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## Project Proposal Template

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Basic project information

**Title of Project:** How does a DFL student succeed at the University of the South Pacific?

**Duration:** 12 months

**Project coordinator:** Dr. Theresa Koroivulaono

### **Project members**

#### **CFDL**

#### ***Instructional designers***

Rokosiga Morrison

Jane Kanas

Anare Tuitoga

Ivy Pagolu

Neelam Narayan

#### ***Education Technologists***

Kerishma Seth

#### ***Electronic Publishers***

Akanisi Sakuwai

Maxine Valentine

Mohammad Hussein

Sera Rokodi

#### ***Administrative staff***

Makarita Erasito

Evonne Inia

#### **Other USP sections**

#### ***Regional Campuses***

Campus Directors

ITS Net operators

Tutors/Teaching assistants

Support services staff

**Key Implementing Unit:** Centre for Flexible & Distance Learning

## 1. Summary of Project

The project will start in February 2012 and conclude in February 2013. The data collected will, **for the first time**, provide USP with the crucial information about essential IT and other support services available for DFL students in the region that, since its establishment, has not been available. Project management processes and tools in the electronic and online environment will also act as testing sites for USPNet. All levels of staff at CFDL who form part of the Course Design and Development teams will be active participants in this project, from administrative staff through to the Acting Director. Researchers travelling out to the region will also be conducting Moodle and REACT workshops, ensuring that the research trips serve more than one crucial purpose. **Reporting and timeline protocols for ensuring that the available services are kept at consistently high operational levels will be one of the outcomes of the project.**

As the only unit of its kind in the region, ALL CFDL staff will be required to satisfy in-house, basic requirements to facilitate eLearning at USP. This research project will address three fundamental areas of IT capacity-building in the region. Firstly, the capacity of the USP IT infrastructure to deliver optimal operating systems that support learning technologies will be evaluated. Secondly, the data will identify the challenges to lagging regional DFL student success rates. Thirdly, CFDL staff who are themselves solely responsible for training USP students and staff in the Learning Technologies will also be up-skilling and multi-skilling in the process.

The major internal stakeholders will include all students and staff at USP, in particular, DFL regional students, SMT, the Faculties, ITS, the regional campuses and Properties and Facilities. Prominent among the external stakeholders will be the USP student sponsors; firstly, USP regional governments and international donors such as AusAid, NZAid and JICA.

## 2. Rationale

While USP has kept abreast of the rapidly changing developments in DFL education, the retention, success and completion rates of DFL students remain alarmingly low. Several studies and research projects in DFL at USP have been conducted over the years; however, none have provided conclusive data about the reasons for the low retention, pass and completion rates of our DFL students,

This research project will investigate three major areas. Firstly, data on DFL student support services and facilities will be collected from the regional campuses. Student opinions about support structures will also be provided through a questionnaire. A survey will also be conducted with regional campus staff. Secondly, this data will be analysed against DFL student success rates. Thirdly, the findings will **directly inform the use of learning technologies in DFL course and programme design and development.** Furthermore, recommendations will be provided to the Faculties and other stakeholders, for example, ITS and Property and Facilities, identifying major challenges and proposing solutions to enhance both the online and offline learning environments.

As more and more Schools at USP seek accreditation for their programmes at an international level and the STAR project moves into its implementation phases, it is

critical that USP interrogates low DFL student success rates and works actively to redress the balance between DFL and Face to face (F) student success rates. On the basis of USP's regionalism, millions of dollars in aid have been and continue to contribute to the enhancement of USP's resources and capacity-building. The paradox – that regional students, the majority of whom study through DFL continue to show less than satisfactory retention and completion rates in particular – requires urgent mitigation which is long overdue. This research project will provide **USP FOR THE FIRST TIME** with the data from across the region to neutralise the paradox and take decisive steps towards improving DFL student retention and completion.

