

Deakin Research Online

This is the published version:

Reed, Richard 1999, Learning environment stimulation in the real world, in *Conference Papers of the 1999 Effective courses / Effective Teaching at University : Reflection on Practice / Practice for Reflection Conference*, Teaching and Educational Development Institute (TEDI), St Lucia, Qld

Available from Deakin Research Online:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30022328>

Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure that permission has been obtained for items included in Deakin Research Online. If you believe that your rights have been infringed by this repository, please contact drosupport@deakin.edu.au

Copyright : 1999, TEDI

Learning Environment Simulation of the Real World

by

Richard Reed
Lecturer in Property Studies
The University of Queensland

Introduction

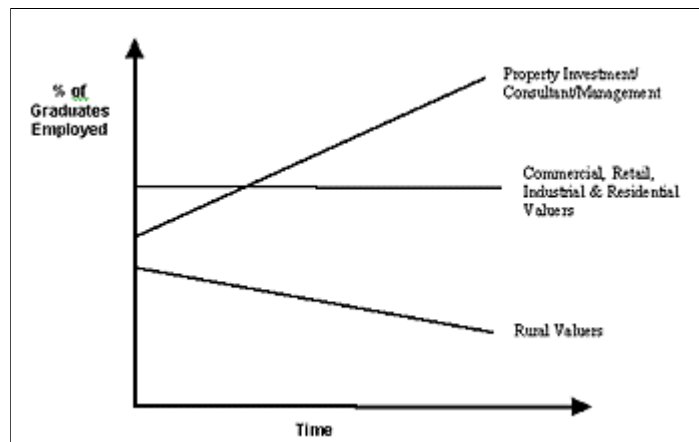
This paper analyses some of the unique circumstances which confronted a member of the lecturing staff in the Real Estate Valuation course at the Gatton campus of the University of Queensland during the late 1990's. Due to the rapidly changing educational needs of valuation students, and requirements of the respective accreditation bodies, the location of the course in Gatton (a rural town) was recognised as being remote from a major city and although relocating the course was inevitable, this could not happen overnight. From Semester 1, 2000 after several years of planning, the degree course relocates to the Department of Geographical Sciences and Planning, St Lucia. This paper discusses some of the challenges confronted and the strategies employed to simulate a city environment in the bush whilst waiting for the move.

Property Education in the 1990's

In the 1990's the focus of educating students in property valuation changed rapidly in Australia and overseas. At Gatton a 3 year Bachelor of Business degree (specialising in Property Studies) superseded an Associate Diploma, which was previously in existence for 20 years. This new degree had already changed its name twice during this decade and will do so again next year, emphasising the fast changing pace of property valuation. Advances in technology during the 1990's have affected most service industries and it is critical that educational institutions recognise the impact that these changes have and modify their courses accordingly, as was the case with the property studies course at the University of Queensland.

Today most graduating property students choose not to become registered valuers, with an even smaller percentage of those who do selecting a career specialising as a rural real estate valuer (see Diagram A). The employment opportunities for graduates are currently strong in the growing field of property investment, mainly due to the two-fold effect of compulsory superannuation and the overall ageing of the population.. Informal discussions with delegates at property conferences confirmed that this is a trend which has been occurring simultaneously in the property industry throughout the USA, UK and Europe.

Diagram A: Changing Distribution of Employment Opportunities in the Property Industry



Location of the Gatton Property Course

The Gatton Campus of the University of Queensland is situated approximately 90km west of Brisbane and 5km east of the township of Gatton (current population approximately 6000 residents). Established in the 19th Century to educate students in rural activities for which it was perfectly located, the campus was originally known as the Queensland Agricultural College. The surrounding region is well known as the 'Lockyer Valley' with an abundance of rich alluvial soil used for the intensive production of high quality fruit and vegetables. The dominant land use surrounding the Gatton Campus is 'rural' with small regional towns

(eg. Gatton, Laidley) supporting small retail and commercial centres.

