educational activities that integrate theoretical learning with practical application in a workplace, profession or future employment. It involves "learning in and through the workplace and community" (VU, 2011: 3).

A popular LiWC activity at VU is work placement—which is increasingly seen as complex and challenging as competition for appropriate placements and suitable supervision heightens (O'Sullivan et al, 2006). While Universities Australia (2008) proposed a National Internship Scheme to enhance the work readiness of graduates, the issues raised in The WIL Report (Patrick et al., 2008) include questions of availability of appropriate roles as well as concerns about the exclusive nature of some work integrated learning (WIL) programs, varying levels of access to WIL experiences, the inconsistency of WIL learning experiences and the costs associated with undertaking unpaid WIL. While universities around the world are working to encourage engagement with industry and the professions to create professionally relevant opportunities for students, many universities are also considering how they might themselves provide 'learningful' work placements for students (McCormack, Pancini and Tout, 2010) in the various departments and roles within the university. Combining LiWC and employment opportunities on campus is not itself new, but VU has formalised it with the Students-as-Staff program model borrowed from UTEP.

Students-as-Staff at VU

The Students-as-Staff programme is a noteworthy initiative that has successfully seen over 1,000 VU students involved in on-campus employment since 2009 in a range of roles—from research assistants to IT support, conference organisers and co-developers of leadership programs. The Students-as-Staff program at UTEP has been running for many years and

typically sees around 2,000 participants each year. UTEP's programme had clear synergies with VU's social justice mission, its LiWC Policy and its practical commitment to enhancing the employability of students. In keeping with well-established practice at UTEP, the aim of the Students-as-Staff program at VU is predominantly to enhance students' employability skills by providing meaningful work experience. The program also serves to more positively engage students with the university. While studies link high rates of off-campus employment of students with negative academic performance, it is conversely the case that on-campus employment, such as Students-as-Staff, can be positively related to enhanced student progress and completion (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Of course, it may also be the case that students motivated to apply for the Students-as-Staff programme are already engaged; any improvement in students' academic achievement is yet to be researched. What is known, is that student engagement in university life, whether in the form of sporting activities, club involvement or paid work, is positively associated with a greater engagement in learning and higher grades (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005) and that students who need to work could be the greatest beneficiaries of schemes such as Students-as-Staff.

Methodology

This paper draws on survey responses by students participating in the first two VU/UTEP Exchange Programs. Two online surveys were administered: one pre-departure survey and one post-placement survey. Student responses concerning cultural awareness, cultural differences and international perspectives are collated from both surveys and general themes are identified. A total of 24 students from both universities participated in two exchange programs in 2010 and 2011. They were sent pre-departure and post-program online surveys via student email and 21 participants responded with most respondents answering every question. The survey combined open-ended questions and some students were asked to rate statements relating to the exchange program using a four point response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree and 4 = strongly agree). Student responses were anonymous and those anonymous responses have been generalised in this discussion. Of the eight general items in one section of the pre-departure survey, four statements sought to rank participants' motives for undertaking the exchange and included items about learning about other countries and cultures and perceived benefits for future careers. In the post-placement survey, of the 20 items, seven asked about what students felt they gained from the experience from personal, academic and career perspectives. Only the responses to the four pre-departure survey items and seven post-placement survey items, together with generalised responses to the open questions are reported here. While the survey responses represent a small sample of students, given that the program is in its infancy, the findings are both encouraging and informative.

Students-as-Staff VU/UTEP Exchange

The Student Employment and Exchange Program is an exchange version of the Students-as-Staff Program. Students from VU and UTEP spend a semester simultaneously studying and working at the partner institution. Both institutions employ students in a range of on-campus positions. The Exchange Program between VU and UTEP in semester two of 2010 and 2011 saw respectively five and seven students from each institution being placed in the other university. All 24 exchange students over the two semesters undertook 19 hours of paid employment each week on behalf of their own university at the other institution. The program enables students to essentially swap positions with peers at the other university. For example, an undergraduate providing library support at VU will swap with a UTEP student in a similar role. The paid nature of the work component of the exchange makes the venture affordable to students who may be from low socio economic backgrounds. VU's general student exchange program has similar aims to other universities: see the world, experience different cultures, develop a network of contacts, extend career opportunities, enhance communication skills, develop life experiences and self-confidence and receive credits towards a degree (VU, 2011a). The aims of the VU/UTEP Exchange include the simple aim of exchanging students for study and on-campus employment between VU and UTEP and to enhance the connection between students' on-campus employment and students' post-college career and/or graduate school preparation. The VU/UTEP exchange differs from

general exchange in its explicit focus on enabling students to both work and study with a view to enhancing career prospects.

