

## CARRICK CITATION FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT LEARNING 2008

### 1. Proposed Citation

For excellence in applying process based pedagogies that utilise powerful new media technologies to enhance the student experience of learning, and for innovative assessment practice.

### 2. Summary of particular contribution and specific context for this

My academic career is grounded in the specific context of Media Studies where students experience a combination of traditional theoretical subjects and 'hands on' applied production skills. Students have experienced these as two unrelated domains. I have a theoretical media studies background and have used this framework to incorporate new media technologies in curriculum in ways that allow students to integrate theory and practice in their learning. My teaching is premised on three key principles. Firstly, I believe that the use of new technologies in media education can facilitate and encourage new learning experiences and support students to employ different forms for the expression of their learning. Secondly, students are empowered by reflective and process based learning because it provides them with the resources and skills to become self-sufficient, critical and creative learners. Thirdly, the integration of theory into practice, and vice versa, is integral to their development as learners, knowledge producers, and future professional media practitioners.

I began full time teaching in 1995, and my practice has changed dramatically from my first, naïve, years. From observing and reflecting on my students' learning, and from my own experience of teaching, I believe strongly that learning involves the discovery of the new, and that this necessitates a learning environment that offers the latitude for some experience of risk taking, play, creativity, exploration and failure. My 'day to day' teaching style and method actively promotes this kind of environment in which I am a learner, too. Through this modelling, I foster, nurture, encourage, and allow students to undertake their learning in similar ways. My teaching has changed dramatically over time, and continues to evolve. What I have chosen to address in response to the criteria is selected from a much larger reservoir of examples.

### 3. Statement addressing chosen criteria

My submission addresses two criteria:

- Development of curricula, resources and services that reflect a command of the field.
- Approaches to assessment, feedback and learning support that foster independent learning.

#### *Development of curricula, resources and services that reflect a command of the field*

The two examples I describe below show how I have used new technologies in my curricula to influence student learning and engagement.

The first example involves my use of blogs in teaching and learning. I have incorporated hypertext and web based writing practices for assessment since 1995. With the development of blogging in the late 1990s I was able to integrate blogs into teaching, and I have done so since 2000. A central aspect of my teaching is that where a new technology is to be used, in this case blogs, I feel it is imperative that what this technology enables is identified, and that learning and assessment is restructured to respond to this, rather than making the technology conform to existing practice. (I see little merit for my students in forcing new technologies to fit with old practices; rather the challenge is to develop new practices that complement new technologies.) In the case of blogs a public writing out of ideas is enabled where students quickly learn that they have to write with enough detail and argument to make sense for others. This makes what they choose to document in their blogs more useful than the notes they may make in class, which often times are cryptic and difficult to understand even a few weeks after writing them. Additionally, as this is a public writing, the students begin to experience what it is to be a contributor to knowledge, rather than only a receiver. This is achieved through their readership, constituted by their peers, and also in some cases by the comments they receive from others outside the course (even outside of Australia).

As a blog is an informal journal it also lets the students write in a manner that is closer to, and more grounded in, their day to day language and media use, which allows them to begin to rewrite what they have learnt into their own language outside of the more anonymous and impersonal voice of the essay. I regard this as a first and important step towards deep learning, as concepts are made their own through this semi-formal but shared writing. Significant peer learning happens via their blogs, as students avidly read each others writing, and entire conversations, extra-curricula information, and resources, are routinely provided by individual students. Blogs allow the connection of posts to each other via links, so students literally make connections between each others commentaries, and larger meta level connections between different subjects that they are undertaking. This is evidenced by blog posts that draw connections between different subjects, or between things they have read or seen outside of university that they recognise as relevant to what they are learning.

In reading each others blogs students also read and view a wide variety of material of varying quality. This helps them to contextualise their own work as they can now see high and poor quality work, and they are able to recognise and articulate the differences between these. I have been instrumental in the development of a whole of program use of blogs within the media program, with the aim of consolidating and supporting students' use of them. This allows students to blog across a variety of subjects, in all year levels. They have a single blog for this, and over time these blogs become major resources for the individual student — in effect becoming a self-written and defined portfolio of their learning. This is routinely evidenced by student observations (in their blogs) where they acknowledge the value of their blogs as learning documentaries, and through structured, reflective assessment activities they use their blogs to provide evidence of their achievements, problems, and experiences. In effect the blogs become a record that externalises and makes visible their learning as a day to day and ongoing practice. I impose no constraints on what content can be placed in their blogs, subject to basic legal requirements, and over the course of their use the blogs become highly valued by students as a place in which they can articulate their ideas, anxieties, share resources, gain support, and become knowledge creators.

