The Learning and Teaching Office Educator Scholar Conference 2020
Student Panel Transcript

With thanks to our Students:

Vlad Matovic – Final Year Bachelor of Communications and Media Student
Heath Cauchi – First Year Bachelor of Business
Daniel Elias – Masters student
David Stokes – Third Year Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Law
Natasha Berthold – Final Year Bachelor of Biomedical Science
Thomas Desmond – Second Year Bachelor of Arts
Angela Irsania – Second Year Bachelor of Arts

Question: what kept you feeling connected?

Vlad: A few of my teachers were nice enough to present a direct email, or some sort of communication there that at least if we needed some assistance that was a bit more immediate than the Notre Dame email they were, they're available on call for us at times. As well as providing regular Zoom meetings, so they had certain Zoom meetings where we could actually just jump in and they were outside of the kind of seminar or lecture and tutorial.

Heath: I think that I've got a similar experience to Vlad. I had a couple of lecturers that likewise did kind of like a catch-up Zoom call, which I thought was really great, but also even though, I might sound kind of biased, I think that the student associations have also done a really good job at keeping that engagement up both in Fremantle and Sydney and the social media pages of the University as well. It's a great place to engage in the University as a whole, as well as with the student association, but for me personally - I'm not sure if anyone or any of the other students go into campus in Sydney, I mean, but I go in usually once a week and I think that's also been a great way to kind of keep up that motivation and stay involved.

Daniel: The thing that kept me connected is like just my passion for the research and just finishing what I started, and like two and a half years of work, finishing that off.

David: well, it was a tendency for assessors to check in with how everything's going, especially during the online learning period. That, and also when my assessors and lecturers and tutors are people who have practiced in the field that they're teaching me in; that made me much more keen to reach out and get practical experience like wisdom from them, as well as the theory that we need to learn from them.

Vlad: Definitely with the library being open in Sydney, I've been on campus maybe two or three times going forward. I think a lot of students don't understand the significance, or are aware of the Facebook group. And with that I think maybe there is some leeway there to really tune in on the importance of following the Notre Dame Facebook pages going forward possibly as an opportunity for you guys. A lot of students weren't aware that the library was open and and were not staying in touch with what was going on, so maybe just one opportunity there.

Natasha: Being in, kind of like Vlad said, being in my final semester of my degree, I've made a lot of good friends along the way. A group of us who did prac together at the beginning of the year, when we did prac we made a Facebook group chat, and for me that was kind of what really kept me sane. Being all by myself locked up in my room, we managed to organize a whole bunch of Zoom revision sessions together, and it was also just sometimes, you know, lecturers take a little while to get back to you by email. So it was a really good resource when you just had a question that you weren't too sure about, so you just threw it out in the group chat and someone would either know the answer, or via a series of collaborative discussions we would get to the end result.

Thomas: My degree it's very sort of hands-on and, obviously given the state of the world, to still be able to do a lot of those things that we get to do in class was really good. And it wasn't like, you know, we have to stop and completely not learn anymore. And we just have to adjust the way that we're

doing things, and so the fact that our tutors and lecturers were willing to help us through that and help us adjust to this new world was very, was the thing that kept me sane.

Question: What helps you with academic integrity?

Angela: I'm quite stubborn so I don't want to be able to submit someone else's work as my own. I also don't think students are aware - it's not communicated exactly, I know it's in our conditions and it's in our code of conduct we get it at the beginning of the semester, but I want to know how many students actually go through their entire course outline word for word. I'm pretty sure they just skip to like what dates are due and what are we doing week to week, like I've done that when I haven't had time, and if it wasn't for me doing the contract cheating day last year I probably wouldn't have researched so much into what academic integrity was. So I don't think it's communicated enough to what degree what academic integrity is. I know people know obviously cheating or like getting someone else to your essays, you know, and then there's different levels of referencing that you've got to resubmit otherwise it's a fail. Or even it's like it's not against the university thing, but there are other aspects. Like I overhear students saying that, and it really got to me. For example I had one student, I overheard a student say that she wasn't sure about her essay so she was going to get a third year to like look over it and then that third year of course is going to correct it. But then it's then no longer that first year's work. So I think there's just so many gray areas that students are not aware of that they need to kind of understand, you know, they can't do quizzes in groups or just stuff like that. It's just like, oh I don't think they communicated enough.

David: It's sort of been something that's been really emphasized to me throughout my degree in a number of ways, but especially during lockdown when there was a lot of emphasis on self-accountability and this sort of self initiative that you had to apply to every aspect of learning. Really obviously to an extent with assistance from the University, but there was a lot of emphasis on getting things done yourself. And in a law degree that sort of idea of: there's a date that you need to be accountable by but up till then, you are your own person and you can, not so much not in a threatening way, but just that sort of very emphasis on that idea that everyone is capable of getting the work done. It is stuff that you are told and reminded that it's not impossible to do, and you are capable of doing it.

