CONFERENCE REPORT
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OLT-2005 “Beyond Delivery” Conference
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Brett Williams

The Online Teaching and Learning (OLT) conference hosted by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is an annual one day conference held in Brisbane. First structured in 2000 for QUT staff only, it has been opened up to teaching and learning contemporaries in Higher Education since 2003. The conference was attended by 220 delegates held at the picturesque Gardens Point Campus of QUT.

This year's theme was titled 'Beyond Delivery' targeted university academic staff and general staff who support academics in using online technologies effectively in their teaching methodologies. Metaphoric examples were provided in the opening address by Dr Neil Carrington, QUT comparing last year's theme, exploring integrated learning environments providing delegates a clear paradigmatic view of developments in both areas over the past twelve months.

Using the theme 'Beyond Delivery' this provided the conference organisers to seek National and International experts in this innovative and contemporary teaching and learning paradigm. Whilst the majority of papers were presented from QUT staff, other research was presented from staff from University of Western Sydney, University of Southern Queensland, Monash University, University of Wollongong, Universitas 21 (Singapore) and Kongju National University (Korea).

The day consisted of four simultaneous sessions which included the following broad themes:

- e-learning and curricula challenges
- Blended learning environments
- Uses of collaborative tools
- Learning designs for more active and collaborative learning

The conference sessions were structured concurrently with four parallel sessions running at any one time, one of which was presented in the beautiful old government house situated in the grounds of Gardens Point. Each simultaneous session allowed four speakers to present for up to twenty-five minutes with standard time set aside for questions from the floor.

Following the opening address the conference commenced with the keynote from Professor Rod Sims. Professor Sims opened his introduction informing delegates of his current interests which included the development of models for learning designs and the emergence of new learning environments. He also reinforced the notion of distance education discussing his current academic position with Duke University, USA despite living in a rural setting 300 km south of Brisbane! His presentation centred on the use of teacher cross-road metaphor. One path led you to a traditional way of teaching, whilst the other path provided teachers with the choice and opportunity of developing innovative e-learning strategies – considerable discussion and debate

centred on this cross-road. Other key areas included electracy (state of mind within which knowing takes place), the importance of emancipation and student empowerment within the confines of e-learning.

Macromedia then provided delegates with the opportunity to view the new synchronous software platform. This software demonstrated a 'live' atmosphere from Auckland, New Zealand which illustrated the capacity to provide live and recorded video and audio conferencing, application sharing, document sharing, seminars and meetings.

Thirty-five papers were presented in total and generally covered the following teaching and learning themes:

- Technology futures
- Putting the learning into e-learning
- Technology preferences of new millennial learners
- Online teaching as mediated conversation
- Building online learning communities

The conference concluded with a satirical hypothetical involving a Dean's advisory committee from the fantasy University – Virtual Information Resource University South (VIRUS). The hypothetical involved the committee and participants to discuss the online teaching and learning issues confronting Australian Universities today and eventually have to choose between two teaching staff members (traditional educator versus online educator) in light of fiscal and teaching and learning responsibilities. Whilst poor 'Bill' (traditional educator) was forced to take his redundancy – it was quite poignant with the current climate of online teaching and learning facing the Australian higher education institutions.

In closing, the overall organisation and quality of presentations was excellent and emphasises the direction some universities are taking towards distance education and collaborative research partnerships. The conference also provided the opportunity to meet with established interstate colleagues whilst allowing the forging of new academic partnerships. The date for the OLT2006 conference has yet to be confirmed, however further information can be found at the following URL: <https://olt.qut.edu.au/>