

IBILTA

THE INTERNATIONAL BLOCK
AND INTENSIVE LEARNING AND
TEACHING ASSOCIATION

Hosted
by:



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MONTANA WESTERN



The International Block and Intensive Learning and Teaching Association (IBILTA) Conference

September 29 – September 30 (US and European Calendar Dates)
September 30 – October 1 (Australian Calendar Dates)

Conference Programme 2026

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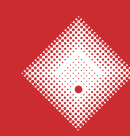
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Conference Programme

DAY 1 29 September – 30 September



TIME	SESSION STREAM I	SESSION STREAM II
30th Sep 06:00 AEST 29th Sep 21:00 GMT 29th Sep 14:00 MST 30 min presentation +10 min Q&A	Conference Welcome Professor Erica Wilson and Professor Thomas Roche (IBILTA Co-Presidents) Keynote Speaker Introduction: Professor Christian Gilde Dr. Estee Aiken, Chancellor, University of Montana Western The Block Is Just the Beginning: Innovation and Opportunity through Immersive Instruction	
30th Sep 06:45 AEST 29th Sep 21:45 GMT 29th Sep 14:45 MST 10 min presentation +5 min Q&A	Session 1A ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Tyler Seacrest Loretta Konjarski and Marc C-Scott Victoria University Teaching the Model by Living It: Transforming Academic Practice through Professional Learning Zach Quince Southern Cross University Redesigning for block delivery: How academics redesign units at Southern Cross University	Session 1B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Goodson Dzenga Yu Li and Katrina Kennett Montana Western Global Cultural Learning and Community Engagement through Hosting an International Festival in Rural Montana Janelle Handlos and Megan Chilson Montana Western Leveraging Block Scheduling for a Community Engaged Learning Experience Session 1C POSTER PRESENTATION India Lawton (<i>Southampton</i>)
30th Sep 07:45 AEST 29th Sep 22:45 GMT 29th Sep 15:45 MST 5 min presentation +1 min Q&A	Session 2A LIGHTNING TALKS Chair: Amanda Muscat Masha Mikola (VU) Joanne Munn (SCU) Jill Parkes (SCU)	Session 2B LIGHTNING TALKS Chair: Gerard Everett Gayathri Rajaraman (VU) Thomas Stiles (Montana Western) Leslie Johnson (Montana Western) Christian Gilde (Montana Western)

Conference Programme

DAY 1 29 September – 30 September



TIME	SESSION STREAM I	SESSION STREAM II
30th Sep 08:30 AEST 29th Sep 23:30 GMT 29th Sep 16:30 MST 45 min discussion	PANEL 1 Chair: Professor Erica Wilson Making Block Models Work: Professional Staff Leading Educational Change Sophie Kemm, Director, Academic Portfolio Office, SCU Rechelle Martinez, Head of Operations, First Year College, VU Mark Try, Program Manager, Academic Portfolio Office, SCU Eric Wright, Professor & Interim Provost & Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, University of Montana Western	
30th Sep 09:30 AEST 30th Sep 00:30 GMT 29th Sep 17:30 MST 10 min presentation +5 min Q&A	Session 3A ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: John Weldon Rafaela Acevedo-Field, Leslie Johnson and Miranda Zent Montana Western The Library & Learning Commons in the Block Bethany Blankenship Montana Western HIPs Don't Lie: Undergraduate Research in the Humanities Nyasha Dzenga and Goodson Dzenga Montana Western Real-Time Research: Teaching, Traveling, and Completing a Dissertation Within a Block Model	Session 3B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Foti Sidiroglou Josiah Koh Western Sydney University The College Modular Block Delivery in a Fully Online Foundation Pathway: A Pilot Study of Engagement and Attainment Thi Phuong Lan Nguyen University of Newcastle To what extent are international students successful in Australian universities' Intensive courses Session 3C POSTER PRESENTATION Loretta Konjarski (VU) 5 min presentation +1 min Q&A

Conference Programme

DAY 1 29 September – 30 September



TIME	SESSION STREAM I	SESSION STREAM II
30th Sep 10:30 AEST 30th Sep 01:30 GMT 29th Sep 18:30 MST 10 min presentation +5 min Q&A	Session 4A ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Bert Oraison Debra Huber <i>Montana Western</i> Artificial Intelligence in Intensive Learning and Teaching: A Multi-Disciplinary Exploration Ryan Bañagale <i>Colorado College</i> From Adoption to Inquiry: Critical AI Literacy on the Block Plan Yolanda Sun and Vail Cui <i>Victoria University</i> Supporting University Lecturers in Enhancing Their AI Literacy for Effective Integration of Generative AI in Teaching and Learning	Session 4B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Megan Chilson Kathleen Raponi <i>Victoria University</i> Designing Authentic Assessment in the Block Amanda Muscat and Melissah Thomas <i>Victoria University</i> Inside the Block: How Academics Bring the VU Block Model to Life Sophia Mihailidis <i>Victoria University</i> 'It's Not That Deep': A framework for mitigating assessment-related anxiety in tertiary classrooms
30th Sep 11:30 AEST 30th Sep 02:30 GMT 29th Sep 19:30 MST 45 min workshop	Session 5A WORKSHOP Joseph Eason and Eric Dyreson <i>Montana Western</i> Interdisciplinary Integrative Research Projects on the Block (IIR Projects)	Session 5B WORKSHOP Kathleen Raponi and Gerard Everett <i>Victoria University</i> Transforming the Curriculum with Simulations
30th Sep 12:30 AEST 30th Sep 03:30 GMT 29th Sep 20:30 MST	SOCIAL HOUR Facilitators: Regional Leads of IBILTA	

Conference Programme

DAY 2 30 September – 1 October



TIME	SESSION STREAM I	SESSION STREAM II
30th Sep 19:00 AEST 30th Sep 10:00 GMT 30th Sep 03:00 MST 30 min presentation +10 min Q&A	Introduction Professor Thomas Roche (Southern Cross University) and Christopher Roffey, Western Sydney University The College (<i>Gold Sponsor</i>) Keynote Speaker Jo Hornby, University of Greater Manchester From Concept to Culture: Reflections on Implementing the Greater Manchester Way	
30th Sep 19:45 AEST 30th Sep 10:45 GMT 30th Sep 03:45 MST 10 min presentation +5 min Q&A	Session 6A ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Puspha Sinnayah Humberto Oraison and Loretta Konjarski Victoria University Start Well Units: The Stepping Stones to Academic Success Jeremy Vassallo and Humberto Oraison Victoria University In-Class Engagement as Protective Against Student Stress and Anxiety in the Context of Block-Mode Teaching	Session 6B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Onur Ateş Carmen Miles De Montfort University Teaching Under Pressure : Pedagogic Judgement in Block-Based Learning Charu Hurria Victoria University Transforming Postgraduate Learning Through the Block Model: A Reflective and Experiential Teaching Approach

