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Student experience of intensive delivery in large scale studio-based learning

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the effect of the intensive mode of delivery on the student experience in large scale studio-based learning, by reporting on the shift to block teaching at Griffith University's Bachelor of Film and Screen Media Production. We use quantitative student experience data over a six-year period (the three years prior to the introduction and the first three full years of the block model) for all 8 first-year core courses and 11 second year elective courses, and perform a reflexive thematic analysis of 3,036 comments in student experience surveys of 46 first-year core course instances. We conclude that the intensive mode of delivery benefits active learning strategies, can create a stronger student-teacher rapport and positively impacts students' perception of their own learning. We argue that students might react more positively to iterative feedback and continuous assessment, and that instructors need to carefully consider volume of learning as well as avoid course overlaps and overly complex course designs. The article adds to a growing body of literature on intensive delivery and fills a gap in the knowledge of its effects on the student experience in large-scale studio-based screen production degrees.

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Introduction

There is a growing body of literature on intensive delivery formats as innovative, and increasingly common, delivery modes in higher education around the world. Yet, there remains a relative dearth of studies on its role in studio-based education. This article attempts to address this gap by reporting on how students experienced the shift to block teaching at Griffith Film Schools' Bachelor of Film and Screen Media Production.

Two developments have begun to drastically alter the identity of screen practice education globally. For one, the massification of higher education has enabled a larger and more diverse part of society to enter universities (Small, McPhail, and Shaw 2022), which, in the case of Australia, has led to the highest student-to-teacher ratio in the Asia-Pacific (Ho, Ravinder, and Branda 2023). On the other hand, digital media has made screen content ubiquitous and lowered barriers to entry into screen production careers, while challenging traditional ideas of the screen industry and its underlying power structures (Zimmerman 2019).

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As a result, Griffith Film School's Bachelor of Film and Screen Media Production (BFSMP) has consistently grown in enrolments from 103.5 total equivalent full-time student load in 2010 to 248.9 in 2021, making it one of the largest screen production degrees in Australia.

Challenges to studio-based learning in programmes of scale

Studio-based learning follows Schön's (1992) concept of the reflective practitioner. It is project-based, hands-on education that uses iterative creation followed by reflection. It is, by nature, problem-focused and usually interdisciplinary and group-based (Jensen, Stentoft, and Ravn 2019). The studio itself functions as a physical space for learning, experimentation and discussion between peers and instructors. While the growth and diversification of student numbers is an exciting development for screen production education, it does create challenges for a studio-based education model. When we began to review the BFSMP curriculum in 2016, we identified four core challenges that all, more or less, had to do with the growing student cohort: retention, student-teacher rapport, fragmentation, and resourcing.

Larger enrolments typically mean higher student-to-teacher ratios and, often, less student-teacher interaction (Allais 2014; Hornsby and Osman 2014), creating a certain degree of anonymity and the danger of a more transactional educational experience, which can be particularly challenging for diverse student cohorts (Maringe and Sing 2014). In traditional boutique screen production degrees, lecturers know most students by name and are able to informally provide personalised study and career mentorship. It is exactly these person-to-person interactions that strengthen retention and employability but also the maturing of students and, therefore, the complexity and inventiveness of their artistic works. A programme of scale creates a larger peer network for students but reduces student-teacher rapport, taking away a central strength of studio-based education.

Larger cohorts, quite naturally, increase demands on space and, especially towards the end of semesters, equipment resources. Continuing academic staff often find that their focus shifts away from pedagogy and learning design towards resource and student management, leading away from integrated, complex learning strategies (van Merrienboer and Kirschner 2017) and towards fragmentation and compartmentalisation in the curriculum, an often-observed theory-practice divide in screen production education (Bell 2004), and increased isolation of individual courses from the larger programme experience.

It is against this backdrop – the challenges of retention, student-teacher rapport, fragmentation, and resourcing for studio-based learning in a programme of scale – that we embarked on an extensive curriculum review for the BFSMP. The idea of experimenting with intensive delivery formats came from many stakeholders during the consultation process. There was a hope that this would allow us to create a more integrated, clearly scaffolded curriculum that can counter some of the effects of massification on studio-based education.

Literature

The Intensive Mode of Delivery (IMD) has become increasingly common in higher education. Initially, postgraduate degrees experimented with IMD to enhance flexibility for adult learners. Today, the format is being used widely in postgraduate and undergraduate programmes, in the latter often as a direct consequence of larger and more diverse student cohorts (Chau, Jamei, and Li 2022; Dixon and O'Gorman 2020; Male 2018; Winchester, Klein, and Sinnayah 2021).

In a study of students' perception of block teaching in a flipped classroom environment, Kwan et al. (2022) identified positive student attitudes towards IMD and increased learning and engagement in the intensive mode, reflecting Buck and Tyrrell's (2022) reporting of Suffolk University's 'block and blend' model. Students appear to prefer intensive delivery formats more generally (Burton and Nesbit 2008; Grant 2001; Richmond et al. 2015; Scott 1995), because of the enhanced focus, flexibility and clarity as well as a faster sense of accomplishment. It has been argued that intensive formats allow for more student-teacher engagement, deeper learning and an easier synthesising of ideas (Davies 2006; Gaubatz 2003).