The second example involves the use of a wiki for a student research assignment. This project allows students to undertake original research (they are provided with a specific topic) which is written in, and published, via a dedicated wiki. As with the use of blogs the specific qualities of a wiki are utilised. Their research is expected to consist of multiple interlinked pages and as it is a wiki they are able to connect, and even contribute to, the pages written by other project groups. This task involves the development of traditional primary and secondary research skills. It introduces and fosters collaboration. My students can express what they learn through video, image, text, interviews, and in writing and building multiple pages. Exercises and activities undertaken encourage students to develop a sense of research not as the reporting of what they know, or have found out, but as the discovery of new things. The research task is based upon finding out the contributions that specific individuals have made to the development of online video and audio. As these are living individuals the traditional distance between knowledge (as being book and expert bound) and themselves is dissolved. They make contact with these research subjects (who could be anywhere in the world), interview them, and contextualise their contributions to this knowledge domain. The wiki itself will be added to and used as a research resource by future students. Its content will form the first (to date) recorded history of this new media movement. In other words these students are making a nett contribution to knowledge, and this knowledge is explicitly in the public domain. This is a significant experience for my students, whose usual experience of learning is to listen, read, and then more or less repeat this in some form via an essay or a class presentation. That first moment when they realise that their work has been read by their research subject, and others, produces an audible gasp in class. Others will literally gather around a screen to read the comment, or email, that shows that someone else apart from their teacher and themselves is reading their writing and interacting with them.

### ***Approaches to assessment, feedback and learning support that foster independent learning***

Over my teaching career I have come to believe that students get very poor treatment through the assessment designs they must respond to. Assessment routinely happens at the end of something, where it can have little if any impact on learning. As a result it generally provides no mechanism to affect their learning or even their final result. Assessment often remains a black box for teacher and student — a credit student has little idea of what high distinction work might look like, and vice versa. As a result of these realisations (and they are

ongoing), I have radically changed my approach to assessment, with the intention of producing assessment models that affirm students' achievement and development, that actually have a meaningful impact on their learning, and which provide explicit and relevant criteria for what is assessed, and how.

An example of this is my approach to the assessment of participation. In the past I would have participation as an assessment item and I might have valued it at 10% of the overall mark. Yet I would tell my students, and I believe it is so, that the value they got from the subject is strongly correlated to their participation. I realised that if this was true, then why not actually reflect that in the assessment weight? So the first thing I did was to make participation worth a minimum of 25% of the total grade. Then I realised that the only person who could actually judge their participation, unless I wanted to treat it as merely synonymous with attendance, would be the individual student. So as a result I developed a self-assessment protocol for participation. This is structured in such a way that it is graduated across year levels, with increasing autonomy provided to students in later years as they learn how to define relevant criteria, and to evaluate these. In first year, for example, in the first lecture all students draw a graph where the x axis describes the semester and the y axis how much they know. They then draw a line indicating how much they think they will learn across the course of the semester. We then make a list, as an entire cohort, of all the activities that they might need to do to make that line rise. This I then describe as participation. We then discuss who would know if these tasks were being done, and once someone quietly suggests "us?" we then discuss the implications of this. I collate and condense the list of activities, producing a weekly diary which is completed by all students individually at the beginning of every class. At the end of semester they use these diaries to give themselves an overall mark for their participation, which they do publicly to the cohort, and they also state what they have done well, what they have learnt to do better, and what they could have done better.

This protocol has an extraordinary impact on student learning. While I have never had a student fail themselves, I have had students give themselves a pass only, and be highly articulate as to why. I have developed this protocol over seven years, and it has been explicitly abused twice. In later years students are able to self-define participation criteria, but the basic structure remains the same, and the mark they give themselves is absolutely their mark for participation – I do not mediate it in anyway. Through this process students demonstrate an enormous maturity and they develop a language of reflection about their learning. They learn that learning is a practice, a way of doing, and not simply about turning up and possibly listening. It encourages them to become active learners, and it explicitly rewards students who have made large steps or leaps through the course of a semester in their own terms.