Internationalising the Curriculum

Universities and colleges in Europe, North America and Australia typically describe internationalising as being about preparing students with the intercultural and international perspectives needed by professionals in a globalised environment. The 1994 OECD definition of internationalised curriculum points to a preparedness for work and life in a globalised world (OECD cited in Rizvi and Walsh, 1998). The ability to perform professionally in international contexts is exactly what the VU/UTEP exchange achieves. Essentially, a curriculum is internationalised through student perspectives and the evidence from the VU/UTEP Exchange Program suggests that students have already experienced a conceptual shift through this powerful learning experience. Simply travelling does not inherently achieve an internationalised experience; rather internationalisation requires participants to become aware of their own cultural assumptions and to reflect on previous unexamined practices to understand that what is 'normal' is cultural.

Internationalising the Curriculum assumes a different focus depending on the educational institution, its national and regional context as well as the cultural and linguistic diversity of students and staff. Internationalisation in education includes global movements of teachers and students, offshore teaching programs, offshore campuses, international students, study tours and student exchanges. The VU/UTEP Exchange Program provides an opportunity for students to develop international knowledge, intercultural competence and intercultural communication skills—all of which an internationalised curriculum encourages. During the exchange program, students might develop intercultural skills through considered comparisons between VU and UTEP systems, processes and cultures, by exposure to iconic and everyday cultural events and phenomenon and by participating in online reflections. Students can also develop international perspectives and knowledge and awareness of other cultures and geographic regions simply by planning, preparing for and participating in travel. The VU/UTEP Exchange Programme provides a rich example of an internationalised learning experience. International travel might not automatically achieve an internationalised outlook in students but it is also true that, for many students, the opportunity to immerse themselves in cultures different from their own begins to address Whalley's basic query: "at a practical level...how do we actually internationalize the curriculum?" (Whalley, 1997: 2).

Study abroad—especially when combined with work—is a practical way that students can develop international knowledge and intercultural communication skills (Bauwens et al: 2009). International work placements are an ideal way for universities to equip students to be professionals in a global workplace (Page and Kupke, 2001; Woodley and Pearce, 2007) but the process is not without challenges including resourcing, bureaucracy and costs to students—especially given the distances between the US and Australia. The increased student mobility between VU and UTEP is achieved without the additional support offered via such supra-national alliances such as the European Union or ASEAN—both of which have substantial student exchange components as part of their respective briefs.

VU's vision of an internationalised curriculum is one which develops international perspectives, fosters intercultural communication skills and increases knowledge and awareness of a range of cultures and geographic regions, including indigenous cultures. Clearly, being relocated in a different institutional culture that is also in another country immediately foregrounds culture as an issue: it is evident in everything from language, accent, behaviours, food and sporting traditions. The extent to which geographic dislocation from the familiar enhances the cultural learning in the VU/UTEP Exchange Program is a vital consideration. Certainly, it is an expectation that travel to and especially employment in a different culture and country contributes to an internationalised outlook in students. Various writers suggest that international travel can change attitudes, promote understanding of difference and even achieve, if not world peace, then at least regional harmony (Page and Kupke, 2001). If an internationalised curriculum aims to prepare students for work and life in a globalised world, the then VU/UTEP Students-as-Staff exchange program is an excellent example of an internationalised program.

Intercultural Skills

There has been increasing attention to developing students' intercultural awareness and skills in Australian university curriculum. Intercultural communication skills feature strongly as part of many Australian universities' internationalising approaches (Crossman, 2011). Globally, the internationalisation of curriculum has resulted from and been informed by increased opportunities for people of diverse cultures to interact: whether through travel, technology, business, study or simply living in diverse communities. Being able to negotiate in and communicate with people and cohorts from different cultures is of particular value for the world of work (Chaney and Martin, 2011). Furthermore, students consider learning about other cultures and reflecting on their own cultures is interesting and relevant to their personal and professional lives (Woodley, Simmons and Licciardi, 2010).

Findings/Discussion

VU's internationalising principles include the aim "to prepare students to perform professionally and socially in global and multicultural contexts" and to "develop and assess intercultural communications skills" (Woodley and Pearce, 2007). These principles have particular resonance in the student comments. Student feedback on the program thus far suggests that exchange participants believe the experience has contributed to their abilities to operate in unfamiliar, international environments which have demanded that they cope with the unknown, deal with diverse and complex situations and work and study with people from different backgrounds who hold different values and beliefs. In fact, the challenge of the unknown and the chance to test themselves in a challenging situation seemed to be a major appeal of the program for many participants. The student exchange ensures that the very context of learning and working is altered and the surveys suggest that the impact of these geographic and cultural dislocations and relocations is profound.

