

# Benchmarking Flexible Learning: A Pilot Study

**Craig Zimitat**

Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

C.Zimitat@mailbox.gu.edu.au

**Abstract:** *This paper reports the pilot exercise of criterion-referenced benchmarking of flexible learning on a new Australian university campus. The University has adopted flexible learning as a key teaching and learning strategy and set targets for numbers of courses offered in flexible mode. Defining flexible mode, and degrees of flexibility in courses, was part of the purpose of this project. Graduating students (n=61) were surveyed regarding their perceptions of the degree of flexibility in two courses of their degree programs. The online benchmarking instrument consisted of seven criteria derived from the university's own Statement on flexible learning. There were three level descriptors (i.e. benchmarks) for each criterion. The results of the survey indicate that students believe their courses offer moderate flexibility in terms of control and choice, access to range of learning technologies, support services, web-based learning materials and quality processes. The criteria with low flexibility were access to and participation in courses, and assessment. In free text responses, students tended to offer surface conceptions of flexible learning consistent with signs of disengagement with the university, however when asked how to enhance flexible learning practices, students requested more quality contact, quality web experiences and greater consistency between espoused goals and practice. The benchmarking instrument appears to be a useful instrument for surveying student perceptions of flexibility in their courses, and may also be used by academics as a tool to self-assess flexibility in their course design.*

**Key words:** *Flexible learning, benchmarking, evaluation, criterion-referenced, Quality Improvement.*

## Introduction

Restructuring of the Australian higher education sector in the 1990s led to concerns about the quality of new institutions within the sector, as well as attendant issues regarding the ways in which quality could be defined, recognised and improved. Since then, the government has decreased direct funding of universities whilst, at the same time, opening access to higher education to a much larger number of people. Most universities have also sought to adopt new technologies to improve the economies of teaching more students and also as entrepreneurial activity to generate further income. Throughout these changes all Australian universities continue to strive to provide a quality education for their students. The definition of quality, however, remains an elusive concept (Higher Education Council, 1990) and even the conceptualisation of quality and quality practices in Australian higher education institutions are diverse. One model of quality, Quality Improvement, focuses on identifying issues, processes or activities for improvement. Benchmarking, one approach to quality

improvement, covers a range of practices from self-assessment to collaborative exercises; and a range of approaches from simple comparisons against internal goals to externally driven comparisons against competitors or leading institutions. Benchmarking processes seek to analyse “performance, practices, and processes within and between organisations and industries, to obtain information for self-improvement (Alstete, 1995).

Griffith University embraced flexible learning as its philosophy underpinning teaching and learning. In its Strategic Plan, Griffith's goal is "to achieve excellence in student-centered learning as measured by international standards and to be known as leading innovators in teaching and learning". The Teaching and Learning Operational Plan identifies one associated performance indicator as the number of courses offered by flexible delivery, with a set target for the number of courses to be offered in flexible mode in 2002 and 2003.

One of the tangible outcomes of the adoption of flexible learning was the establishment of Logan campus where all courses at Logan were to be offered in flexible mode, and that the focus of "flexible learning" was to be on Internet access to study resources and materials. The Vice Chancellor later issues a clarification that flexible learning was not simply putting courses on the web, but about increasing flexibility for students with the intention for improving learning outcomes (Webb, 1998). The University formally recognised a more catholic definition of flexible learning as:

"an educational approach using a variety of student-centred teaching and learning methods, resources and flexible administrative practices that responds to the needs of a diverse student population, enabling them to achieve vocational and professional qualifications and the goals of a university education".

Flexibility in academic course offerings was conceived as a variety of practices ranging across seven different dimensions (or meeting some of seven criteria): participation and access; progression and assessment; learner control and choice; access to learning technology and resources; learner support services; quality; and web technology. In this way, Griffith courses can accommodate and respond to the increasing diversity of its student population. Thus it can be seen that offering a course in flexible mode is not just about providing a website, but designing courses to provide appropriate levels of flexibility for students along each dimension. Depending on their design and offering, some courses may be more flexible than others.

The aims of this pilot study were: (i) to measure degrees of flexibility in courses; (ii) measure progress towards the implementation of flexible learning on Logan campus; (iii) identify dimensions of flexibility within curricula that may need improvement; and (iv) to develop this instrument and methodology for wider use across the university.