A second example I would like to describe is an assessment strategy that I have developed for use with major assignments. This strategy attempts to provide assessable and meaningful feedback to students at a point in the task where this feedback can have an impact on their final mark, and can affect the work itself in some manner. It generally consists of a major assessment task; a long essay, for example. I require a draft of this to be submitted for assessment, and this draft may constitute up to 50% of the overall mark. There are explicit and clear assessment criteria provided, and then feedback is provided orally to the student via an interview. I do this because in having a conversation with the student a much richer assessment dialogue can be held, and through this we develop a strategy together that provides a set of tasks that becomes their roadmap to complete the essay. This could involve new ideas, references, or correcting some basic theoretical errors. They then write up this meeting which they send to me, which in turn becomes a record of the meeting in their own words, as well as a contract of what they have undertaken to do. If this record is substantially wrong (they have deeply misunderstood our conversation) then I correct it, or have a second interview. They submit the final work, and here the assessment criteria is heavily weighted towards their engagement with the draft assessment, where they are rewarded if they have responded to and enacted these changes (or demonstrated why they have not). This practice allows feedback and assessment to have a direct impact on the final result of their work, and so becomes more meaningful for the student. Its major method is oral, which helps those students who struggle with abstract or theoretical concepts as in our conversations we can use concrete examples to illustrate points, and easily identify difficulties. It helps the students see the role of reflection, editing, and critique and the substantial difference it can make to the quality of their work, providing them with a method that is applicable across other activities. Finally, it provides and rewards assessment at a point in the task where it makes a meaningful difference for the student as it materially changes what and how they learn through actually doing this task.

#### **4. Statement identifying the ways in which the contribution has influenced student learning, engagement and/or the overall student experience, been sustained over time and been recognised by fellow staff, the institution and/or the broader community**

What I have described above is best read as a 'snapshot' of my practice. Since 1995 I have experimented and developed ways to let students express their learning and knowledge through means that take advantage of what new technologies can offer. For media students, I believe the ability to use a variety of media in their 'writing' supports and encourages their engagement with theory through practice and that this is directly relevant to their everyday, and professional, worlds. It influences their learning in dramatic ways as they are invited to explore forms of knowledge creation that fall outside those available in the more usual forms of assessable work they have experienced, such as essays, tutorial presentations, and exams. These activities, which have aligned my own research interests and practices with my teaching, have added benefit. They help students to contextualise their own experience as learners because they are supported to identify the similarities and differences between these other forms of knowledge expression and development, and those they are more accustomed to.

What I do in my teaching, and what I hope to achieve through my teaching, has changed over the course of these experiments. I have remained committed to the belief that new technologies allow students to discover other literacies that are relevant to their learning and that these other literacies are empowering, engaging and valued by students. They allow some students to discover that they can write, are capable of independent research, and can make sophisticated arguments, while allowing all students to engage with a wider variety of research practice, learning experiences and the ability to develop their voices as learners and knowledge creators. This is evident through the teaching quality data that the university has recorded in my courses, the feedback I receive from students, and even more so in the artefacts that my students produce, including their blogs, interactive works (which have an international audience) and their research wiki. For example, I recently received an email from a former student who graduated two years ago who specifically thanked me for what I had taught him. What I particularly valued in this email was his observation that while he might not be "writing hypertext every day" he was using "the process and trouble shooting skills that you taught me every hour, every day in my job". The resources I make available online, for example my personal research blog and an archive of all my publications, are widely used by other academics. This material includes a great deal of informal discussion around the teaching of media studies, and I routinely meet colleagues who are familiar with my work through my blog who comment that they have experimented with their own teaching based on what I have shared.

My expertise in these areas is further recognised by the leadership role I have played in developing models of blog use in teaching for the media program, and by my participation in the Carrick Digital Learning Communities Project (funded as a part of the Competitive Grants Program). I have published essays derived from my teaching and research practice — most recently "Softvideography: Digital Video as Postliterate Practice" in the 2008 University of Minnesota Press anthology *Small Tech: The Culture of Digital Tools*. I have been an invited speaker at national conferences such as Learning Technologies (Mooloolaba 2005), and have presented internationally at conferences such as EdMedia (Lugano 2004).

I believe media students should have access to, and learn, how knowledge can be created and expressed using a variety of media, and that this not only complements their possible careers but enables and supports a wide variety of learning styles. I have actively developed such models since 1995, with the technologies used changing regularly, while the underlying model has remained robust — new technologies let us 'write' and present our learning in new and novel forms. These are deeply engaging for students, and their impact is evidenced in two ways. Firstly, it is clear from the quality of the work produced. Secondly, impact is evident through students' new understandings of their own learning processes and how they can express their learning through the creation of a diverse range of media-rich knowledge artefacts that utilise a variety of cognitive skills and literacies. I enjoy, and bring great passion and skill to helping students discover their own abilities and achievements through the creative use of technology for the making of playful and critical media rich objects, and I am committed to valid and authentic assessment that supports learning.