Fellow Profile

Professor Des Butler
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Professor Des Butler is currently a Professor of Law in the Faculty of Law at the Queensland University of Technology. He is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Mentor Advisor of the QUT Academy of Learning and Teaching.

Fellowship title: Using cost–effective multimedia to create engaging learning experiences in law and other disciplines

Year completed: 2011

Expertise key words: authentic learning, simulations, machinima

What did you achieve?: The Fellowship addressed the needs of two separate groups of learners: (1) students studying ethics, and (2) academics and other interested educators in higher education wishing to use ICT to create engaging learning environments for their students but lacking the capacity to do so. It demonstrated that multimedia can provide an effective alternative to real–life settings such as clinical exercises, without sacrificing the critical authentic context. Multimedia involving the use of virtual characters to present tasks and critical information in a simulated environment was shown to be an effective strategy in the creation of more authentic online learning environments. However, for many academics a significant obstacle to introducing multimedia innovations into their curricula is the prohibitive cost of computer software programming that is normally required. By contrast, 'machinima' – computer graphics imagery created without the cost of professional software or professional programming – can be an economical means of creating effective learning environments. The Fellowship created an exemplar blended learning program called Entry into Valhalla that combined realistic machinima–facilitated learning environments with instruction on the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of legal ethics, enabling students to obtain an essential foundation for addressing the challenges posed by the complex real–world type scenarios.

A second outcome of the Fellowship was a program of professional development activities that constructed the knowledge, skills and techniques of producing cost effective multimedia projects in academics and other interested educators in higher education. An enduring component of that program is a how–to manual, which has now been downloaded nearly 3,000 times in 60 countries.

What does the sector need now?: Higher education and power brokers need to recognise, and support, innovative techniques that produce positive student outcomes and which are transferable across disciplines.

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