



Equity Incentives Fund Project Proposal

(NB: projects with ICT components must also complete an ICT Project Mandate and submit to the ICT Strategy Committee)

Project Name:	Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) online learning community: from noWhere2learn to nowHere2learn
Project Manager/Lead Applicant:	Peter Evans and David Bull
Department:	LTSU
Amount Requested:	\$20040.54

NB: projects that are not aligned with the tendered initiatives can only request a maximum of \$15,000

Persons consulted in the development of this proposal:

Name, Position	Project Role
Peter Evans,	Project Officer
Tas Bedford, TPP7120 Examiner – Study management	Project facilitator
Henk Huijser, TPP7120 Examiner - Communications	Project facilitator
Peter Van Vuuren, TPP7181 Examiner - Mathematics	Project facilitator
Michael Sankey, Senior Lecturer, LTSU	Moodle advisor and ICT strategist
Catherine Arden, Faculty of Education	Project facilitator

If under the tendering scheme, please identify which tender:

- 1 – Transition of second-chance learners
- 2 – Inclusive curriculum – resource kit
- 3 – Supporting refugee communities
- 4 – Supporting identifiable ‘at-risk’ students

Confidential

EIF applic TPP Online Learning Community Final.doc

Purpose

What does this project set out to achieve? (100 word limit)

A significant majority of TPP students struggle with the transition to University study and numerous issues which place them "at risk" and these are exacerbated through isolation associated with many external courses. It is known that online communities can foster high levels of connectedness and social presence and trust (Moore, Bartkovich, Fetzne, & Ison, 2002) and that these factors can markedly increase resilience and student retention (Bedford, 2007).

This project will establish an enduring online learning community for TPP students to promote connectedness, support, social presence and networking between students. This recognises and enacts the key principal that "learning is seen by students as a fundamentally social process" (The Student Learning Journey, p. 6) and the University's aspiration to create "an environment that is caring, nurturing and supportive of students achieving their own educational, personal and development goals" (USQ Strategic directions 2005-2009, p10).

The community will be available throughout their program and subsequent university study.

The community will:

- Allow students to create rich profiles (text, blogs, images) and build overlapping friendship networks
- Provide online presence indicator and instant messaging and links to web conferencing e.g. Elluminate, MSN messenger, Skype or other tools available to the student
- Provide a space where TPP staff can place resources used across the program rather than needing to repeat the information in each course
- Provide a stable and ongoing environment to share resources and build social networking between students throughout the TPP and as they progress into their degree
- Reduce attrition and increase retention and progression rates
- Tap into, and capitalise on, existing ways of connecting and other web 2.0 tools
- Be a marketing and recruitment vehicle to draw students into the TPP through word of mouth referrals

The value of such communities is demonstrated by:

- Literature pointing to the importance of informal student connections as a way to increasing student retention (Moore, Bartkovich, Fetzne, & Ison, 2002; Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003)
- success of the knowledgeGarden learning community within Education as evidenced by student comments (Messages to prospective members, 2007) and the SET (Student evaluation of FOE1000, 2007) and SEC and SELT evaluations of FET8611 (About FET8611: Emerging Environments for Learning. (2007) of two courses using knowledgeGarden.
- The global trend to group forming networks e.g. Facebook or MySpace

Itemised budget

Please provide a detailed list of budgeted items that you are seeking funding for. Seek advice from HR and ITS, where necessary, on items related to computer purchases and staffing. Include on-costs for staffing items and describe as "HEW 7, step 1, 0.2 FTE, 5 weeks fixed term" for example.

Activity	Total Cost
Project officer (HEW 8 step 3 .2 FTE 48 week (8 hrs per week * 48 weeks * \$43.59 per hour)	\$16738.56
On-costs @ 14.35%	\$2401.98
5 * Webcam and headset for loan to staff and students (\$100 * 5)	\$500
Resources books and software	\$400
TOTAL:	\$20040.54

Funding contributions by other sources/in-kind support

Activity	Total Cost
David Bull - Project leadership	In-kind
TPP staff meetings (planning, training and experience sharing) (1 hour * 10 meetings * 10 staff)	In-kind
LTSU staff using the environment to support their students	In-kind
Computer facilities for Peter Evans when on campus	In-kind
TOTAL:	\$ 0.00

Project methodology

How will the project be conducted? (250 word limit)

<p>The underlying project methodology is based on the view that the underlying technology is important only to the degree to which it allows each person to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express themselves through rich profiles containing text, images, and audio • find others and build interconnected friendship groups • build and strengthen these interconnected friendship groups by sharing resources and assistance in an environment in which assistance is reciprocated <p>It is likely that the community will be built around Moodle or another environment supported by ICT but also draw upon other social networking services supported at USQ (e.g. web conferencing systems such as Elluminate) or other externally hosted web 2.0 applications e.g. MSN messenger</p> <p>The project will progress through the following broad stages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify needs, strategies and potential solutions by meeting with TPP staff and a small group of students • Develop prototype design or an online environment
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- Work with TPP staff to create "magnet" content and a navigational structure and start to populate the environment
- Work with each course to integrate core activities into the community when this significantly adds value to the course and the community
- Invite small number of TPP students to use the environment and establish the community
- Launch community to all TPP students
- Promote community activities and self management
- Hold regular events (online and physical) and foster the development of the community

This community does not aim to replace any existing online or physical environment within the TPP program but rather to provide an ongoing environment which can be used throughout their program.

Project objectives

(200 word limit)

What are the specific goals to be achieved? What needs to be done?

Are they achievable?

What are the major milestones? What are the deliverables?