Australian research suggests that exchange students are already experienced travellers (Daly, 2011). Whether this is true of the Students-as-Staff exchange cohort is not known, although comments suggest that the Australian students were more likely to be experienced travellers than their UTEP counterparts. In fact, most respondents (VU and UTEP) were motivated by the prospect of travel and experiencing difference. Of the 13 respondents in a pre-departure survey addressing the question "Why did you decide to participate in the exchange?" 12 respondents mention experiencing different cultures and the chance to work overseas as the motivating factors. Only one respondent mentioned the opportunity to study a different subject. The eight respondents in a 2010 post-exchange survey rated "learn a new culture" (100%) as highly as "personal development" (100%) as the perceived benefits of the exchange. "Career benefits" were rated only slightly lower at 87.5%. See Tables 1 and 2 for figures rating statements in both surveys pertaining to culture and work. The combination of encountering new cultures while simultaneously working is of particular appeal. These views support a finding in the Erasmus exchange program that suggests that students who work in other countries spend more time with representatives of the local community than students who only study abroad and that interns have more opportunities to create local networks (Bauwens et al, 2009: 30). Exposure to different culture is intensified by working.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I will learn more about the differences between my country and other countries.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	38.5% (5)	61.5% (8)
The overseas employment experience will assist me in my future career.	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	42.4% (6)	42.4% (6)
I will gain experience in a different culture than my own.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	38.5% (5)	61.5% (8)
This experience will give me an opportunity to develop professional relationships	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	38.5% (5)	61.5% (8)

Table 1: Pre-departure Survey Responses 2011 from 13 respondents

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This exchange improved my communication skills.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	25.00% (2)	75.0% (0)
This exchange gave me an opportunity to develop professional relationships.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	87.5% (7)
This exchange helped me feel comfortable in discussing cultural differences.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	50.0% (4)	50.0% (4)
This exchange enhanced my knowledge of another culture.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	87.5% (7)
This exchange enhanced my knowledge of cultural sensitivity.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (1)	87.5% (7)
This exchange helped me feel comfortable in discussing cultural differences.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	25.00% (2)	75.0% (6)
I learned more about the differences between my country and other countires.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	25.00% (2)	75.0% (6)

Table 2: Post Exchange Survey 2010 from 8 respondents

Survey responses see students self-reporting significant development across a range of graduate capabilities such as managing learning and career development opportunities. The theme of culture, however, dominates the surveys. Asked how the exchange experience has contributed to career goals, cultural factors dominate eight student responses. Students emphasise developing different perspectives, communication skills and their capacity to network with different people while working in another country. Students see cultural knowledge as career-enhancing. In Likert-type ratings to a set of statements (Table 2), all eight participants post-exchange anticipated that the exchange will enhance their future careers, that it provided opportunities to develop professional relationships, increased their confidence to discuss cultural difference, enhanced their knowledge of another culture and increased their awareness of cultural sensitivity. Most respondents regarded the ability to adapt to different cultural situations, to understand different systems and to work with people from different cultural backgrounds as beneficial to their career prospects. All respondents believe that the exchange provided them with opportunities to develop and demonstrate those abilities to adapt and work with difference.

Conclusion

The need to better measure the extent to which exchange students demonstrate improved international awareness or perspectives or intercultural communication skills as a result of the exchange is clear. Whether it is through blogs, emails, journals or vlogs, it is crucial to provide a forum for students to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and values—before, during and after the exchange. The value of the Students-as-Staff Exchange Program will be more accurately measured in the future. Students involved in European Erasmus exchanges claimed that their personality changed and that international exchange made them "more flexible, more self confident, open to dialogue and more tolerant towards others" (Bauwens et al, 2009: 30). The small sample of surveys used in this paper suggest that VU/UTEP students might be expected to make similar claims. The surveys provide a modicum of qualitative data on the VU/UTEP exchange with students positively self-assessing their personal growth (independence, cultural sensitivity, social networks) and enhanced employability skills (communication skills, work experience, professional relationships). It will be interesting to confirm if, as students expect, that as well as being a psychologically and emotionally rich experience, the VU/UTEP Students-as-Staff Exchange is advantageous in the recruitment process. Will it, as one student hoped, provide an 'edge' when it comes to applying for jobs in a globalised future?

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Sports Science study group at Victoria University

Research student at University of Texas at El Paso

Building Research Relationships Through Postgraduate Seminars

Victoria University: Alan Hayes, Andrew McAinch, and Mary Carolan-Olah

Alan Hayes

The beginning of our research collaboration with the University of Texas at El Paso began in 2009 when potential synergies were identified between the School of Biomedical and Health Sciences at Victoria University and the College of Health Sciences at UTEP through the respective Deans, Michelle Towstoless (Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science) and Kathleen Curtis (College of Health Sciences). There was an initial exchange of staff profiles and a videoconference—after which as Academic Coordinator for Research and Research Training, I was put into touch with my counterpart in the College of Health Sciences, UTEP, Associate Research Professor Joao Ferreira-Pinto. After some initial discussions and use of Skype (which at the time was a new way to videoconference with friends and work colleagues), we agreed that just trying to put people together was not the best way to produce a long standing and mutually beneficial research collaboration, and that we needed to get to know each other better.

Thus, we decided that the best way to exchange research expertise and current interests was for students (primarily) and staff to deliver a monthly oral presentation on topics of mutual interest. The benefits of this approach was it did not need to wait until conference attendance coincided, gave research students international exposure, and allowed them to practice their oral presentation skills in a smaller, supportive environment.