Burton and Nesbit (2002, 4) evaluated faculty and student attitudes towards block teaching in a business school and found that '[o]f students who had taken a block, 58.1% stated that they would have taken the course by block by preference. Of students who had not taken a block, only 5% said that they would prefer to take the course by block. Predicting willingness to take a block course in an ordinal logistic regression showed that taking one block course was a significant predictor of preference'.

Previous studies found that student learning outcomes are often better, and at worst, the same, in IMD compared to a semester-long course delivery (Burton and Nesbit 2002; Davies 2006; Dixon and O'Gorman 2020; Scott and Conrad 1992; Seamon 2004). IMD's focus on single courses at any given time appears to be especially conducive to non-traditional and adult learners (Burton and Nesbit 2008; Schuetze and Slowey 2002; Winchester, Klein, and Sinnayah 2021).

The literature provides a number of recommendations for teaching in IMD: a shift from larger lectures to more active learning strategies (King et al. 2018; Male 2018; Tucker and Rollo 2005), a preference for smaller, more frequent formative assessment tasks as opposed to larger summative assignments at the end of the teaching period (Dixon and O'Gorman 2020; Male 2018; Walsh, Sanders, and Gadgil 2019), the need for clear instructions to students on what they are expected to do before and after each class, often in conjunction with well-thought out online learning materials (Buck and Tyrrell 2022; Chau, Jamei, and Li 2022), assessment designs that can be completed within the time of a block (Buck and Tyrrell 2022; Male 2018), an emphasis on feedback during the block (Male 2018; Walsh, Sanders, and Gadgil 2019) as well as the possible reinforcement and scaffolding of learning content in successive courses (Buck and Tyrrell 2022).

Dixon and O'Gorman (2020), while coming to a generally positive conclusion of IMD, share a warning tale about assessment scheduling in this format. In their case study, every course had two assessment tasks, with the due date of the second assessment overlapping with the delivery of the next course. This led to a drastic decrease in student performance for the second assessment. The researchers, quite understandably, recommend avoiding such overlaps to allow for the focus students and teachers appreciate about IMD.

Literature that specifically reflects on IMD in the creative arts and studio-based education is rather scarce. In one of the more comprehensive studies, Chau, Jamei, and Li (2022) identified an overall positive student experience, increased immersion in and focus on the learning experience, reduced cognitive load, and a better student-teacher rapport. The study highlights the ability to include field trips, client-based work, authentic assessments, and an iterative design process as well as immediate feedback from instructors in each teaching block. Again, a case is made for shorter and more frequent assessments, and a warning authored that assessment tasks and scaffolding need to be considered carefully for students to have enough time to complete assessments and critically reflect on their work, and for tutors to mark and provide timely feedback. Chau, Jamei, and Li (2022) and Dawson (2017) argue that well-written assessment rubrics are one way for teachers to give timely and appropriate feedback during a teaching block.

In a smaller study, Adeyeye et al. (2011) assessed student perceptions of intensive design weeks and found that students have a positive attitude towards learning experiences in intensive delivery weeks. One aspect students particularly liked was the fact that the intensive delivery gave them faster feedback on their performance and where they needed to improve – in other words, it engaged the students in more reflective learning.

In an article that was written well before the massification of higher education, Mims (1983, 118) discussed the effect of time on learning in the arts and points to a number of studies that have shown that artists and creatives 'work best under conditions that allow long, uninterrupted periods of intense concentration on a single project'. To Mims, the advantages of block teaching in the arts include an encouragement for self-directed learning, more emphasis on critical thinking and in-depth inquiry, a stronger bond between instructors and students, and the ability to experience learning environments outside of the campus.

Materials and methods

The shift to IMD provided the opportunity to rethink the programme design of the BFSMP, and create a holistic curriculum that is driven by the integration of theory and practice, scaffolded production assignments, a better balance of assessment tasks throughout the semester, as well as course designs that embrace multi-disciplinarity and complex learning strategies (van Merrienboer and Kirschner 2017).

The BFSMP's block design changes in the different year levels to allow for a natural increase in complexities of screen productions. First year core courses are arranged in three-week blocks. Every week starts with what we call Contextual Studies Monday, followed by more practical, hands-on workshops that allow students to practice the theoretical concepts they have learned about on Monday. Semesters run over fourteen weeks, with the final course in every semester being a small semester capstone project that allows students to apply the knowledge and skills acquired previously.

The second year expands blocks to four weeks. Both semesters start with elective courses that are followed by core production-focused courses. A special wrinkle of the year-two experience is that students have one semester-long contextual studies course in each semester. These are scheduled on Monday and Thursday only to avoid overlapping classes with the intensive blocks. These two semester-long courses are shared with other degrees across the University that do not teach in the intensive format. To alleviate pressures on the students and provide choice, both courses are repeated in intensive format during the summer semester.

