

Associate Professor Nicolette Lee

The Swinburne professional learning model:  
Undergraduate experience as preparation for  
graduate life

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Background: the Swinburne context

## Swinburne University of Technology

- Metropolitan  
Melbourne, Australia
- Dual sector
- University established  
1992
- 3 University campuses  
+ Sarawak
- 6 Faculties
- Off-shore + OUA  
partnerships



## Higher education student demographics

- 22.5k enrolments
- 6.5k commencing
- 4.5k onshore Int'l
- 10/7 M/F
- 90% UG 18-25
- Career-oriented
- Working 20+ hrs



## Higher education program structures

- 3-4 years
- Industry placements
- Honours is a separate year
- Four units per semester
- Also winter and summer terms
- Multiple entry points



# The professional learning model and final year experience at Swinburne

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## Background to change

- Curriculum Framework Project (2005-2009)
- Drivers – diversification in a competitive environment, employability, student experience, progressive philosophy
- Whole of university approach
- Building on strengths

*The Curriculum Framework Project will ensure that Swinburne students receive a distinctive learning experience leading to enhanced opportunities. Furthermore, the CFP will promote Swinburne University as an educational environment which is distinguished from those of competitor universities. This vision will be achieved by adding value to students' learning, to their employment prospects on graduation, and to their options for the future.*

<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/hed/framework/>

## The Swinburne Professional Learning Model

- Key components:
  - 'Real-world' learning
  - Student-focused
  - Transformative
  - Evidence-based

*...a conceptualisation of curriculum as purposeful, coherent, evidence-based and transformative, rather than additive.*

<http://www.swinburne.edu.au/head/framework/>



## The final year experience project

- Implementation
  - 2006-2008
  - Final year project units
  - 1/4 full time load across the year (2 units)
  - Every final year undergraduate student (2200+)
  - 70+ named 3, 4 & 5 year degrees
- Transition-out - building independence, confidence, self-efficacy, capability and contextual understanding

## The final year experience project

- Open-structured and open-ended projects
  - Industry-related and interdisciplinary group projects
  - Dealing with complex, authentic and ambiguous problems
  - Project management and communication skills
  - Decision-making, negotiation and leadership
  - Self-direction, resilience and critical judgment
- Primary assessment - reports, presentations, products
- Coaching rather than control

## The final year experience project: strategies

- Staff concerns
  - Professional bodies and program coherence
  - Experience and workload
  - Student readiness
- Start at the point of departure
- Primary research + direct knowledge (evidence base)
- Individuals + raising profiles
- Guides and templates
- Development (group, individual, conference)
- Ongoing support

## The final year experience project: typologies

- Projects *See Lee, N. (2009)*
  - Inquiry
  - Guided
  - Directed
- Industry engagement
  - Individual student and client
  - One client all students
  - Competitions
- Groups and interdisciplinarity (mind the barriers)
  - Complete integration
  - Parallel engagement
  - A nod to others

## The final year experience project: examples

- Business
  - Whole of faculty business strategy projects
- IT and Engineering
  - Research and prototype development projects
  - SAE car project
- PR and Design
  - Consultancies and community projects
  - Design Factory open access projects
- Psychology and Sociology
  - Primary and secondary research application projects

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The outcome of our research on group learning  
in projects

## The project hub

- Group project experiences study
  - Second most common choice
  - Considered most important
  - Travel and schedules
- Digital Learning Initiative outcomes
  - “...a physical place which utilises technology and which, through innovative application, provides some form of campus heart.”*