## **Methodology**

### **The benchmarking instrument**

A web-based survey of graduating third year students from Logan campus was used in this pilot benchmarking study. The first section of the survey explored students' experiences of flexible learning asking students to rate the flexibility of courses undertaken that year according to seven criteria. The criteria correlated with the Dimensions of Flexible Learning, and for each dimension three standards or levels were described: Level 1 described a standard of very limited flexibility, Level 2 described a standard of moderate flexibility and Level 3 described a standard of a high degree of flexibility. The second section of the survey consisted of two open-ended questions probing students' understanding of the meaning of flexible

learning and how courses might be changed to make study and learning more flexible and convenient (to suit their learning needs and lifestyle). Data were subjected to statistical analysis by use of SigmaStat statistical analysis software (Version 1.1, Jandel Scientific, CA, USA).

## Results

A total of 61 of 150 graduating students responded to the request to complete this voluntary survey. It was available online for one-month prior to completion of studies.

### *Student perceptions of the flexibility of courses on Logan campus*

Since there were few independent student reviews for any one course, the reviews of all courses were combined to provide an overall view or snapshot of the dimensions of flexible learning experienced by third year Logan campus students across a range of faculties. In this survey 83 different courses across five degree programs were reviewed by the respondent group (61 students). Overall (Table 1), students rated most third year courses that they had studied as moderately flexible (i.e. at Level 2). No course was rated as being highly flexible in all dimensions, however 12 students identified courses with moderate flexibility across five dimensions and nine students identified courses with moderate flexibility across six dimensions. Flexibility of participation and access and Flexibility of progression and assessment were rated the lowest (Level 1 of three levels).

**Table 1. Logan student's perceptions of the flexibility of their courses.**

<b>Dimensions (or criteria) of Flexible Learning</b>	<b>Median Level (Range 1-3)</b>	<b>25th percentile Level</b>	<b>75th percentile Level</b>
1. Participation and access	1.0	1.0	1.0
2. Learner control and choice	2.0	1.0	2.0
3. Progression and Assessment	1.0	1.0	2.0
4. Range of technologies and resources	2.0	1.0	2.0
5. Learner support and access to information and services	2.0	1.0	2.0
6. Quality	2.0	1.0	2.0
<b>Use of Internet technology (Range 1 - 4)</b>			
7. Web technology	2.0	1.5	2.5

Of the various dimension of flexible learning, the student rating of 'Flexibility of progression and assessment' was significantly lower than that of 'Range of technologies and resources' ( $p < 0.05$ , Dunn's Method) and 'Learner support and access to information and services' ( $p < 0.05$ , Dunn's Method).

### *Student evaluation of courses by each dimension of flexible learning*

*Dimension 1: Access and participation (n=97 courses; 61 students, Table 2)*

Flexible learning offers students the opportunity to manage their own learning in new 24/7 time-frames and at locations of convenience rather than being restricted to on-campus contact,

Monday-to-Friday during semester time (Table 2). Nearly one third of students (30%) believed that their third year courses offered moderate flexibility in that there were many opportunities for study in off-campus environments. About 10% of students considered their courses highly flexible. Notably, over half of the students (55%) rated their third-level courses as having limited flexibility where enrolment was during semester 1 or 2 and required attendance at on-campus events.

**Table 2. Student's perceptions of flexibility of access and participation.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	All teaching activities (e.g. formal lectures/seminars/plenaries/ lab work/ studio/ performance) were mandatory and held on campus. The course was not offered in intensive, summer school or off-campus modes. Enrolment was limited to semester times.	55%
<b>Level 2</b>	There were options for independent, on- or off-campus study of this course. Alternatively, the place and timing of some teaching activities were actively negotiated with me (or all students).	35%
<b>Level 3</b>	I could enrol in this course in 'off campus' mode, on-campus mode or outside traditional semester times (e.g. summer school) or a combination of on- and off-campus options. It may have been possible to enrol and study "anywhere, anytime." There may have been opportunities for learning in the work-place or professional environments.	10%