The third year consists of one year-long capstone course, four-week electives at the start of each semester, and one four-week intensive with a focus on screen careers and entrepreneurship close to the end of the students' final semester.

All core courses are team-taught and multi-disciplinary, reflecting the complex nature of screen productions. Elective courses, on the other hand, usually focus on a single discipline, providing depth and opportunities for specialisation.

We attempted to give every semester a production theme, reflecting common modes of production in the screen industries. These are short fiction film (Year 1, Semester 1), multicamera television (Year 1, Semester 2), non-fiction formats, namely documentary and client-based productions (Year 2, Semester 1), episodic content (Year 2, Trimester 2), as well as television commercials and music videos that all discipline electives collaborate on at the beginning of the students' second year. Our goal was to reduce the reliance on the short fiction film as dominant training tool and diversify students' experiences and portfolios. Outside of screen production training, short fiction films are a niche medium. Other modes of production offer clearer pathways into employment. The differently themed studio-based production courses allowed us to reflect this.

Data collection

The BFSMP's block model was introduced in March 2020, four weeks before Australia changed to online learning during the first COVID-19 lockdowns. While 2020 was interrupted by multiple lockdowns, years two to four of the block teaching experience went more or less in an orderly fashion. It is useful to acknowledge, however, that the pandemic, of course, skews the data we collected in some form (and, sadly, appears to have a lasting effect on students, academics and society at large).

In our evaluation, we were interested in the effects of IMD on the student experience (we also collected data on retention, student performance, and staff experience and hope to report those in a later article). We collected quantitative student experience data for all 8 first-year core courses and 11 second year elective courses over a six-year period: the three years prior to the introduction of IMD (2017–2019) and the first three full years of IMD (2021–2023), and performed a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021) of 3,036 comments in student experience surveys of 46 first-year core course instances over a six-year period (2017–2022).

We did exclude quantitative data from 2020 as the degree was taught in mixed mode during the transition year, with first year courses in IMD and second year courses still in a trimester long schedule. The reflexive thematic analysis includes 2020 data because it only analyses first year courses.

The purpose of the reflexive thematic analysis was to investigate more deeply how student expectations and experiences of the programme shifted with the introduction of IMD rather than to evaluate whether it had an overall positive or negative impact. We chose to follow Braun and Clarke's (2021) model of reflexive thematic analysis because it offered us a qualitative paradigm that acknowledges and builds on our professional experiences and familiarity with the data and encourages a 'reflexive engagement with theory, data and interpretation' (Braun and Clarke 2021, 330). The authors' model divides the analysis into six subsequent phases: data familiarisation, systematic coding, generating of initial themes, reviewing of themes, refining of themes, and writing up the findings into a report.

Grounded in the data, our analytical process was inductive in nature. We say 'in nature' because the analysis was naturally influenced by previous literature and our own professional experiences (see also Braun and Clarke 2021). Deviating slightly from Braun and Clarke's model (2021), we developed initial themes based on the literature and our research interests before coding started. A single team member then familiarised themselves with the data and coded a small subset of approximately 10% of the total student comments to test the validity of the initial themes and, in discussion with the other researchers, reviewed and refined those where appropriate. A second team member then re-coded the same subset of comments to ensure reliability of the coding and themes. The remaining data was analysed by a single team member.

To collect data, we used the University's standard end-of-semester Student Experience of Course survey, giving us a consistent tool to compare the student experience before and after the introduction of IMD. The survey consists of six numerical indicators (with a scale of 1–5) as well as two open-ended qualitative questions. The two open-ended questions allow students to reflect on 'What did you find particularly good about this course?' and 'How could this course be improved?'. The six numerical indicators invite students to rank the following statements:

- Q1: This course was well-organised.
- Q2: The assessment was clear and fair.
- Q3: I received helpful feedback on my assessment work.
- Q4: This course engaged me in learning.
- Q5: The teaching (lecturers, tutors, online etc.) in this course was effective in helping me learn.
- Q6: Overall I am satisfied with the quality of this course.

We excluded third-year courses from the evaluation for two reasons. Firstly, they were only offered in the third year of the programme change, providing very limited data. But mostly because we only added one intensive course to the students' third year, while their major capstone project still stretches over two full semesters.

Student evaluation of courses are not perfect data. In fact, there is ample research that highlights its biases, flaws (Heffernan 2021) and questionable usefulness in determining teaching quality and effectiveness (Spooren, Brockx, and Mortelmans 2013). But it represents a consistent tool students are familiar with, and one, we believe, that can be used to interrogate student experience and satisfaction more broadly (Grace et al. 2012). Using the standard, university-wide course experience surveys allowed us to access historical data (going back three years before the introduction of IMD) and keep the data collection method consistent over the six-year period we analysed. It also meant that we did not specifically ask students to evaluate IMD and therefore did not prime them towards reflecting on the novelty of the class schedule.

