

# What's Uni Like?

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**What's Uni Like? is a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) which aims to increase enrolments of low socio-economic status (SES) students to Australian universities. The MOOC was developed by Charles Sturt University and funded through the Federal Government's Higher Education Participation and Partnership Programme.**

### Institution & Institutional Context

Charles Sturt University (CSU) is Australia's largest regional tertiary education institution with a footprint covering most of regional New South Wales. CSU is amongst the top three Australian distance education providers delivering online courses to over 30,000 students.

### What is the case study about?

What's Uni Like? is a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) which aims to increase enrolments of low SES students to Australian universities. It is a free, accessible source of information in which students build an awareness of tertiary entry achievement levels and explores aspects of the transition to university in a flexible, interactive digital environment. The MOOC is aimed at students/youth aged 14-22 from low SES backgrounds. The course addresses academic writing and reading, raises awareness of university as a post school option, and parallels university expectations.

What's Uni Like? consists of a series of learning modules comprising videos (presenter, claymation & vox pops) interactive exercises and discussion forums which students can work through. It also builds important digital literacy and online learning skills for students.

The course contributes to the attainment of the Australian Government's ambition that 20% of domestic undergraduate students be from low SES backgrounds by 2020.

### What is the issue or need you are addressing?

What's Uni Like? promotes the benefits of and encourages participation in higher education. This is achieved through an Learning Management System (LMS) where students interact individually and amongst themselves creating new information, new knowledge. As much as the students' cognition is guided to specific learning outcomes, the content in the different modules and their personal interactions assist them to connect with the information that is relevant to them. This information assists them in making more informed decisions when choosing to further their studies through higher education.

The goals of the What's Uni Like? are:

- I. to encourage and increase the aspirations of students and youth across Australia from low SES backgrounds, to participate in higher education;
- II. to assist in developing a greater understanding of university culture and expectations in order to support effective participation.

### Digital platform

Fundamental to the success of this MOOC is an appropriate platform on which to deliver the content. The selected platform facilitates the achievement of project deliverables in terms of quality, timeframe and cost. The platform ensures reliable and easy access and registration to all students regardless of location across Australia, adheres to necessary privacy and security requirements and provides access to suitable data analysis and tracking functionality. Additionally, the platform's user experience provides an online environment

that facilitates the development of students' digital literacy and online learning skills.

What's Uni Like? uses a proprietary Cloud Management System (CMS) owned by Janison Pty Ltd. This CMS is built upon current robust and secure technologies and is designed to deliver easily customisable content across a variety of platforms and devices (responsive design). The content of the course is designed on a modular system that is scalable, intuitive and very user-friendly. The platform allows the administrators to have full control of the content. This content can be adapted or modified at any time without any disruption to the course.

What's Uni Like? was rolled out in July 2015 and is expected to be available to students until June 2017.

### The Outcomes of What's Uni Like? are:

- Develop a greater understanding of university expectations and culture
- Increase aspirations of low SES students to engage with the benefits of higher education
- Increase confidence of low SES students in their ability to succeed in higher education
- Encourage participation in and engagement with academic language and learning
- Increase students' writing and reading skills for pre tertiary achievement
- Build social capital for low SES students in developing their knowledge about universities and their ability to participate and succeed in higher education

The course assists in developing an improved understanding of university culture and expectations. This is to support an effective participation in the academic engagement. The needs addressed in What's Uni Like? are intended to breakdown of the walls that stand between low SES students and admission to university. Social capital is built through information, relevant exercises and quizzes and overcoming misconceptions of how to attend university.

## Issues & challenges

The two main challenges encountered to make this course available to students were the promotion of its existence and student participation. As the course is hosted online, the course competes against a myriad of other digital content for the attention and engagement of students.

Promotion strategies are implemented to bring the awareness of its presence and benefits to relevant stakeholders. A number of schools and career advisors across the CSU footprint are using the course as an out-of-the-box resource to tertiary education awareness to their students. More recently, TAFE and universities Aspiration and widening participation programs have been contacted to implement the course to assist them with their programs. Follow up and support with the rollout will be take place before the end of 2015.

## Collaboration with sector.

Being a non-branded online course that promotes university study in general, What's Uni Like? is a valuable resource to any widening participation program of all Australian tertiary education providers. Currently the course is being actively promoted and utilised in over 70 regional NSW schools through Future Moves, CSU's aspiration program.

Other collaboration to utilise the MOOC is taking place through the Bridges to Higher Education (Macquarie University, the University of Sydney, UTS, ACU, WSU). What's Uni Like? has participated in a number tertiary education promotion campaigns with Bridges to Higher Education across regional NSW. The widening participation programs of these universities have become acquainted with

the usability of the online course. These programs are now looking to implement the course as another resource when reaching to new students.

More recently What's Uni Like? was presented in Brisbane to the Queensland University consortium with a strong interest from the widening participation programs of five universities (QUT, UQ, USQ, Griffith university, ACU). There are currently talks to organise further demonstrations for the course to be implemented by the widening participation programs of these universities.

Career advisors in particular find the MOOC to be a very valuable resource to use with students from different age groups. They see What's Uni Like? as an out-of-the-box ready to use resource that answers many of the students' questions when these are considering post-school options.

## Trials and focus groups

Prior to rolling out the MOOC to the sector, a set of three monitored trials was carried out with focus groups (Year 10 and Year 11 students). These tests delivered invaluable insight from end users' perspective about level of engagement with the course and general user experience. After this feedback some aspects of the following items were implemented: choice of presenter, module navigation, the way information was presented, set of activities and learning outcomes.

As the course is now being widely used, further ongoing focus groups tests are being conducted. The findings of these tests and general feedback that is received is analysed to be implemented in regular minor tweaks or larger iteration updates to the course.

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### Contact person and details

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