



## Establishing a Sense of Connectedness Amongst Theology Students in Distance Education

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### Abstract

Student engagement is required for effective distance learning. Amongst other things, it is built by fostering connectedness amongst tutors, academic advisors, and students, and by providing high-quality content and materials through appropriate technologies. Students are more likely to succeed when they experience these different aspects as a coherent whole in their learning environment. Previously, Laidlaw College's Centre for Distance Learning refined its systems for course design and evaluated its provision of academic support. The present paper reports findings from a survey which explored student learning experiences by measuring perceptions of connectedness with tutors, advisors, and their fellow students; perceptions of an orientation event; and preferences for a variety of technologies through which students access course materials. The findings tentatively suggest that students experienced their study as an integrated whole. While there was significant variability in individual preferences relating to the use of technology, expectations that different demographic groups would have different preferences were not supported.

**Keywords:** distance education; social connectedness; technology; student preferences; transition pedagogy

### Introduction

High student engagement has been established amongst the many factors that contribute to effective distance learning (Kuh, 2009; Volery & Lord, 2000). Academic and tutor support, transition programmes and technologies used to deliver course materials and facilitate student learning aim to increase student engagement. Optimal feedback, appropriate tutor expectations, and effective interactions between tutors or advisors and students all play a part in maximising learning (for example, see Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Feldman, 2005).

However, rather than viewing the provision of support as a series of transactions to be optimised, the 'transition pedagogy' articulated by Kift, Nelson, and Clarke (2010) provides an integrated whole-of-institution approach. Briefly, Kift et al. (2010) outlined the evolution of an approach to managing students' first-year experience. This research showed that three central features that appeared to promote engagement: (1) integration of curricular and co-curricular learning experiences, (2) the 'curriculum' functioning as a central connecting concept for both students

and faculty, and (3) active partnerships between academic and professional staff in the institution.

On the other hand, Garrison's (2007) model of social, teaching, and cognitive presence identifies three core determinants of the student experience (Akyol & Garrison, 2013; Cui, Lockee, & Meng, 2013). When social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence are all high, student engagement is also likely to be high—resulting in improved performance by the students and their tertiary organisation. Social connectedness, which refers to the feelings of connection, trust, and interdependence within a group (or between different people in a learning community) is also considered to be a key aspect of student engagement (Benjamin, 2013; McCormick & Plucker, 2013).

Perceptions of social connectedness amongst students (Rovai, 2002) might reasonably be expected to relate to the social presence dimension of Garrison's model (2007). Similarly, perceptions of connectedness with tutors seemed to have the potential to reference teaching presence, while perceptions of connectedness with academic advisors might reasonably be associated with cognitive presence. Conceptualising student engagement and experience in this way was used to design a study of the experience of students in a tertiary organisation with the aim of improving the performance of the organisation as well as student success. In the context of distance learning, technology also plays a role in establishing, building, and maintaining student engagement by fostering cognitive development (Herrington & Kervin, 2007). Further, well-designed materials actively contribute to effective learning (Norton et al., 2012). Technologies that enable higher degrees of interactivity (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010), and more control by the student over the order of engagement with learning materials (Christou & Dinov, 2010), have also been noted as further improving learning outcomes. The main research questions therefore were:

1. Did the pattern of student perceptions about social connectedness indicate an integrated experience of the organisation as a whole?
2. What were the student preferences for the different types of technology, including more interactive formats?

## **The context of the study**

The study took place at Laidlaw College, which has students at campuses in Auckland and Christchurch, and distance students who study through the Centre for Distance Learning (CDL). Most of these students live throughout New Zealand, although a few are based overseas. Laidlaw College is one of the larger private tertiary education (PTE) providers in New Zealand, and is a typical PTE in that it focuses on a small number of disciplines compared with universities and polytechnics. Laidlaw College's distance learning programme is the largest distance theological education programme in Australasia.

The research team consisted of the CDL Manager, two CDL academic advisors, and a lecturer who was based in Laidlaw College's School of Education. This group came together to find ways to make further improvements to student experiences of study through CDL. Previously, documentation and course designs were revised (Cowie & Nichols, 2010). Since 2008, CDL has employed advisors specifically to provide support for students in a range of areas judged to be outside the responsibility of course tutors (Nichols, 2010). These interventions had significantly improved student experience, engagement, and performance (see Appendix A). The present study sought to explore how well student experience was integrated, in order to identify areas for possible further improvement.