Response rates for student experience surveys ranged from 53.4% to 7.8% of enrolled students in individual courses. There was a clear dip in response rates during and after 2020 from average responses of about 35% pre-2020 to about 25% from 2020. We observed a similar, albeit smaller, decline in response rates in other degrees over the same period, likely owed to the impact of Covid-19. We excluded courses that had less than three responses. Because of the vastly inconsistent response rates across courses, we decided to not compare individual courses but instead combine all data available for each year of analysis. This allowed us to work with a more robust sample size. Overall, we analysed a total of $n = 3{,}036$ unique student comments. Longer, more complex comments were divided into shorter statements ($n = 3{,}576$) that could be assigned to individual themes. Total student comments per year declined from $n = 657$ in 2017, $n = 673$ in 2018, and $n = 597$ in 2019, to post introduction of IMD of $n = 373$ in 2020, $n = 368$ in 2021, and again $n = 368$ in 2022.

Results

Quantitative data

The average overall student experience (Q6) over the first three years of the block model was slightly lower for first year core courses and slightly higher for second year electives compared to the three years before the introduction of IMD (Table 1). Looking at annual data, the average overall student satisfaction remained remarkably consistent over the six years we analysed. 2022 stands out as the year with the lowest average overall student satisfaction for first year core courses but the highest for second year electives. 2023 data sits right at the pre-IMD average.

Table 1. Average Student experience of courses per year.

BFSMP	2017	2018	2019	Avg. 2017–19	2021	2022	2023	Avg. 2021–23
Y1 Core	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.94	4.1	3.6	3.9	3.90
Y2 Elective	3.9	3.9	4.1	3.97	4.0	4.3	4.0	4.10

Table 2. Student experience of first-year core courses; individual survey questions.

	2017	2018	2019	Avg. 2017–19	2021	2022	2023	Avg. 2021–23	Difference pre/post
Q1	3.9	3.9	4.1	3.95	3.9	3.5	3.9	3.72	− 0.23
Q2	3.9	3.8	4.0	3.90	4.0	3.6	3.9	3.80	− 0.10
Q3	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.81	3.9	3.6	3.9	3.76	− 0.05
Q4	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.93	4.3	4.0	4.1	4.09	+ 0.16
Q5	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.06	4.3	4.0	4.2	4.13	+ 0.07
Q6	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.94	4.1	3.6	3.9	3.83	− 0.11

Table 3. Student experience of second-year elective courses; individual survey questions.

	2017	2018	2019	Avg. 2017–19	2021	2022	2023	Avg. 2021–23	Difference pre/post
Q1	3.7	3.7	4.0	3.82	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.86	+0.04
Q2	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.05	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.99	−0.06
Q3	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.03	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.12	+0.09
Q4	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.14	4.3	4.6	4.3	4.41	+0.27
Q5	4.2	4.2	4.1	4.21	4.3	4.7	4.3	4.42	+0.21
Q6	3.9	3.9	4.1	3.99	4.0	4.3	4.0	4.10	+0.11

Looking into the remaining five questions of the student experience survey provides some deeper insights (Tables 2 and 3). It appears that students feel that IMD engages them more in learning (Q4) and makes teaching more effective in helping them learn (Q5). Both categories experienced the largest positive swing post IMD. On the other hand, students feel less positive about the clarity of assessments (Q2) in IMD. While these three sub-questions show similar comparative results between IMD and pre-IMD years, the other two questions were evaluated differently. Students of single-discipline second year elective courses appear to think that they receive more helpful feedback (Q3) and that courses are organised better (Q1) in IMD, while students in first year core courses evaluate both questions worse in IMD. Interestingly, the year with the highest evaluations across all questions bar Q1 (course organisation) can be located after the introduction of IMD for both, first year core courses (2021) and second year electives (2022).

Student concerns around course organisation, assessment design and feedback reflect concerns raised in the existing literature. The largest drop in student satisfaction is around course organisation. It is unclear what exactly caused this dissatisfaction, but one stands to reason that the dramatic changes to timetabling, course outlines, teaching content but also the changing teaching personnel in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that courses were not prepared to a similar level of professionalism as previously. The increase of perceived learning in IMD, on the other hand, is an encouraging development.

Qualitative data

In addition to the quantitative questions, we undertook a reflexive thematic analysis of all 3,036 comments for two open-ended survey questions across 46 first-year course instances between 2017 and 2022. The two questions were:

- What did you find particularly good about this course?
- How could this course be improved?

A hierarchical coding frame was used. Responses were first coded as positive or negative, with eight comments discarded because they could not be interpreted as either positive or negative. For the most part, this aligned directly to the focus of the question being asked, with the first leaning positive and the second negative. There were some exceptions, for instance with responses that suggested no improvements were needed or that nothing was particularly good about the course respectively.

Individual comments were then assigned high-level themes and low-level subthemes. Individual comments could be complex and refer to multiple aspects of a course. In these cases, comments were subdivided into individual comment units such that each could be assigned a single theme. This resulted in a total of 3,576 comment units, each assigned a single theme and between one and four subthemes.