Conference Programme

DAY 2 30 September – 1 October



TIME	SESSION STREAM I	SESSION STREAM II
30th Sep 20:30 AEST 30th Sep 11:30 GMT 30th Sep 04:30 MST 10 min presentation + 5 min Q&A	Session 7A ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Gayathri Rajaraman Taylor Lau <i>Victoria University</i> Pedagogy Under Pressure: Embedding Real-World Research in Block Teaching Christopher Roffey <i>Western Sydney University The College</i> Pathways Student Success in Modular Block Mode Delivery at Western Sydney University College Fiona Naumann and Kellie Toohey <i>Southern Cross University</i> Managing Curriculum Refinement after Implementation of Immersive Block Teaching	Session 7B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Jamie Meekins Michelle Praver and Renita Michielin <i>Victoria University</i> Observational Placement for Pre- Service Teachers in the Block Model: An Examination of Student Perceptions of Observational Learning Ali Reza Alaei and Reza Ghanbarzadeh <i>Southern Cross University</i> Pedagogy for Student Success in Block Teaching: Insights from Student Experiences in Information Technology Programs Nisha Rawindaran <i>University of South Wales</i> From Capability to Professional Judgement: Rethinking Pedagogy in Intensive Cyber Security Education
30th Sep 21:30 AEST 30th Sep 12:30 GMT 30th Sep 05:30 MST 45 min discussion	PANEL 2 Chair: Matt Raffety, Director of University Communications, University of Montana Western Title: Student Perspectives on Intensive Learning, Success Strategies, and Innovation in the Block Model Student Panel- Cross Institutional Tayla Andrews - Southern Cross University, Australia Vanessa Astorga - Victoria University, Australia Rylee Glimm - University of Montana Western, United States Sam Jeffery - Southern Cross University, Australia Carsten Lemelin - University of Montana Western, United States Bellamy Wirth - Victoria University, Australia	

Conference Programme

DAY 2 30 September – 1 October



TIME	SESSION STREAM I	SESSION STREAM II
30th Sep 22:30 AEST 30th Sep 13:30 GMT 30th Sep 06:30 MST 10 min presentation + 5 min Q&A	Session 8A ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Craig Kappes Erica Wilson and Thomas Roche Southern Cross University Policy, practice and people: A case study of transforming assessment for block delivery Puspha Sinnayah and Amanda Muscat Victoria University ProblematISING Assessment in Block Model Higher Education: A Bacchi-Informed Policy Analysis Rebecca Wospil and Susan Johnston Victoria University Secure Assessment in Practice: Student Perspectives from a First-Year Health Curriculum	Session 8B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Onur Ates Andrea Moro Southern Cross University Enhancing student experience through AI-generated podcasts in the Southern Cross Model: A case study of a flexible microlearning approach Madura Thiwanka Pathirana British University Vietnam More Than a Tool: Undergraduate Tourism Students' Lived Experiences of Co-Creating Knowledge with Generative AI in Project-Based Learning Stanislaw Paul Maj and Dia Rossides Southern Cross University Cognitive Load Optimization - creating the probably most efficient, easiest and fastest learning paths and answering the question - what is the role of a teacher in an AI world?
30th Sep 23:30 AEST 30th Sep 14:30 GMT 30th Sep 07:30 MST 45 min workshop	Session 9A WORKSHOP Nicola Bishop, Alasdair Blair and John Weldon De Montfort University, UK Victoria University, Australia Enhancing the Block: findings from a participant research workshop	Session 9B ORAL PRESENTATIONS Chair: Emma Lewis Pamela Humphreys and Onur Ateş Macquarie University Rethinking pathway academic calendars: leveraging the student voice and experience in an immersive block model Sashi Kant and Janice Petherick Western Sydney University The College Enhancing Student Success in First-Year Chemistry through Modular, Scaffolded Learning Design: A Case Study
1st Oct 00:30 AEST 30th Sep 15:30 GMT 30th Sep 08:30 MST	CONFERENCE AWARDS & WRAP UP Professor Puspha Sinnayah (IBILTA Vice-President, Victoria University) IBILTA 2027 Conference Handover: Southern Cross University, Gold Coast, Australia END OF PROGRAMME	

Opening Keynote Presentation



Dr Estee Aiken

The Block Is Just the Beginning: Innovation and Opportunity through Immersive Instruction

Certainly, experiential education can and does happen in traditional classrooms. A block schedule allows for more than experiential education—it allows students to be immersed in their studies. In our rapidly changing world, concentrated time for focused, deep exploration can be hard to find. Further, while we have seemingly limitless ways to interact with others via technology, students are feeling lonelier and more disconnected than ever before. Immersive instruction just might be the antidote to what ails us. This approach to education does not happen by accident; it happens by design. How do we move beyond a scheduling model to a pedagogical approach? Dr. Estee Aiken has been a student, educator, and administrator at block-scheduled institutions, and her keynote presentation will highlight what she has learned through these roles, particularly with regard to the innovation and opportunity provided through authentic immersion.

Closing Keynote Presentation



Jo Hornby

From Concept to Culture: Reflections on Implementing the Greater Manchester Way

This keynote explores the University of Greater Manchester's journey in implementing block teaching as part of the Greater Manchester Way, a transformational approach to curriculum design, assessment, and student success. Drawing on reflections from leading this institution-wide change, the presentation examines the challenges and opportunities of redesigning learning around focused, sequential study. It highlights key lessons about leading cultural change, engaging staff and students as partners, and ensuring quality assurance supports innovation. The session offers practical insights for educational leaders considering large-scale curriculum transformation and reflects on the role of leadership in creating conditions for meaningful and sustainable change.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 1A – Academic development and practice

Teaching the Model by Living It: Transforming Academic Practice through Professional Learning

Loretta Konjarski and Marc C-Scott, Victoria University, Australia

This work is highly relevant to research and development in higher education as institutions seek scalable approaches to enhance teaching quality, student engagement, and academic capability. It addresses a persistent challenge identified in the literature, the limited impact of traditional professional learning on teaching practice, by presenting an immersive, practice based model aligned to contemporary pedagogical expectations. By aligning educator learning with the student experience, this approach foregrounds high engagement teaching, relational pedagogy, and active learning as central to student success. Drawing on block pedagogy and institutional practice, it demonstrates how educators can shift from content delivery towards facilitation of learning in meaningful and sustained ways. Importantly, this work offers a whole of institution model that is both scalable and adaptable across contexts. It provides practical strategies for embedding pedagogical change across disciplines and campuses, positioning professional learning as a key driver of innovation, educator identity, and improved student outcomes.

Redesigning for Block Delivery: How Academics Redesign Units at Southern Cross University

Zach Quince, Gayani Samarawickrema and Ruth Greenaway, Southern Cross University, Australia

This study explores how academics redesign traditionally structured university units for an immersive six-week block model in Australia. Using inductive thematic analysis of responses from educators in high-achieving block units, three connected redesign strategies emerged: (1) narrowing scope to essential learning and removing low-value “busywork”; (2) mapping outcomes, activities, and assessment into a clear week-by-week pathway with strong signposting and consistent rubrics; and (3) moving foundational content online to use class time for coached practice, peer learning, and feedback. This work will support others to make similar changes, and provide an international benchmark of proven redesign.

Session 1B – Experiential and community-engaged learning

Global Cultural Learning and Community Engagement through Hosting an International Festival in Rural Montana

Yu Li and Katrina Kennett, University of Montana Western, USA

This project demonstrates the impact of experiential, culturally responsive teaching, community-engaged learning on preservice teacher preparation. As institutions seek to better align academic content with real-world applications, this initiative offers a model for bridging theory and practice through student-led programming.

The International Festival addresses a critical gap in teacher education: the need for applied experiences that foster cultural competence and inclusive pedagogy. While diversity and global education are often taught conceptually, this project enables students to actively design and facilitate intercultural learning experiences with local business owners and community agents. Such engagement aligns with high-impact educational practices of Community-Based Learning and Diversity/Global Learning, which have been shown to improve student learning outcomes, engagement, and retention.