In the 1970's a course was established at Gatton Campus (then known as the Queensland Agricultural College) which offered an Associate Diploma in Real Estate Valuation, with the majority of graduating students becoming registered real estate valuers and many involved in valuing rural properties. In the 1970's and 1980's there were numerous annual valuation fields trips to North Queensland and to rural properties in West Queensland, where a diversity of cane farms, grazing and cropping properties were valued for student assignment purposes.

The Gatton Valuation Course in the 1990's

In the 1990's the emphasis in valuation education at Gatton was increasingly placed upon new technology, involving spreadsheet computer programs and specialised valuation programs to value multi-tenanted commercial properties and shopping centres which are few and far between in the Lockyer Valley. Although graduating students must work with a property valuer for 2 years before qualifying for registration, the 3 year Bachelor degree is the only formal training undertaken for many student valuers prior to registration and the application of theory to 'real life' situations is critical. The days of offering the entire course without leaving the Gatton campus have long since passed.

The challenge at hand was to simulate the valuation challenges of the real world whilst surrounded by a feed lot, piggery and hay sheds. The location of the course was perfectly situated for rural valuations, but for involved commercial/retail/industrial valuations a minimum one hour bus journey each way was required with the majority of the time spent travelling. Considering that it was impractical to undertake weekly or fortnightly bus trips to Brisbane, it was essential that existing students would not be disadvantaged in the latter half of the 1990's, before the course moved to Brisbane in 2000. Alternative approaches were developed to meet the changing educational needs and the following assignment scenarios explain how the restrictions were overcome.

QB244 Property Development and Urban Planning Assignment - April 1999

As the majority of land in the Gatton district is either rural or residential, a site was required with a number of possible alternative land uses. The simulation of a real world scenario involved a parcel of land at the Brisbane Airport. The class was assembled into groupings of four students, with each group taking the role of a *property consultant company*. There were no specific instructions issued on how to distribute the workload within the group, and from this point onwards the students were only referred to as *property consultants*. The first stage involved a presentation by an executive of the Brisbane Airport Corporation to the students, who were issued the task of presenting a viable development proposal, followed by an on-site inspection. The students were then taken to the Brisbane City Council to hold discussions with the local town planner. Significantly this all-day visit to Brisbane was the only contact with the outside world by the students in the 13 week lecture program.

As well as the Brisbane Airport Corporation, the lecturer was also presented as a member of the *requesting party*, who fully explained the technical requirements of the task (assignment). In many ways the lecturer was simulated as a director and the first point of contact, even down to the issuing of a separate mobile telephone number to students, thus allowing direct availability at the discretion of the student. Most students used this option to call at various times for clarification and to discuss aspects of the task (assignment).

The final step was the submission of group development proposals for the property and an accompanying oral presentation during tutorials at Gatton. The presentations were approached with a professional attitude with student groups critically analysed opposing development proposals during question time with a high level of competitiveness. The development proposals were taken to a meeting at the Brisbane Airport with the original instructing executive where they were discussed and ranked. One proposal even included a detailed scale model of the site showing all buildings and improvements.

In the week following the oral presentations (during the lecture) a meeting was called to announce the winning tender (and assignment results). The attributes of each proposal were discussed including feedback from the Brisbane Airport Corporation and the results were then issued.

QB230 Statutory Valuation - Semester 1 1999

Unlike the mock court facilities at the TC Beirne School of Law (St Lucia campus), most courses at Gatton Campus have little exposure to the legislative processes or court proceedings. Due to decreases in property prices and associated 'busts', valuers are increasingly finding themselves in court defending their valuations and it is now an integral part of the property course. Many people are unaware that if a property sell for less than the valuation, the valuer can be taken to court and (at times successfully) sued for the

difference.

Students undertaking QB231 Statutory Valuation in 1999 were involved in a simulation of a Moot Court process at Gatton, despite the obvious locational disadvantages. After a one-off inspection of a property at Slacks Creek, specific lectures were conducted in a make-shift courtroom/lecture room at Gatton. This process involved other lecturing staff and witnesses who were required to be sworn in using a copy of "Land Valuation and Compensation".

These students entered each contest with a high degree of preparation and determination, most dressing appropriately in a three-piece suits with business attire for the ladies. The results were memorable spirited simulations of courtroom scenarios where the students appreciated the pressure and responsibilities associated with being an expert witness.

