

Blending Learning in Public Law Classrooms

‘**Blended learning**’ is the introduction of different modes of delivery of materials (typically involving technology) that are *blended* with face-to-face class time to provide better learning experiences. Closely associated with ‘**flipped classroom**’.

Why?

Pedagogy — Enhance learning, encourage self-learning, greater exposure to different perspectives through pre-recorded videos, lectures freed up for modelling and active learning (application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation)

Efficiency — Less time available for small group teaching in compulsory courses. Blended learning provided opportunity to use time allocated more effectively.

Institutional Priorities — University of Adelaide ‘Beacon of Enlightenment’ Strategic Plan: To prioritise small-group teaching led by researchers through technological innovation.

How?

- Supported by University Learning and Teaching Grants.
- Literature review conducted on flipped classroom and blended learning.
- Professional production company (Sugarsmack Productions) engaged for filming and editing videos.
- Videos uploaded onto MyUni (Blackboard) and made available to students (in PPL, videos were uploaded with slides).
- In PPL, weekly quizzes on video content to encourage viewing and diversify assessment scheme.
- Significant time spent explaining to students the purpose of the videos and how they were to be incorporated into the course.
- Survey to review student response.

Dr Rebecca LaForgia filming the *Tasmanian Dam Case* with Sugarsmack Productions



Dr Matthew Stubbs interviewing Chief Justice Christopher Kourakis



Blended Learning in Australian Constitutional Law (ACL) (Compulsory 2nd/3rd year course, 350 enrolments):

Objective in ACL: renewed emphasis on critical thinking

Videos — Introductory video on constitutional interpretation (week 1) followed by weekly videos. Each video focused on a single major constitutional case. Videos included historical and political background and impact of the cases, an explanation and analysis of the Court’s reasoning, and a critical discussion engaged in between the lecturer and another person (who may be another lecturer in the course, an adjunct professor, or a legal practitioner who may have been involved in the particular case discussed: the key here was that they brought a different perspective to the case).

Change to lecture format — Lectures were used for two purposes. First, to provide an overview to the general legal principles in the area (which was supplemented by the readings and videos). Second, the lectures were used to model answering problem-based questions and critical thinking questions, of a similar type that the students were expected to attempt and discuss in tutorials and assessment.

Modelling Critical Debates

A critical debate between Dr Gabrielle Appleby and Dr Rachael Gray (from the SA Bar) regarding the High Court’s judicial method in constitutional jurisprudence.



Blended Learning in Principles of Public Law (PPL) (Compulsory, 1st year course, 400 enrolments):

Objectives in PPL: increase active learning by implementing a flipped classroom; create space to model case reading skills and engage in small-group teaching

Videos — Traditional lecture content delivered entirely as online pre-lecture videos. Videos also included interviews with key figures relevant to each week’s content (for example, the Chief Justice, the Clerk of the House of Assembly of the Parliament of SA, Professor Ron McCallum AO) and critical discussions/debates between Drs Appleby and Stubbs.

