

**Concurrent Session E**  
**Tuesday 1 September**  
**2.25pm – 3.15pm**



**Session 7**

**Getting the Balance Right Between Student Self-Service and the Personal Touch; Meeting Evolving Student Expectations?**

**Lucy Schulz**

*Deakin University*

*Lucy Schulz commenced with Deakin in mid June 2014 as Program Director for the LIVE Agenda, Deakin University's vision for 2020. Lucy is coordinating a range of projects focused on enhancing the student experience. One of the key projects is the implementation of IBM Watson as the student engagement advisor that will transform how students access information and advice on anything relating to their lives at University. She has over 25 years experience in higher education and is a Fellow and Meritorious Service Award winner of ATEM.*

There is not a one-size fits all view about student expectations and experience at university and different student cohorts have varying and different expectations which change and evolve as they progress through their course. This is a challenge for us all as we design learning and service environments to meet the diversity of student needs. There are also imperatives to be efficient and cost effective in what we offer and deliver.

Like all universities Deakin is very focused on reviewing survey results (both our own internal ones as well as various national sector surveys) to reflect on our performance and consider areas for improvement and development. However, these are lag indicators and whilst useful there is more we can do to understand current student experiences.

In addition to reflections about internal and sector performance it is also important to consider community expectations and business models for service organisations and what is driving their approaches. For example, we are time poor, we want to be able to do simple transactions quickly and easily and online, we want data and information to be protected, we want to be recognised when we are return customers, and we want specialist help and assistance when we need it. In 2014 when Deakin conducted a number of focus groups with students to understand what they wanted from support services, the answers made resounding common sense; student want services which are *easy to find and use*, that *just work* and that are *tailored to them*.

This paper will explore how one university has worked through this simple proposition to develop a strategy which includes self service options wherever possible but which has also maintained a focus on the needs and expectations for a personalised experience. Significantly this has involved rethinking how an online service experience can be personal; customised and differentiated based on the individual.

In 2014 Deakin embarked on a program of work including a number of significant projects to delight our students at every stage on their student journey. The program of work brings together IT/eSolutions, teaching and learning, marketing and support services in an unprecedented collaborative effort with the student at the centre of our thinking. Critical to this effort is to ensure we maintain the personal touch for students whether they are studying online in the cloud, on one of the three main campuses, or indeed in one of the Learning Centres the University has established throughout Melbourne.

In 2014 Deakin introduced DeakinSync, a student portal with a difference. The portal is customised based on various student profiles including for prospective students (once offers are made) enabling them to access the information and resources relevant to them. It is also where students access their online learning resources, students can develop profiles that they can share with social and professional networks and in 2015 more work will be done to enhance tools students can use to enhance their employability while they study as well as upon graduation.

In 2015 Deakin was the first university in the world to introduce IBM Watson to the service environment. Watson, which is integrated within DeakinSync, answers student questions and is available 24/7. Students can access Watson on any device connected to the internet. Unlike search engines and frequently asked question tools Watson learns and understands natural language and over time Deakin in partnership with IBM will expand on the range and level of personalisation available when responding to student questions. This is still experimental technology but Deakin is prepared to take these opportunities to explore the digital frontier and create the wow factor amongst our students. Students expect innovation and a service experience that keeps pace with their lives outside of university.

In all of this Deakin is mindful of the need to review its internal practices, processes, structures, and underlying information systems from the perspective of the student. This is the challenging part of any service improvement or innovation.

This is a work in progress and the two presenters will showcase some examples of what has been done to date and reflect on what has been learnt, as well as talk to what Deakin plans to do in the future.