All students at CDL are expected to attend an online orientation event before the start of their first semester of study. Each course within a student's programme has its own tutor, who provides course-related support, moderates online discussions, and grades student work. In addition, CDL employs two part-time advisors who provide integrated learning support for all enrolled students on a wide range of matters that are related to their study, but beyond the scope of the tutors' responsibilities. These matters include programme planning, course selection, and developing academic skills such as assignment writing.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

All enrolled students at CDL ( $n = 250$ ) were sent an email about 3 weeks after the start of the semester, inviting them to participate in an online survey. The sample obtained consisted of  $n = 114$  respondents (40% response rate), of whom 51% were male and 49% were female. The respondents' ages were relatively evenly distributed, ranging from those in their 20s to those in their 60s. English was the first language for 88% of respondents, and over half held at least an undergraduate degree before enrolling in their current course of study.

### **Measures**

A number of constructs were measured in a self-report survey that also included questions covering age, gender, and prior educational achievement. Qualitative data was also collected about each construct via open responses to a question. The quantitative measures generally used 5-point Likert-type scales labelled from Strongly Disagree through to Strongly Agree.

The students' sense of connectedness with other students, tutors, and academic advisors was assessed through a number of items selected and adapted from the Community of Inquiry measure developed by Arbaugh et al. (2008) and the Classroom Community Scale (Rovai, 2002). A number of further items were developed by the research team to measure perceptions of value about different technologies used to access course content, including printed and electronic readings and other digital media provided via CD-ROM and the internet.

When the intent was to measure a construct through a number of quantitatively rated items, the selected items were checked for coherence as a single construct by using factor analysis (principal components analysis with varimax rotation). A Harman test (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) was used to confirm unidimensionality (Eigenvalues  $> 1$  for primary extracted components only; no significant loading on secondary extracted components). Reliability of the constructed variables was also checked.

When qualitative responses were sought from respondents, the responses were gathered and read over by the research team. The research team conducted a simple content analysis by noting particularly salient themes and phrases, and applying them to interpret the data. The full questionnaire is included in Appendix B.

## **Findings**

The statistical analyses are presented first, followed by consideration of the two research questions. The following unidimensional constructs were supported by the adequate factor analytical results shown in Table 1:

1. Perceptions of connectedness with other students
2. Perceptions of connectedness with tutors
3. Perceptions of connectedness with academic advisors

4. Positivity towards the orientation programme

For each of these constructs, all the potential items loaded on to the first extracted component in each respective factor analyses. The additive combination of all potential items is used from this point on as a measure for each of these constructs.

**Table 1** Component loadings for the four constructs produced by exploratory factor analysis (n = 114)

	Component loadings	1st extracted Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Cronbach's alpha
<i>Perceptions of connectedness with other students</i>		2.02	53.4%	.82
I feel comfortable participating in the course discussions.	0.59			
I feel that I'm getting to know some course participants.	0.55			
I feel connected to some course participants.	0.61			
I feel comfortable disagreeing with other course participants.	0.51			
I feel that my point of view is heard by other course participants.	0.52			
Online discussions are valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.	0.68			
<i>Perceptions of connectedness with tutors</i>		2.36	61.6%	.87
The tutor reinforces the development of a sense of community among course participants.	0.69			
The tutor provides feedback in a timely fashion.	0.51			
I feel that I'm getting to know the tutor(s).	0.71			
I feel connected to the tutor(s).	0.71			
I feel that my point of view is heard by the tutor(s).	0.56			
I feel comfortable disagreeing with the tutor(s).	0.55			
<i>Perceptions of connectedness with academic advisors</i>		2.39	62.8%	.90
<i>Academic advisors...</i>				
are easy to get in touch with.	0.52			
give me as much time as I need.	0.57			
encourage me to contact them for help.	0.53			
encourage me to express my thoughts and feelings.	0.59			
give me accurate information about course requirements.	0.47			
consider my personal abilities and interests when advising me about courses or programmes of study.	0.69			
help me make important educational decisions.	0.68			

<i>Positivity towards the orientation programme</i>		2.48	71.6%	.85
My transition into study was smooth.	0.64			
My transition into study was enjoyable.	0.62			
My transition into study was stressful (reverse coded).	0.93			
My transition into study was confusing (reverse coded).	0.9			

**Research question 1:** Did the pattern of student perceptions about social connectedness indicate an integrated experience of the organisation as a whole?

