

Delivering the Right Blend for Practice-Based Research

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Champa De graduated with a M.Ed. in Educational Leadership and Policy from the University of Utah and is soon embarking on a PhD in Economics of Education. After mentoring undergraduate and postgraduate students for two years in Western Governors University where all programmes are delivered online she moved to Auckland where she now manages all the 10 postgraduate programmes offered in the School of Art + Design at AUT University.

AUT University's strategic plan incorporates the five themes: learning and teaching; research and scholarship; contributions of staff; engagement with communities; and continuous development, through all of which AUT seeks to widen participation and success in education. The theme of learning and teaching identifies one of its objectives as advancing educational opportunities and success in the diverse communities of Auckland and New Zealand by continuing to expand and grow the participation and success of Maori and Pacific people across disciplines and levels of qualification.

In addition to offering the traditional on-campus research programmes since 2003 the School of Art & Design has adopted the method of blended education for advancing achievements of students residing in far flung areas of New Zealand. The School offers two postgraduate qualifications via blended learning throughout New Zealand including Auckland. The two year Master of Art & Design and the Postgraduate Diploma in Art & Design programmes are driven by students' research interests in all areas of art and design – visual arts, graphics, spatial and fashion design. The majority of research projects are practice-based although all have a theoretical or contextual component.

Delivery of these research programmes is supported by a well established online learning environment. There are regular weekly online sessions from 4 pm – 6 pm with peers and staff to discuss research interests alongside individual tutorials and this distance learning format is blended with intensive on-campus weekend residencies. The on-campus residencies take place four times a year with two of these at AUT University in Auckland (February and August) where the whole cohort comes together. For the other two residencies (mid and end of year), the student attends their nearest location – either Auckland, or Wanganui or Nelson (depending on numbers), where AUT has an association with the local polytechnics UCOL and NMIT.

In striving to deliver the right blend of learning for a practice-based research programme the challenge as well as the focus has always been on providing an innovative teaching and learning environment. Constant innovations through the years have been undertaken resulting in a well established online learning environment that supports practice-based research projects pursued by distance learners. In pursuit of practice-based research while on-campus students enjoy dedicated individual studio spaces, specialist facilities with extended access hours, and library and learning centre facilities it is important to note that the off-campus students do not have access to these resources. Though they benefit from a flexible library delivery service for our off campus students the right blend, comprised of an effective and innovative online learning environment in conjunction with the traditional on-campus residencies, is critical to achieve the desired outcomes.

To date our off-campus students have been drawn from 12 different cities within New Zealand. Delivering the right blend has transcended borders and has transformed careers. In 2008 the School offered the two year master's programme to a cohort of students residing in Rarotonga within the Cook Islands. This raised new challenges and produced new innovations in teaching. This cohort has successfully completed their practice-based projects and graduated in 2011.

This 30 minute presentation will reveal the journey the staff have taken through the years to deliver the right blend focusing on the innovations undertaken in teaching and establishing an effective online learning environment. Achieving the right blend has been made possible through the untiring efforts of a dedicated and enthusiastic team of teaching and support staff committed to promoting both educational and career success. Staff innovations in achieving and delivering the right blend will be highlighted. Transformed student careers and lives benefiting from the right blend will be revealed.