

# FINAL PROJECT REPORT

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**Name of project:** Applying seamless learning to the Social Entrepreneurship module on the QwaQwa campus: 'Students' experiences

## Description of my project

### Introduction

When planning my TAU project, I wanted to do something worthwhile. I thought about my classes and that my students may perhaps experience academic boredom impacting their engagement and experience. This made me think there must be a way to engage students more and make the content presentation and completion of assignments more exciting while remaining assessable. Seamless learning and the use of technology were identified as a solution to this problem. Shonola et al. (2016, p. 44) state that when students use mobile technologies they are in 'full control by having access to information on their mobile devices, thereby giving them a certain amount of liberty, freedom, and 'independence'. This in turn heightens independence and agency for the student.

I worked on the presumption that there is a lack of knowledge regarding alternative teaching strategies that can incorporate technology in the lecture room and designing of assessment strategies. The 'project's objective was to propose seamless learning as an alternative teaching and learning strategy (ethics clearance number UFS-HSD2022/0841/22). The target group was the 42 students of the Social Entrepreneurship module (COMD2623) at the UFS, Qwaqwa campus. I applied seamless learning strategies by re-designing units and assessments of the module.

Another objective was to incorporate self-directed learning within the context of adult learning. Herod (2012, p. 1) postulates that adult learning is "highly individualistic and fluid", meaning that teaching approaches and methods must be flexible. Part of adult learning is self-directed learning. This is when the learner takes more responsibility for decisions regarding the learning experience, learning is not necessarily in isolation, skill transfers occur, and learning incorporates various activities and resources (Hiemstra 1994). The lecturers' roles are still important. They have interactive conversations encouraging critical thinking, provide sources and evaluate outcomes. These strategies fit in with the seamless learning strategy which is based on fluidity, incorporating different methods and strategies built on individual needs, and the freedom to learn wherever and whenever.

### Seamless learning strategies

Seamless learning is used in the same breath as hybrid, online and distance learning, but there are subtle differences. One of the most important aspects is that seamless learning uses mainly handheld devices. Sharples et al. (2012, p. 246) explain it as 'when a person experiences a continuity of learning, and consciously bridges the multifaceted learning efforts, across a combination of locations, times, technologies or social settings'. Further, according to Rusman, Tan and Firssova (2018, p. 88), seamless learning can be described as follows:

Connect experiences and learning activities, through technology-supported learning scenarios using ubiquitous technology and handheld devices, that learners experience through participation in various contexts and hereby supporting, improving, and enhancing learning processes, so that learners experience a continuity of learning across environments and settings at different times.

### **A short overview of the target module**

The second-year module used for the study is Social Entrepreneurship, offered to students on the QwaQwa campus of the UFS as part of the four-year degree in Community Development. This module introduces students to the field of social entrepreneurship and its role in resolving problems related to poverty and growth in the developing world, particularly South Africa. It presents several theoretical concepts relevant to social entrepreneurship, such as social innovation and social economy. The purpose of identifying this module as the target for the project is the big sample size where I could gather rich data. It was also convenient since I know the lecturer and we have done a previous research project together.

### **The method used for this project**

Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The students completed the first questionnaire before the commencement of the study where topics included questions on devices, choice of assessments, data, and internet access. The module was then adapted to fit a seamless learning approach constructed around these answers. After completing the module, the students did a second questionnaire which probed their opinions regarding the application of seamless learning in the module. I also asked seven open-ended, non-leading questions to ten randomly selected participating students during in-person semi-structured interviews (Jupp, 2006, p. 88). The interviewees were selected using the Research Randomiser app (<https://www.randomizer.org/app>) and an interpretive inductive analysis approach was applied to identify themes.

### **Findings and conclusion**

I identified two encompassing themes: empowerment and accessibility. Empowerment emerged in the sense of communication and personal and technology empowerment. Communicative empowerment occurs because they feel they learn from one another, but they also learn from themselves. This overlaps with personal empowerment, where they felt they could stay anonymous and apply their minds without judgment. They also acquired new skills and functions and learned about technology. Once again, this overlaps with technology empowerment, where participants feel comfortable using smart phones. The fact that smart phones are easy to use for internet searches added to the students' positive feelings and attitudes. Therefore, accessibility surfaced multiple times. The students felt they could produce work at any time – attending the classes and completing the assignments anywhere (they did not need to be on campus and could even do their work while driving in a taxi).

