Monash VLE Newsletter

Sem 1, 2012, No 1

Hello and welcome to the third edition of the Monash Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) newsletter. We hope that you find this a valuable source of news and information about the Monash VLE Project and Monash’s new educational technologies and initiatives.

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Announcements
Equella Approved as Monash’s Enterprise Content Repository for Education

The VLE is pleased to announce that on 29 February, Academic Board endorsed the adoption of Equella as Monash’s enterprise content repository software for education purposes. This approval was the result of a strategic enterprise application assessment recently conducted by the VLE Project Team under the guidance of Marnie Hughes-Warrington, former Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching), which reviewed nearly half a dozen content repository products against Monash business requirements.

In keeping with the VLE’s model of integrating educational technologies wherever possible, Equella will be integrated with Moodle 2.

For more information regarding the Equella roll-out, including details regarding when your faculty will be able to utilise this service, please keep an eye on the VLE website.

VLE Completes Wave 2 Moodle 2 Training and Outreach Sessions

The VLE is pleased to announce that on 16 February, the VLE Project Team successfully completed our last face to face Moodle training sessions for Wave 2 faculties. During the lead up to semester 1, the VLE training team conducted over 60 instances of seven specialised Moodle trainings, training over 1000 Monash staff members. These trainings will be reviewed in a formal de-brief session in the coming weeks to improve training offerings for Wave 3 faculties. Wave 3 training will commence in April.

Survey feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive with an overall 4.2/5 satisfaction rating and comments including,”Thanks for the training session, it was indeed excellent. It would have to be one of the best training sessions I have had, while I have been here at Monash University (I have been here since 2003).”

In addition to training, the VLE took several steps to ensure staff and students were prepared for the start of semester with Moodle. This included conducting awareness building sessions at school and department staff meetings, hosting drop-in support centres on multiple campuses, the development of a number of online self-help resources and co-location of our staff with the eSolutions ServiceDesk, our key support partners.

For more information regarding the VLE’s training, support and outreach activities for both staff and students visit our website.

VLE Welcomes Three New Staff Members
The VLE is pleased to welcome three new members to our fast growing project team!

Photos: From left to right: Lin Lu, Yelena Shmelyova and Nilma Perera

**Lin Lu**, VLE Business Analyst, comes from the Callista eAdmissions Project in the Student Admissions Unit where she had significant experience engaging a diverse group of stakeholders to elicit and understand their needs. Lin enjoys taking a collaborative approach when developing creative solutions for users. Lin loves to run and has recently started the VLE Running Club. She is enjoying the challenge of inspiring her colleagues to run with her at lunchtime.

**Yelena Shmelyova**, VLE Project Support Officer, splits her time between the VLE Project Team at Caulfield and the eSolutions Project Management Office (PMO) at Clayton. Yelena possesses a Masters in Mathematics, is a trained web developer and has extensive experience in project management in the automotive and education sectors. Yelena enjoys utilising project management procedures and standards and is looking forward to bringing her experience to the VLE team. Yelena loves travelling and experimenting with cooking international cuisines.

**Nilma Perera**, Usability and Accessibility Consultant from the eSolutions User Experience Team, joins the VLE team two days a week to provide usability and accessibility solutions to our educational technologies. Nilma comes from an academic background and is currently completing her PhD in the area of Human Computer Interaction. She loves animals and owns two cats and two dogs.

**VLE Develops Educational Design Initiatives to Take Moodle and Other Ed Techs to the Next Level at Monash**

The function of the Monash Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Educational Design team is to guide the progress of the VLE project in the achievement of its goals of curriculum improvement, deeper academic engagement with educational technology, and increased student satisfaction with technology. In order to achieve these goals, the VLE has drafted an outcomes framework based on key pedagogical themes which have emerged and will continue to be extracted from relevant higher education online learning research. Themes will be supported through reviewing the transfer of knowledge, training and support functions to a wider group of VLE stakeholders; promulgating exemplars of learning and teaching; facilitating support communities; and supporting
VLE technology users through in-person action.

The VLE Educational Design team will actively research and seek feedback from stakeholders to improve the outcomes framework, identify the most valuable themes for future years and trial new methods throughout the life of the VLE project.

Monash Moodle 2 Takes Off Without a Hitch!

Day one, Semester 1, 2012, marked the first day of teaching with Moodle 2 for Monash’s four Wave 2 faculties - Art, Design & Architecture; Engineering; Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences; and Science. On day one 16,000 staff and students used Moodle 2 and the VLE is very happy to report that all ran smoothly.

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Learning and Teaching Corner | Using Video in Moodle

Ms Ann Kempe and Dr Kris Ryan Welcome Students to their Moodle Units with Videos

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Photos: Ms Ann Kempe and Dr Kris Ryan

Ms Ann Kempe from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences and Dr Kris Ryan from the Faculty of Engineering are using webcam videos to welcome students to their Moodle 2 units at the start of each semester. These videos set the tone for the unit and give students a general outline of what to expect in the coming weeks. Ann and Kris also utilise their videos to outline some of the features, functions and layout of their Moodle units as a way of helping students in the transition from Blackboard.