Additionally, the project highlights the role of community partnerships in enriching higher education. Collaborating with local organizations and international partners expands learning beyond the classroom and strengthens institutional-community relationships. This approach is particularly relevant in rural and less diverse regions, where opportunities for intercultural interaction may be limited.

By documenting student outcomes and instructional design, this work contributes to scholarship on experiential learning, culturally responsive teaching, and innovative curriculum design in higher education.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Leveraging Block Scheduling for a Community Engaged Learning Experience

Janelle Handlos and Megan Chilson, University of Montana Western, USA

The University's block scheduling model is linked with an emphasis on experiential learning and high impact practices. Leveraging the flexibility and opportunities of a one course at a time block scheduling system, faculty from Kinesiology and Education partnered with homeschool cooperative families to offer learning experiences in health, physical education, literacy, and physical performance. This project demonstrates how block scheduling can be used to facilitate high-impact experiential opportunities, and highlights some of the unique considerations for working with partners in a intensive learning model.

Session 1C – Poster presentation

Learning in One Place at a Time: Block Teaching, Belonging, and Inclusive Practice in Foundation Education

India Lawton, Southampton Solent University, UK

This poster contributes to research and development in higher education by foregrounding how curriculum structure shapes student engagement, belonging, and approaches to learning, particularly within Foundation (Year 0) provision. Drawing on reflective practice and sustained programme-level observation, it examines block and intensive teaching not simply as a timetabling innovation, but as a pedagogical and ethical choice that communicates institutional values about time, care, and learning.

The work speaks to ongoing sector-wide concerns around inclusive, student-centred learning, transition into higher education, and supporting increasingly diverse student cohorts. By attending to the affective and relational dimensions of teaching, such as confidence, cognitive load, continuity of relationships, and community-building, it highlights how structural design can either support or undermine meaningful engagement.

Rather than positioning student difficulty as individual deficit, the poster reframes challenges around organisation, anxiety, and surface-level engagement as responses to fragmented learning environments. In doing so, it offers practice-informed insight relevant to curriculum design, inclusive pedagogy, and educational leadership.

This poster draws on a reflective article currently under review with the Journal of Block and Intensive Learning and Teaching, extending that discussion into a shared space for dialogue, feedback, and sector-wide reflection.

Session 2A – Lightning talks

Critical and Inclusive Storytelling: Engaging Lived Experience in Intensive Social Work Education

Masha Mikola, Victoria University, Australia

This presentation contributes to ongoing research and development in higher education by addressing how intensive teaching models can be designed to support increasingly diverse student cohorts. As universities expand the use of block and other compressed delivery formats, there is a growing need to move beyond structural innovation toward pedagogical approaches that are inclusive, ethical, and responsive to complexity.

By bringing together neurodiversity-affirming, trauma-informed, and critical pedagogies, this work highlights the importance of relational and flexible teaching practices in supporting student engagement, belonging, and success. It contributes to emerging scholarship on inclusive pedagogy by demonstrating how storytelling, particularly ethnographic and auto-ethnographic approaches, can both enable and complicate participation within intensive learning environments.

The presentation foregrounds ethical considerations that are often underexplored in higher education research, including issues of power, voice, and the risks of narrative extraction. In doing so, it offers practical and theoretically informed insights for educators seeking to design learning environments that are not only accessible, but also socially just. This work supports the development of block pedagogy as a critical, inclusive, and reflective practice within higher education.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Health Check: Impact of Block and Blended Delivery on Student Performance and Experience in Undergraduate Health Programs

Joanne Munn and Jenelle Benson, Southern Cross University, Australia

This presentation presents a practical case study of a block-and-blended curriculum change in undergraduate health programs, drawing on student grade outcomes and experiences. It compares how different delivery models impact success outcomes and satisfaction, including for commencing versus continuing students. The work supports conversations about innovative teaching practice and how curriculum design can impact student experience and success in higher education, and specifically provides data for health courses, where accrediting bodies voice concerns about assurance of complex knowledge building and skill development with condensed curriculum models.

Optimizing Information Literacy for a Block Model: A Case Study

Jill Parkes, Talli Allen and Cintamani Brown, Southern Cross University, Australia

As universities increasingly adopt block or time-intensive teaching models alongside generative AI tools, information literacy has become both essential and more complex. Students are now required not only to locate and evaluate information rapidly, but to critically engage with AI-generated content and make ethical and informed decisions about AI use within compressed learning timeframes. This case study examines how library-led information literacy support can be designed and delivered to effectively aligned to block teaching structures. By positioning librarians as partners in curriculum and assessment design, this paper contributes insights into building students' critical, ethical, and reflective research capabilities in the age of GenAI. The findings are relevant to educators, learning designers, and institutional leaders seeking to future-proof teaching practice while maintaining academic integrity, equity, and student success.

Session 2B – Lightning talks

Navigating Change: Anxiety, Stress and Student Wellbeing in Times of Institutional Assessment Reform

Gayathri Rajaraman, Melissah Thomas, Sunam Pradhan and Ligia Pelosi, Victoria University, Australia

This study addresses a critical and rapidly evolving challenge in higher education: how to design assessment in the era of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) while maintaining academic integrity, equity, and student wellbeing. As institutions increasingly adopt secure, high-stakes assessment formats in response to GenAI, there is a growing need for evidence-based approaches that mitigate unintended consequences such as heightened student anxiety, stress, and disengagement. This research contributes to scholarly and institutional conversations on curriculum, assessment, and feedback by investigating how assessment redesign can balance rigour with inclusivity and wellbeing.

By integrating mixed methods data from students and academic staff, alongside institutional metrics such as academic performance and support service utilisation, the study offers a comprehensive, data-informed perspective on assessment reform. Its focus on Universal Design for Assessment advances research on equitable and accessible practices, while its use of real-world institutional data strengthens the link between policy, pedagogy, and measurable outcomes.

The findings will support research and development in higher education by identifying sustainable assessment design principles that respond to emerging technological advances. Importantly, the study foregrounds stakeholder voices and aligns with sector-wide priorities around curriculum innovation, regulatory accountability, and the ethical implementation of assessment in a changing educational landscape.

A Triadic Mentoring Model for Teacher Preparation in Clinical Settings

Thomas Stiles, University of Montana Western, USA

To improve pre-service mentoring during a clinical teaching experience within the 17-day block schedule, the Rural Fridays program at the University of Montana Western implemented a mentoring model involving schoolteachers, university faculty, and teacher candidates. Preliminary findings suggest that this triadic mentoring model strengthens key dimensions of teacher development, including instructional adaptability, classroom management, responsiveness to student diversity, and overall teaching confidence. Teacher candidates benefit by refining their instructional decision-making in real time while schoolteachers gain practical curricular insights and new instructional strategies applicable to their own classrooms. The study highlights how structuring placements as collaborative, goal-aligned partnerships focused on solving real curricular problems can help the professional growth of all participants.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Universal Design for Teaching: There is No Normal

Leslie Johnson, University of Montana Western, USA

Much like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), the block system can challenge the idea of “normal” in higher education. Unfortunately, technology infrastructure, including vital systems such as a Learning Management System, are generally built for the “normal.” This presentation will explore this friction between what’s considered normal or routine and what actually happens at institutions, especially those using block scheduling, and in individual classrooms. This lightning talk will explore how long professional experience in implementing educational technology led to a revelatory thought: There will be no Universal Design for Learning until we have Universal Design for Teaching. Therefore, we need to put the concept that there is no such thing as normal at the foundation of any technology governance system.