Students were generally positive about how connected they felt to advisors, tutors and other students (see Table 2). Respondents were also generally positive towards the transition programme, although there was a larger variability amongst respondents.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics for students' perceptions of social connectedness ( $n = 114$ )

	Advisor connectedness	Tutor connectedness	Student connectedness	Positivity towards transition
Mean*	4.14	3.92	3.85	3.71
S.D	0.58	0.63	0.58	0.78

Note: \* Scores represent a mean from 5-point ratings, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

Significant correlations were observed between each of the measures of connectedness respectively, as well as with attitudes towards the transition programme. Most notably, the relationship between perceptions of connectedness with tutors and perceptions of connectedness with other students was moderately strong ( $r = .67$ ;  $p < .01$ ) (see Table 3). No differences between perceptions of connectedness and age, gender, or prior education were observed.

**Table 3** Correlations between the four measures of social connectedness

	Positivity towards transition	Student connectedness	Tutor connectedness
Advisor connectedness	0.38**	0.34**	0.34**
Tutor connectedness	0.28*	0.67**	
Student connectedness	0.31**		

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$

**Research question 2:** What were the student preferences for the different types of technology, including more interactive formats?

There was significant variability amongst students' preferences for different formats for the delivery of learning resources, although printed formats were preferred more strongly than either CD-ROM or online delivery (see Table 4). Other findings included a strong preference for CD-ROM for delivery of video materials (51% preferred CD-ROM and 16% preferred online), a strong preference for the use of tablets over smartphones for accessing learning materials, and a moderate interest in seeing the development of more interactive materials (25% rated more interactivity as a significant potential improvement over the status quo). It was notable that almost no differences or relationships emerged between gender, age, or previous education on

any of the variables of interest, including preferences for different technologies. A modest negative correlation between age and preference for online materials ( $r = .22$ ;  $p = .03$ ) was observed.

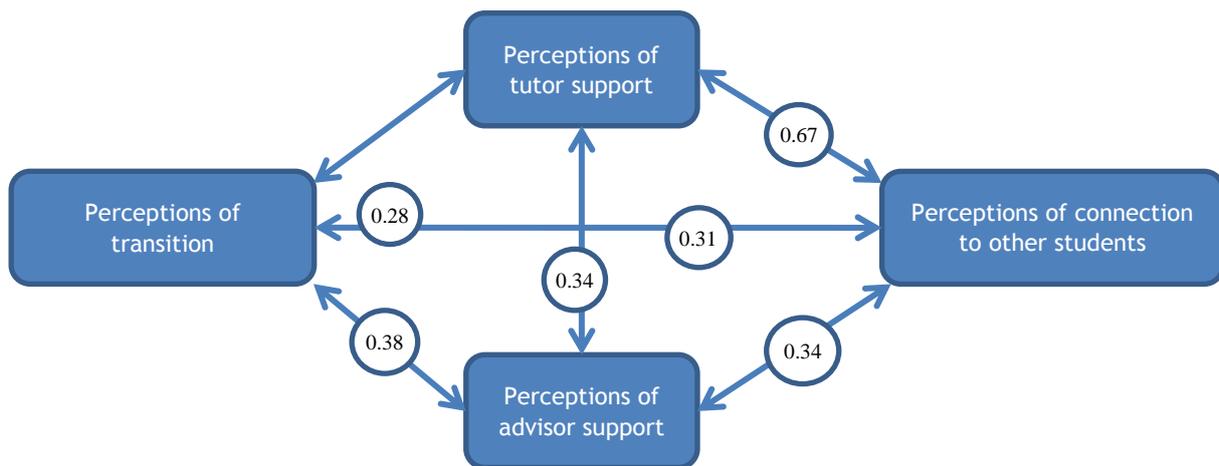
**Table 4** Descriptive statistics of students' preferences for different types of learning resources ( $n = 114$ )

Overall rating for preference of format of materials	Mean	Printed 4.44	CD-ROM 3.43	Online 3.32
	S.D.	0.85	1.15	1.23
% who preferred specific format to access video resources *	No response 13%	No preference 20%	CD-ROM 51%	Online 16%
% who felt that fully interactive materials would improve their learning experience *	No response 13%	No significant improvement 32%	Small improvement 29%	Significant improvement 25%
% who would access material via tablet or smartphone **	Learning guide	Tablet 37%	Smartphone 21%	
	Course readings	41%	20%	
	Multimedia clips	40%	22%	

Note: \* Respondents chose one option only; \*\* Respondents could select several options

## Discussion

There were few relationships between demographic variables (such as age, gender, or prior education) and other variables of interest. Students experienced their study through CDL in broadly similar ways (individual differences notwithstanding), irrespective of gender, age, or level of education. This resonates with other findings that individual variability in preferences for technology is generally larger than differences between different demographic groups (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Smith, 2013).



