1 The bigger picture of pedagogy at WSU

WSU (like most universities) has been on a trajectory to more active and more flexible pedagogies for some time. These pedagogies are student-centred; they constructively align with the needs of today’s students, in terms of both their learning engagement (experience) and learning needs (outcomes). The endorsement of the Securing Success strategic plan affirmed we are on the right trajectory and commits the University to the next stage of that journey, through the implementation of transformative pedagogies in technology-rich learning environments to equip our students for future contributions to work and society. This is a key element of being a truly student-centered university. A list of the specific alignment to Securing Success is included in Appendix 1.

2 Why the move to active, student-centred pedagogies?

The evidence from large scale meta-analyses is convincing; compared to lectures, teacher–structured, student-active learning experiences reduce failure rates and improve examination performance http://theconversation.com/are-lectures-a-good-way-to-learn-26905. Student-centred learning strategies such as problem-based learning, experiential learning and case-based learning, encourage students to actively participate in their own learning while nurturing the development of collaborative, authentic, critical thinking and problem solving skills necessary for the 21st century student. See also the companion paper: ‘Learning in collaborative technology-enhanced spaces’.

3 What does this mean for lectures?

Our precious face-to-face time with students is precious for them and us. We need to think carefully about how we use that time. When we do use lectures we should use them wisely and in ways that allow students to best engage with the learning experience. Wisely - because lectures (no matter how well prepared) are not good for teaching some things. Wisely, because there are some things active and engaging lectures do very well — for example present new synthesis of information and concepts that can’t be accessed elsewhere. Because they are important, we should use lectures in ways that optimize students’ access given the realities of their life, and in ways that make the best use of our constrained institutional resources and environments. Increasingly, because good lectures are a resource that can be pre-recorded and accessed by students at any time, students don’t need to physically attend: instead we can offer them our lectures recorded through our desktop or using video production suites. Using lectures wisely and in the right way, allows us to use our precious face-to-face class time for active learning to best complement the lecture resource or to supplement them with equally engaging learning activities. This is the idea of ‘flipping’ that has become ubiquitous in universities. Additional resources are available: http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/qilt/qilt/designing_for_learning/strategies_for_engagement http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/programs/teaching_insights/pdf/insight9_flipped_classrooms.pdf

4 Why are we building new learning spaces?

Until recently universities have built teaching spaces primarily to allow us to deliver lectures, even though we have known for a long time that we needed a broader array of teaching strategies than lectures. As a result teachers have spent the last decade struggling with the legacy of adapting old fashioned spaces like lecture theatres to active learning spaces. As universities started to build
learning spaces that were better suited to student-centred active learning – many stopped building lecture theatres all together. Instead universities have prioritised their new buildings around providing staff and students with smaller technology enabled spaces designed to support active student-centred learning.

The design of the learning spaces within One Parramatta Square (1PSQ) reflects WSU’s commitment to these new approaches. This new vertical campus is intended to be the flagship of a wider transformation within the university which will see similar spaces constructed across all campuses. Consequently, the discussion of the ‘1PSQ Fitout and Design Working Group’ and the Steering Group have informed the development of a prototype classroom. This prototype has been built as a pilot to ensure that our future learning spaces provide an outstanding environment for active learning. The pedagogical intention reflected in the layout is that the rooms will be used for interactive ‘flipped classroom’ learning activities. Rather than taking information in, as in a traditional lecture, students will bring to class what they have prepared elsewhere – through digital resources, online activities, work experience, site visits, research tasks, etc. The learning activities will be designed for students to share, engage, apply, integrate and develop their knowledge interactively and socially – with peers as much as with the lecturer/tutor. The rooms are for student-centred activity and engaged learning, not passive learning.

