
DEMONSTRATING ADAPTABILITY: ROLE MODELLING MULTIDISCIPLINARY LEARNING IN THE LAB, ONLINE AND AT HOME

Liam Phelan, Alescia Cullen, Rafiquel Islam, Timothy Kirkman, Bonnie McBain, Joseph Pegler, Caitlin Romanis, Thi Kim Tran, Trieu Nguyen Trinh

Presenting Author: Liam Phelan (Liam.Phelan@newcastle.edu.au)
School of Environmental and Life Sciences, University of Newcastle, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia

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In this paper we analyse changes required in the role of laboratory demonstrators to support students across a mid-semester move to online learning in response to COVID-19. 'Multidisciplinary Laboratories' is a large (~450 students) first-year, multi-campus course at the University of Newcastle that is organised around two multifaceted investigations: 'Water – would you drink it?', and 'Energy – can it be sustainable?'. The course introduces students each week to diverse disciplinary perspectives, i.e. Environmental Science and Management, Biology, Chemistry, Psychology, Human Geography, Earth Sciences, and Physics. The teaching cohort in each laboratory session (~45 students) comprises a discipline-specific academic lead that changes weekly, and two demonstrators who remain with the class for the whole semester. As laboratories moved online, demonstrators supported students' learning through synchronous live classes, experiments at home, virtual experiments and asynchronous materials including video tutorials. Importantly, demonstrators have role-modelled for students adaptability under conditions of uncertainty. Analysis of evaluative data including Blackboard engagement records, student surveys and demonstrators' observations suggests effectively supporting students' learning required nuanced and important changes in demonstrators' roles including technical aspects, and techniques for engaging students and facilitating classes.

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