

RETURNING STUDENTS TO CAMPUS

‘Slow and Steady Wins the Race’

Greg Whateley

Andy West

Anurag Kanwar

April 2021

This short paper addresses the issue of returning students to campus in a restrained and careful way ensuring minimum risk to students, staff and reputation. It is important to remember that from the outset of COVID-19 restrictions, *all teaching* at UBSS has been done onsite – that is the campus has never closed. *All learning*, on the other hand, has been online. An early attempt at a hybrid return was actioned (mid 2020) but ceased after renewed NSW restrictions were put in place.

Extensive use of TEQSA Guidance Notes, TEQSA Good Practice guides and other material available to inform decision making on moving to online during COVID, blended campus options and returning after COVID have been made.

The challenge of 2021 and 2022 will be *how* and *when* to return students to campus appropriately and safely. The evidence suggests that UBSS teaching and learning online is currently well received by students and any sudden shift back to F2F would be unwise.

Transition to online

The transition to online teaching and learning has been well documented. Whateley, West and Kanwar (September 2020) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/1824/transition-to-online-teaching-and-learning-at-ubss-2020.pdf> - Chanda (October 2020) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/1834/self-assessment-of-technology-enhanced-learning-at-ubss.pdf> - Chanda and Whateley (November 2020) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/1926/tel-ubss-a-case-study.pdf> - Chanda, Whateley and Roopram (December 2020) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/1954/transitioning-from-classroom-to-tech-room-research-paper-from-ubss-australia.pdf> .

UBSS handled the transition to online effectively and appropriately and this in turn has been further documented and narrated. Whateley (September 2020) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2020/09/full-marks-for-educators-the-digital-convicts-of-covid-19/> - Whateley (October 2020) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2020/10/5-ways-covid-19-will-impact-higher-education-for-good/> - Whateley (November 2020) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2020/11/what-the-international-student-exodus-really-means-for-education/>.

Staff at UBSS and GCA have been encouraged to share their experiences of the transition to online and the issues associated with online teaching. The responses have been significant and overwhelmingly positive (from the staff perspective) – Phillips (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/never-lose-the-moment/> - Roopram, Chanda and Whateley (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/transitioning-from-the-classroom-to-the-techroom/> - Uddin (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/covid-driven-transition-to-online-teaching-a>

[reflection/](#) - Whateley (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/the-digital-convicts-of-covid-19/>.

Issues around administrative support and IT support have also been well documented – Xi (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/support-for-online-teaching-and-learning-during-covid-19-an-administrator-s-reflections/> - Whitfield (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/lessons-from-the-transition-to-online-learning-information-technology/> - Whitfield (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/transitioning-to-online-learning-more-lessons-for-information-technology/>

A most recent article by Kanwar (April 2021) provides a valuable comparison of two institutions, suggesting UBSS has done well (comparatively) in the transition process - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/online-teaching-a-tale-of-two-institutions/>

The UBSS Academic Senate has taken a leadership role in the facilitation of online learning via the UBSS Dean and associated reports. This demonstrates that staff are not alone but rather supported by an informed team who are keeping an eye on changes to the current environment.

Student Feedback

The student perspective is essential in the discussion of how well online teaching and learning has been received and reviewed. The three key sources of student satisfaction data is reflected in the internal *Student Feedback on Units* (SFU) Survey (conducted throughout COVID-19); the internal trimester *Return to Campus Surveys* (conducted throughout COVID-19) and the external *Student Experience Survey* (QILT) outcomes for 2020 (conducted during COVID-19) and considered under the heading 'External Benchmarking'.

The most recent **SFUs** (T1, 2021) suggest high level of student satisfaction in line with the previous 13 trimesters. This suggests a high level of satisfaction with the online option –

Survey Questions		BBus	BAcc	MBA
		T1 2021	T1 2021	T1 2021
Q1	The subject provided useful knowledge and skills	4.41	4.23	4.30
Q2	The learning outcomes were achievable	4.31	4.13	4.22
Q3	The subject workload was manageable	4.26	4.12	4.16
Q4	The subject helped to develop relevant professional skills such as problem solving and critical	4.37	4.17	4.26
Q5	The lecturer was well prepared for each class	4.37	4.24	4.39
Q6	The lecturer provided useful feedback	4.43	4.29	4.25
Q7	The lecturer had a good knowledge of the subject matter	4.48	4.33	4.38
Q8	The lecturer used e-learning resources eg smartboard moodle in a way that aided learning in t	4.47	4.22	4.28
Q9	The lecturer was available to discuss learning problems outside of class time	4.32	4.00	4.11
Q10	The assessment requirements were clearly explained	4.39	4.30	4.26
Q11	Overall the teaching in the subject was of a high quality	4.38	4.30	4.25
Average		4.38	4.21	4.25
T3, 2020		4.42	4.39	4.23

The most recent survey of students (conducted during T1, 2021) around **enthusiasm to return to F2F classes** on campus suggests a low level of keenness to return (12%) and a high level of satisfaction with online teaching and learning and remaining online (88%).