5 New pedagogical designs for business students using these spaces

The new curriculum in the School of Business responds to the need to prepare graduates for roles in enterprise futures. The goal of producing business graduates who are ethical, creative, critical, entrepreneurial and able to work in collaborative and sustainable ways, challenges us to rethink how we conceptualise our teaching and learning work in a changing environment. The location of 1PSQ opens up further opportunities to build on the authentic work-based and engaged learning design focus in the curriculum. The new learning spaces within 1PSQ provide opportunities for students to collaboratively construct understandings, negotiate meaning, and create new knowledge. When didactic lecture delivery is replaced by student-centred activities, we support students to become active knowledge creators rather than passive consumers. The classroom becomes valued space where students reflect, discuss, debate, negotiate, role play, present and persuade. Thoughtful inclusion of the rich technological options within the new learning spaces will help us enhance our current practice and design tasks that could not be completed in a traditional classroom setting.

6 The University recognises the implications of practice change

New spaces like 1PSQ will allow us to apply these new pedagogies – but for many of us we will be learning to do that. The university recognises this and will support staff to develop new ideas and approaches in their teaching. There are many examples of teaching in these spaces we can already learn from. Some are described in the accompanying paper (from the 1PSQ Pedagogies Working Group). For staff teaching in the new spaces, the School and DVCA Portfolio will develop a detailed support plan which includes teaching development sessions, learning resources and peer mentoring to support less experienced colleagues. There will be recognition in workload allocations of the time required to develop new curriculum as well as the availability of expert advice and support from the School and the DVCA Portfolio. There will be the opportunity to take risks, experiment and explore new teaching strategies safely.

At present, the DVCA Portfolio is offering teaching development sessions to support staff in getting started in the new learning spaces. A staff orientation video will be ready for release shortly. Both of these resources incorporate classroom management tips and considerations to foster active participation and collaborative learning experiences within the new learning spaces.
7 How will students be supported in learning in this new environment?

The DVCA Portfolio is also developing a student orientation video to support students in the use of the new learning spaces. In addition each room is equipped with resources as they use these new learning technologies. The University offers our students general learning support through workshops and programs and a range of online resources. This is complemented by the library learning advisors on campus. As new ideas and teaching approaches in this space develop, a growing suite of student support resources will continue to be created and shared across the University.

8 How will we know the new curriculum and new spaces are working?

As part of the implementation, the School will be evaluating the new curriculum and pilot projects, including the use of the new learning environments to support ongoing planning and review. That evaluation will draw on the usual range of university data sources and include input from teaching staff, support staff and students regarding the pedagogical, physical and technological aspects of these learning spaces.

Author: Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic in consultation with the 1PSQ working groups
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Appendix 1: Securing Success Alignment

1. To be a distinctively student-centred university, Western will:

1.2 Transform its teaching and learning environments by integrating digital technologies with innovative curricula and work-integrated learning

1.3 Continue to build the capacity of staff to support students as active participants in their learning

1.10 Monitor and evaluate the quality of student learning and support to improve students’ engagement, outcomes and satisfaction

3. To deliver a unique learning experience that is innovative, flexible and responsive, Western will:

3.1 Continue to expand entry pathways, enhance English proficiency support, and develop learning capabilities through flexible modes of delivery, consistent with Objective 1.1

3.2 Use technology innovatively to provide students with access to authentic, engaging and diverse learning experiences tailored to their interests, capabilities and aspirations, consistent with Objective 1.2

3.6 Offer innovative courses that respond to changing global employment markets and industry and community needs

3.7 Expand flexible and creative modes of course delivery through high quality and engaging on-campus, online and hybrid programs in response to emerging student needs and workforce demands

3.10 Continue to support teaching that engages students as active participants in their learning and development, consistent with Objective 1.3

6. To secure success with a dynamic, innovative and respectful culture, Western will:

6.3 Deliver a range of relevant and value-adding career development opportunities for staff

6.4 Develop staff capabilities in key impact areas of the University’s strategic plan

6.6 Equip and train staff in the use of emerging technologies which encourage innovation and efficiency

6.7 Foster a strong culture and track record of successful renewal and innovation, achieved through the determination, creativity and hard work of all staff. Western is recognized as an Employer of Choice for Gender Equality by the Workplace Gender Agency.

6.8 Continue to invest in cutting-edge technology to ensure staff and students benefit from an excellent and modern learning environment, consistent with Objectives 1.2 and