**Figure 1** Observed univariate correlations and tentative relationships between the four measures of student perceptions

Students' sense of being connected with advisors related to their sense of connection with tutors and other students. In Garrison's (2007) terms, the perception of social presence related to perceptions of both cognitive and teaching presence. Those who experienced the transition programme positively were also more likely to feel connected to advisors, tutors, and other students (see Figure 1). These findings tentatively affirm that students do experience their study as an integrated whole, as conceptualised within the 'transition pedagogy' of Kift et al. (2010). It is therefore important for educational institutions to align staff interactions with students throughout the process of their learning. Our relatively small context may have enabled such alignment due to the small number of staff involved, and their shared working environment. Larger institutions are recommended to ensure that structures shaping the interactions of both tutors and advisors with students facilitate an aligned experience, rather than one where student experiences are incongruent or fragmented.

In relation to preferences for technology, it was clear that printed formats are still preferred for the type of study that is typical at CDL. This was observed for both genders, all educational backgrounds and, in general, across a wide range of ages. However, older respondents were slightly less likely to prefer online materials than younger respondents, despite the fact that no age-based differences emerged on any other technology- or format-related questions. This pattern of results may suggest that, in a given student body, some individuals will naturally gravitate to electronically delivered content, and some to more traditionally delivered content (i.e., print), thereby modestly supporting critiques of the 'digital native' hypothesis (Bennett et al., 2008; Prensky, 2001). An assumption that most students will eventually prefer electronically delivered resources is unlikely to be warranted because other individual or personality factors are likely to be more important than age.

The observed preference for printed formats may relate to the nature of theological study, which involves reading long texts. Comprehension of high-level content in long texts is greater when they are printed than when the student is reading from a screen (Mangen, Walgermo, & Brønck, 2013; Sanchez & Wiley, 2009). However, it is not yet clear whether these preferences relate uniquely to theological study or to theological students, or are shared with other similar disciplines in the humanities. A comparison between the present context and other contexts would be one way to explore this. We would therefore recommend that, where engagement with long texts is required, the potential advantage of traditional formats for understanding complex concepts is considered. Other learning tasks involving searchable text clearly require electronic formats. A balance based on the mix of learning tasks expected of students and the media is important.

It was also interesting that, amongst our respondents, few indicated that they preferred to access video content online. The use of CD-ROM for this purpose remains the most highly preferred option by a wide margin. Respondents' comments regarding the cost of data via capped internet might indicate the cause of this, supporting more general observations made elsewhere (Mirza & Beltran, 2014; Paynter & Chung, 2003). It will be interesting to see whether the uncapped internet plans that are starting to become available in New Zealand have any effect on this preference. It is also possible that being able to access video content immediately from a local computer is preferable to a streamed viewing via the internet, particularly if networks are problematic.

The relative lack of interest in using smartphones for accessing course materials suggests that these phones are not considered by many to be a serious tool for tertiary study. However, the much higher interest in tablet computing suggests that designing course materials with the mobile learner in mind is increasing in importance.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, these findings should be treated with caution. Although the sample size is sufficient for the kinds of analysis that have been undertaken, a larger sample would provide more confidence regarding the relationships observed. In addition, as with all invited samples, a degree of self-selection is likely to have occurred, although the demographic distributions of the sample generally matched the variability in the target population (as known from administrative records). As with all self-report-based studies, there is likely to be a difference between how respondents actually feel and how they report their feelings. We noted in the qualitative data that some respondents did not appear to accurately distinguish between tutors and academic advisors. This could be interpreted as further evidence of a holistic student experience. However, if some respondents did not make this distinction when answering the quantitative questions in the survey, then the magnitude of the inter-correlations reported in Figure 1 may be inflated.