## 2.1 *Background*

Shortly after being established in 1968, the University of the South Pacific (USP) started offering the first Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) courses to its regional students. The first course was delivered in 1971 and forty years later, in 2011, USP has developed into a multimodal university with over three hundred courses being designed and developed in the print, blended and online modes. Face to face teaching continues to characterise many of the programmes offered at USP's main campuses including flexi-schools which are conducted in the semester breaks throughout the region.

Advanced communication technologies through *USPNet* are used to reach DFL students across the fourteen campuses. With the deployment of KU band to remote sites – Vavau and Haapai in Tonga and Malampa in Vanuatu - existing DFL student support structures need to be documented, reviewed and improved where necessary to provide an acceptable, institutional, baseline IT and support services standard across the campuses.

In 2011 CFDL focussed predominantly on increasing Moodle, REACT and other learning technological training sessions to regional students and staff. The training was conducted in all of the modes currently available at USP: Face to face (F), Print (P), Blended (B) and Online (O). The seeds of this project grew out of our increased regional training programmes as CFDL staff returned to Laucala with evidence that pointed to the necessity of investigating poor DFL student retention and success rates.

## 2.2 *Problems to be addressed*

This research will address the major areas that challenge IT infrastructure and support services and facilities in the region and whether or not they need to be maximised to their fullest potential in relation to DFL course design and development. Offline multimedia components and other adapted versions of eLearning that support the DFL experience, will only be correctly identified and integrated in learning designs if, the corresponding data on regional campus services is available.

Services and facilities provided at the Laucala campus for ALL students include computer labs with 1: 10 student to computer ratios, several well-equipped venues for audio and video conferencing including state-of-the art REACT rooms in the new ICT Centre, the biggest library in the USP region and face-to face tutorials. In most regional campuses and sub-centres, only selected and down-sized services and facilities are available. Moreover with bandwidth, access and connectivity issues, and

inaccessibility issues due to distance from the campus and the cost of transport, USP support services to regional DFL students require immediate attention.

The Laucala-based CFDL trainers in Moodle, REACT and learning technologies for both students and staff will also benefit from identifying the specific needs and levels required at the different regional campuses.

It is also envisaged that language issues in particular will also be identified as a result of this research project. As English is a second, third or fourth language for almost all USP students, self-assessed, electronic/online English remedial modules could also be an output particularly in light of STAR Working Group 4 objectives: to revise the English testing and remedial systems at USP.

### 2.3 *Relationship to Strategic Plan*

2.4 This research project directly addresses the following areas:

- **Priority Area 1: Learning and Teaching; in particular,**
  - **Objective 1.1:** “Implement the Learning and Teaching Policy and Plan.”
  - **Objective 1.4:** “Convert additional full programmes at both Undergraduate and Postgraduate level into a flexible distance learning format.”
  - **Objective 3.5:** “Significantly expand the implementation of Moodle as a learning management system.”
  - **Objective 3.6:** “Improve the physical teaching environment in all campuses.”

\*The Key target, “50% increase in number/percentage of courses to be implemented through Moodle by 2012”, ( listed in Priority Area 1), has already been achieved. Currently, 482/570 or over 85% of USP courses are Moodle-supported or enhanced.

### **Priority Area 2: Student Support; in particular:**

- **Objective 5.10:** “Improve the student to computer ratio.”
- **Objective 5.11:** “Improve support for students in using ICTs.”
- **Objective 6.3:** “Assist students to create e-portfolios to improve employability.”

This research project also directly addresses the **Strategic Goals in Priority Areas 3, 4, 5 and 6**. The wide-ranging benefits of this research project will impact the USP region and its communities at several levels:

- through the data furnishing ‘needs assessment’ models for the improvement of higher education **in the region;**
- this enhancement should result in increasing the level of graduates with the right IT attributes to compete at international levels; and
- by mapping the integral relationship between IT and other support services in relation to the successful attainment of graduate attributes, USP accreditation with international institutions should also be positively facilitated.

