COMMITTEE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

FINAL REPORT ON UNIVERSITY TEACHING DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Name: Kwok-Wing Lai

Department: College of Education

Title of Project: Understand our digital learners: Using technologies to support formal and informal learning

Date on letter notifying award of grant: November 30, 2011

General progress report: A questionnaire survey was conducted during the orientation week in late February 2012 and 879 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) from all four academic divisions were successfully surveyed. 13 students were also interviewed in 2012. The survey instrument was modified and administered again in February 2013 with 813 students being successfully surveyed. 30 additional students were interviewed in 2013. A comparative study was also conducted in a Malaysian university in 2012 using the same instrument.

Specific objectives achieved and any notable successes:

This project aimed at investigating the learning characteristics of Otago students associated with technology use, and how students use these technologies to support formal and informal learning. These objectives have been achieved.

Specific objectives not achieved:

The original plan of the study was also to investigate the technology use patterns of a small group of participants by using a tracking software which was to be installed in their computers for two weeks. Unfortunately there were unanticipated technical as well as ethical issues that have prevented this objective to be achieved.

Student groups directly involved in the project or whose learning might indirectly benefit from the project:

Participants of this study were randomly selected from all four academic divisions including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Both student groups will be benefited directly or indirectly from this project.

Details of publications arising from the research:

A paper submitted to the British Journal of Educational Technology is now under peer review. I am in the process of completing two additional papers (titled *Connecting informal and formal learning using digital technology: Perspectives from different age group students* and *Undergraduates' technology use and digital learning characteristics: A comparison between two Asia-Pacific universities*). Findings from this study have been presented in a keynote address at the DEANZ (Distance Education Association of New Zealand) in April 2012, and as an invited address at the New Zealand Qualification Authority in May 2013.

Financial information:

Final statement attached.

Summary:

This project aimed at investigating the learning characteristics of Otago students associated with technology use, and how they use technology to support formal and informal learning. A questionnaire was administered in Feb 2012, with 879 respondents. 13 students were also interviewed. The survey was modified and re-administered in February 2013, with 813 respondents and 30 additional students being interviewed. Findings showed that there were no practical generational differences of the learning characteristics among the three groups of respondents (under 20, 20-30, and over 30), and there was no evidence to back the claim that the current generation of learners had a distinctive set of digital characteristics. Otago students used a limited range of digital technologies for their university work and personal/social activities, but they used them to facilitate informal learning. On average they spent 7.6 hours per week on informal learning related to coursework, and the majority of them felt that informal learning was helpful to their formal learning. However, only less than half of the students felt that their lecturers always or often encouraged them to undertake informal learning. The majority of the respondents felt that informal learning should be encouraged at Otago and supported by the University.

Signature:

Date: October 25, 2013