**Table 3. Student's perceptions of flexibility of progression and assessment.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	All assessment tasks were determined and scheduled by the teaching team responsible for this course. I may have been able to choose assignment or project topics.	50%
<b>Level 2</b>	I may have been able to choose assignment or project topics or the class may have been able to negotiate the weighting of various assessment items, but the tasks were determined by the teaching staff. There may have been an opportunity to complete this course at my own pace.	45%
<b>Level 3</b>	I was able to select or choose from a range of assessment tasks or negotiate assessment for this course (e.g. through use of a learning contract). It may have been possible to progress through the course at my own rate through self-paced study, alternative activities (e.g. weekend intensive, performance), or by undertaking assessment activities when I was ready to do them. Prior learning (e.g. in TAFE, workplace) may have been recognised in lieu of some assessment tasks and speed-up progression through the course.	5%

*Dimension 2: Progression and assessment (n=99 courses; 61 students, Table 3)*

The opportunity to rethink and initiate more flexible assessment practices occurred only in a small proportion of the courses (5%) undertaken by this student population (Table 3). These students experienced highly flexible assessment practices characterised by a high level of choice or negotiation of assessment tasks, recognition of prior experience or assessment that allowed self-paced study and self-determined progression through the course. For many students (45%) some choice in the selection of assessment topics and tasks was available, however the majority of students experienced fairly traditional assessment practices with limited scope for choice of topics.

*Dimension 3: Learner control and choice (n= 98 courses; 61 students; Table 4)*

Flexible learning has a strong association with student centredness and providing students with choices through which they can demonstrate learning or select studies relevant to their own needs or context. A reasonable proportion of students (37%) believed that their courses allowed them moderate control and choice regarding what was studied, how it could be explored and when (Table 4). The majority of student (60%) experienced limited student-centredness in their third year courses at Logan (Level 1 standard). A very small proportion of students (3%) perceived their courses to allow a high level of learner control and choice regarding the material studied, a variety of study paths/options and choice regarding interactions with peers and staff.

**Table 4. Student's perceptions of flexibility of learner control and choice.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	The course matter, teaching activities, content, resources and the manner of my participation and interactions with staff and others in the course were determined by the teaching staff and were primarily undertaken during weekdays in the semester.	37%
<b>Level 2</b>	I was able to choose which teaching activities I attended and learning resources I used allowing me to study at home, work or on-campus to meet the learning objectives of the course. There may have been some choice in tutorial topics, performance pieces, media etc or the ways in which I could interact/communicate with staff and other students in the course (e.g. drop-in or voluntary tutorials). Overall, the course matter and learning activities were mainly (e.g. $\geq 60\%$ ) selected by the teaching staff.	60%
<b>Level 3</b>	I was given a large amount of choice to the topic, sequence and/or depth of much of the course matter that I studied (e.g. special project). I could choose the ways in which I interacted with staff and other students (voluntary tutorials, peer learning groups), and the learning resources that I could use to meet learning objectives of the course. Overall, I was able to choose the course matter and path of my study in this course.	3%

*Dimension 4: Learning technologies and resources (n=87 courses; 61 students; Table 5)*

Logan campus was designed as a site where the best range of learning technologies and resources would be available for students. The majority of students had access to a number of different learning resources in their various courses, allowing them to choose which of those

available suited their needs best. One fifth of students (20%) believed that there were many different resources and tools available to support their learning and that these were available for independent study at times of their own choosing. These tools and resources may have been available over the Internet. More than 40% of students believed they had access to several different resources enabling independent study. A large proportion (35%) of students indicated that few resources other than a text book (or web presence) were suggested or available to support their learning.

**Table 5. Student's perceptions of flexibility of learning technologies and resources.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	I was expected to attend all teaching activities (e.g. lectures, videoconference etc) and there were no resources (other than textbook) available to help me study either off-campus, in my own time or in my preferred learning style.	35%
<b>Level 2</b>	There were a few different resources available to help me learn in this course so that I could undertake some study off-campus (e.g. study guide) or in my own time (e.g. videotaped lectures). Communication with staff and students was achieved through a variety of means e.g. email, forum face-to-face tutorials etc.	20%
<b>Level 3</b>	There were many different resources available to help me learn in this course so that I could undertake some study off-campus (e.g. study guide) or in my own time (e.g. videotaped lectures) or in my preferred learning style. Information and communication technologies (e.g. print, CD-ROM, Internet web-site) were <i>integral</i> to this course allowing me the opportunity to study independently, on- or off-campus. Communication with staff and students was achieved effectively through a variety of means e.g. email, forum, face-to-face tutorials etc.	40%

*Dimension 5: Learner support and access to information and services (Table 6)*

The transition from secondary school to university is not easy for students who may require support to develop new skills, refine existing skills or adapt them to a new environment. The majority of third-year students at Logan were aware of orientation and learning assistance activities which were either scheduled into their course (12%) or announced as available (50%) in their course of study (Table 6). One third of students (37%) appeared not to be aware of orientation, library or learning support services associated with their specific course, though this does not mean that they were unaware of the services provided by Information Services, the Library or Learning Assistance Unit.

