

**Concurrent Session L**  
**Wednesday 2 September**  
**1.55pm – 2.45pm**



**Session 6**  
**Enhancing the Student Experience through UWS Summer**  
**Ann Cheryl Armstrong, Katrina White**  
*University of Western Sydney*

*Dr. Ann Cheryl Armstrong is the Director, Academic Year Optimisation at the University of Western Sydney. In 2012, Ann Cheryl led the review of the Academic Year Review which canvassed the views of staff and students of the University about the possible move to a trimester system, resulting in the decision to establish an enhanced Summer School. Ann Cheryl has an international track record in strategic and transformational leadership and the design, management, implementation and evaluation of strategic initiatives.*

*Katrina White is the Operations Manager for UWS Summer at the University of Western Sydney. She has worked with UWS as the Enrolments Manager within the Academic Registrar's Office and as a School Manager for the School of Communication Arts. Katrina is a highly experienced project manager with an extensive understanding of UWS Systems, data interpretation/analysis, policy and legislative knowledge, process development/reengineering and budget management. Her experience provides valuable insights into some of the challenges experienced by Schools.*

Over the past 50 years, many of the universities in Australia offered their courses through a two semester system, generally running from early March to late November. More recently, some institutions have offered a third teaching and learning period either through a trimester system or the introduction of summer schools which run from December to February. One of the policy principles identified in the Universities Australia paper, *Smarter Australia: An Agenda for Higher Education 2013 – 2016* is the need for provision of flexible learning options to support students who may have work, family and other commitments. Cognisant of the emerging trends in higher education institutions in Australia, the University of Western Sydney (UWS) decided to consider optimising and extending the academic year to best equip the University to respond to the rapidly changing and increasing competitive context of the higher education environment. A review of the University's academic year was commissioned in 2012. This review revealed that the two things our students wanted most were: greater flexibility and choice. For some, this was about finishing their degree more quickly; others wanted the chance to catch up on missed or failed units from a previous semester, while others wanted to spread their study load to better fit in with lifestyle, work or other study commitments. From this extensive review, the University's fledgling summer program was rebranded as 'UWS Summer' and expanded with over 100 units of study on offer across 5 campuses. This initiative was conceptualised within a case study framework and was piloted and monitored as an action research/learning project. Embedded within the overarching project implementation strategy was a continuous improvement methodology designed to provide a structured approach to reviewing and improving performance, which are two key elements of the academic year optimisation enterprise. This paper will explore the growth and development of the initial UWS Summer concept, and how this was successfully piloted over two years. It will discuss the relevance of three key implementation issues: the critical importance of authentic consultation with staff and students, the need for detailed operational planning and the serious consideration of resource implications. We describe the many moving parts that had to be brought together within the University in order to implement a cohesive and attractive third teaching session. This included extensive internal stakeholder engagement across Schools and Business Units to 'sell' the concept and to gain

traction through widespread acceptance – not always an easy task in an environment where many staff, both Academic and Professional, felt that their workloads were already stretched with the delivery of two regular semesters. The paper will also explore the ways in which the central co-ordinating project team – The Summer Team – worked across the University to engage staff, secure high-level buy-in, utilise the expertise of key personnel or units, and, where necessary, develop completely new processes, activities or groups to move the project forward.

In conclusion, we will provide an overview of the trends surrounding UWS Summer over two cycles, the successes, the challenges, and insights into how Summer was experienced by students, professional staff and academics. Drawing on the comparative UWS Summer evaluation data over a two year period, we will explore some of the ways in which UWS could increase efficiencies while providing greater flexibility to support students' varying learning needs. We conclude with an exploration of future plans and the anticipated growth through an extension of the academic year.