Themes and subthemes were primarily based on the rationale behind the programme's redesign. Some data-driven themes were added in response to trends identified in the responses. Seven themes were used, though four were unrelated to the implementation of IMD and hence exempted from further analysis. These four themes included:

- *Content* – comments expressing interest or disinterest in the skills and knowledge that a course focused on;
- *Staff* – comments related to praise or complaints about a course's teaching team;
- *Generic* – comments that did not attribute their positive/negative experience with any specific aspect of the course; and
- *COVID* – comments about the general impact of COVID-19 or the course adjustments required due to COVID-19 on student experience.

Table 4. Analysis of Student experience comments; themes and subthemes.

	PEDAGOGY	ASSESSMENT	ADMINISTRATION
Assessment Design	How assessment activities contributed to learning.	Design of specific assessment items.	N/A
Clarity	How easily learning content could be understood.	How clearly assessment expectations and requirements were communicated.	How effectively course information was communicated to students.
Consistency	Consistency in the learning activities and experience for students in different classes and their alignment to course learning objectives.	Consistency of requirements and expectations in assessment for different students.	Consistent course management was between different classes and in relation to the University more broadly.
Course Design	How the overall structure of a course contributed to learning.	How assessment was embedded within the course.	How different classes within the course are scheduled in relation to each other.
Expertise	Pedagogical value of industry professionals delivering learning content.	N/A	N/A
Feedback	Integration of feedback into learning tasks.	Feedback provided on assessment tasks.	Effectiveness of how feedback was communicated.
In-Class Experience	How specific learning activities or classes contributed to learning.	Experience of performing in-class assessment tasks.	Organisation and smooth running of classes.
Organisation Between Courses	How the learning experience of a single course related to experience of other courses or wider degree.	Interactions between assessment tasks for different courses.	Management of the wider degree programme, especially in relation to communication and enrolment.
Resources	How effectively equipment and web resources were integrated into learning activities.	Availability of information about assessment, as well as resources required to complete assessment tasks.	Availability and management of equipment access as well as web resources.
Time	Time allocations for learning activities.	Timing and time requirements of assessment workload.	Timetabling.

Table 4 outlines how the three remaining themes – *Pedagogy*, *Assessment*, and *Administration* – were further broken down into subthemes. Some complex comment units could relate to multiple subthemes – for example, a comment stating that assessment requirements were unclear because different classes were told different information would correspond to both *Clarity* and *Consistency* within the *Assessment* theme.

Analysis of this data started at the theme level. The relative salience of each theme as a percentage of the total number of comment units for the relevant periods was calculated, as was the relative proportion of the comment units for each theme that were positive or negative. This process was then repeated for subthemes in the three areas we were most interested in: *Pedagogy*, *Assessment*, *Administration*. The results can be seen in Tables 5–8.

Salience

There was no significant difference in the proportion of comment units aligning with each theme between the non-IMD and IMD curriculum. Pedagogy was consistently the most prominent theme throughout all comments (49% and 46% in non-IMD and IMD respectively), followed by Assessment (17% and 17%). Administration saw a slight increase from 5% to 8% of comment units following the introduction of IMD. Changes in the positive/negative balance for each of these themes was more significant, though still small. Pedagogy went from 55% to 58% positive, Assessment from 31% to 25%, and Administration from 6% to 12% positive.

Administration

The increase in positive comments relating to *Administration* was inconsistent over the three years following the introduction of IMD, with 22%, 17% and 2% in 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively. This decline can be explained by interrogating the subthemes for these comment units, which suggest

Table 5. Analysis of all student experience comments.

	Weekly Schedule (2017–19)					Intensive Delivery (2020)					Intensive Delivery (2021)					Intensive Delivery (2022)					Intensive Delivery (Total)				
	Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage		
	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot
Pedagogy	611	493	55	45	49	87	64	58	42	33	122	87	58	42	48	139	105	57	43	58	348	256	58	42	46
Content	225	71	76	24	13	45	15	75	25	13	25	17	60	40	10	4	5	44	56	2	74	37	67	33	8
Assessm.	118	267	31	69	17	21	57	27	73	17	19	60	24	76	18	18	53	25	75	17	58	170	25	75	17
Staff	210	26	89	11	10	62	11	85	15	16	54	5	92	8	14	39	2	95	5	10	155	18	90	10	13
Generic	110	16	87	13	6	16	5	76	24	5	19	2	90	10	5	9	2	82	18	3	44	9	83	17	4
Admin.	7	102	6	94	5	8	28	22	78	8	4	20	17	83	6	1	47	2	98	11	13	95	12	88	8
COVID	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	10	32	24	76	9	0	1	0	100	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	10	33	23	77	3
	1281	**975**	57	43		**249**	**212**				**243**	**192**				**210**	**214**				**702**	**618**	53	47	

Figures do not include responses that could not be classified as positive or negative.

Table 6. Analysis of student experience comments in assessment theme.