Vlad: Honestly I think it's when people have to resubmit. I know it sounds such a simple thing, but having a few in my first year, having a few students that were in my group and hearing their stories of having to resubmit because the referencing wasn't done correctly, I think it's just a good way to value it, as in good way to show it's important. And then there was a Logos module which I attended, but it was more about saying to them any idea that you've ever had, or that you think you've thought of on your own, someone else has thought about it before you. You can't bring in your own thoughts unless you've done some sort of reading. I think they shared a meme, I think it said think before you speak, and then read before you think. In addition to that, I think we also got shown how to organize our references and that was quite valuable. So that as we're reading, any ideas we have we can organize our references and it just makes it a lot easier towards the end.

Heath: I think that, I think it comes down to personal values is as a major thing for students and I know for me that I'm doing this degree for myself and I'm paying for it, so I want to get the most accurate representation of my knowledge. And I think that's a motivator for why people might want to stick with their academic integrity. But also the academic integrity modules that I did this semester were also quite helpful in kind of verbalizing those requirements and expectations

Daniel: For me it is just the passion for the content, and the desire - well the thing with a dissertation being high stakes and; I would like to be a scholar and that would be, that was the driving point for me. It's like, I need to do this right, it's like this needs to be perfect for me and for my future.

Angela: I think there just needs to be more information on what it is to the nitty gritty of exactly like the, not the obvious ones, but the non-obvious parts of academic integrity.

Question: What could we do better?

Thomas: Sometimes during Covid, especially being on the student association, we were getting lots of questions about what was going on. I believe by having that more open communication then, you know, students are a bit less restless and a bit less agitated, and so can quite easily relax a bit, and if they know what's going on - even if it's every couple of weeks, just being like we're still working on it, I think the students, we just sort of like to know that something is happening. Whether even if it's still two or three months in the pipeline, just sort of that communication, saying that we're still here we're still working. So that sort of stuff.

Natasha: While it was very good of the University to manage to transition online so rapidly, I did find there was a fair amount of variation between the approachableness and accessibility of lecturers and different tutors. It can be quite difficult to get a straightforward answer from some of my lecturers and tutors. We're not being told until right before, like a few days before an assessment: what time the assessment opens, where it's going to open on Blackboard, how many questions, what types of questions, just kind of things that help you prepare mentally. I understand that lecturers and tutors are very busy as well, and this is a very new field for everyone, and everyone's figuring out what's going on, but I do think that lecturers and tutors should have the support to be able to respond in, you know, two days from when you send an inquiry, for example. A lot of the time I've gotten lecturers and tutors responding and saying, we're really sorry that, you know, we haven't responded to your email up until now, we've just been so inundated with things to do.

Daniel: I am a bit of a social butterfly and I've been talking to students, a lot of students and postgrads and lecturers, and the feedback that I have been like getting, all the conversations I've had, are just a general dislike of online education and a real hope that once the worst of Covid is out of the way that will return back to the in person classrooms. Friends who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, for the lack of a better word, and online learning is like a massive disadvantage for them because they don't have as much of the best internet connection. When the library was open, which was good, but for them travel was difficult to get to the library to do the assessments.

Angela: It's a lot more online but less flexible, it's not flexible at all, there are still the timelines for the course, or the timelines for assessments is exactly the same as that it would be on campus. And it would be and, which is fine, I understand there needs to be deadlines, but I had one for example, one of my mentees contacted me and was like I don't know who to reach out to or what I should do. They didn't know anything about learning access plans, that it hasn't been communicated, that these resources are available at the University, especially by any of our tutors or lecturers, so they were like I have anxiety and Covid has heightened it more, I can't do online. Because we have to be visible online with our videos, but he was like I can't, I don't want to face 30 students on a screen, it's like my anxiety, my depression is going to kick in, I don't know what to do but they're not going to mark me as attended if I'm not on video.

David: I feel like some lecturers are so knowledgeable, both on the content that they need to teach you, and on wider real world experience, but through no fault of their own they're not entirely sure the best way to get that across to you. So what I know myself, and a lot of people have experienced, is lecturers use that online environment, and they thought oh this is a great opportunity for me to just give you a lot more content, to give you the ability to learn a lot more. And it's, I don't mind that in some senses, because it does mean that we can learn more, but then it wasn't taken advantage of in any sort of practical sense sometimes. So I felt that the classes and the units and the lectures I had that really took advantage of being in lockdown, and sort of a Covid learning environment were those who used all those sort of technical advantages that they could. So small things like breakout rooms to do tutorials together, sharing documents and being really involved, and using that class time as efficiently as possible to interact because they acknowledge that you coming and sitting for two hours online listening to a lecture maybe isn't the best use of this time. You can go and do this at another time obviously, that then puts more emphasis on you to manage your own time, but there is only so much they can do and I absolutely acknowledge that.