The final results from the student survey regarding whether students would prefer to remain online for their studies or return to campus are –

T1, 2021

	Remain Online	Return to Campus
	%	%
PG	88%	12%
UG	88%	12%
All	88%	12%

Responses

Remain Online	Return to Campus	Total	% of Response
253	36	289	79%
66	9	75	21%
319	45	364	

The total number of responses reached 364, which is a statistically significant 30% response rate. Interestingly, the postgraduate MBA and the undergraduate students are identical in their desire to remain online compared to coming back on to campus.

Set out below is the comparison with T3, 2020 -

T3, 2020

	Remain Online	Return to Campus
	%	%
PG	93%	7%
UG	86%	14%
All	91%	9%

Responses

Remain Online	Return to Campus	Total	% of Response
317	24	341	75%
97	16	113	25%
414	40	455	

This shows a high level of preference to remain online for the postgraduate MBA students at 93%, with the undergraduate preference at 86%. In Trimester 3, 2020 there was an overall preference to remain online at 91%.

This a ringing endorsement of the student support available online; the transition to online lecture delivery through TedX style studios; and the technology that supports it. There are also the curriculum modifications by faculty to ensure students are engaged throughout and the assessment modifications to be more contextual and case study based that have also contributed to the high levels of student satisfaction.

External Benchmarking

UBSS has drawn on its involvement in a range of sector level and industry body external benchmarking throughout 2020 and 2021 to monitor best practice in the sector and inform decision making.

The 2020 **QILT** outcomes (survey completed in July - August 2020 and published in March 2021) indicate high levels of student satisfaction (throughout the COVID-10 period) –

Undergraduate

Institution Name	Education Experience	Teaching Quality	Learner Engagement	Learning Resources	Student Support	Skills Develop
Undergraduate						
UBSS	81.2	84.7	70.2	76.7	79.8	82.9
National Average	73.5	79.5	52.2	80.3	73.9	79.7
University Average	73.4	79.3	51.5	81.0	73.4	79.5
NUHEI Average	74.9	81.3	59.1	74.4	78.0	80.6

Postgraduate

Institution Name	Education Experience	Teaching Quality	Learner Engagement	Learning Resources	Student Support	Skills Develop
UBSS	76.3	81.2	61.1	68.9	76.1	80.7
National Average	72.0	79.2	47.7	77.7	74.3	79.5
University Average	71.1	78.7	47.0	78.1	73.5	79.2
NUHEI Average	79.2	82.7	52.6	74.5	79.9	81.7

Useful comparison

Provider Type	Location	Overall Quality	Teaching Quality	Learner Engagement	Student Support
NUHEI Business Schools	AU	5	8	3	11
NUHEI Business Schools	NSW	4	5	3	6
NUHEI Business Schools	Sydney	4	5	3	6
NUHEI Business Schools	Sydney CBD	2	1	1	2

Top 1	
Top 5	
Top 10	

HEPP-QN Benchmark Grade Distribution v4

UBSS was involved in the HEPP-QN Benchmark Grade Distribution v4 project. The Dean of UBSS **Professor Andrew West** co-administered the project and co-authored the final report presented to the HEPP-QN online conference on the 24th November, 2020.

This project evaluated the impact of COVID19 on grade distributions at the 14 participating IHEPs. This involved comparing grade distributions in the first study period of 2020 as impacted by COVID and the corresponding study period in 2019. There was also a qualitative survey of changes and responses to COVID at each IHEP. See Spence and West (2020) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/2160/hepp-qn-grade-distribution.pdf>

Chairs of Academic Boards Forum

UBSS participated in the CABF survey conducted November 2020 - https://d56a0c9a-6eeb-47b0-a009-dc1912e945ba.filesusr.com/ugd/6321ce_89bebf8fcb04eb797a0fb37f3bbde1b.pdf - The Dean of UBSS **Professor Andrew West** along with Professor Peter Schmidt from Holmes Institute, presented the results of the CABF survey and HEPP-QN results to the CABF held on 23rd March 2021 - https://d56a0c9a-6eeb-47b0-a009-dc1912e945ba.filesusr.com/ugd/6321ce_e72759ed03f84591a77d4dfb3533e2b5.pdf