	Weekly Schedule (2017–19)					Intensive Delivery (2020)					Intensive Delivery (2021)					Intensive Delivery (2022)					Intensive Delivery (Total)				
	Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage		
Assessment	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot
Assessm. Design	40	45	47	53	17	9	11	45	55	20	15	14	13	48	27	10	10	50	50	21	34	35	49	51	23
Clarity	19	93	17	83	22	1	29	3	97	29	0	14	0	100	13	0	19	0	100	20	1	62	2	98	21
Consistency	0	21	0	100	4	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	5	0	100	5	0	11	0	100	11	0	16	0	100	5
Course Design	17	42	29	71	12	1	6	14	86	7	1	8	11	89	8	1	6	14	86	7	3	20	13	87	8
Feedback	12	58	17	83	14	3	10	23	77	13	1	5	17	83	6	4	2	67	33	6	8	17	32	68	8
In-class Experience	33	8	80	20	8	7	0	100	0	7	0	1	0	100	1	5	1	83	17	6	12	2	86	14	5
Organisation btw Courses	1	5	17	83	1	2	1	67	33	3	0	11	0	100	10	0	7	0	100	7	2	19	10	90	7
Resources	5	60	8	92	13	0	12	0	100	12	1	5	17	83	6	0	6	0	100	6	1	23	4	96	8
Time	4	40	9	91	9	1	9	10	90	10	4	21	16	84	24	2	12	14	86	15	7	42	14	86	16
	131	**372**	26	74		**24**	**78**				**22**	**84**				**22**	**74**				**68**	**236**	22	78	

Table 7. Analysis of student experience comments in pedagogy theme.

	Weekly Schedule (2017–19)					Intensive Delivery (2020)					Intensive Delivery (2021)					Intensive Delivery (2022)					Intensive Delivery (Total)				
	Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage		
Pedagogy	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot
Assessm. Design	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	2	3	40	60	2	2	3	40	60	1
Clarity	9	15	38	63	2	3	7	30	70	6	3	5	38	63	3	1	5	17	83	2	7	17	29	71	3
Consistency	0	4	0	100	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	1	0	100	0	0	6	0	100	2	0	7	0	100	1
Course Design	184	222	45	55	34	15	14	52	48	16	31	27	53	47	22	35	34	51	49	21	81	75	52	48	21
Expertise	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	1	0	100	0	0	1	0	100	0	0
Feedback	17	24	41	59	3	2	11	15	85	7	0	10	0	100	4	2	4	33	67	2	4	25	14	86	4
In-class Experience	417	190	69	31	50	66	13	84	16	45	85	23	79	21	42	107	37	74	26	44	258	73	78	22	44
Organisation btw Courses	2	9	18	82	1	3	6	33	67	5	7	11	39	61	7	2	24	8	92	8	12	41	23	77	7
Resources	29	36	45	55	5	3	1	75	25	2	9	1	90	10	4	17	13	57	43	9	29	15	66	34	6
Time	3	47	6	94	4	8	25	24	76	19	11	34	24	76	17	5	27	16	84	10	24	86	22	78	14
	661	**547**	55	45		**100**	**77**				**146**	**112**				**172**	**153**				**418**	**342**	58	42	

Table 8. Analysis of student experience comments in administration theme.

	Weekly Schedule (2017–19)					Intensive Delivery (2020)					Intensive Delivery (2021)					Intensive Delivery (2022)					Intensive Delivery (Total)				
	Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage			Total		Percentage		
Administr.	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot	Pos	Neg	Pos	Neg	Tot
Clarity	3	19	14	86	17	4	13	24	76	40	1	7	13	88	30	1	17	6	94	27	6	37	14	86	32
Consistency	2	11	15	85	10	0	1	0	100	2	0	1	0	100	4	0	8	0	100	12	0	10	0	100	7
Course Design	3	8	27	73	8	1	1	50	50	5	2	1	67	33	11	0	5	0	100	8	3	7	30	70	7
Feedback	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	1	0	100	2	0	1	0	100	1
In-class Experience	0	4	0	100	3	0	1	0	100	2	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	1	0	100	2	0	2	0	100	1
Organisation btw Courses	0	2	0	100	2	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	2	0	100	7	0	0	N/A	N/A	0	0	2	0	100	1
Resources	2	48	4	96	38	4	15	21	79	45	2	5	29	71	26	0	6	0	100	9	6	26	19	81	24
Time	0	30	0	100	23	0	2	0	100	5	0	6	0	100	22	0	27	0	100	41	0	35	0	100	26
	10	**122**	6	94		**9**	**33**				**5**	**22**				**1**	**65**				**15**	**120**	12	88	

that the trend indirectly resulted from the impact of Covid-19. Most positive *Administration* comments in 2020 and, to a lesser extent, 2021, related to the subthemes *Clarity* and *Resources*, and tended to focus specifically on how well-structured the online experience was for the course, e.g. 'I liked how clear and well set out the in-class assessments and module work was in [learning management system] [B]lackboard'. There was, of course, an increased engagement with these online resources due to Covid-19. 2022 saw a dramatic increase in negative comments in the subthemes of *Time* and *Clarity*, generally associated with timetabling, especially citing late evening classes or overly long days on campus.