Ann and Kris understand that video can be a powerful tool for lecturers to build students’ interest and excitement about the unit. Ann thinks that, “students want more of their learning environments than just a plain bulletin board. They want to feel connected to their lecturers and tutors and a
video and other tools in Moodle, offer us a more flexible approach to connecting with our students".

The introduction video serves as a first step in relationship building with the new cohort of students.

Watch Ann and Kris' videos to see how they introduce their units.

Dr Michael Henderson Harnesses the Power of Video to Provide Feedback on Assignments

![Photo: Dr Michael Henderson](image)

"I have actually had students write back to me apologising for not having aced their assignments!"

Dr Michael Henderson from the Faculty of Education recommends video as a powerful way to provide feedback to students. He finds that students are far more engaged, as video allows lecturers to draw upon both verbal and non-verbal modes, allowing for richer communication with students. It also helps to create the sense that teaching is personalised as the feedback is both specific and constructive. Moreover, Michael suggests that video could even be a more enjoyable way to do marking!

Watch a video of Michael explaining the pedagogical benefits of using video to provide feedback.

Find out how to make a webcam video and upload it to Moodle like Ann, Kris and Michael.

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Community Reports

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VLE Takes Moodle 2 Overseas
Members of the VLE team recently travelled to Monash’s overseas campuses to conduct Moodle 2 training sessions for lecturers. While in South Africa, Susan and Richard held a total of seven training sessions for 60 lecturers, over three days. These included Moodle training workshops, Google Apps presentations and a Moodle Moments session to showcase the interesting and innovative ways Monash lecturers have been using Moodle. The Monash South Africa staff were extremely positive about Moodle and reported that they are really looking forward to teaching with it in 2012.

Similarly, in Malaysia, Emily Spencer and Jeannette Ngau held six Moodle training workshops over three days. The sessions were very well attended with over 80 attendees across the six sessions. Monash staff in Malaysia are also looking forward to harnessing some of Moodle’s more interactive teaching applications and plan to host a Moodle showcase later this year.

Monash Staff Win Two of the Four Netspot Innovation Fund Grants

Netspot, Monash’s Moodle hosting vendor, have launched a new fund open to all tertiary education institutions based in the Asia Pacific region. The Netspot Innovation Fund has “been established to provide funding for innovative technologies with the aim of incorporating them into Moodle for long term sustainability.”
A/Prof Angela Carbone

One of the Netspot grant recipients, Monash A/Prof Angela Carbone, received funding to lead a joint project in conjunction with Australian National University and Moodle to develop a Moodle plug-in to detect computer programming code similarities. Angela says that the plug-in “will combine the proven functionality of code detection tools with educative resources that will help students understand the acceptability of any code similarity in their assignment submissions and develop good scholarly practices.”

Development, trialling and testing of the plug-in will occur in the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University, and will be released as part of Moodle’s suite of plug-ins. The project is led by A/Prof Angela Carbone from the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), with team members A/Prof Judy Sheard and Ms Margot Schuhmacher, Monash Faculty of Information Technology; A/Prof Chris Johnson, Australian National University; and Dr Michael deRaadt, Senior Development Manager at Moodle HQ.

Dr Phillip Dawson

NetSpot’s Innovation Fund has also provided $50k of funding for Monash to lead a joint project in
partnership with the University of Otago in New Zealand.

Dr Phillip Dawson, lecturer for the Office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) will lead the project. He describes it as, “the development of an analytics block to identify students at risk of disengaging. The research says that we can tell a lot about students from what they do on Learning Management Systems such as Moodle; right down to which students are at risk of disengaging with university altogether. Our project will present a quick graphical snapshot of these students in a 'block' that lecturers can add to their Moodle site. We'll be researching how lecturers follow up with their students, and what impact they think it has on keeping their students engaged.”

Phill applied for the project because he is committed to ensuring students get the most out of their time at university and be given every opportunity to perform to the best of their potential. Phill also wants to contribute towards reducing student drop-out rates and believes the development of the analytics block will help achieve this.

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**Feedback in Action**

**Moodle 2 Student Survey Guides VLE in Student Outreach Efforts**

In Semester 2, 2011, over 4,000 students were enrolled in Moodle Wave 1 units. These students were invited to participate in a survey to gauge their experiences with the first instance of Moodle 2 at Monash University. The VLE is very pleased to report that the majority of students indicated satisfaction with their experience of Moodle overall.

Key findings of the survey included:

- **Logging in:** 65% logged in daily or more often, 95% of students logged in at least once a week.
- **Navigation and ease of use:** 72% of students found Moodle 2 easy to navigate and 69% of students quickly became comfortable with the basics.

While most students enjoyed the introduction of Moodle and did not experience any significant problems using or accessing it, several recommendations emerged from the survey. These recommendations have been used to create student resources including student specific Learning Topics, student FAQs and a 'Moodle 2 in two' presentation which students can download to help learn the Moodle basics in two minutes.

Warm regards,
The VLE Project Team

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The VLE welcomes contributions about your experience with Moodle and other VLE technologies to our newsletter. To
contribute please email vle@monash.edu.