Mandatory: include timetable for project including milestone achievement

Achievable goals:

- Build a user friendly and robust online community infrastructure
- Integrate the TPP community into all TPP courses through activities in each course
- Encourage members within the community to facilitate the community
- Encourage use after they finish their TPP (or if they defer and are going to return)
- Use while a USQ student
- Optional tasks that can be done in a course
- Optional tasks that can be done in the program

Milestones:

January	Needs analysis with TPP staff looking at student needs and LTSU aspirations
January	Develop prototype
February March	Develop magnet content & train staff and populate environment
March	Pilot with staff and a small group of students
April	Launch community
June	Interim project report
May September	Foster and maintain community through regular events
November	Evaluation, reporting and planning for the future
December	Final project report

Deliverables:

- Ongoing community for students and staff to support TPP
- Magnet content that can be reused in various ways
- The community infrastructure (tools, customisations, policies) that can be used to build and support other communities

Quality expectations

(100 word limit)

Sustainability of project.

Ongoing sources of funding (if necessary)?

Method of evaluation and success indicators (how will success be measured including Key Success Points to be used in project reporting)

Sustainability and funding

We expect that after the first year the community will be a core feature of the TPP and the way staff work with students and the way students interact with other students. For this reason, additional special purpose funding will not be required to train staff or to create content.

Additional funding may be required to further modify the community and integrate it into USQ's evolving community infrastructure e.g. USQ alumni or USQ identify management (single signon).

Evaluation and success indicators

The following success metrics will be used:

- Retention and progression rates
- Learning and satisfaction measures as measured through grades and SELT and SET evaluations
- Questionnaires measuring levels of satisfaction
- Participation rates and intentions to use it in future

Outline Business Case

(150 word limit)

How will this project benefit USQ students?

Link to funding priorities and Equity & Multiculturalism goal, quality objectives, and strategic development priorities.

The business case

A significant majority of TPP students have limited experience with higher education and struggle to come to terms with the isolation which is associated with distance education. Informal analysis of existing discussion boards in TPP courses suggest there is a need for students to feel more strongly connected to the University learning environment and, in particular, other students, who are in a similar, unfamiliar social/educational space. Recent research work (Bedford, 2007), aimed at improving retention and progression in the TPP, has produced preliminary findings suggesting that feelings about belonging or not belonging to the University community figure prominently in students' decision making regarding continuation of their studies. This equity project seeks to provide an

online strategy for addressing some of these concerns.

Enterprises are increasingly using community and social networking strategies to engage with their existing and potential markets. These community forming and engagement strategies involve providing members with tools to create rich profiles, enabling social presence and forming friendship groups with the goal of fostering conversations and the building of social capital. This recognises and enacts the key principal "that learning is seen by students as a fundamentally social process" (The Student Learning Journey, p. 6) and the goal to create "an environment that is caring, nurturing and supportive of students achieving their own educational, personal and development goals" (USQ Strategic directions 2005-2009, p10).

Alignments with university aspirations:

- Higher levels of participation and retention (USQ Strategic plan 2005-2009, p9)
- A more connected community with higher levels of "trust", social capital, social presence" and "investment"
- Lowered "transaction cost" or "friction" which further increases interactions among the community e.g.
 - if you see that someone is online you can contact them with a click of a button
 - user profiles allow you to find people who are more likely to form ongoing friendships with others
- Recognise and celebrate diversity and difference in the student population by providing people with a venue for self expression, and ways of forming groups
- Increased resilience to setbacks and challenges within single courses through a stronger community and access to wider social and academic support in previous and future courses
- Allowing students to interact from their own frame of reference (rather than sometimes disjointed university systems) as they experience initial engagement through to enrolment, progression, TPP graduation and the progress through a USQ degree.

Relevant signatures

Project Manager or Lead Applicant

_____ Date: _____

Head(s) of relevant cost centre

_____ Date: _____

Senior Manager (Category 3 Delegate)

_____ Date: _____

**PLEASE SUBMIT THIS APPLICATION IN DUPLICATE –
ONE ELECTRONIC COPY AND ONE HARDCOPY WITH ORIGINAL
SIGNATURES TO THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE FUNDING SCHEME**

Reference list

- About FET8611: Emerging Environments for Learning. (2007). knowledgeGarden: our learning community Retrieved September 20, 2007, from <http://tinyurl.com/38svac>
- Baker, G. (2007, March). The Student Learning Journey: A Framework for Quality Assurance and Decision Making at USQ: The University of Southern Queensland.
- Bedford (2007) Preliminary report on responses to the questionnaire in the project 'An investigation of candidate contributing causes of USQ Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) student non-progression to USQ undergraduate programs'. LTSU, University of Southern Queensland, Draft 1, August 2007.
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2003). Investigating "Sense of Belonging" in First-Year College Students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, v4(n3), p227.
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- USQ Strategic Plan 2005-2009. (2005, January). The University of Southern Queensland.

Bibliography

- Chapman, C., Ramondt, L., & Smiley, G. (2005). Strong community, deep learning: exploring the link. *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*, 42(3), 217-230.
- Eighty Percent Persistence Online: How Does WGU Do It? (2004). *Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education*, 18(4), 6-6.
- Hornish, R. (2005). Student Resiliency and Academic Performance. *Recruitment & Retention in Higher Education*, 19(11), 1-2.
- Johnson, J. L. (2001). Learning Communities and Special Efforts in the Retention of University Students: What Works, What Doesn't, and Is the Return Worth the Investment? *Journal of College Student Retention*, v2(n3), p219.
- Moore, K., Bartkovich, J., Fetzner, M., & Ison, S. (2002). Success in Cyberspace: Student Retention in Online Courses. AIR 2002 Forum Paper.
- Transition and Retention Working Party of Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee. (2006). Investigating transition to and retention in undergraduate studies at the University of Southern Queensland. Toowoomba: University of Southern Queensland.