

RESEARCH INTO ONLINE LEARNING

Although cyberspace has brought many conveniences in the way we communicate, a new La Trobe University research project has been granted \$10,000 to determine the benefits of online learning compared to the physical learning space.



Project leader, Dr Sherrie Wentworth, Anatomy Program Coordinator at La Trobe's Faculty of Health Sciences, and a team of researchers received the grant from Echo 360, the company which produces La Trobe's online tool Lectopia.

'There is increasing concern amongst lecturers about the efficacy of on-line learning tools such as recorded lectures. Many are finding that students are not attending live lectures and the perception is that they are not learning the subject content and running the risk of failing or at the very least gaining lower marks,' she says.

Dr Wentworth began looking into this area between 2009 and 2011, questioning students in two first year anatomy and physiology subjects about the way in which they manage their lectures.

Looking retrospectively at student use of the recorded lectures over those three years split across the five La Trobe campuses, Dr Wentworth plans to use the grant to investigate students who progressed in the first study and compare their learning habits and results.

The retrospective study will involve approximately 1100 students in 2009, 1300 students in 2010 and 1400 students in 2011 who

were all enrolled in the two first year anatomy and physiology subjects.

'Lectopia tools will be used to study usage patterns over the three years and the number of times each student used the recorded lectures to students who did not use the recorded lectures at all and to correlate usage with final grades in their anatomy and physiology subjects.'

The data will be examined from student questionnaires given to both the 2nd and 3rd year students. They will be asked about their perceptions of their experience, why they used recorded lectures and what benefits they felt came from using them.

'As more and more online tools become available for students it's important to see whether or not they are hindering or augmenting teaching and learning,' says Dr Wentworth.

This project will provide more evidence on the use of recorded lectures and final student grades, the link between lecture attendance and the usage of recorded lectures and student thoughts on their use of the recorded lectures over years of enrolment in their study of anatomy.

'This study will be used to improve the understanding of the use of the lecture capture system through the University and the wider University community so as to maximise student learning and student results,' she says.

MORE INFORMATION

Further information on the research opportunities in the School of Public Health can be found at:
latrobe.edu.au/health/about/schools/school-of-public-health-and-human-biosciencesprograms