## Conclusion and future research

The student learning experiences that were explored in this study with a survey measuring perceptions of connectedness with tutors, advisors and their fellow students, perceptions of an orientation event and preferences for a variety of technologies through which students access course materials, suggest that students did experience their study as an integrated whole. While there was significant variability in individual preferences relating to the use of technology, expectations that different demographic groups would have different preferences were not supported. The lively discussion at the biennial conference of DEANZ (the national association for open flexible and distance learning) indicated interest in this topic.

Theology distance students at Laidlaw College's CDL feel generally positive about their experience of study, and they experience their study as a generally integrated whole. Students' preferences for technology are more variable than differences of demographic groupings such as age or gender. While there is some support for innovation towards newer technologies, older technologies are preferred by a significant proportion of respondents—possibly because of the lengthy nature of the documents studied, and lack of robust internet access in some locations.

There are some suggestions for future research drawing on the findings and the literature reviewed earlier in this paper. While this study sought to explore student perceptions of their experience of study, we did not examine the perceptions of staff. Comparing staff perceptions with those gained from students could more comprehensively illuminate whether Kift et al.'s (2010) transition pedagogy is being implemented. One notable feature of the present context is that students interact with both academic advisors and tutors throughout their studies. Exploring tutors' and advisors' perceptions of course integration could help us to understand how well those who 'teach' and those who 'support learning' are working together towards student success. In addition, students' views of this tutor-or-advisor dynamic could also be a valuable extension. Other possible avenues for future research include exploring patterns of engagement through a semester and/or performance outcomes such as grades. Another useful possibility would be to examine whether students' purpose in studying contributes to their sense of connectedness or preference for different technologies.

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## Biographical notes

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Nigel is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at Laidlaw College in Auckland, New Zealand. He previously worked as a research coordinator at AUT University and has taught history, psychology, and theory of knowledge in K–12 schools in New Zealand and the Philippines. His research interests include justice issues in cross-cultural encounters, the effect of internet technologies on society, and the centrality of relationship to effective teaching and learning.

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Charles has a background of electrical engineering in the telecommunications industry. Charles joined the teaching staff of Laidlaw College in Palmerston North in 2001. He assumed leadership of the Centre for Distance Learning at the beginning of 2003. Charles's research interests include distance learning technologies and the emerging church movement.

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Naomi is an academic advisor working with Laidlaw College's distance learning students, guiding them with programme planning and study skills. She also works with subject-area experts in the design and review of Laidlaw's distance learning courses, and in the online learning management system team.

### Grace Sylvester

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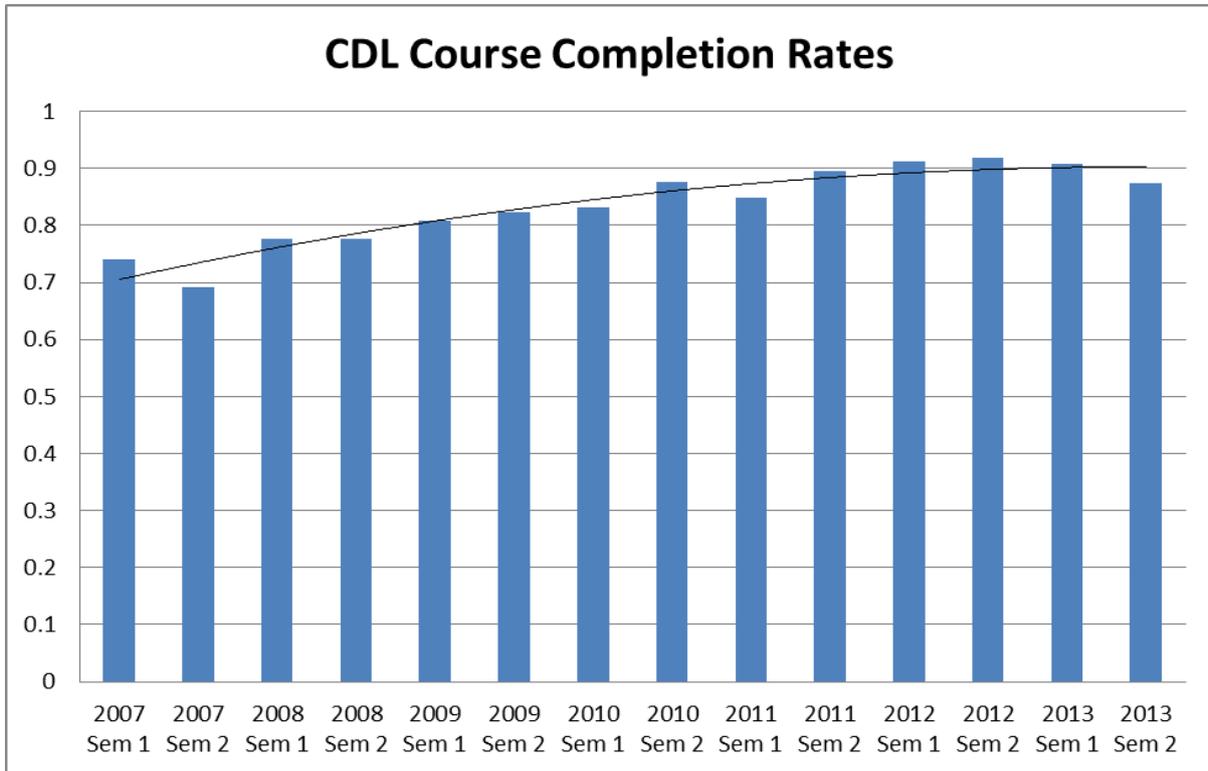
Grace joined Laidlaw College as a part-time student support coordinator in the Centre for Distance Learning in 2008. She has extensive experience in the New Zealand tertiary sector, particularly in teaching and learning, curriculum development, and review. Her current interest is in providing an integrated approach to the student learning experience.