Pedagogy

For the comment units coded under *Pedagogy*, the subthemes *In-Class Experience* and *Course Design* were consistently the two most prominent subthemes in the student feedback. *In-Class Experience* encompassed comments relating to how students responded to the learning activities in workshops, lectures and tutorials. *Course Design* relates to how the overall course engages students in learning. The proportion of positive comments increased for both comment units, *In-Class Experience* from 69% to 78% and *Course Design* from 45% to 52%. The content of these comment units suggests that post-IMD students increasingly praised the hands-on production experiences delivered in some courses, with comments about how 'practical' a course was or referring to 'hands on experience with the equipment'. Such comments were present in the pre-IMD surveys, but their prevalence increased noticeably. While in the traditional delivery model production activities were dispersed throughout the trimester, having them concentrated during certain weeks appears to have caused students to value these experiences more. This supports the results of the quantitative data that students believe their learning benefited from IMD.

The subthemes *Time* and *Organisation Between Courses* became significantly more prevalent following the introduction of IMD, from 4% to 14% and 1% to 7% respectively, while the prevalence of the subtheme *Course Design* dropped from 34% to 21%. The subthemes *Time* and *Organisation Between Courses* also increased the proportion of positive comment units (6% to 22% and 18% to 23% respectively). This suggests an overall shift in how students perceive the design of their learning experience, with the novelty of IMD resulting in comments being slightly more likely to focus on programme-level rather than course-level design characteristics. Comparing the content of some of these comments confirms this observation. Pre-IMD, the small number of comments referring to *Organisation Between Courses* tended to focus on repetition in learning content or gaps in prerequisite knowledge (e.g. 'The lecture content sometimes repeated what was taught in first semester'). With the introduction of IMD, the focus of these comments shifted to how courses interacted within a semester (e.g. 'Having to work on all this documentation, scheduling crew meetings, casting and location scouting all while doing another subject intensive with weekly assessment was barely manageable').

Similarly, the dramatic increase in the prevalence of the subtheme *Time* suggests that this issue was more salient to students with the change in delivery mode, and was likely perceived as one of the objectives of the change. In fact, most comments relating to time explicitly referred to the IMD structure in their response. Sampling specific comments from different years indicates a change in how students thought about time in relation to their course, from focusing on the length or number of individual classes pre-IMD ('There is always so much to cram into the 50 minute lectures') to how much of the term was allocated to the course ('3 weeks is not enough time to properly understand and engage with the content especially when you are expected to deliver two visual presentations in the one week').

Assessment

There are comparable trends within the *Assessment* theme. Overall, *Assessment* was the second most common theme after *Pedagogy*, consistently representing around 17% of comment units. Comments about *Assessment* tended to be negative, though they did become more so following the introduction of IMD (from 31% to 25% positive) with comments relating to *Clarity* and *Course Design* seeing the greatest negative shift, while *Assessment Design*, *Feedback* and *Time* saw a slight increase of positive comments, indicating that students feel slightly better about the time they have to complete assessments and the feedback they receive on assessments (the latter a possible slight contraction of the quantitative results above) in IMD, while clarity on expectations around assessments and how an assessment fits within the larger design of the course were areas of concern.

A deeper exploration of the subthemes *Time* and *Organisation Between Courses* might offer an explanation. Both increased in prominence, going from 9% to 16% and 1% to 7% of comment units coded in the *Assessment* theme respectively. Though the substance of negative comments relating to *Time* and *Organisation Between Courses* was generally consistent in terms of concerns around being rushed and overwhelmed by assessment workloads, the comments relating to IMD tended to refer directly to the new programme design, expressing an expectation that this design should have removed overlap between assessment tasks and eased the assessment workload overall. Several negative comments highlight having multiple assignments due in quick succession, something that was not raised as a concern prior to the introduction of IMD even though assessment deadlines often overlapped between courses in the traditional delivery model.

The content of some comments relating to *Time* also reveals slight differences in how students responded to IMD in theory-based versus practice-based courses. Pre-IMD, all comments relating to *Time* for theory-oriented courses were negative, while a small but significant proportion following the move to IMD were positive, specifically identifying the intensity of those courses as a positive, 'as it allowed [students] to keep focus on the one topic enough to understand it, but the class moved onto a new one before [they] would get bored of focusing on that topic'. Some comments even explicitly stated that they felt that the intensity of IMD worked for theory-oriented courses better than practice-based ones, suggesting that the latter 'try to cram too much in too little time'.

Discussion

The main reasons for Griffith Film School to experiment with IMD was to find an answer to the rapid growth of the student cohort, and the associated challenges for retention, student-teacher rapport, curriculum fragmentation, and resourcing for studio-based learning in a programme of scale, without impacting the student experience. We managed the change process as a relatively small continuing academic team, during the uncertainties and upheavals of the Covid years. One unforeseen but encouraging aspect of the initiative was a deepening of pedagogical discussions within the academic staff, growing collaboration across the teaching team and an overall eagerness to reflect on the student experience.

We purposely used data over a long comparison period and many courses to draw as much of a holistic picture as possible about the impact of the intensive delivery mode on the student experience of studio-based learning at a film school of scale.