Fostering Creative Learning: Reimagining Block Teaching for Creative Thinking and Artificial Intelligence

Christian Gilde, University of Montana Western, USA, Christian Byrge, Vilnius University Business School, Lithuania, and Erik Guzik, University of Montana Western, USA

There is insufficient pedagogical research on how well artificial intelligence can support creative problem-solving within a compressed education format. This work has chosen the future problem-solving approach due to its focus on several steps of the creative process to generate solutions for real-world problems. The methodology selected to assess the effectiveness of this teaching approach is in-depth interviews with different instructors and students. The presentation also features a brief, reflective exercise that allows session participants to integrate creative education in the context of AI into their own block course. Preliminary pedagogical findings of this exploratory project demonstrate that creative education can be successfully applied in a time-intensive setting in an artificial intelligence context. The work proposes a scalable approach for creative education that engages students and allows them to think critically, collaborate, and develop 21st century learning skills.

Session 3A – Research and reading in block

The Library & Learning Commons in the Block

Rafaela Acevedo-Field, Leslie Johnson and Miranda Zent, University of Montana Western, USA

This presentation will provide a plan for long term implementation of a Library & Learning Commons model to best serve student academic needs in the block schedule. While most successful models of Learning Commons have developed around a traditional semester or quarter schedules, significant adjustments in practice have to be made to better serve students in the block schedule. Labor workflows, space, and financial resources have to be reallocated thoughtfully to provide more appropriate student support services. At the same time the integration of Library & Learning Commons, which in this case includes the library, the learning center, and eLearning, can also provide a more integrated set of services and programming better tailored to the block.

HIPs Don’t Lie: Undergraduate Research in the Humanities

Bethany Blankenship, University of Montana Western, USA

People in academia rely too much on the quick, easy, and largely inaccurate identifier of experiential education as “hands-on learning.” This definition erases learning that takes place in minds that research by reading and writing. Studying literature is especially experiential when studied on the block. Purposeful reading and writing in a block calls on students’ ability to sort quickly through multiple genres (literary and scholarly) to situate their ideas within (in some cases) hundreds of years of criticism. Undergraduate research in the block is important for literature students because it provides meaningful engagement with what literary scholars have always practiced: making critical claims about what they have read. Unfortunately, very few critical studies have offered advice on how best to encourage undergraduate research in the Humanities let alone on the block. In this presentation, I will demonstrate how the experiential and high impact practice of undergraduate research engaged second-year students in a literature class.

Real-Time Research: Teaching, Traveling, and Completing a Dissertation Within a Block Model

Nyasha Dzenga and Goodson Dzenga, University of Montana Western, USA

This presentation shares my journey of completing a major research project while teaching full-time in an intensive block model. It highlights how 18-day course structures can allow faculty to combine teaching and research, even during busy and demanding schedules. Using interviews with practicing teachers, the study explored how prepared they feel to support inclusive education, particularly for students with autism. The findings show how research can directly improve teaching, support professional growth, and create more student-centered learning. I will share practical strategies for connecting research and teaching in block courses, managing time and energy, and involving students as collaborators in inquiry. This work reflects the resiliency, commitment, and goal-oriented mindset required to balance long-distance travel for data collection, late-night writing, and the simultaneous demands of teaching and scholarship. Participants will see how challenges can be transformed into opportunities for reflection, innovation, and growth. Ultimately, this session demonstrates that block and immersive teaching models can foster deep learning, strengthen professional skills, and make research immediately relevant to classroom practice. It highlights how dedication, strategic planning, and perseverance allow educators to advance scholarship while making a meaningful impact on teaching and student outcomes.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 3B – Inclusive curriculum and pedagogy

Modular Block Delivery in a Fully Online Foundation Pathway: A Pilot Study of Engagement and Attainment

Josiah Koh, Western Sydney University The College, Australia

As higher education institutions seek to expand access and flexibility, block and modular delivery models have emerged as promising alternatives to traditional semester-based formats. Evidence increasingly supports their effectiveness in improving engagement and attainment, yet almost all existing research focuses on face-to-face or blended contexts. The application of modular block delivery in fully online environments, particularly within open access foundation pathway programs, remains largely undocumented. This paper addresses that gap by reporting on a pilot at Western Sydney University The College, which delivered a foundational literacy subject through a fully online modular block model over a four-week intensive period. The model combined synchronous reflective sessions, asynchronous discussion-based teaching, and self-paced learning modules to maintain structured engagement alongside flexibility. With a pass rate of 94.8% and average weekly engagement of 93% across the cohort, results suggest that modular delivery translates effectively to online contexts. This work is relevant to higher education researchers and practitioners interested in intensive delivery design, online pedagogy, and widening participation. It offers one of the few documented examples of a fully online modular block model in a foundation pathway setting, providing a replicable framework for institutions exploring scalable approaches to supporting diverse student cohorts.

To What Extent are International Students Successful in Australian Universities' Intensive Courses?

Thi Phuong Lan Nguyen, University of Newcastle, Australia

The number of international students, especially from Asian countries, coming to Australia to have higher education study is increasing dramatically. However, according to the data from Australian Education Assessment Services (AEAS), only Singapore Malaysia and Hong Kong are considered to have high levels of English proficiency among students. South Korea and Vietnam are classified as moderate, with China, Japan, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Thailand considered to be low or very low. The study is highly relevant to the theme Inclusive, Student-Centred Learning. The initial results show the close link between students' low level of English proficiency and their socio-cultural skills, and a range of difficulties in their intensive courses, as well as their daily life and their life-long learning plans. These would help educators develop better pedagogies and strategies to facilitate international students in general and Asian ones in particular participation and integration in Australian education. The discussions and findings are meaningful to various stakeholders, Australian institutions, educational agents, teachers and international students in better preparing students crucial skills prior to and during studying in Australia.

Session 3C – Poster presentation

Graduate Studies in Block Teaching: Advancing Teaching in the VU Block Model

Loretta Konjarski, Marc C-Scott and Kerith Peter-Budge, Victoria University, Australia

This poster is highly relevant to research and development in higher education, particularly for institutions adopting or exploring block and immersive delivery models. It addresses a critical gap between traditional academic development and the pedagogical demands of block teaching, demonstrating how a purpose built Graduate Certificate and Diploma in Block Teaching can better support educators in these contexts. Designed by experienced block educators, these qualifications use the block model to teach how to teach in block, ensuring alignment between educator learning and student experience. This approach foregrounds experiential learning, reflective practice, and educator identity, positioning professional learning as scholarly, practice based work embedded within authentic teaching contexts. Importantly, this work contributes to an international community of block teaching institutions by offering a scalable and transferable model for building educator capability in immersive environments. It supports shared conversations about advancing high engagement teaching and creating professional learning that is context responsive, future focused, and grounded in practice.

Session 4A – Strategies for AI literacy

Artificial Intelligence in Intensive Learning and Teaching: A Multi-Disciplinary Exploration

Debra Huber, Christian Gilde, Tyler Seacrest and Goodson Dzenga, University of Montana Western, USA

While artificial intelligence (AI) tools are increasingly integrated into semester-long university courses, their application in intensive teaching formats remains underexplored. This research examines how AI supports both teaching and learning in 18-day block courses across four disciplines: mathematics, business, economics, and education. The study employs the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2009), which examines the critical intersections among technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge. This lens enables systematic analysis of how AI integration varies across disciplinary contexts while maintaining focus on effective teaching practice. Cross-case analysis reveals five key considerations for effective AI integration in intensive formats: (1) balancing AI capabilities with human expertise to maintain instructional quality; (2) developing AI literacy through embedded training; (3) personalizing learning experiences by leveraging AI's adaptive capabilities; (4) establishing clear guidelines for responsible AI use; and (5) fostering intellectual curiosity about AI's potential and limitations.