Smith, N. V., Erlam, C., Quirke, N., & Sylvester, G. (2014). Establishing a sense of connectedness amongst theology students in distance education. *Journal of Open, Flexible and Distance Learning*, 18(2), [11–28].



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## Appendix A: Improvements in CDL Course Completion Rates from 2007 to 2013 (Based on Nichols, 2010)



## **Appendix B: Student Experience Questionnaire (derived from a number of sources including Arbough, 2008 and Rovai, 2002).**

Welcome. Laidlaw College wants to have a better understanding of your experience as a student. This survey is part of our effort to continue improving how you experience studying through CDL. First, could you tell us a little about yourself.

1) What gender are you?

Male

Female

2) What age range are you?

Under 20 yrs

20 - 30 yrs

30 - 40 yrs

40 - 50 yrs

50 - 60 yrs

Over 60 yrs

3) What is your highest level of educational achievement (not including your current study at Laidlaw)?

Completed primary school

Completed NCEA Level 1 (or equivalent eg. School Certificate)

Completed NCEA Level 2 (or equivalent eg. 6th form cert. / University Entrance)

Completed NCEA Level 3 (or equivalent eg. University Bursary Exam)

Completed a tertiary qualification up to Level 4 (eg. Certificate)

Completed a tertiary qualification at Levels 5 or 6 (eg. Diploma)

Completed undergraduate degree (eg. Bachelors or Graduate Diploma)

Completed postgraduate degree (eg. Masters or PhD)

4) Are you currently studying through CDL?

Yes

No

5) Is English your first language? (including if you have native-level proficiency in English)

Yes

No

Thinking now about your experience of studying through CDL so far, please rate the following in terms of how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

6) With reference to academic advice and support such as enrolment, course selection, and study skills, please rate your agreement with the following statements:

CDL academic advisors;

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
are easy to get in touch with	1	2	3	4	5
give me as much time as I need	1	2	3	4	5
encourage me to contact them for help	1	2	3	4	5
encourage me to express my thoughts and feelings	1	2	3	4	5
give me accurate information about course requirements	1	2	3	4	5
consider my personal abilities and interests when advising me about courses or programmes of study	1	2	3	4	5
help me make important educational decisions	1	2	3	4	5

7) What could your advisors do to improve the quality of your learning experience?

8) With reference to the tutor(s), and the interactions you have with them through online discussions, about assignment grading and other in-course matters, please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The tutor reinforces the development of a sense of community among course participants.	1	2	3	4	5
The tutor provides feedback in a timely fashion.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that I'm getting to know the tutor(s)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel connected to the tutor(s)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that my point of view is heard by the tutor(s)	1	2	3	4	5
I feel comfortable disagreeing with the tutor(s)	1	2	3	4	5

9) What could your tutor(s) do to improve your learning experience?

