Using online personalized study plans to address diversity and facilitate independent learning

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First year psychology units are taught to a large, diverse cohort of students across multiple campuses locally and internationally, and by off-campus learning. Using a blended learning model we have transformed the delivery of first year psychology lectures to meet these challenges: finding methods of sustainable and flexible lecture delivery; facilitating independence as students transition to university; providing timely and frequent feedback on student learning; and meeting the needs of students with different educational backgrounds.

A core component of the new curriculum is the introduction of personalized study plans using *MyPsychLab*, an online learning resource published by Pearson Education. Using a 'pretest' plus 'posttest' model, *MyPsychLab* creates a personalized study plan that adapts over time to reflect the student's current level of knowledge. Students use *MyPsychLab* to ensure they have met a particular set of learning objectives prior to the lecture. This will mean all students, regardless of their prior knowledge of psychology, can come together in the lecture with a similar level of understanding of basic concepts. *MyPsychLab* models a successful approach to study based on self-evaluation and setting clear learning goals, and is designed to facilitate the transition toward becoming self-regulated, independent learners (Krause & Coates, 2008; Winters, Greene, & Costich, 2008). Students complete an assessable quiz after the lecture (in *Moodle*), and are then provided with targeted feedback, based on the group performance, in the following lecture. In this way, the online and face-to-face learning experiences form an integrated teaching and learning environment, critical to the success of blended learning models (Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts, & Francis, 2006). Lecturers have access to reports on students' progress in the online environments and can use this information to adapt their teaching in response to student needs. Information about student progress is otherwise difficult to obtain with large lecture classes; helping teachers to 'get to know' their students and improve retention rates (Grosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009).

The new curriculum has already been successful in transforming our approach to lecturing from a traditional, information transmission model, to thinking about how to use lectures to engage students in discussion based on their learning in the online environment. Further outcomes of the program will be evaluated using learning analytics on student use and progress in the online environment to explore links with learning outcomes and differences as a function of educational background. Preliminary mid-semester findings will be presented.

References

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