Conference Presentation Summaries



From Adoption to Inquiry: Critical AI Literacy on the Block Plan

Ryan Bañagale, Colorado College, USA

Generative AI has intensified longstanding questions in higher education about knowledge, communication, authorship, authority, and judgment. This presentation addresses those questions by connecting Critical AI Literacy with Critical Language Inquiry as a framework for research and development in intensive teaching contexts. Rather than approaching AI primarily through adoption, efficiency, or academic integrity, this model treats AI as part of a broader ecology of meaning-making that includes written, spoken, symbolic, visual, and embodied forms of language.

The presentation is relevant to higher education development because it offers a transferable approach for faculty learning, curriculum design, and student-centered inquiry. It focuses on two emerging practices: adaptable course modules that help students examine how AI mediates meaning across disciplines, and faculty learning communities that support reflective course design through workshops, reading groups, and shared pedagogical experimentation. Early qualitative evidence from faculty conversations, reading group reflections, and course/module designs suggests that this approach helps instructors move beyond the binary of adoption versus prohibition and instead locate AI within existing questions of language, power, interpretation, and disciplinary judgment. This work contributes to broader efforts to develop critical, ethical, and context-sensitive responses to generative AI in higher education.

Supporting University Lecturers in Enhancing Their AI Literacy for Effective Integration of Generative AI in Teaching and Learning

Yolanda Sun and Vail Cui, Victoria University, Australia

The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has created new expectations for student capability, particularly in relation to responsible and critical engagement with emerging technologies. However, less attention has been given to lecturers' preparedness to model and support these practices, resulting in a significant professional development gap.

This presentation reports on a case study from an early childhood education team at Victoria University, where a university-wide AI literacy module was embedded into assessment design within block and intensive teaching contexts. Lecturers engaged in a parallel process of developing their own AI literacy while redesigning assessments and teaching approaches.

Through structured professional learning, including curriculum adaptation and scaffolded experimentation, lecturers demonstrated increased confidence and pedagogical capability. Evidence from interviews, reflective journals, and focus groups shows meaningful shifts in teaching practice.

The study offers a transferable model for embedding AI literacy into everyday teaching practice through aligned institutional policy, curriculum design, and professional learning.

Session 4B – Authentic assessment and teaching delivery

Designing Authentic Assessment in the Block

Kathleen Raponi, Victoria University, Australia

In the digital age of AI, it is becoming increasingly concerning for higher education institutions how do they ensure students have acquired the relevant learning and skills (Arise et al, 2024). These concerns often arise in subjects which are focused on writing skills. As a result, institutions are responding to these concerns by introducing secure assessment tasks.

This presentation will discuss the design of an authentic secure assessment in a law unit which not only mirrors real world practice but allows for cognitive development. The assessment design for this new secure task applied Villarroel et al (2018) three elements of authentic assessment – realism, cognitive challenge and evaluative judgement. Rather than just getting students to prepare a legal document which is a form of active learning, this task goes one step further to require students to “file” the document with the court and make submissions to a hypothetical judge (the assessor). Thereby allowing the marker to assess they have prepared the document and understood its contents.

The presentation will provide insights to academics on how to balance the use of AI in assessment and provide clear steps on creating a secure authentic assessment task

Conference Presentation Summaries



Inside the Block: How Academics Bring the VU Block Model to Life

Amanda Muscat, Melissah Thomas, Bec Marland and Sam Howe, Victoria University, Australia

While research on block delivery has predominantly focused on student outcomes, engagement, and retention, less attention has been given to the teaching practices that underpin effective implementation. This presentation reports on a qualitative study examining how academics experience, interpret, and enact the VU Block Model® across three disciplines. Using a social constructivist qualitative research design, data were collected through in-class observations of three academics' teaching practices, post-teaching interviews, student surveys (n=39), end-of-block student focus groups (n=11). Thematic analysis revealed the importance of deliberate scaffolding, purposeful sequencing of learning experiences, and sustained teacher presence in supporting student engagement and focus within block delivery. Academics' explicit articulation of learning intentions, conceptual rationales, and task purposes enhanced perceptions of relevance and strengthened real-world connections. Structured and responsive formative feedback was consistently identified by students as critical to deepening understanding and reinforcing progress. Key challenges included managing compressed delivery periods, sustaining engagement across diverse cohorts, and balancing content depth with interactive teaching approaches. This research provides evidence-informed insights to support effective teaching practice in block and other intensive higher-education delivery formats.

'It's Not That Deep': A Framework for Mitigating Assessment-Related Anxiety in Tertiary Classrooms

Sophie Mihailidis, Victoria University, Australia

Assessment-related anxiety is a phenomenon that affects many university students, often impacting their ability to perform or achieve to the best of their abilities. This can lead to increased stress, potential mental health issues, burnout, and perfectionism. The 'It's Not That Deep' method of delivering assessment tasks to students aims to alleviate anxiety around assessment tasks by offering a practical, cohesive and supportive approach to assessments. Developed by a neurodivergent academic, this approach has drawn on lived experience and has been delivered to multiple student cohorts with positive feedback, improved student engagement and results, and increased student confidence and self-efficacy.

The framework integrates three interrelated strategies: the 'Cut Up the Steak' method, which scaffolds assessment tasks into manageable parts; the 'Fine Tooth Comb' method, which promotes transparency through detailed unpacking of rubrics and expectations; and the titular 'It's Not That Deep' method, which offers students a cognitive reframing tool to counter perfectionist thinking and anxiety spirals. Together, these strategies foster self-efficacy, autonomy, and resilience in preservice teachers, while also modelling pedagogical practices they can adopt in their own future classrooms.

Session 5A – Workshop

Interdisciplinary Integrative Research Projects on the Block (IIR Projects)

Joseph Eason and Eric Dyreson, University of Montana Western, USA

With the intense schedule of the block, it can be hard to find time to do research with students. We will present an effective method for including interdisciplinary integrative research projects in your courses while using the advantages of the block schedule. A crucial part of creating a sustainable research project is giving autonomy over the research to the students, who will be able to provide the time and effort needed to conduct the research. When students have the ability to direct it, research can evolve in unexpected ways. We will show how you can create your own interdisciplinary integrative research projects in your classes and highlight how a project can evolve when you give students the autonomy to direct the research.

Session 5B – Workshop

Transforming the Curriculum with Simulations

Kathleen Raponi and Gerard Everett, Victoria University, Australia

Teaching in a block or intensive mode presents engagement and knowledge transfer concerns that may not be present in a more traditional approach to higher education. Simulated learning fosters engagement, critical thinking and experimental knowledge in learning environments. The current literature focuses on simulations that take place in traditional semester mode of delivery and are often focussed on health sciences disciplines.

The workshop will draw on simulation learning activities that have been successfully implemented into two content-heavy law subjects being delivered in VU Block Model (4-week period). Drawing on Wiggins and McTighe's Backward Curriculum Design principles, the workshop will provide a "how to guide" on designing simulation learning activities into the curriculum. Overall, the aim of this workshop is to encourage other academics to create simulated learning experiences to deliver content.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 6A – Supporting student success and wellbeing

Start Well Units: The Stepping Stones to Academic Success

Humberto Oraison and Loretta Konjarski, Victoria University, Australia

The research topic is directly related to Theme 4 Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Student Experience as it involves an exploration of initiatives to enhance teaching and learning practices as well as student wellbeing. This research is deeply related to core of block teaching principles as well the theoretical underpinning of transition pedagogy.