The initial potential problem was a room with suitable technology—we needed more than just videoconference facilities, but also the ability for content sharing, as the idea was that the audience on both sides of the world would be able to see the presentation, while still also being able to see the speakers and interact with them in real time. Fortunately, such a room existed in both locations: the Conference Room 2 on level 6, K building at the Footscray Park campus at VU, and the Teleconference Room at the Undergraduate Learning Center, room 101 at the UTEP Campus. The postgraduate UTEP/VU seminar series, as it came to be known, was born. Given the location and also the wider health focus of the UTEP College of Health Sciences, the seminars were expanded to involve staff and students of the School of Sport and Exercise Science at VU, and other presenters from the El Paso region.

Next came the timing. The time difference meant that it would only work if it was late afternoon at UTEP and early morning at VU. So, as to minimise interruption to teaching, and try and keep some consistency, it was agreed that timing would always be 4:00 pm in El Paso. This meant that with the vagaries of daylight saving at both locations, from February to November, the sequence at VU went from 10:00 am, to 9:00 am, to 8:00 am and then back to 9:00 am and 10:00 am again. While the 8:00 am starts were not necessarily a favourite of staff, the presenting students didn't mind as they managed to get a car park! There is no doubt that the presentations would not have had the longevity they have enjoyed without the support of the two Deans. Despite how busy they were, in the early days of the seminars, Professor Towstoless and Professor Curtis made a specific effort to attend. This level of support was greatly appreciated by the students, and demonstrated to staff how sincere and committed the University was for the collaboration with UTEP to be successful.

So, what could possibly go wrong? Well, while what will follow may sound like a litany of problems, the seminars really have gone remarkably smoothly

and some of the below were quite funny and importantly, any difficulties have been dealt with in a professional manner and respect:

The time is OK, but what about the day?

In the beginning, we went with the 3rd Wednesday/Thursday of the month. In general that is fine—until the 1st of the month falls on a Thursday. There we were sitting in the room on the 3rd Thursday of the month and no one was on the other end of the phone—only after a call to João did we laugh about it being only the 2nd Wednesday in El Paso. At least we were a week early and not a week late.

I'm not as important as I think I am.

A day before the talk, the Vice Chancellor at VU needed the room when we had it booked. Not surprisingly, I agreed! Now too late to cancel or move to another room (not that we had one to move to), we hired a projector from the library, e-mailed the talk and verbally/ manually changed the slides on each end with the video from my laptop screened on the wall and everyone on the other side crowded around for our one and only Skype-inspired presentation.

Holidays are fun but can play havoc with your plans.

Anzac Day in Melbourne and Thanksgiving in El Paso have both caused cancellations. The different semester times were also a major impediment to maximising attendance. Having a presentation in late May meant that many staff at UTEP were already on Summer Holiday break (for the same reason we chose not to undertake presentations in June/July or December/ January) and I still remember the week that not only did this occur, but the UTEP President had called a meeting for all staff. There was poor João and the speaker around a big table. The minimum attendance at VU has been three, so we are ahead on that one! We have subsequently considered this in scheduling, and while the Wednesday/Thursday has remained, the exact days vary from month to month.

When the picture-in-picture is faulty, animations in PowerPoint are not useful.

There was a period where a glitch in the system sometimes made both the major screen and picture in picture flash and flick between the slides and the speaker. However, on the UTEP side, things were fine. So, with UTEP being able to see the slides, we could only see our UTEP colleagues and thus I tried changing the slides on a keyboard for slides I could not see, while the speaker followed their talk on their own laptop. Due to the large number of animations and things appearing and disappearing, I take it as a success that I only got stopped twice to be told that we were talking about a figure that they could not see!

Upgrades are not always for the better.

After many years of successfully operating the videoconference control panel (I liked to think I had become quite proficient), I came in to find that all the IP address numbers had been wiped from the system. I had always just dialled in with the number in the address book—now it was gone. Luckily I had asked IT to trial the system from another site, and thus was able to find the IP address. I successfully dialled in, but could not get the content sharing to work (nor sound)—even our own IT could not get it to work as it is an external company who upgraded it. At least I didn't take it personally—apparently the same thing had happened to the Vice Chancellor the day before.

When you think about all the things that need to be organised and go right, it is a credit to both organisations, the people involved and the support senior staff that the seminars are entering their seventh year. We now run them regularly at VU's St Albans and Footscray Park campuses, and it has been wonderful for staff, particularly at UTEP, to hear from new PhD students in the first years of the seminars, and having them deliver a talk at the end of their PhD.

As part of the further strengthening of research collaborations between UTEP and VU, a call for applications for International Collaborative Research Grant Schemes between the two organisations was announced in late 2013. The first two of these are described in the next sections.

Andrew McAinch

Following the release of the guidelines, Dr Sudip Bajpeyi from UTEP was

identified as a possible collaborator with my group. Assistant Professor Bajpeyi from the Department of Kinesiology, College of Health Sciences, UTEP, had a complementary background to my group in muscle physiology, human primary skeletal muscle cell lines and an interest in fat oxidation and its role in obesity/diabetes as well as sports performance. He also brought expertise in determination of intramuscular lipid content and intermediates. My group had just finished a rodent study with different agonists and antagonists targeting the endocannabinoid system, thus we applied for a collaborative project titled "Role of endocannabinoids and diet in obesity management". This application was successful. This has started an ongoing collaborative relationship with Dr Bajpeyi.

