

Key Policy Issues Around e-learning at a Defence Academy: An Australian Case Study

Keywords/phrases:

UNSW@ADFA; e-learning policy and practice; communication with military staff; academic administration.

Abstract:

The Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) is a unique and challenging environment. It operates as a partnership between the Australian Defence Force and the University of NSW in providing a balanced and liberal tertiary education within a tri-service military environment. All undergraduate students at ADFA are serving Defence personnel while at the postgraduate level ADFA operates much like a traditional university offering both coursework and research programs to a range of Defence personnel, both serving and civilian, and to the general community.

E-learning is an integral component of the learning and teaching strategy at UNSW@ADFA. A centralised Learning Management System (OLIVE- OnlineLIVE) is available and is used to various extents in both the undergraduate and postgraduate coursework arenas, and especially so for Distance Education postgraduates. For the undergraduates, there is a requirement for attendance at all scheduled classes and there would seem to be less opportunity to fully engage with e-learning. The dilemma this creates is that this approach does not appropriately expose undergraduate students to working regularly and constructively in the on-line environment, an environment with which they will surely engage over their service careers.

This paper addresses a range of policy issues and practical matters relating to expansion of the nature and scope of online learning at ADFA. In developing these approaches, it has become apparent that there must be a clear understanding of the “tensions” that sometimes arise when policy development trails practice. Policies arising from ‘traditional’ face to face teaching and learning environments have needed to be adjusted and approaches re-focus as a result of the use of more network centric learning environments.

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