Overall, the trends observed in the student experience comments in the transition to IMD suggest that, broadly, students have tended to perceive their learning experience based on their interpretations of the objectives of IMD, tailoring their expectations of the programme based on that delivery model. This is visible especially in the increased salience of *Time* in the comments, as the programme timeline and structure are the most visible impacts of IMD on the student experience. It is also seen in the wording of some comments, which refer directly to IMD and its perceived purpose. It is possible that this trend will decrease as the newness of IMD's implementation in the BFSMP passes, though the model will likely remain a novelty compared to other University programmes that maintain a traditional structure. Additionally, there is an increased tendency to comment on characteristics of the degree programme as a whole rather than specific courses as evidenced in the decline in comments on *Course Design* and increase in comments about *Organisation Between Courses*. It is not surprising that a significant programme-wide change like IMD would encourage students to take a more holistic, interconnected view of their studies, or that these changes would be at the forefront of students' minds when asked to evaluate their learning experience. This is likely further exacerbated through informal conversations between students and tutors during or after classes.

Previous literature suggests that students display a preference for learning in IMD. Our study was less interested in a comparison of preferences but focused instead on trying to analyse students' perceptions of IMD to inform future iterations of the programme design. That being said, our study confirms most of the findings of previous literature. As such, we want to conclude this article with seven overarching observations and recommendations:

Active learning

Students feel that they learn better in IMD, enjoy the in-class experience more as well as the perceived time on task. Hands-on, active learning strategies appear to benefit from IMD and should be encouraged (see also King et al. 2018; Tucker and Rollo 2005). Such focus on student participation and deep, active learning is also a strategy to address challenges of more diverse cohorts associated with the general massification of higher education (Maringe and Sing 2014).

Student-teacher rapport

Student comments in the *Staff* theme increased in prominence (from 10% to 13% of all comments) and in the percentage of positive comments (89% to 90%, increasing to 95% in 2022) after the introduction of IMD, suggesting that IMD might enable a stronger student-teacher rapport as argued by previous studies (Chau, Jamei, and Li 2022; Davies 2006; Gaubatz 2003; Male 2018).

Course design simplicity

It appears that IMD improves the student experience more dramatically for single-discipline electives as well as theory-based core courses, which can fully embrace studio-based learning without distraction from other courses. Student comments are less positive for more complex multi-disciplinary production courses. One of our main design principles for first-year core production courses was to combine the teaching of contextual studies with two or three production skills to reflect the complexity of screen production – e.g. training in camera, sound and production design skills was combined with screen history in a single course titled 'Image & Sound'. We engaged large teaching teams that previously taught these skills and knowledges across multiple, fragmented single-discipline courses and now had to collaborate in designing a cohesive learning experience. The student experience data suggests that this experiment has failed and might have been the main contributor to students appearing to be less satisfied with course design and assessment clarity for those courses. A counter measure might be to engage generalist tutors that would teach across all disciplines within a course to create a more cohesive learning environment. A stronger focus on depth in IMD at the expense of breadth was argued for in previous studies (Davies 2006; Gaubatz 2003).

Course Separation

Consistent with previous literature (Buck and Tyrrell 2022; Dixon and O'Gorman 2020), overlapping courses should be avoided in IMD. We initially allowed submission of summative assessments for one course to take place during the delivery time of the next course to provide students with 'more time' to complete their assessments. But delivering those during another intensive course increases cognitive loads and workloads for students, and are not supportive of their learning.

Iteration and formative assessment/feedback

In a studio-based environment, a large summative assessment as final creative artefact often dictates the learning design. Again, consistent with previous literature (Dixon and O'Gorman 2020; Male 2018; Walsh, Sanders, and Gadgil 2019), we argue that smaller, formative assessments and a stronger emphasis on iterative learning and in-class feedback is more suited to IMD. While Chau, Jamei, and Li (2022) and Dawson (2017) suggest well-written rubrics as a core feedback strategy in IMD, we also found that end-of-semester face-to-face panel feedback sessions for creative artefacts are invaluable opportunities to provide detailed feedback, engage in student-tutor dialogue, and reflect industry practices more broadly.

Volume of learning

When we embarked on the curriculum review, one of our main concerns was the discrepancy in assumed volume of learning between contextual studies courses, single discipline electives and larger production-based core courses. Often, we observed, students strongly focused their attention on group-based production assessments towards the end of a semester in the traditional teaching format, at the expense of assessments in other courses. IMD and the associated student experience brings this to the fore. While student experiences for contextual courses as well as exercise-focused discipline electives improved, large production courses found it much more difficult to cope with what they perceived as less learning time for students. In IMD, production-focused courses have to make the largest concession and drastically reduce assessment volume away from capstone-like productions towards smaller, iterative, exercise-based practical assessments. A careful consideration of student workloads is paramount in IMD (see also Chau, Jamei, and Li 2022; Male 2018).

Preparation

The largest decrease within the quantitative student experience data was for the statement 'this course is well-organised'. This is reflected in the quantitative data. IMD requires a shift in attitude, practice and annual planning for academics, who need to prepare their courses before they start without being able to make adjustments during the course (see also Chau, Jamei, and Li 2022; Dixon and O'Gorman 2020; Kops 2014). This needs to be accounted for when considering IMD teaching models.

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