*Dimension 6: Quality (n=98 courses; 61 students; Table 7)*

Since many of the courses at Logan are in the developmental phase, it is not surprising that the majority of students (52%) were asked to provide feedback on their course and these students perceived that this feedback primarily gauged their satisfaction with the course and the teaching within the course (Table 7). A much smaller proportion (5%) of students were asked to provide comprehensive feedback covering a number of relevant issues in the course.

Surprisingly, one third of students (37%) were not asked to provide any feedback on their nominated courses.

**Table 6. Student's perceptions of learner support and access of information & services.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	I was not aware of any specific orientation, learning assistance or peer support services available to me as an individual enrolled in this course.	37%
<b>Level 2</b>	I was aware that orientation, learning assistance (e.g. essay writing skills, study skills), information literacy and Internet courses and/or peer support or mentoring programs were available on a voluntary basis to assist me with my study in this course	52%
<b>Level 3</b>	Some of the following: course orientation, learning assistance (e.g. essay writing skills), information literacy and Internet courses and/or peer support (e.g. common time) or mentoring programs were scheduled into the timetable of this course.	5%

**Table 7. Student's perceptions of quality issues**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	I was not asked to provide written or spoken feedback on any aspect of this course.	37%
<b>Level 2</b>	I was asked to provide written or spoken feedback primarily relating to my <i>satisfaction</i> with the course and/or the teaching in this course.	52%
<b>Level 3</b>	I was asked to provide written or spoken feedback on many aspects of the course: such as my satisfaction with the course, the content or teaching in this course, the website and other resources, my experiences or how the course might be improved.	5%

*Dimension 7: Web technology (n=62 courses; 61 students, Table 8)*

Students at Griffith may experience varying levels of web-based learning support in their courses depending on the relative appropriateness of this medium for their learning context. A small percentage of students (3%) considered the website resources and functions to be an vital part of their learning in the course. Nearly half (40%) of students considered the course website (and its associated resources and tools) played a significant or vital role in their learning (Table 8). Roughly the same proportion (37%) indicated that the course website and its associated resources and tools played a minor role in their learning. Thus overall, 77% of students found some useful learning experience or support through use of the web. One-fifth of students believed that the web-based resources played no significant role in the learning of the course matter and skills associated with their course.

**Table 8. Student's perceptions of role of web technology in supporting learning.**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Proportion rating</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	There were no web-based teaching or learning resources developed for this course <i>or</i> they played no significant role in my learning in this course	20%
<b>Level 2</b>	The web-based teaching and learning resources for this course played a <i>minor</i> role in my learning in this course.	37%
<b>Level 3</b>	The web-based teaching and learning resources for this course played a <i>significant</i> role in my learning in this course.	40%
<b>Level 4</b>	The web-based teaching and learning resources available for this course played a <i>vital</i> role in my learning in this course.	3%

### ***Student conceptions of flexible learning***

The free-text responses (n=54) to the question "What does flexible learning mean to you?" were categorised broadly in line with the words or meaning conveyed by the students. There were several common themes, some of which were mentioned by more than one student:

- opportunity to study in own time, place and pace (n=19)
- study from a variety of resources to suit learning style (n=9)
- web access to information and resources (n=12)
- academic staff do less work, less contact with students (n=6)
- greater independence and control over own learning (n=7)

The sophistication in answers ranged from simply: "I don't have to attend lectures" and "Do it at your own pace!" to more metacognitive comments such as: "flexible Learning means that the campus is flexible so that I can learn in the manner which best suits me" and "flexible learning means more independence, it teaches me to take control of my own learning".

### ***Making courses more flexible for students***

Students were asked to indicate how courses at Logan campus could be made more flexible i.e. changed to accommodate their learning needs and lifestyle. The free-text responses (n=55) to this question were categorised broadly in line with the words or meaning conveyed by the students. There were five main themes:

1. flexibility of academic timetables and service opening times to suit the diversity of the student population - those with children, family and work commitments;
2. an improved program-wide view of assessment - in particular consideration be given to spreading assessment items across the semester rather than all items falling at common times during semester;
3. improved websites providing timely access to information, more comprehensive information and functionality;
4. need for improved staff-student communication and interaction, whether mediated by face-to-face tutorials or via the web; and
5. better organisation and structuring of contact time within and across courses in a degree program.