This initial grant enabled a visit first by one of my PhD students for six weeks to undertake some analysis on samples that we sent across to Dr Bajpeyi's lab as well as Dr. Igor Almeida, Director, Biomolecule Analysis Core Facility (BACF), Department of Biological Sciences, Border Biomedical Research Center, and members of his research team. Specifically, my PhD student Shaan Naughton and Dr Almeida's PhD candidate, Felipe Lopes, spent a significant amount of time working up methods for analysis on their mass spectrometer and High Performance Liquid Chromatropher (HPLC) during Shaan's six week visit to UTEP. This work has been continued by Dr Nathan VerBerkmoes at UTEP and a Master's degree student with Dr Bajpeyi, Manuel Amador. Following this research exchange, I also went across for a short visit to El Paso along with our Chancellor and Vice Chancellor as part of UTEP's Centennial celebration in the latter half of 2014. During this visit, I met in person with Dr, Bajpeyi and Dr Almeida and had a tour of their facilities.

Our ongoing collaboration has resulted in a recent successful Border Biomedical Research Center grant application which will ensure the continuation of our collaboration over the coming years. In addition to this successful grant we have also submitted multiple other grant applications (including NIH R01, National Health and Medical Research Council project grant).

Outside of these collaborations, I have also helped formulate and design the dietary intervention for a project being conducted by Dr Bajpeyi and have collaborated extensively on this project which has included numerous email exchanges with his research students involved in the project. We will continue to look at other research collaborations into the future that mix our overlapping and complementary backgrounds.

Mary Carolan-Olah

Our collaboration began in 2013 and centres around our common interest in women's health and empowerment to live healthier lives, especially during pregnancy. Our particular focus is gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM), or diabetes that is first discovered in pregnancy, which may result in serious pregnancy complications. Hispanic women in the Mexican border regions are more at risk of this condition based on ethnicity and low socio economic status.

Our research team brings together a diverse range of expertise including Professor Carolan- Olah's clinical midwifery experience in the area of 'at risk' pregnancies, and her research work in GDM and ethnicity, UTEP Professor Maria Duarte-Gardea's expertise in dietetics and GDM and her interest in Hispanic populations, and UTEP Associate Professor Julia Lechuga's expertise in psychology and the development and testing of culturally appropriate behavioral interventions targeting Latina women.

Together, we have been involved in a collaborative project 'Developing an educational intervention for Hispanic women with GDM in El Paso, Texas' and it has been fascinating to work closely together and to see the world from each other's philosophical, cultural, and professional lens. The first phase of this project has now been completed and has achieved its aim to gather preliminary data on the experience of gestational diabetes in low income Hispanic women, and to ascertain the women's knowledge of food values and dietary recommendations during GDM. We have one publication accepted and two publications under review.

In phase two we plan to apply for grants to fund the development of an educational program, aimed at low levels of health literacy and containing pictures of food and simple instructions.

Alan Hayes

The collaboration between UTEP Professor Sandor Dorgo and myself started a little differently. It was clear we had strong similarities in research interests in muscle mass and function, particularly as it relates to aging. However, Professor Dorgo had specific need for help with the psychological aspect of his training program, and thus submitted a grant application with other VU colleagues (which was ultimately unsuccessful). However, given my mechanistic approach to aging muscle research, and the already successful Golden Age exercise intervention program that Professor Dorgo was running, we got back in touch and agreed that we should work together on submitting an International Collaborative Grant to the National Strength and Conditioning Society on "Combating dynapenia in diverse ethnic groups of older adults" in 2014. While the grant ended up not being reviewed due to an administrative mix up, we began to work on the project. Further impetus came from the second round of International Collaborative Research Grant Schemes between the two organisations, of which we were the only successful applicants. I undertook a radiations course that allowed me to operate a dual energy x-ray (DXA) machine for body composition, as well as peripheral quantitative computer topography machine for more in depth analysis of bone and muscle quality. This would complement the introduction of DXA measurements into the Golden Age program at UTEP, and importantly allow cross reference of measurements on a wide ethnic demographic.

I had the opportunity to visit El Paso in August 2015, where I instructed Professor Dorgo's assistants on the correct use and interpretation of DXA information, and was able to experience first hand the Golden Age program, particularly the pre and post-training testing sessions. While technology has made keeping in touch easier than ever, the opportunity to visit and meet face-to-face many people I had only seen on video was wonderful. Further, it strengthened the research collaboration with Professor Dorgo, as we were better able to plan for the future and how we could use data already existing, submitted a number of EOIs for upcoming grants, and have resubmitted the NSCA grant. We will catch up again at the American College of Sports Medicine annual conference this year to follow up, conduct further planning, and continue to strengthen what began as very humble beginnings of the UTEP/VU research collaboration in the Health area.