10) With reference to other participants in your course(s);

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable participating in the course discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that I'm getting to know some course participants.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel connected to some course participants.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel comfortable disagreeing with other course participants.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that my point of view is heard by other course participants.	1	2	3	4	5
Online discussions are valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5

Next, we'd like to find out a little about your experience of beginning study through CDL.

11) Please rate your transition into studying through CDL, with reference to the statements below

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My transition into study was smooth	1	2	3	4	5
My transition into study was enjoyable	1	2	3	4	5
My transition into study was stressful	1	2	3	4	5
My transition into study was confusing	1	2	3	4	5

12) How could we further improve your experience of starting study for the first time through CDL?

13) When you began studying through CDL, did you upload the orientation assignment on time?

Yes

I uploaded an assignment after the due date

No

I don't recall any orientation assignment

14) If you're in your first year, can you tell us a little about your first week of study. What were the things you remember about your 'start' with CDL?

15) Thinking now about how you engage with the readings or textbooks you are provided with, please rate each of the following statements in terms of how much you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a purpose in mind when I read.	1	2	3	4	5
I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it.	1	2	3	4	5
I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	1	2	3	4	5
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
I highlight information in the text to help me remember it.	1	2	3	4	5
I write summaries to reflect on key ideas in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
When a text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I'm reading.	1	2	3	4	5
I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	1	2	3	4	5

16) Are there any other comments you'd like to make about engaging with readings?

17) Thinking now about the Learning Guide that accompanies each course, please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can identify important course goals in the learning guide.	1	2	3	4	5
I can identify important due dates/time frames in the learning guide.	1	2	3	4	5
Discussion questions increase my interest in course issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Reflection on course content and discussions helps me understand fundamental concepts.	1	2	3	4	5

18) How could we further improve the Learning Guides we produce to accompany each course?

Your CDL course materials are delivered to you in a variety of formats. We would like to find out more about how you engage with these various formats.

19) Thinking about how you access the Learning Guide, please indicate your preference for each of the formats below.

	I don't like this format at all	Neutral	I like this format a lot
In printed form	1	2	3
From a CD-ROM	1	2	3
Online via Moodle	1	2	3

20) Thinking now about the course readings you are provided with, please indicate your preference for the formats in which they are offered.

	I don't like this format at all	Neutral	I like this format a lot
In printed form	1	2	3
From a CD-ROM	1	2	3
Online via Moodle	1	2	3

21) Some CDL course materials make use of audio or video recordings. These are usually available via CD-ROM, and sometimes also online via Moodle. Given that accessing video over the internet demands a high quality broadband internet connection, which platform for delivering audio or video content do you prefer?

I prefer to access media content via CD-ROM

I prefer to access media content online via Moodle

I have no preference about how I access media content

The digital formats we currently use are generally like a collection of files or documents. This is the case whether they are stored on a CD-ROM, or arranged in folders in Moodle. We are considering developing course materials that are more fully interactive, like a web page where you would be able to click hyperlinks throughout the text to access content that is related to what you are looking at.

22) How much of an improvement would fully interactive course materials be over what you currently receive?

This would not be a significant improvement for me

This would improve my learning experience a little

This would improve my learning experience a lot

23) We are considering optimising our course materials for delivery to mobile devices, such as tablets or smartphones. Please indicate which of the following you would use to access course materials, if they were optimised for that platform (Tick all that apply).

I would access the Learning Guide via a tablet

I would access the Learning Guide via a smartphone

I would access course readings via a tablet

I would access course readings via a smartphone

I would access multimedia clips via a tablet

I would access multimedia clips via a smartphone

Note that Moodle is available on these mobile platforms already, but materials may not be optimised for high quality display.

Finally, we have just a few more questions about you.

24) Is studying through CDL your first experience of distance learning?

Yes

No

25) Which of the following best describes how long you have studied through CDL?

I'm in my first year

I'm in my second year

I'm in my third or later year

26) What level or levels of study are you currently enrolled in at Laidlaw? (Select all those that apply to you)

Level 5

Level 6

Level 7

27) Please indicate whether you study part-time or full-time.

I study part-time

I study full-time

28) Lastly, if you would like to go into the draw for a \$100 book voucher, please enter your name here. In order to maintain anonymity, we will not connect your name to any of your responses to this survey. It will only be used for the purpose of selecting the lucky winner of the draw.