## **Discussion**

Many Australian universities have adopted definitions of flexible learning that provide for a range of practices that almost defy the possibility of measuring, in a meaningful way, progress towards the achievement of quality flexible learning environments. Flexible learning, like quality, is considered in many different ways. Whilst some suggest that the mere presence of materials on the Internet signifies a flexible course, such a definition does not reflect the extent of materials provided, use of companion technologies (e.g. communication tools), or the functional utility of those online materials. The definition provides only small scope to assist the institution to quantify progress towards implementation of flexible learning and improving quality of its academic offerings. Griffith University chose to circumvent this situation by describing dimensions or characteristics of flexibility that would be embedded in its academic offerings. We extended these dimensions to provide levels descriptors that were meaningful to students who could then rate their experience of flexible learning in a manner that could map directly to the university's intentions.

Whilst the survey approach used in this benchmarking pilot is not unusual, the specific use of criteria and standards (or levels descriptors) for flexible learning is innovative. A number of projects promoting evaluation of learning technology innovations (Phillips, 2001) and a recent university-wide benchmarking of IT systems and services (McNaught et al 1999) have used surveys, but none of these surveys use a criterion referenced approach. In the UK, a variety of criterion-referenced approaches have been used for benchmarking discipline-based programs in higher education (Smith et al, 1999; Jackson et al, 2000). The most well known benchmarking of student experiences in Australian universities is reported in CEQ data collected from graduates of all universities (Linke, 1991). This is not a criterion-referenced approach: benchmark performance criteria are illustrated through various combinations of dimensions of the student experience of learning e.g. completion rates, progression, satisfaction. McKinnon et al (2000) have formalised this approach, recommending self-assessment using a combination of criterion-referenced and quantitative approaches to benchmarking. For example, they define some benchmark criteria (e.g. Learning and Teaching benchmarks pp. 77-87) in terms combinations of CEQ data and institutional responses to improvement based upon that data. It is likely that our current approach described here can be extended to combine survey data, such as First Year Experience type data (McInnis et al, 2000), with self-assessment of flexible learning practices by academic staff. This would be expected to generate a more complete picture of flexible learning and relationships between curriculum design and student profiles.

### **The Benchmarking Instrument**

Degrees of flexibility for each of the seven dimensions in the university statement on flexible learning were described according to the experiences of members of the Institute who have been closely involved with the development of the campus. These level descriptors were designed to describe a spirit and intent of flexibility with appropriate examples, rather than highly detailed lists of practices in each level. It was decided that only three levels would be described correlating with low, moderate and high flexibility. A focus group conducted with ten students randomly selected from the surveyed group indicated that the number of described levels of flexibility was appropriate, the terminology familiar and understandable. Whilst more levels of flexibility could have been described this would have required greater respondent sophistication in discriminating between the different levels and may have caused confusion as students tried to sort a broad range of teaching and learning practices into many narrow categories. It appears that for Logan campus these descriptions are appropriate,

however they may need elaboration or more examples if the instrument is to be used on all six of the university's campuses.

### **Flexibility in courses at Logan campus**

Academic staff members have designed courses that largely offer a moderate degree of flexibility across dimensions of learner control and choice, use of learning technologies, student support services and utilisation of web technology to enhance learning (Table 1). Thus the university has made considerable progress in implementing flexible learning on its newest campus. Subsequent surveys will enable the institution to better monitor the state of implementation of flexible learning and improvement in quality web-developments that support teaching and learning.

Academic staff at the university have access to a wide range of resources to facilitate the introduction of more flexible teaching and learning practices in their academic courses. Indications from the benchmark data show several areas for improvement, based upon student experiences. The majority of students considered that their courses had:

- a high degree of teacher-centredness where academic staff selected the majority of resources and set assessment tasks that did not provide a great deal of scope for students;
- limited flexibility in terms of enrolment time and participation and timetables that did not always provide enough flexibility for students with essential extra-curricular commitments;
- quality assurance processes that were mainly oriented toward student satisfaction with the subject matter and teaching or very limited in the feedback collected from students; and
- web-based resources that did not contribute significantly to their learning experience in these courses.