Research student at University of Texas at El Paso

Students on campus at University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of International Education Announces Winners of the 2012 Andrew Heiskell Awards for Innovation in International Education: A Global Engagement and Learning Program - Victoria University, Melbourne Australia, and University of Texas at El Paso

University of Texas at El Paso: Stephen Riter
Victoria University: Susan Young

What inspires leaders from two universities located tens of thousands of kilometres apart across the Pacific Ocean to build a strong and enduring partnership focusing on internationalising the student experience? Victoria University in Melbourne Australia and the University of Texas at El Paso are both universities with significant non traditional student numbers. Each is dedicated to building excellence and accessibility in their education and research activities to serve the needs of 21st century students.

Some may say that the two universities are part of different systems with different funding arrangements and different political contexts and even different student profiles. Victoria University is a multi-sector university with over 58,000 students participating in school education, technical and further education and higher education while UTEP with its 22,000 students is an emerging research university with bachelors, masters, and doctoral programs and a strong regional focus.

Over the past five years, the relationship has developed and enough common ground has been identified for the two institutions to benefit from the exchange of ideas and programs and to build collective knowledge to benefit students and staff.

In the initial stages of the partnership, programs which would benefit each organisation were planned and implemented. The three pillars of the partnership which were recognised in the recent Institute of International Education (IIE) with an honourable mention in the category of International Partnerships in the 11th Andrew Heiskell Awards for Innovation in International Education were 'The Global Learning Community', 'Student Employment' and 'Exchange and Library Exchange'. The award honours the most outstanding initiatives in international higher education among the member campuses of the IIE Network with membership of more than 1,100 higher education institutions. The Andrew Heiskell awards showcase the most innovative and successful models for internationalising campuses with particular emphasis on removing institutional barriers and broadening the base of participation in international teaching

and learning. The award recognises the unique commitment that the two universities share in providing an excellent and accessible educational experience for students from culturally diverse and educationally disrupted backgrounds, who are often the first in their families to gain a degree.

In the Global Learning Community, first year students from UTEP in their freshmen-level seminar classes known as University Studies 1301 and Victoria University Liberal Arts students study joint subjects via videoconferencing, teleconferencing and social media. This program has been conducted since 2007 and has attracted much international attention in terms of providing hundreds of students with an international learning experience which is culturally rich and stimulating and does not necessitate international travel. During 2011 the program was selected as one of the 22 national universities in the US to participate in the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities.

The Student Employment and Exchange program enables UTEP and Victoria University students to trade places for a semester of study and work. Since 2010 sixteen students have participated in this program and each university has benefited from learning from the students as they work and learn in another cultural context. The students have had an affordable international study experience through their paid work on campus.

The Library Exchange has been a strong component of the program since 2008, and has influenced the thinking around Libraries as interactive learning spaces at each university. Sharing of resources and system understanding has enhanced the operation of the two libraries over this period.

As the relationship has matured the activities have been broadened, and all have a focus on internationalising the student experience in teaching, learning and research. In addition to the three areas outlined above, the 2011 activities include:

- The electronic publishing of a high-end creative magazine by creative writing students from the two universities
- Teaching of an international accounting program using technology where Victoria University holds the accreditation and delivers to UTEP students
- Continuation of the Health Research seminars with post graduate students presenting findings of their research to peers
- Investigation of methods of accelerating pathway progress of Victorian students from school through to university based on the US Early College High School and Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) models
- Collaborative desalination research facilitated by a US Fulbright Specialist grant to support a UTEP researcher to visit Victoria University for a month in 2012 to conduct cooperative research
- One week delegation to Victoria University by UTEP leaders in August with a focus on reporting on developments in the program areas and building on the face to face meetings by linking UTEP students and staff in to the sessions by videoconference

Throughout the past five years the senior leadership of each university has encouraged students and staff to participate in areas of collaborative interest. The driving principles are that there is mutual benefit, that knowledge exchange and growth will enhance the operations of each university and that the students will have an enhanced international experience. The funding to underpin this partnership has been kept to a minimum largely through the innovative use of technology – videoconferencing, teleconferencing and social networking.

Recognition by the Institute of International Education for innovation and success in this international partnership encourages each university to continue to strive for excellence and achievement to benefit students and staff and add to the collective knowledge of the sector.

Susan Young

Executive Dean

Victoria University

Melbourne Australia

Stephen Riter PhD

Vice President for Information Resources and Planning

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Dr Christine Armatas has over 15 years of experience working as an academic in curriculum design, assessment and evaluation. She has worked on curriculum and e-learning projects of varying sizes, including the award winning 3C Project at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the Interprofessional Education Program at Victoria University. Her research interests include the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning and institutional assessment and evaluation.

Dr Gill Best

Dr Gill Best is a Senior Lecturer and Manager, Students Supporting Student Learning (SSSL) in the Centre for Student Success. She holds a PhD from Victoria University titled 'First Year University Students and their Parents: Conjoint Experiences of University'. Gill has worked at VU since 1991 and has been experimenting with, devising and implementing student peer mentoring programs since 1998. Gill considers SSSL programs to be an exciting and transformative way to support students both academically and socially and sees the students within the programs as a key to unlocking students' talents, skills and knowledge. Gill visited UTEP in 2010 where she enjoyed learning about UTEP's peer learning programs, and meeting the students and staff.