The implementation of seamless learning specific in the COMD2623 module had surprising outcomes. There was an evident eagerness among the students to attempt a 'new' approach to learning, supported by the fact that they had become used to using their mobile devices for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. An interesting fact was that several students clearly showed their preference for not returning to class but continuing online-based learning approaches and using their smart phones for this purpose.

This project is important since it addresses an alternative way of presenting knowledge and designing assessments. The project's value is that positive results may result in a plan to implement the approach in other departments. Further, the project exposes that adapting content may lead to more accessible and possibly more engaging experiences for the students.

### **My project's link to the institution's Teaching and Learning priorities**

The UFS's vision is to be a "research-led, student-centred, and regionally engaged University that contributes to development and social justice through the production of globally competitive graduates and knowledge" (Towards VISION-130, 2023).

- **Research-led:** My project is an example of aligning research, learning and teaching, by researching what works best for the student's learning and teaching environment.
- **Student-centred:** The content of the re0curriculataed module promotes the learning experiences and support of students with various needs from diverse backgrounds.
- **Regionally engaged University that contributes to development and social justice:** When looking at the definition of social justice, namely a "political and philosophical theory that focuses on the concept of fairness in relations between individuals in society and equal access to wealth, opportunities and social privileges" (<https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/other/social-justice/>), my project contribute to this concept. It boils down to the removal of inequalities. Students will have equal opportunities to complete the task at hand since they have access to the same resources provided to them, and all of them can do it wherever and whenever they want. If they cannot attend a class for whatever reason, that will not set them back. All their voices will be heard, and different preferences of the students will be accommodated by providing an array of types of assignments and different ways to access knowledge. In other words, all students will have equal access to opportunity, privileges, and well-being.
- **Globally competitive graduates and knowledge:** Online teaching is the way to go after the COVID-9 pandemy. Globally, researchers and lecturers are looking for ways to make the curriculum content more accessible. By implementing seamless learning, we prepare our students for the changed world we live in and help them on their way to make a difference locally and globally.

My project also links to the following teaching and learning priorities of the UFS:

- **Curriculum design:** The current curriculum does not make enough provision for the student's independent completion of the module and assessments, as the seamless learning strategy proposes.
- **Student development:** The student needs to take responsibility for the module's content. By applying the seamless learning approach, they develop different skills like time management, accountability, commitment, and the use of technology.
- **Staff development:** The staff will learn new skills like developing a blended learning approach by utilising technology, new assessment methods, and a new teaching strategy.

### **Change Imperatives**

- I hope to inspire other lecturers to implement seamless learning in their modules. I want to change their mindsets towards using seamless learning and technology as part of their teaching strategy.
- I want to change students' mindsets about completing tasks and assignments in alternative ways.
- I hope to change the misconception of what seamless learning (hybrid learning) entails.
- I want to provide lecturers with the skill sets (tools) to use technology and seamless learning in their everyday teaching.
- Long-term implications may include that the way staff present modules may change to incorporate seamless learning in their approach to teaching.

## Collaborations

When re-curriculating my own modules next year, based on my findings, I will seek the support of our Centre of Teaching and Learning and our Faculty's Teaching and Learning Manager.

- Liaise with the Centre of Teaching and Learning for their expertise in re-curriculation – specifically Me Dalene Meintjies.
- The Faculty of Humanities' Teaching and Learning Manager, Dr Rosaline Sebalao.
- The Faculty's Teaching and Learning coordinator: Mr Zayne Mintoor. He helps with the design and outlay of new documents.
- I will ask the Innovation and recruitment manager of our department to create posts on our Facebook and Instagram pages for coverage of the alternative method of teaching.
- I will make an appointment with our dean regarding implementation possibilities in other modules.

## Affect and socially just teaching and learning context

The students of the COMD2623 module were directly affected. They experienced an alternative way of doing their assignments, which was informed by their input and thoughts about module's content. The students liked it and took ownership of their own learning. The UFS has three campuses: Bloemfontein, Qwaqwa and South campus. The Qwaqwa campus is more than three hours' drive from Bloemfontein. They have many difficulties with power issues, load shedding, student protests, transportation, and resources. If implementing the Seamless Learning strategy is viable to rollout across modules, these students may not be affected so much by these disruptions since they can complete their modules and assignments at their own pace and in their own space.

The idea is that seamless learning may be included within the institution's learning and teaching strategy. By doing so, this can result in a more inclusive learning application and be applied to the broader spectrum of modules across the three campuses. Thereby, also streamlining the offering, as opposed to generating various versions for alternative campuses. I hope to inspire other lecturers to follow suit in implementing seamless learning in their modules.

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