It would be interesting to reconcile these student views with data obtained from academics using the same criteria for self-assessment of the flexibility in the courses they are teaching.

The university has invested heavily in online course development. In 2001, all of Logan courses had a web-presence ranging from web-supplemented, web-dependent and fully online courses. One point of concern is that over half of the Logan third year students (57%) of considered that the online resources had little or no value for their learning compared with the remaining group (47%) who reported that their web resources played a significant or critical role in their learning. If these data are consistent across the range of courses offered by the university, then the support of flexible learning, at a number of levels, will need to be carefully reviewed.

### **Student conceptions of flexible learning and increasing flexibility in courses**

Graduating student conceptions of flexible learning, after three-year's experience with the experience, are broadly consistent with most elements of the university statement on flexible learning. For students, flexible learning meant enabling students to study in their "own time, at their own pace and place". These surface level views of flexible learning were also common in first year students commencing at Logan campus (Macleod, 2001). At a more sophisticated level, many students saw flexible learning as improving "access to a variety of resources " and "more opportunities for smaller classes and more discussion", though there was little recognition that it had the potential to enhance learning. This indicates that the simple message about flexible learning has circulated, but that its purpose may remain

obscure for many students. Only three students (5%) saw flexible learning as a means of becoming more independent self-directed learners, even though 85% of the group indicated that they had become more independent learners through their studies at Logan (Zimitat, 2001). Perhaps this is because they are poorly placed to make attributions about how this independence was achieved.

The underlying issues in many respondents' comments may signify some degree of disengagement (McInnis, 2001) with the university. Disengagement appears to be a general trend amongst first year students in Australian universities (McInnis et al, 2000), and may extend to other undergraduates too. Only two students stated a commitment or an obligation towards their studies; about one third of students indicated that education took second place to their lifestyle and flexible learning was seen primarily as an opportunity not to go to campus. Additive to this situation was the persistent student perception that academic staff saw flexible learning as an opportunity not to teach, to do less work and to be less available. It is interesting to speculate on how much disengagement is due to a lack of student commitment due to competing priorities of other commitments (e.g. family, employment) (McInnis et al, 2000) and how much is a reaction to a perceived lack of interest in them by the university. In light of the recognised potential student disengagement, it was surprising that students did not overwhelmingly ask for more flexibility in time, pace and place. Many students requested more quality contact time, greater online interactivity and better access to information. Clearly Logan students do appear to value their learning experiences and the resources that support their learning. Broadly speaking, students wanted more consistency in the university implementation of flexible learning. First, consistency in terms of improved organisation and structuring degree programs to provide a more coherent suite of courses (e.g. block timetabling, integrated and spaced assessment). Second, consistency in terms of the conception of flexible learning and how it is implemented across the various courses experienced by students. These two issues present a challenge for Schools to offer well-designed degree programs and for academic staff to design courses that respond to the changing character of the university student population.

### **Improvement**

This benchmarking exercise has identified a method of characterising the flexibility of courses offered by the university and could be used more broadly in other higher education institutions. Students rated most courses with moderate degrees of flexibility, and identified two criteria of flexibility in course design that need improvement. This online benchmarking survey will be extended in 2002 to obtain feedback about the inherent flexibility of all courses undertaken by first year students on all campuses of the university. The tool will also be available to academic staff for self-assessing their courses against the same criteria. Used more broadly, it will provide a baseline from which progress can be measured against.

### **Conclusion**

This is the first time that such an approach has been used to evaluate the adoption of flexible learning initiative in an Australian university. It has proved useful in identifying strengths in current practice, areas for further improvement and significant challenges for the university to engage its student population. Of no less importance, it has drawn the attention of academics and senior managers to the dimensions of flexibility that are available, and invite ongoing conversations about the value of striving for maximum flexibility across all dimensions for all students in Logan programs. That is to say, it has invited conversations about the nature,

value and possibility of more flexible interpretations of the concept and implementation of flexible learning.

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Zimitat, C. (2001). The Logan Student Audit. Griffith Institute for Higher Education, Griffith University: Brisbane.

**Craig Zimitat** BSc (Hons) GCHEd PhD is a lecturer at the Griffith Institute for Higher Education with responsibilities for academic development in flexible learning. His interests lie in the use of technologies to enhance learning, critical thinking, online learning and continuing medical education.