## The project hub



## The project hub



## The project hub



## The project hub



## The project hub

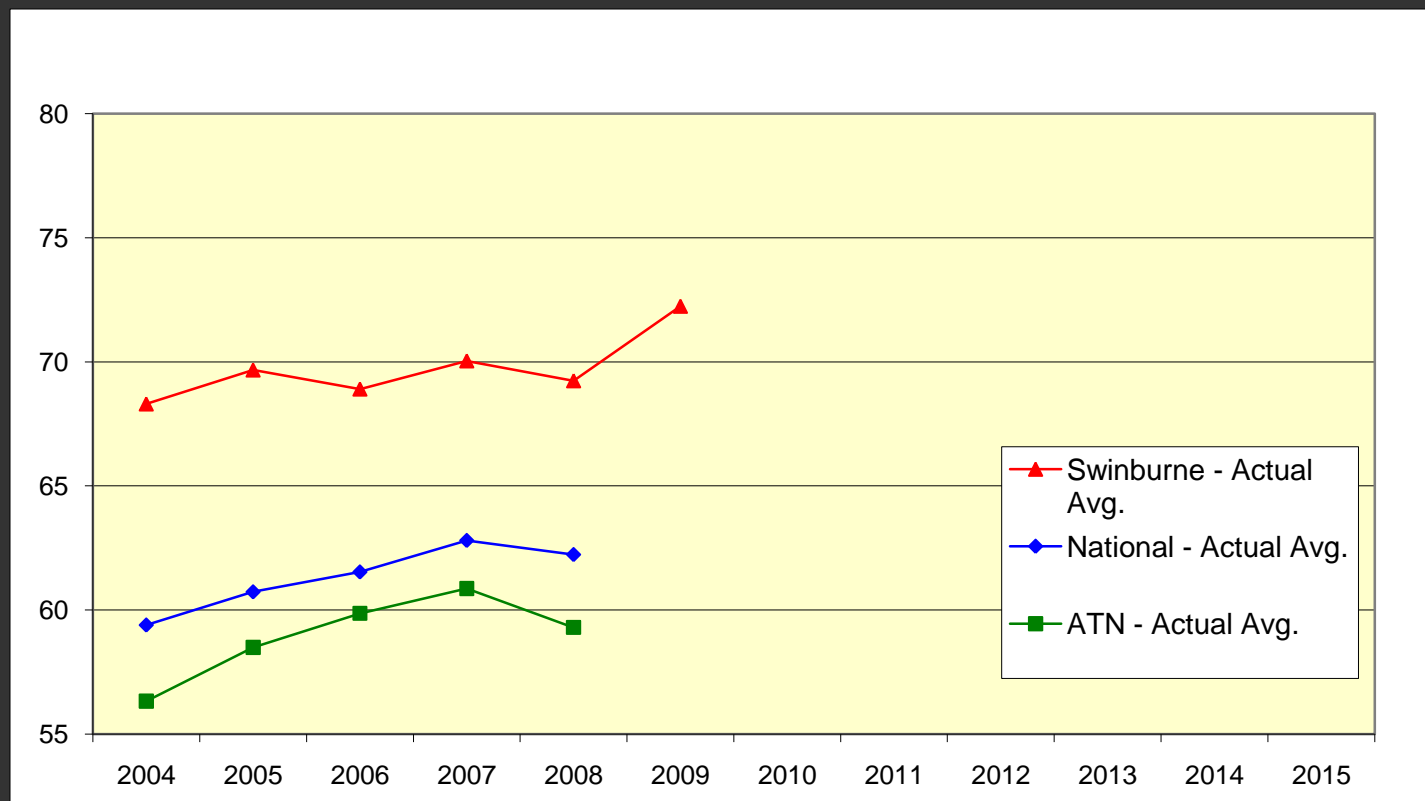


## The project hub



## Positive outcomes

Satisfaction with generic skills  
Satisfaction with good teaching  
Overall satisfaction



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*Lee, N. (2009). Project methods as the vehicle for learning in undergraduate design education: a typology. Design Studies, 30(5), 541-560.*

*Lee, N. & Tan, S. (2011). A comprehensive learning space evaluation model (report). Canberra: Australian Learning & Teaching Council. ISBN 978-1-921856-54-9, available online at <http://www.altc.edu.au/project-comprehensive-learning-space-swinburne-2008>*

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