IHEA Submission 9th April to QILT

UBSS made a response to the request for information to assist IHEA make the submission to QILT for measures implemented by IHEA members in response to COVID-19. QILT is preparing a government white paper on what IHEPS did to support students during 2020. IHEA has been asked to provide information about initiatives and programs that IHEA members put in place to assist students through the COVID disruptions. UBSS addressed the three questions posed by QILT and IHEA. See West, Whateley, Roopram, Stravens and Smithson (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/2159/response-to-ihea-re-qilt.pdf>

Proctoring

A key consideration around staying online is maintaining both *credibility and accreditation* with the CPA and CA ANZ. To this end proctoring of specific examinations is in train. The matter is discussed (and shared) in some detail – Roopram (2021) - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/online-proctoring-the-likely-future-of-assessment/> - Roopram and Whateley (March 2021) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2021/03/online-proctoring-the-smart-future-of-assessment/>

On the matter of *examinations* – the current completion rate is at 89% including final exams and supplementary exams - that is no change from the F2F examination completion rate.

Also of interest is the T1, 2021 *grade distributions* which indicate a high similarity with previous trimesters (COVID-19 and otherwise) suggesting no issues with regard to online teaching and learning in this domain.

Hybrid Approach

Much has been said about the hybrid return to campus concept. The notion is that a dual system of online and F2F co-exists. UBSS is very well placed to accommodate this notion as evidenced in Whateley December 2020 p24) - <https://view.joomag.com/campus-review-vol-30-issue-12-dec-2020/0365267001606972437?short&> - Whateley (December 2020) - https://www.campusreview.com.au/2020/12/double-bubble-toil-and-trouble-the-international-student-cauldron/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CR+BN+Email+-+14+Dec+2020%2A%27Open+Universities&utm_content=Double+bubble%2C+toil+and+trouble%3A+the+international+student+cauldron%2A3%2AIE%2AOP&utm_source=apneducationalmedia.writemsg.com – Whateley (January 2021) - https://www.campusreview.com.au/2020/12/to-be-or-not-to-be-a-hybrid-return-to-campus/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CR+BN+Email+-+13+Jan+2021&utm_content=To+be+or+not+to+be%3A+a+hybrid+return+to+campus%2A1%2AOC%2AOP&utm_source=apneducationalmedia.writemsg.com and Whateley (January 2021) - <https://view.joomag.com/campus-review-vol-31-issue-01-january-2021/0817897001611279210?short&> and Whateley (March 2021) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2021/03/transition-to-an-online-mba-a-genuine-game->

[changer/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CR+BN+Email+-+19+Mar+2021&utm_content=Transition+to+an+online+MBA%3A+a+genuine+game+changer%2A2%2AOP%2AVC&utm_source=apneducationalmedia.writemsg.com](https://www.campusreview.com.au/2021/02/training-and-its-contribution-to-operational-effectiveness-during-covid-19/)

UBSS is very well placed to continue teaching online given the GCA investment in technology – both software and hardware. GCA has invested significantly in the training of staff – hundreds of hours in fact – resulting in a most valuable asset. Newcombe (February 2021) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2021/02/training-and-its-contribution-to-operational-effectiveness-during-covid-19/> and again Newcombe (March 2021) - <https://www.campusreview.com.au/2021/03/ensuring-maximum-returns-from-organisational-training/> - reminds us of the importance of training especially during COVID-19.

WHS Issues

Fundamental to the success, to date, of our teaching on campus – learning off line model has been our vigilant oversight of all WHS issues.

The safety of students and staff remains our priority. The WHS Committee is chaired by an Executive Director. WHS items are discussed by the Board of Directors (as a standing item) at all meetings. In addition, UBSS is one of the few if not the only independent higher education provider with its COVID-19 transition plan publicly available on the website. This demonstrates that UBSS is a market leader in its approach. The current COVID-19 plan is a living document and there is a watching brief on any changes.

GCA ensured that it was COVID safe and all necessary protocols have been put in place including hygiene, QR coding for onsite personnel and rigorous cleaning protocols throughout each day.



This regime is overseen by senior staff at UBSS and monitored by the GCA WHS Committee.

Timing

It is evident that both GCA and UBSS are well informed, active thought leaders.

The timing of a hybrid return to campus will be dependent on a range of issues including changes to current NSW Government directives.

The current view (which is informed and current) is that UBSS should move slowly and steadily toward a hybrid return ensuring safety and avoiding risk. The likely timeline is to remain online throughout 2021 and initiating a return to campus (hybrid) in 2022.

Authors -

Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley is currently the Deputy Vice Chancellor, GCA

Professor Andrew West is currently the Dean, UBSS

Anurag Kanwar is currently the Compliance and Continuous Improvement Director, GCA