



## Case Study: Western Sydney University improves student outcomes with a blended approach facilitated by WileyPLUS.

Wiley's online learning environment WileyPLUS has facilitated a blended learning approach in Western Sydney University unit Accounting Information for Managers (AIM) since Spring 2013.

**Since its implementation the blended approach has delivered a highly engaging learning experience for students resulting in increased pass rates, decreased fail rates and improved student satisfaction.**

In fact, results indicate that over 400 students have passed the unit in the blended mode who would likely have failed it under the traditional delivery.

This case study outlines how the blended approach was implemented, its impact on student outcomes and staff satisfaction, and recommendations from AIM faculty.

### QUICK FACTS

- Core unit across nine disciplines
- Approximately 3000 students per year
- Diverse cohort; students span 25 degree programs
- Delivered in traditional lecture and tutorial format prior to Spring 2013

### CHALLENGES PRIOR TO BLENDED DELIVERY

- Students transitioning from school to university
- Low engagement
- Poor understanding of relevance of the unit
- Failure rates approximately 36 percent

### HIGHLIGHTS

Key results from blended learning approach facilitated by WileyPLUS in AIM unit



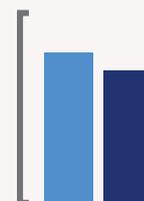
Pass rates increased  
**62% to 74%**  
in first year



Credit and  
Distinction grades  
increased



Improved  
participation in  
online homework



Compulsory fail  
grades decreased by  
**4%**

## Building a flexible and engaging learning experience

In Spring 2013 the university's School of Business embraced a new emphasis on blended learning driven by the philosophy that 'those doing the work are doing the learning'.

In line with this new focus, AIM was re-designed to create a flexible and engaging learning experience, blending face-to-face and interactive online learning.

The approach was designed to boost students' engagement – not only with content but with the process of becoming more independent learners.

“ It is important that we provide scaffolding and support to help students navigate the transition from high school to university and become effective lifelong learners. ”

Graeme Mitchell, Unit Coordinator

### THEMES UNDERLYING BLENDED APPROACH

- Reframe role of tutor as guide, not sage
- Promote collaborative peer-to-peer learning
- Safe environment for trial and error
- Connecting learning to authentic workplace experience
- Active learning via regular practice using online resources

## Implementing a blended approach with WileyPLUS

For Blended Learning Advisor Paul Macmullen, the thinking behind the re-design was 'what kinds of activities should students be doing in face-to-face classes, and how can we use the online environment to prepare them for these activities?'

WileyPLUS provides the platform, tools and resources to support this preparation.

Through this interactive online learning environment students access the textbook reading, rich media content such as video and animations, and extra resources such as practice quizzes with instant feedback.

**WileyPLUS therefore facilitates a blended learning approach where students are encouraged to read, study and practice independently – and come to class prepared for deeper engagement and discussion.**

The collaboration between AIM faculty and Wiley created an effective blend of WileyPlus resources with Western Sydney University produced resources. This, combined with on-campus teaching, delivered an engaging blended learning experience for students. This rich combination of online resources and activities included:

- Mini-lecture 'vodcasts' and videos with Western Sydney academics from various disciplines relating AIM to different areas of study
- Assigned readings and interactive practice activities
- Weekly instructions for preparing and completing tutorial classwork
- Homework accessible online, incentivised and automatically marked
- An online, open-book mid-session exam

“ These resources brought the lectures to life and showed to students the relevance of the topics they were learning. ”

Graeme Mitchell

Students were incentivised to complete the online learning activities through an adapted marking scheme which allocated 400 points for homework over 14 weeks, combining marks for online and in-class tutorial problems to equal 20 percent of the final grade.

## Blended mode leads to better outcomes

By the third delivery of AIM as a blended unit with WileyPLUS, pass rates had increased from 62 to 74 percent and there was a reciprocal impact on failure rates.

With students much more engaged in the unit, improvements in pass and failure rates have been maintained.

In the three offerings since Spring 2014, average pass rates have been maintained at 72 percent, with average overall failure rates being 23 percent.



Pass rates increased 62% to 74%



Reciprocal impact on failure rates



Average credit grades increased from 18% to 24%



Distinction grades increased from 8% to 12%



Online participation in homework increased



Average mid-session exam result of 80%



Compulsory Fail grades decreased by 4%

## Satisfied students, energised staff

Surveys indicate that students' satisfaction with the unit design and relevance improved in the first year of the blended mode. Anecdotal feedback from faculty suggests students displayed greater persistence, resilience, engagement and general enjoyment in the unit. Similarly, Mitchell notes the benefits gained in the upskilling, energy and engagement of the faculty staff.

“**Sessional staff in this unit have been re-energised by this new teaching mode, and are more enthusiastic than ever about helping students learn.**”

Graeme Mitchell

## Faculty recommendations

Both Mitchell and Macmullen suggest that while the re-design of AIM required a significant initial investment of resources, they are now fluidly working within a blended learning delivery that is resulting in improved student engagement, satisfaction and performance.

“**AIM is a great example of blended learning that conforms to the definition of integrating the best aspects of face-to-face and online interactions. Our blended learning design created an environment that successfully offered a flexible and engaging learning experience.**”

Paul Macmullen,  
Blended Learning Advisor

Mitchell adds, 'You do have to devote an investment up front, but once it's there it really does run itself. And it ultimately saves you time.'

The WileyPLUS platform and ongoing support provided by Wiley is considered integral to the successful implementation of the approach.

Mitchell attributes the success of the AIM re-design to 'the attitude of Wiley, the blended learning team at the university and the collaborative effort of all staff using WileyPLUS'.



**Critical to our success was the relationship we had with Wiley.**



**Graeme Mitchell**

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

Incentivised  
online homework

Collaboration  
between Unit  
Coordinator,  
Blended Learning  
Advisor & Wiley

Offering early  
success and visibility  
of progress with  
openbook mid-  
session exam

Training tutors in  
blended learning

## KEY BENEFITS

- Improved student readiness and engagement
- Improved student learning outcomes
- Real-time visibility on student progress

## SUMMARY

- Delivering AIM in a blended mode facilitated by WileyPLUS has improved student readiness, engagement, satisfaction and performance in the unit.
- Collaboration between Unit Coordinator, Blended Learning Advisor and publisher was integral to the successful redesign of AIM.
- Shifting to a blended learning approach requires significant initial investment by faculty, but ultimately saves time and delivers significant benefits to both faculty and students.