QB231 Advanced Valuation Interview Simulation

In 1998 the final year students were involved in an interview simulation process which contributed to 100% employment for all students. Prior to this process there was a strong need for the students to bridge the gap between graduation and full time employment. Most students did not have a valid resume before this simulation, or had ever undertaken an employment interview. Considering the strong competition for employment positions in that year, it was decided to combine their education and increase their employment prospects.

Two interview panels were assembled with three interviewers per panel, all taking place at Customs House, Brisbane. Although lecturing staff of the Gatton course were present on the panels, there were also current staff from Government bodies such as the Department of Public Housing and the Department of Natural Resources. These interviewers were unknown to the students and enforced a 'real world' approach. Each student was interviewed for 20 minutes, then given 10 minutes of instant feedback. Prior to the interview each student was required to submit a current resume to the interviewing panel. Additionally, the interview questions were for a hypothetical cadet valuer's position with the actual questions relating to their current studies in QB231. This ensured that the student/applicant studied the material thoroughly with the ability to orally explain answers - a key consideration in property education. The observations were that each student gained a better understanding of the lecture material, appreciated the interview scenario and benefited in the long term for employment prospects. Unsolicited emails and letters received during early 1999 from these students who are gainfully employed in the property industry confirm these conclusions.

Lecturer's Comments

These approaches were designed from an innovative angle to overcome circumstances which threatened to restrict the education of the Gatton property students prior to the move in 2000. Some important ingredients for its success which need to be emphasised include:

- the confidence level of the students to interact with the requesting party (lecturer) and the willingness of the students to join the scenario;
- the availability of a professional and respected organisation (Brisbane Airport Corporation) to appreciate the potential learning outcomes of this approach and also to dedicate resources on site at the presentation and afterwards with assessment and ranking (marking) of the tenders (assignments);
- the availability of the lecturer to be directly accessible, either at the university or at all times via a mobile phone - it was considered imperative that the students have the option of contacting the requesting party (lecturer) at all times;
- interim meetings and progress reports were held which enabled the suppliers (student groups) and the requesting party (lecturer) to distribute additional information where required.
- the relatively smaller student number (maximum about 30) enabling personal identification of each student eg. name, ability, etc.

Conclusion

One of the largest hurdles in education is for students to bridge the gap from theory to the real world. For the Property degree course at Gatton there were severe restrictions on time and resources which were addressed and overcome. Although using an unconventional approach for the long-running property course with limited resources, the strategies employed required substantial planning to coordinate activities and simulation scenarios.

From a learning perspective the students were extremely appreciative of the consultative processes used and the communication channels which remained open beyond normal lecturer's consultation hours via a mobile telephone, a point of amusement to some after the assignment was complete. The moot court experience was priceless when presented in a rural surrounding and the combined interview/learning

process paid dividends with the subsequent exam results and confirmation of employment.

There is no doubt that these simulation approaches, although not viable in all learning environments, improved the knowledge and understanding of the Gatton property students in an unavoidable temporary situation during the late 1990's.

Appendix A - Selected Student Questionnaire Responses

Question 1. As a student in the Property Studies course, please explain how you have been exposed to the outside world and the learning environment.

"This exposure to the outside world allowed us as students to have a basic understanding of the outside world"

Question 2. How has this closer relationship with the real world helped your learning process?

"I realise how individuals/professionals/institutions solve business problems"

"It has made the course more realistic and will provide a fast transformation into the real world"

"Contact with the real world is essential in this subject due to the ever-changing market"

Question 3. Please add any additional comments that you may have about the subjects you have studied at the university and the real world.

"This approach has shown me that there are many factors that can affect real estate, and how these effects occur"

[Conference home page](#) [About the conference](#) [Conference program](#) [Conference papers](#)

[TEDI Home](#) [UQ Home](#)

Teaching and Educational Development Institute,
The University of Queensland
Brisbane, Queensland 4072 Australia
Phone: +61 (7) 3365 2788
Authorised by: ACE Group, Teaching and Educational Development Institute
Modified: 8 March 2002
© 2002 The University of Queensland