Professor Mary Carolan-Olah

Professor Mary Carolan-Olah, PhD, MPH, BN, is Coordinator (Research & Research Training) and Leader of the Clinical and Community Health research unit within Victoria University's College of Health & Biomedicine. Professor Mary Carolan-Olah is a registered Nurse, a certified midwife, and she has been conducting research in high risk pregnancy for almost 10 years. Her research has made significant impact in a number of areas, including: pregnancy in women over 35 years, gestational diabetes mellitus and predictors of perinatal morbidity.

Dr Karen Charman

Dr Karen Charman is a senior lecturer at Victoria University, and the President of the Public Pedagogies Institute. Her academic research is around pedagogy and curriculum as well memory, representation and communities. This research has been undertaken in a variety of different ways, through the development of curriculum to assist transition to higher education, education and museums and memoir and archives.

Dr Gary Edens

Dr Gary Edens is the Vice President for Student Affairs at The University of Texas at El Paso and provides administrative leadership to thirty-four student service departments including University Recruitment, Scholarships, Career Center, Counseling Services, Recreational Sports, International Programs, Residence Life, Union Services and the Student Engagement and Leadership Center. As the Chief Student Affairs Officer, he is also a key leader in developing the university's enrolment management strategies and has actively worked to improve retention rates and decrease time to degree. Dr Edens graduated from UTEP in 1990 as a Top Ten Senior with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. He went on to earn both his Master's degree in Public Administration and Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration from The University of Texas at El Paso.

Dr Donna Ekal

Dr Donna Ekal is Associate Provost in the Office for Undergraduate Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her duties include leading the departments in Undergraduate Studies, coordinating the university programming with El Paso Community College, and participating in other campus programs and activities. Prior to coming to UTEP, Dr. Ekal was

principal of El Paso Country Day School, a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand, and worked on a U.S.A.I.D. grant with University of Illinois at Egerton University in Njoro, Kenya. She received her undergraduate degree from University of Minnesota in Agronomy and her graduate degrees from Cornell University.

Adrian Gallagher

Adrian Gallagher is a graduate of the University Of Melbourne and RMIT with over 24 years of experience in academic and special libraries. From July 2007 to 2011 Adrian worked as the Learning Commons Manager at Victoria University completing a range of projects including the creation of the Footscray Park and Footscray Nicholson Learning Commons. In 2011 Adrian received a Vice Chancellors award for contributions to Learning Commons Projects at Victoria University. In previous roles Adrian was the RMIT Swanston Library and the Victorian Parliamentary Librarian. Adrian is currently the Associate Librarian, Information Resources, Systems and Infrastructure at Victoria University Library where he has been responsible for library projects integrating repository systems with university research publication systems and implementing open access platforms for university data collections.

Dr Effy George

Dr Effy George teaches in the Bachelor of Arts first year program at Victoria University, Australia. Her research and teaching interests include Anthropology, South Asia, Asian Art History and Gender Studies. From 2009 to 2015, she has designed and coordinated the Web 2.0 Global Learning Community (GLC), a suite of collaborative programs involving Victoria University and the University of Texas, El Paso.

Dr Darko Hajzler

Dr Darko Hajzler is a registered psychologist. He has worked as a counsellor and lecturer at several universities within Australia and in the United States. Dr Hajzler seeks to understand the situations of students in order to provide them with options and support them while they explore these possibilities. He has received training in language based models: including behavioural, cognitive behavioural (principally REBT), hypnosis, narrative, and psychoanalytic.

Associate Professor Alan Hayes

Associate Professor Hayes is a teaching and research academic at Victoria University. He has over 25 years of experience in muscle and exercise physiology with a focus on the importance of muscle mass and function in health, disease and aging. Associate Professor Hayes has been instrumental in facilitating research collaboration with the College of Health Sciences at The University of Texas at El Paso. He continues to advance research engagement as the Assistant Dean, Western Centre for Health Research and Education and as Deputy Director of The Australian Institute for Musculoskeletal Sciences based at Sunshine Hospital.

Ralph Kiel

Ralph Kiel has been University Librarian at Victoria University since August 2009. His main current interests are managing the Library through a time of significant changes, engaging with the university's patrons and stakeholders, expanding the Library's service catalogue into innovative areas, and ensuring the Library delivers high quality services that are cost effective. He has been involved with the education sector all his working life, starting in Victorian secondary schools and TAFE colleges before moving to University libraries in 1999.

Joanne Kropp

Joanne Kropp has a B.A. in Drama from Texas State University, a MA in History from The University of Texas at El Paso and is a PhD candidate in Borderlands History at UTEP. She is a Senior Lecturer in UTEP's Entering Student Program (ESP) and teaches courses in Borderlands

History, World History, Latin American History, US History, and Women's Studies. Her research and teaching focus on environmentalism, law, gender, and migration/immigration. Ms Kropp currently teaches the GLCs with Victoria University and Guttman College.

