Bringing learning to regional communities: designing the game

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ABSTRACT
It is widely recognised that people living in regional communities face educational disadvantage. In Australia, a Review of Higher Education in 2008 recommended a university participation target for regional residents of 20%, half the national target [3]. Current low participation rates are linked with lower socioeconomic status and with lower levels of education and occupation in regional towns [1]. Without intervention, this cycle perpetuates [10]. Regional development is thus a major initiative for the current Australian Government, with significant funding proposed for programs that bring educational opportunity to non-metropolitan communities.

This interactive session addresses five major inhibitors to participation in higher education for regional residents: aspirations to engage in educational studies; access to technology; access to academic support and enabling programs; access to learning resources and access to meaningful career pathways. Participants will be encouraged to share existing institutional approaches to regional outreach and to critically review the design of their own regional delivery game.

BACKGROUND
Following the Bradley Review of 2008, the Australian Government set a national target of ‘at least 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-olds having attained a qualification at bachelor level or above’ by 2025. In recognition of the educational disadvantage faced by people from low socio-economic status backgrounds, including those from regional communities, the Government set a national target of 20 per cent of higher education undergraduate enrolments from this group by 2020 [3]. The University of Canberra has been awarded a Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund grant1 to investigate strategies to enhance higher education participation and learning outcomes for regional and low socioeconomic status (SES) communities in the S-E Region of NSW [4]. In collaboration with TAFE NSW - Illawarra Institute, government agencies, regional communities and business and industry partners, the project ‘Entry Pathways to Enhance Regional Participation’ is addressing several national objectives:

a. Increasing educational aspirations and access to post-compulsory education
b. Enabling wider participation through creation of pathways from school to further and higher education
c. Maintaining educational achievement for all Australians through access to learning resources, appropriate learning support, academic skills development and educational technologies
d. Supporting social inclusion and minimising exclusion for regional communities and Indigenous communities
e. Promoting community participation in social inclusion strategies.

DESIGNING THE GAME
For educational managers, teachers and designers, the task is to design cost-effective higher education programs for delivery to regional residents [3] [9]. Success factors include: planning for sustainability [8], incorporation of ‘good practice’ technology-supported educational design [2] [5] [6] [7] and inclusion of specific strategies to enhance the access, participation and success rates of regional students who are educationally disadvantaged [3] [9] [10]

Table 1 outlines the design framework for this task.

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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Objective</th>
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<tr>
<td>Design of teaching, learning and assessment strategies</td>
<td>Application of educational design principles</td>
<td>To increase student aspirations and access to post-compulsory education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of suitable technology support</td>
<td>Investigation of technology options to support off-site teaching and learning</td>
<td>To enable wider participation in regional areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning support strategy</td>
<td>Design of academic support components: e.g. enabling programs, access to local learning resources and workplace experiences</td>
<td>To optimise educational achievement for enrolled students</td>
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1 Funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008-20011
OUTCOMES
The presentation demonstrates how a multidisciplinary team has applied the regional design framework to develop off-campus delivery programs that incorporate:

a. creation of cross-sectoral pathways
b. application of educational design principles to enable wider participation
c. incorporation of academic support components that connect locally available learning resources, local libraries and regional workplace experience
d. application of existing and emerging educational technologies – including lecture recordings, Moodle site, e-Resources and local infrastructure including TAFE video-conferencing facilities – to bring learning into the community.

The framework creates a structure for the conference session, which will include open and critical discussion between session participants.

REFERENCES

BIO
Barbara Cram is an educational designer with over 20 years experience in vocational and higher education. Barbara's research interests include student self-assessment, online educational design, cross-sectoral design and VET-HE pathways. She is currently the project manager of a Diversity Fund project that is investigating strategies for enhancing access, participation and success of regional students in higher education.

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Topic: Widening access and increasing participation

Session type
Concurrent sessions are short presentations around work you have undertaken or topics you have explored. They are conversation starters, providing enough information to encourage the audience to engage and seek further information. Presentation submissions should include EITHER a full paper to be blind peer reviewed OR a 2-page abstract and short speaker bio of 150 words or less. Accepted papers will be included in the conference proceedings; however writing a full paper is not a requirement.