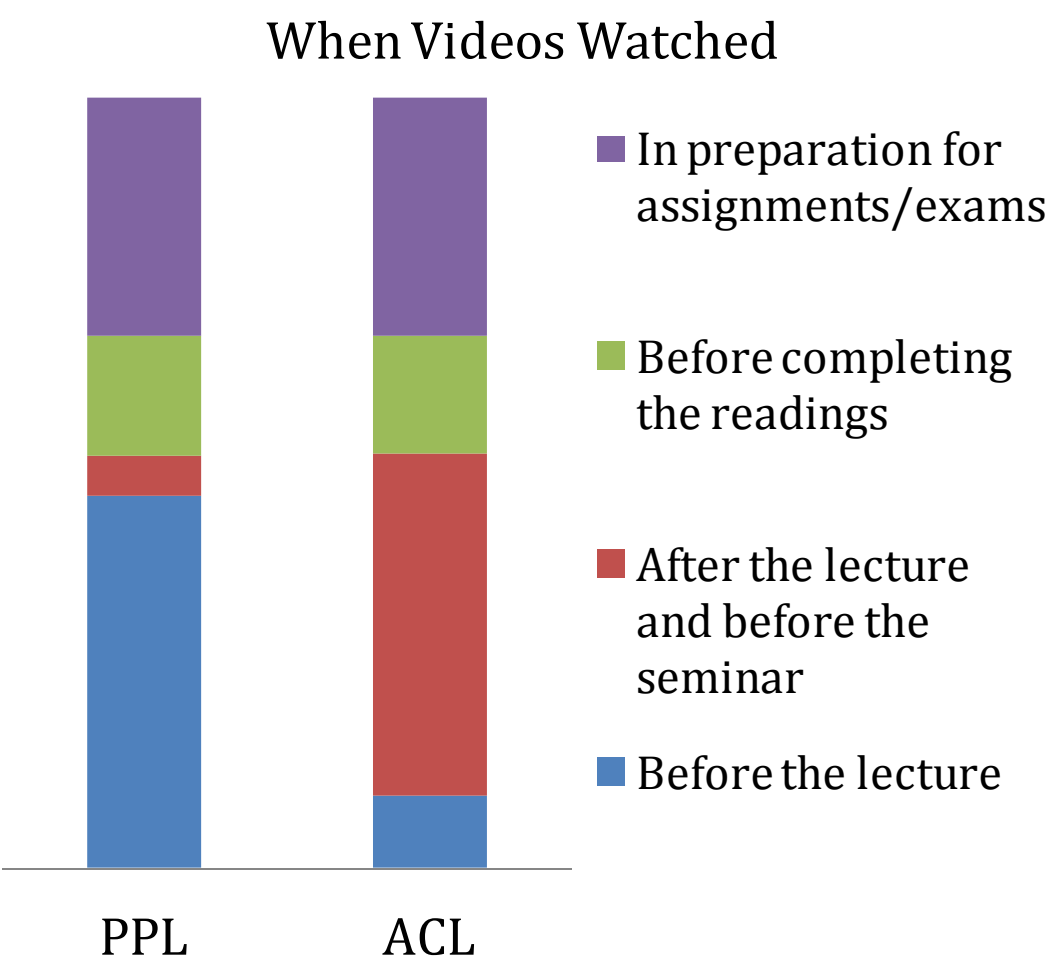
Change to lecture format — Students required to complete an online quiz based on the pre-lecture videos in advance of each lecture. Lectures used for teaching legal skills such as reading complex High Court decisions, active learning through students engaging in answering problem-based questions and critical thinking questions, and modelling the answering of questions of a type students will encounter in tutorials and assessment.

Change to tutorial format— Increased emphasis on critical thinking and legal reasoning skills.

Student Response: Overwhelmingly positive response to videos and new lecture formats in both courses.

Improvements for the Future:

- Keep videos short (15-20 minutes).
- Provide slides to students where text used in videos.
- Provide further explanation and advice about different ways and times to use videos in learning.



Student Survey Responses	Mean (Likert 1-5 scale)	% Broad Agreement (Agree / Strongly Agree)
The videos helped me gain a greater understanding of the historical, legal and political background to the issues involved.	4.58	94%
The discussions in the videos helped me to understand how to critique and debate legal principles and judgments.	4.21	87%
The change in lecture format to include practice problems and discussion questions assisted my understanding of how to answer these and the expectations in the seminars and assessment.	4.52	91%
I found the videos helpful because of the flexibility they gave me to watch / listen at a time that was convenient to me and return to re-watch / re-listen whenever I wanted.	4.48	92%
I think that I have learned more about the course topics as a result of having access to the videos and undertaking more practice problems and discussion questions in the lecture.	4.39	89%

Dr Gabrielle Appleby, Associate Professor, UNSW Law and Dr Matthew Stubbs, Associate Professor, Adelaide Law School
Youtube clip with more information on flipping the classroom, including student testimonials: <http://youtu.be/0vMOD7ZbYj8>