Professor Andrew McAinch

Professor Andrew McAinch is a faculty member of Victoria University's College of Health and Biomedicine. He has clinical training as a Dietitian and Exercise Physiologist as well as research training in molecular physiology. Andrew has been the Treasurer for the Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society for the last 5 years, is currently a member of the Council of Deans of Nutrition and Dietetics (Australia, New Zealand), Leader of the Lifestyle Associated Diseases Program area within the Centre for Chronic Disease and member of the College Research and Research Training Committee.

Dr Belinda Mclennan

Ms Belinda Mclennan serves as the Chief Operating Officer at Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) Pty. Ltd., and served as its General Manager of Education and Training Services and General Manager of Education. Ms. McLennan was responsible for the delivery of AMES Education and Training services, including AMEP and Distance. Ms Mclennan has previously held positions as the CEO of Tasmanian Polytechnic, and the Pro Vice Chancellor of Teaching and Learning at Victoria University.

Gaon Mitchell

Gaon Mitchell is currently the Owner/Operator of Careers in the West. She has had a 25 year career history in post-compulsory education, predominantly in the higher education sector. This has focused on Career and Employability outcomes for students. Across 2010-2015 she had the opportunity to engage in an exciting strategic partnership that allowed Victoria University to build a successful Students-as-Staff campaign, replicated on the UTEP model. The success of this model saw over 1000 students employed on campus across VU's various sites, and grow their employability and entrepreneurship possibilities. Since leaving VU in 2015, Gaon has established a consultancy specialising in work integrated learning, and has undertaken a range of projects including policy, online portal, and internship unit development.

Dr Irma Victoria Montelongo

Dr Irma Victoria Montelongo received her PhD in Borderlands History from UTEP. Her fields of study include Gender and Sexuality, Latin American History, United States History and Borderlands History. Her research and teaching interests focus on race, class, gender, sexuality, and criminology on the United States-Mexico border. In 2009, Dr. Montelongo developed and taught the first Global Learning Community with Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia, which focused on globalization, migration, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality on opposite sides of the globe.

Jacinta Richards

Jacinta in her current position as Manager, Student Learning Pathways at Victoria University has a leadership role in preparing and inducting non-traditional students from diverse educational backgrounds for study in degree courses at Victoria University. As part of this responsibility she manages the university's Higher Education Participation and Partnership funded Early University Pathways initiative, working with secondary schools and the University colleges to build and support pathways for secondary school students, through co-enrolment in tertiary and secondary programs, early university credits, academic development and transition experiences.

Robert L Stakes

Robert L Stakes is the Associate Vice President for Information Resources and Director of the University Library at UTEP. Robert has served as Director of the Library since 2005, at which time the UTEP library began a

transformation based on Learning Commons model for academic libraries. Since that time the Library has added a 300-seat open computer lab, the University Writing Center, the Math Tutoring Center, the Technology Support Center and IT Help Desk. Statistics show that 88% of enrolled students have accessed resources in the Library at least once in the academic year.

Professor Stephen Riter

Dr Stephen Riter was educated at Rice University and the University of Houston. He was a faculty member at Texas A&M University between 1968 and 1980 rising to the rank of Professor. In 1980 he joined the University of Texas at El Paso as Professor and Chair of Electrical Engineering. He has also served UTEP as Chair of Computer Science, Dean of Engineering and 1996 became UTEP's first Provost. As Provost he was responsible for UTEP's teaching, research and public service programs. In 2005 Dr. Riter became UTEP's first Vice President for Information Resources and Planning and is responsible for all information related activities of the University including information technology and the UTEP Library.

Dr Carolyn Woodley

Dr Carolyn Woodley is Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and is Course Director of the Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at Charles Sturt University. Carolyn's research interests include the use of ICT in teaching and learning, internationalising the curriculum, transnational quality and building capacity through community-based projects. While her PhD was in the area of postcolonial theory and identity, Carolyn has taught in Education, Arts, Business and Law programs in the tertiary sector over 20 years. She has published in international journals on various themes including ePortfolios, risks and benefits of social media, graduate capabilities and team assessment. Like many educators, she is currently exploring how best to exploit the pedagogical opportunities presented by social media. When at Victoria University, she worked on the VU/UTEP relationship in the areas of postgraduate Accounting as well as student exchange.

Susan Young

Susan Young is the Dean of Students at Victoria University. This is a newly established position to lead the university's student participation and efforts to enhance student success and retention and the overall student experience. Previously she was the inaugural Dean of the Victoria University College, providing foundation and general education support to the diverse student cohort both domestic and international—and building strong links with community and pathways into higher education and the workplace. She began her career in education working as a high school teacher and has a keen interest in the capacity building of individuals who are learning for work and life. Her current role enables Susan to contribute to VU's longstanding commitment to Excellent, Engaged and Accessible education.

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