In-Class Engagement as Protective Against Student Stress and Anxiety in the Context of Block-Mode Teaching

Jeremy Vassallo and Humberto Oraison, Victoria University, Australia

University students face mounting psychological pressures that can undermine academic success. This study investigated whether block-mode teaching, characterised by concentrated single-subject study, smaller classes, and intensive in-person engagement, is conducive to student wellbeing. First-year psychology students at Victoria University were assessed on stress and anxiety at the start and midpoint of a teaching block. Results showed significantly lower stress and anxiety at the block's midpoint, suggesting that immersive, structured learning environments contribute to lower psychological distress. Anxiety was also associated with higher rates of failing grades and lower attendance, highlighting the link between wellbeing and academic engagement. These findings offer preliminary evidence that block-mode pedagogy may support student mental wellbeing alongside academic outcomes, contributing meaningfully to scholarship of teaching and learning and informing institutional decisions about alternative pedagogical models in higher education.

Session 6B – Teaching for engagement and employability

Teaching Under Pressure : Pedagogic Judgement in Block-Based Learning

Carmen Miles, De Montfort University, UK

Block teaching is often treated as a timetabling change, but in practice it creates a high-pressure pedagogic environment where decisions about pacing, intervention, and assessment have immediate and amplified consequences. This research shares what that means for teaching in reality. Drawing on institutional experience of implementing block-based delivery at scale, the presentation explores how educators navigate compressed learning cycles using structured guided learning, early engagement analytics, and targeted interventions. It highlights the micro-decisions that shape student experience, what to prioritise, when to intervene, and how to respond to early signals of disengagement. The session introduces the concept of pedagogic judgement literacies, extending TPACK, to argue that effective teaching in intensive models depends less on tools or content and more on the quality and timing of decisions in practice. Participants will gain practical insight into what works in block teaching, where standardised approaches fall short, and how professional development can better support adaptive, data-informed teaching. The session combines real examples, reflective insights, and forward-looking implications for curriculum design, staff development, and student success in increasingly intensive learning environments.

Transforming Postgraduate Learning Through the Block Model: A Reflective and Experiential Teaching Approach

Charu Hurria, Victoria University, Australia

This paper contributes to research and development in higher education by examining how innovative teaching approaches and learning environments can enhance student engagement, learning outcomes, and overall student experience. Using the Block Model as a context, the paper demonstrates how intensive delivery, combined with flipped classroom pedagogy, reshapes traditional teaching practices by prioritising active learning, structured engagement, and purposeful use of learning technologies. The study highlights how carefully designed learning environments enable students to focus on one unit at a time, fostering deeper learning and meaningful interaction. The paper further responds to calls for engagement, collaboration, and real-world learning by illustrating how curriculum and assessment design within the Block Model support students in connecting theory with professional practice. Through experiential learning activities and collaborative assessment tasks, students develop transferable skills relevant to the workplace while building strong peer relationships and a sense of belonging. By adopting a reflective and storytelling approach grounded in lived academic experience, this research offers practice-based insights into creating comprehensive, student-centred learning experiences. The findings provide actionable guidance for educators and institutions seeking to enhance teaching quality, curriculum coherence, and student success in contemporary higher education.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 7A – Improving student outcomes in block

Pedagogy Under Pressure: Embedding Real-World Research in Block Teaching

Taylor Lau, Victoria University, Australia

This presentation addresses a key challenge in higher education: embedding meaningful research experiences within intensive or block teaching formats. While such models are often seen as limiting deep learning (Burton & Nesbit, 2008; Davies, 2006), this project demonstrates how carefully designed, community-engaged approaches can support authentic, scaffolded research within compressed timeframes.

Drawing on the redesign of two final-year criminology units, the initiative integrates student-led research in partnership with community organisations, enabling real-world application of academic skills. The model enhances student engagement, collaboration, and research confidence while strengthening connections between theory and practice.

Importantly, this approach offers a scalable framework that can be adapted across disciplines, contributing to ongoing research and development in experiential learning, curriculum innovation, and the preparation of socially responsive graduates.

Pathways Student Success in Modular Block Mode Delivery at Western Sydney University College

Christopher Roffey, Western Sydney University The College, Australia

The transition into higher education for open-access pathway students continues to present persistent challenges, particularly within traditional term-based delivery models that require concurrent study of multiple subjects. This paper further advances knowledge in the field through a critical examination of the design and impact of the Western Sydney University College flipped block delivery model, introduced in 2025 to support diverse first-year cohorts.

The study is significant to higher education research as it responds to evidence that student support alone is insufficient without intentional curriculum and delivery design. It contributes to sector-wide inquiry into how structural redesign of teaching models can improve retention, progression, and transition outcomes for non-traditional and time-constrained learners.

Using a mixed-methods evaluation, the paper presents empirical evidence of outcomes associated with the College's modular block model, including strong retention and persistence, high academic performance, and substantial transition rates into Bachelor-level study. It demonstrates the effectiveness of block delivery for open-access cohorts, providing a model for positive student impact and showing clear advantages over traditional semester-based delivery. It highlights the role of sequential block design, flipped learning, agile teaching practices, and embedded student coaching in enabling student success.

The findings are relevant to institutions seeking scalable, evidence-informed approaches to first-year experience redesign and contribute to debates on curriculum reform, student equity, and widening participation in higher education.

Managing Curriculum Refinement after Implementation of Immersive Block Teaching

Fiona Naumann and Kellie Toohey, Southern Cross University, Australia

Managing curriculum refinement after the implementation of immersive block teaching is increasingly relevant to research and development in higher education because it addresses a central challenge of large-scale educational reform: sustaining quality and student outcomes beyond initial rollout. Drawing on a descriptive case study of the Southern Cross Model (SCM), this work examines how iterative review cycles, grounded in mixed-method evidence from unit performance, student satisfaction, and student feedback, can guide continuous improvement in curriculum design, assessment alignment, active learning strategies, and student-staff engagement. Early findings highlight predictable transition pressures for students adapting to accelerated, responsibility-intensive study patterns, alongside the need for staff capability-building to redesign units in line with block model principles. Importantly, successive refinements informed by student voice were associated with measurable gains in student success and satisfaction over multiple years. The topic contributes practical insights for institutional research and development by demonstrating how data-informed curriculum governance, responsive design processes, and clearer communication of expectations can mitigate implementation risks and strengthen student experience in intensive teaching models.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 7B – Practice-based pedagogies in block

Observational Placement for Pre-Service Teachers in the Block Model: An Examination of Student Perceptions of Observational Learning

Michelle Prawer and Renita Michelin, Victoria University, Australia

The purpose of this presentation is to examine Pre-Service Teacher perceptions of the benefits of observational placement in classroom and library settings, as an authentic learning experience within the Block model. Jensen et al. (2025) highlights the value of using placement for authentic work experiences and the literature affirms that peer observation of teaching is an effective tool for the professional development of teachers (Sharmin & Udin 2024; Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2025). We will explore whether time spent in this endeavour is perceived by students themselves to benefit their learning particularly in the short time frame of block model. Do students who have engaged in observational placements assess the experience positively? Do they recognise the benefits and what, if any, are these perceived benefits?