Thomas: From what I've heard from other students, and from what I've experienced is that a lot of lecturers sort of are just logging on and then going through the content and then logging off, and so

there's not that sort of you know checking in and talking to the students and having that sort of discussion. Asking them how they, asking, you know, if they need any help and obviously this isn't all lecturers and everyone is different, but lecturers and tutors just sort of maybe, I don't know if they start their Zooms like the Zoom calls or the Blackboard Collaborate calls like a little bit earlier, and they can then check in with the students, and they can just have a chat so it's not just content and then we're done and we move on. That's why I enjoy coming to Notre Dame, it's because I know all my lecturers, and I know my tutors, and you know if I pass them in the street, or see them at a coffee shop, we'll stop and have a chat for five minutes. And so I think that's missing from this online world.

Angela: A lot of the times I felt that the lecturers weren't as approachable, I didn't feel comfortable telling them that this was what was happening because they just weren't, they didn't seem as approachable as, I guess, other lecturers or tutors that I would feel comfortable telling them what was going on. So I think a lot of the students that approached me about it, saying that I don't know what to do, they also didn't feel comfortable, so they don't know how to even bring it up or approach their lecturer to tell them that they're struggling with learning difficulties.

Daniel: the premise shouldn't be we're all going to learn online, like that's the key problem.

Question: How did group work go?

Heath: I think it's been a little bit of a challenge that, as a first year student, I feel like there are lots of people that may not necessarily know what they want to be doing, so they're not as engaged in the course. So I think while breakout rooms and all the other things are a great resource, it's not a good resource if the students aren't actually facilitating or participating in that. Rather, so I'll be in a breakout room with five people, and three of them don't have their cameras on or their audio and I'm just talking with one other person, and that makes it quite challenging in relation to the group work.

Vlad: It was extremely challenging. I'm the mature student so, just like Angela, I mean I've got no kid, but it was challenging having you know, 19, 20, 21 year olds who were trying to, I mean, I feel like I'm playing the father figure at all times. I'm like, turn your cameras on, and I'm probably not conscious of their anxieties or whatnot, my thing was; it's four or five people in my group, I'm like cameras on and I don't want to be talking to a blank screen.

Question: Tell us what works.

David: There are some lecturers who just seem to have an ability to make classes and make the learning and the content interactive in a way that makes me really keen to do it, and keen to be more involved as opposed to go and watch these lectures before you come into class and then we'll just discuss it in class. Discussing a lecture isn't as interesting to say let's do these activities together, and I want all your input.

Vlad: I've got a teacher, perhaps not the most technology savvy, but she's able to deliver amazing content and you can really stay up to date with her. And then there is other teacher who's quite technologically savvy, he has a very great organized structure, and I think that's the first thing: organized online content. I'm switching between different teachers, and they have that - you can tell the ones that aren't tech savvy. So there needs to be organized, uniform content, or content delivery, so whether it's Blackboard, whether it's Zoom, it needs to be kind of uniform. Just one thing that is just structured and organized throughout this whole online aspect. I came from UTS originally, so I went from UTS to Notre Dame, so I already had that UTS full capability of online, which is what they were doing. And one thing that they had done really well is they actually had a big buddy program. They actually had a postgraduate student who would be available twice a week for, I think it was two to four hours, they would be in the room so they'd have a room, and it was where students could actually come for additional support in that specific subject. But also the room would, the audio and the video would actually be recorded.

David: I think making lectures available for students to review or view ahead of time is really good aspect because it allows you to get on top of it in your own time. Firstly, in addition to the time you're meant to attend the class, but for one of my units she prepared the content really quite rapid fire, you know like a 20, 25 minute video for you to look at ahead of time, before the two hour lecture period.

And then what would happen is the first hour she would go through the content in a bit more depth, and you could question, you could ask, and then the second half of those two hours she would - that was her check-in time with all the students. It would actually just allow her to go through every student and talk to you about what any difficulties you were having, what you could do better, any questions you had. Access to lectures outside of the class time in addition to inside the class is something to take forward, and then not spending the entire two hours just harping on the content, actually having a bit more two-way flow of communication

Natasha: My degree, and specifically the second and third years where it becomes more specific than like generalized health science units, are very very very content heavy. Having pre-recorded lectures is far better than either having a Zoom lecture, or sitting in a lecture theatre because you're able to stop start pause. It can take a few listens of the one recording to really assimilate that information. I'm getting a lot more out of the content than I have done previously, unlike in live lectures where they're kind of like, okay, so anyone have any questions? and you're still processing that information. I think having pre-recorded lectures and then having, like David was saying, that time to ask your lecturers the questions that you have, now having assimilated that content. I have loved having assessments online. I perform best in these higher content lectures when you have a chance to actually show what you know, rather than focusing on that photographic memory kind of recall that has previously been in like a written assessment. Being able to submit paperless assignments has been a godsend. Having that online submission aspect was amazing because it means you don't have to take two hours out of your day just to travel into uni and submit an assignment you can do it online and it takes five minutes