'If you build it, they will come':
The challenge of developing a social networking site in a university context
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First Year Challenges
• Settling in
• Finding their way
• Feeling welcome
• Belonging to a learning community
• Could that be real/online community?

Knowing your students
• Characteristics of UWA’s First Year cohort:
  – Gen Y
  – Peer relations important
  – Constant communication
• UWA Node survey
• University of Melbourne
• Curtin University
• JISC surveys
What do they use?

What do they want?

How can Web 2.0 aid learning and engagement?

What is on the horizon?

Web 2.0: possibilities

- Building online communities
  - Communication across year/course boundaries
  - Personal publishing
  - Creative content
  - Information exchange
  - Groups and forums
- Alternative communication strategies

node.live
www.node.uwa.edu.au

- Open to all UWA staff and students
- Open source software – Drupal
- Modular system – blogs, books, forums
Lesson 1: Attract funds for a pilot project

- Recognise potential for engagement and learning
- Look for early adopters - those groups already online
- Be prepared for teething problems – don’t wait until it’s ‘perfect’

Lesson 2: Establish ground rules

- Use any rules and code of conduct already in use at your institution
- Adapt if necessary
- Make sure new users are aware of protocols
- Discuss potential for bad behaviour with your Steering Group and Project Sponsor

Lesson 3: Don’t be put off by what you don’t know

- Learn by doing
- Create instructions
- Have some Gen Y input into the project team
- Be responsive to changing trends
Lesson 4: Have confidence in what you are doing

• Have confidence in your vision
• Building a community doesn’t happen overnight
• Be prepared to defend the pedagogical value

Lesson 5: Have an ongoing commitment

• Be the best member of your community
• Be prepared to ‘seed’ content in the early stages

Lesson 6: Promote your website as widely as possible

• Think about how Gen Y access information and promote your site in ways that will attract them
• Focus on particular cohorts (ours was first year students)
Lesson 7: Justify your project outcomes as broadly as possible

- Make use of webstats
- Survey students
- Reflective papers

Future directions

- Content in formats other than written word
- Outreach to prospective students
  - Blogs and forums on living in Perth
  - E-mentoring prior to arrival

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