Pedagogy for Student Success in Block Teaching: Insights from Student Experiences in Information Technology Programs

Ali Reza Alaei, Reza Ghanbarzadeh, Elizabeth Goode, Ruitao Feng and Haifeng Shen, Southern Cross University, Australia

This work contributes to higher education research and development by advancing understanding of how block and intensive teaching models can support student success within conceptually demanding, practice-oriented disciplines such as Information Technology (IT). While block models are often discussed in structural terms, this study reconceptualises block delivery as a pedagogical amplifier, showing that improvements in student success, GPA and satisfaction are contingent upon curriculum alignment, teaching quality and assessment design rather than compressed timeframes alone. Drawing on three years of mixed-methods evidence, the study identifies specific pedagogical mechanisms that support learning in IT block contexts. At the same time, it highlights the challenges of block delivery in conceptually dense subjects when scaffolding is insufficient, offering a more nuanced and discipline-sensitive account of block teaching effectiveness. By foregrounding student perspectives alongside longitudinal outcome data, the work provides practical, evidence-based guidance for educators, curriculum designers and academic leaders seeking to design effective block mode IT programs. More broadly, it contributes to higher education development by demonstrating how pedagogical design mediates the relationship between delivery models and student success. It also extends block model scholarship by highlighting discipline-specific insights of particular relevance for IT and STEM education.

From Capability to Professional Judgement: Rethinking Pedagogy in Intensive Cyber Security Education

Nisha Rawindaran, University of South Wales, UK

This paper contributes to ongoing research and development in higher education by examining how Intensive Block Teaching (IBT) can be leveraged to support higher-order learning in technically complex disciplines. While IBT is often associated with efficiency and accelerated delivery, its potential to foster deep, applied learning remains underexplored. Focusing on postgraduate cybersecurity education, this study highlights how block-mode delivery can be intentionally designed to cultivate professional judgement, ethical awareness, and context-sensitive decision-making capabilities increasingly recognised as essential for graduate employability. The work responds to sector-wide priorities around authentic learning, industry alignment, and skills development in rapidly evolving fields. By integrating simulations, real-world scenarios, and practitioner engagement, the study demonstrates how IBT can support experiential and student-centred learning at scale. It also offers a practical, evidence-informed framework for curriculum design that can be adapted across disciplines where uncertainty and complexity are central. As universities continue to adopt flexible and intensive delivery models, this research provides timely insights into how IBT can move beyond content compression towards transformative educational practice, supporting both pedagogical innovation and workforce readiness.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 8A – Assessment principles and practices

Policy, Practice and People: A Case Study of Transforming Assessment for Block Delivery

Erica Wilson, Thomas Roche, Elizabeth Goode and Sophie Kemm, Southern Cross University, Australia

This topic is highly relevant to research and development in higher education, addressing one of the most pressing challenges facing universities: how to repurpose assessment policy and practice so that it is fit for purpose for a university's context and delivery model, rather than simply replicating traditional approaches. The presentation contributes to higher education scholarship by moving beyond unit- or discipline-level examples to examine assessment reform at a whole-of-institution scale, showing how policy, practice and leadership must work together to support meaningful change.

The presentation also has practical relevance. As more institutions explore block, intensive and other alternative teaching models, there is growing need for evidence-based guidance on how to align curriculum, assessment and feedback with these approaches. This case study offers that guidance by identifying the policy settings, leadership strategies and implementation mechanisms that supported sustainable reform across diverse disciplines. In doing so, it speaks directly to current sector priorities around student success, academic quality, professional development, and curriculum transformation, making it valuable for both researchers and higher education leaders seeking to improve assessment design and student learning outcomes.

Problematising Assessment in Block Model Higher Education: A Bacchi-Informed Policy Analysis

Puspha Sinnayah, Amanda Muscat, Sarah Rutter, Joane Jonathan, Sidney Adams, Kofi Awuviry-Newton, Joshua Johnson, Abdi Osman and Ligia Pelosi, Victoria University, Australia

The rise of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT is transforming assessment practices in higher education, challenging traditional ideas of authorship, integrity, and valid evidence of learning. This study is relevant to research and development as it examines how institutional assessment policies within a block model both constrain and enable innovation in AI-integrated assessment design.

Using Bacchi's What's the Problem Represented to Be (WPR) framework, the research shows how policy shapes not only practice but also the definition of the "problem" of AI in education. In alignment with sector guidance from the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, the study highlights the need for policies that balance academic integrity with authentic, future-focused learning.

The findings support the development of more flexible, equitable, and pedagogically relevant assessment approaches in AI-augmented higher education contexts.

Secure Assessment in Practice: Student Perspectives from a First-Year Health Curriculum

Rebecca Wospil and Susan Johnston, Victoria University, Australia

Generative AI is an emerging trend which is reshaping curriculum design in higher education. Literature supports a shift toward assessments which demonstrate understanding of learning outcomes, while maintaining academic security. However, not all assessment can be, or should be, secure. This highlights the importance of a balance of assessment types across a study program.

This presentation will demonstrate a 4.5 year programmatic approach to secure assessment delivered in block mode. Early units incorporate invigilated in-class quizzes. Assessments increase in complexity over time and culminate in capstone assessments which require synthesis, clinical reasoning, and demonstration of professional practice. To strengthen preparedness for capstones, the proportion of secure assessment was increased within first-year units.

A practice-based mixed-methods evaluation was used to evaluate this initiative. Assessment and unit outcomes were compared before and after assessment changes. Learning analytics examined student engagement, basic qualitative surveys captured student experience, and staff workload was compared.

This work presents a scalable model for increasing secure assessment across first-year block units. A scaffolded progression from controlled to authentic tasks supports academic integrity while ensuring learning outcomes have been met.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 8B – AI-Enabled and Evidence-Informed Learning Design

Enhancing Student Experience through AI-Generated Podcasts in the Southern Cross Model: A Case Study of a Flexible Microlearning Approach

Andrea Moro, Yu (Jack) Qin, Damian Fernando and Clare du Plessis, Southern Cross University, Australia

This exploratory study contributes to growing conversations in higher education around flexible learning, student engagement, and the integration of AI in teaching. As universities increasingly adopt intensive block delivery models, where compressed timeframes place real demands on both students and educators, there is a need for practical, scalable strategies that support learning without adding significant workload. Set within the Southern Cross University Model, this study demonstrates how AI-generated podcasts can be rapidly developed and deployed as structured microlearning resources. Rather than treating podcasts as supplementary content, the approach adopts a deliberate multi-format design, unit overviews, weekly summaries, and assessment snapshots that supports student orientation, concept reinforcement, and assessment preparation. Early findings show students reported improved understanding of key concepts, with benefits for assessment readiness and on-the-go learning. For educators, the approach offers a low-effort, replicable model that can be adapted across units and disciplines. For institutions, it illustrates how emerging AI tools can be embedded into teaching in ways that are both pedagogically intentional and responsive to the realities of modern delivery formats.

More Than a Tool: Undergraduate Tourism Students' Lived Experiences of Co-Creating Knowledge with Generative AI in Project-Based Learning

Madura Thiwanka Pathirana, British University Vietnam, and U. S. Warnakula, V. Wanigasekara, P. A. Senadeera and M. De Silva, Edith Cowan University, Australia

This study responds to a pressing concern within higher education research: the need to understand students' lived experiences of generative AI as a collaborative partner rather than a tool. Aligned with the IBILTA 2026 themes of Innovation and Research, Enhancing Learning and Student Experience, and Sharing Stories, this phenomenological investigation centres student voices—persistently marginalised in AI scholarship—through 125 in-depth interviews. The findings reveal that students inhabit profound ambivalence, epistemic tension, and vulnerability when co-creating knowledge with AI in project-based learning contexts. These experiences challenge instrumental framings of AI and demand pedagogical approaches that honour human distinctiveness—cultural empathy, ethical reasoning, and authentic professional identity formation. By foregrounding these stories of ambivalent co-becoming, the study offers empirically grounded insights for curriculum design, assessment practices, and academic integrity frameworks. It contributes to preparing graduates not for replacement by intelligent machines, but for meaningful partnership with them—a priority that resonates with IBILTA's commitment to collaboration, reflective practice, and future-oriented educational development.

Cognitive Load Optimization – Creating the Probably most Efficient, Easiest and Fastest Learning Paths and Answering the Question – What is the Role of a Teacher in an AI World?

Stanislaw Paul Maj and Dia Rossides, Southern Cross University, Australia

Cognitive Load Optimisation (CLO) represents a philosophy of learning design that seeks to optimise learning for all students by focusing on the development of relational knowledge, or deep understanding that reduces reliance on memorisation. Central to the approach are CLO schemas, which quantitatively model knowledge structures and are designed to minimise cognitive load while providing the most efficient pathway to learning. These schemas serve as a scalable foundation for instructional design from school through to university and have demonstrated strong potential for improving learning outcomes, particularly in STEM disciplines. As discipline- and pedagogy-agnostic tools, they can be adapted across contexts, languages, educational levels, and learning approaches, including AI-supported implementation.

Conference Presentation Summaries



Session 9A – Workshop

Enhancing the Block: Findings from a Participant Research Workshop

Nicola Bishop, Alasdair Blair, De Montfort University, and John Weldon, Victoria University, Australia

Internationally, several higher education institutions have changed to intensive or block teaching over the last few years and others are exploring making the move. At IBILTA 2025, the researchers held a participant-research workshop to reflect on and consider the key challenges of block, while focusing on a solution-orientated approach that saw those with experience of teaching in block working together to visualise potential enhancements. This interactive workshop will share the findings captured during the workshop, and, give opportunities for participants to respond to the results. The content will reflect on the wider discussions from the workshop in 2025 around the impact of block delivery, its benefits and complexities and the enhancements that were proposed by those who are most familiar with how it works. The content of the session will be valuable to other institutions considering a move to block teaching, while the solutions that participants identified support the sharing of innovation and best practice amongst those already engaged with alternative methods of delivery.

Session 9B – Approaches for curriculum redesign

Rethinking Pathway Academic Calendars: Leveraging the Student Voice and Experience in an Immersive Block Model

Pamela Humphreys, Macquarie University, Yulia Kharchenko, Maynooth University, and Onur Ates, Macquarie University, Australia

Our study demonstrates that students can meaningfully contribute to complex operational decisions, challenging assumptions about their capacity to engage beyond curricular matters. By systematically embedding the student voice in decision making, the institution implemented substantive calendar reforms that balance efficiency with learning, wellbeing, and transition support. The findings contribute a replicable model for evidence based, student partnered decision making in IBM contexts and offer actionable insights for institutions seeking to refine intensive delivery structures.

Enhancing Student Success in First-Year Chemistry through Modular, Scaffolded Learning Design: A Case Study

Sashi Kant and Janice Petherick, Western Sydney University The College, Australia

This case study explores how block mode teaching can be effectively used in STEM subjects, where there are often concerns about maintaining deep learning and practical skill development. Focusing on first-year chemistry, it shows that a well-structured, scaffolded approach can support both conceptual understanding and hands-on learning, even within a four-week format.

The redesign of CHEM1013 uses established teaching principles such as constructive alignment, flipped learning, and regular formative feedback. By combining pre-class learning with active workshops and practical sessions, the subject encourages student engagement and continuous learning. Improvements in pass rates and participation suggest that this approach helps students stay on track and succeed, particularly in their first year of study.

This work is relevant to current priorities in higher education, including flexible delivery, inclusive teaching, and improving student retention. It provides a practical model for educators looking to design effective block-mode subjects, particularly in STEM disciplines.

Expert Panel One: Making Block Models Work: Professional Staff Leading Educational Change



CHAIR- Professor Erica Wilson
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Innovation) Southern Cross University



Professor Erica Wilson is Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Innovation) at Southern Cross University and Dean of the Hotel School Australia.

Erica has co-led the design and implementation of the Southern Cross Model, a revolutionary curriculum approach grounded in student success, based on 6-week teaching periods.

Rechelle Martinez, Head of Operations, First Year College, Victoria University



From 2014 to 2017 Rechelle worked as the Senior Executive Officer within the Offices of the Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Victoria University.

In October 2017, Rechelle successfully attained the role of Head of Operations within the First Year College, where she was initially tasked with the establishment of the new College and the smooth implementation of the VU Block Model.

Sophie Kemm
Director, Academic Portfolio Office, Southern Cross University



Sophie Kemm is the Director of the Academic Portfolio Office. She was instrumental in the policy and process reform required to implement and refine the Southern Cross Model.

Mark Try
Program Manager, Southern Cross University



Mark Try is the program manager for the implementation and continuous improvement of the Southern Cross Model, 2021-present.

Eric Wright
Professor & Interim Provost & Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs



Dr. Eric Wright has been a faculty member at UM Western since 2005. During his tenure at UM Western, Dr. Wright served in various functions, such as Department Chair, Division Chair of Mathematics and Sciences, and currently as Interim Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Student Panel Two: Student Perspectives on Intensive Learning, Success Strategies, and Innovation in the Block Mode



CHAIR – Matt Rafferty

Director of Communications at the University of Montana Western

PANELLISTS:

Tayla Andrews

My name is Tayla Andrews. I am a fourth year social work student (just finished my degree last month!) at Southern Cross University, and a mum of three. I am passionate about supporting women and children and creating a stronger community for us all.

Vanessa Astorga

My name is Vanessa and I am a third-year Bachelor of Nursing student at Victoria University, currently working as a Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing (RUSON) at one of Melbourne's leading tertiary hospitals and major trauma centres. This role has provided me with valuable opportunities to develop my clinical knowledge and skills while working within a multidisciplinary healthcare team.

Rylee Glimm

My name is Rylee Glimm. I'm a senior from Kalispell, Montana, majoring in Kinesiology.

Sam Jeffrey

My name is Sam Jeffery and I am a first-year Bachelor of Education (Primary/ Secondary) student from Lismore and an SCU Student Ambassador. Returning to university as a mature-age student after an eight-year break, I have valued the support provided by my First Year Adviser and the Faculty of Education. I particularly appreciate SCU's welcoming culture and flexible approach to balancing study, work and life.

Carsten Lemelin

My name is Carsten Lemelin. I'm a senior from Dillon, Montana, majoring in Kinesiology with minors in Biology, Strength & Conditioning, and Coaching.

Bellamy Wirth

My name is Bellamy Wirth, and I am a third-year Bachelor of Paramedicine student at Victoria University in Melbourne. I am particularly interested in improving the early recognition of posterior circulation stroke in the pre-hospital setting. Through my studies and future career in paramedicine, I hope to contribute to improving how these presentations are recognised and managed in the field.

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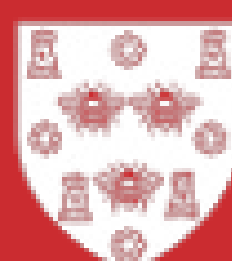


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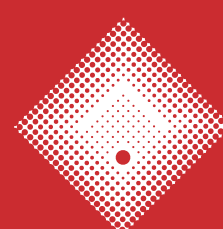
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