Since May 2011, CFDL has been in a collaborative research pilot project on Interactive Distance eLearning – IDeL – with the University of Newcastle (UoN) and M & S Consultants located in Darwin, Australia. Michael Wilson, Director/Co-owner of M & S

Consultants invented the REACT satellite tutorial platform currently used by USP. The project report will be available in February 2012.

**Note:** Refer to the Appendix for the Ethics approval form for USP and the UoN.

This research project is the first of many projects that will be initiated by CFDL, working in collaboration firstly, with the Faculties and essential support services staff and secondly, with other regional and international higher education institutions and organisations.

#### 2.5 Target Group and Beneficiaries

- Target groups: USP students and staff, in particular; SMT, the Faculties, ITS, Regional campus support and teaching staff, Properties and Facilities and CFDL.
- Beneficiaries: Prominent among the external stakeholders will be the USP student sponsors; firstly, USP regional governments and international donors such as AusAid, NZAid and JICA.

### 3. Project Description and Effectiveness

#### 3.1 Goal

To evaluate the capacity of the USP IT infrastructure at the regional campuses to deliver optimal operating systems that support DFL and identify the challenges that contribute to lagging regional DFL student success rates.

#### 3.2 Overall Objectives

1. To ensure that reporting and timeline protocols for ensuring that the USPNet infrastructure and support services are kept at optimal operational levels.
2. To investigate the factors that will contribute to raising the levels of DFL students' retention, success and completion rates at USP.
3. To consolidate the research culture at CFDL in order to make significant and ongoing contributions to USP's DFL programme - particularly those online - by raising DFL student all-round success rates and place USP's DFL programmes on par with our comparator institutions.

#### 3.3 Result Areas

Several components play a key role in a DFL student's success and these components will be assessed during the course of this study. These are:

- (i) Technology e.g. computers and computer programmes: ease of access, connectivity and the relevance and currency of learning-related software
- (ii) Internet connectivity for satellite tutorials and Moodle courses
- (iii) Maintenance - repairs and updating the equipment
- (iv) Infrastructure – the foundational network and telecommunications infrastructure located at the campuses and centres in the region
- (v) Course materials – enhanced learning design that is appropriate for distance learning in the USP context
- (vi) Other Student Support Services:

- The Library: ease of access and connectivity to online/electronic data bases;
  - Student Learning Specialists: online tutor access
- (vii) Personnel – Campus directors, regional teaching staff (where applicable) and support services campus staff
- (viii) Reporting protocols that will ensure an expedient and efficient response time to complaints about IT and other student support services

A daily log book for recording issues and problems will be available during the project as well as the Moodle page.

### 3.4 *Expected Outcomes*

1. USPNet capacity operating at optimal capacity when delivering online DFL learning materials (Moodle, REACT, mLearning and current multimedia components).
2. Revised DFL learning designs that maximise DFL students’ retention and completion rates.

## 4. Sustainability of the Project

### 4.1 *What happens at the end of the project?*

A second CFDL-initiated research proposal has been submitted to the Research Office entitled, “Interactive Distance eLearning (IDeL) @ USP.” That research project will focus specifically on the challenges in the USPNet infrastructure to support ‘new’ learning and teaching practices (and pedagogy) in the regional campuses through the REACT platform.

This present research project will provide the critical information on IDeL to complete the institutional profile on the current capacity of the USPNet infrastructure to support learning and teaching and in particular, through DFL.

### 4.2 *Likely Follow-on events*

The results of this research will provide very valuable data to the current collaborative research project between USP (through CFDL) and the UoN. Specifically-designed IDeL Learning and Teaching materials for USP will require ongoing research to inform DFL learning designs as USP moves into the dynamic online learning environment, for example, with mLearning and, Personal Learning Networks (PLNs).

## 5. Project Management

A Moodle page will be set up in the Research portal to document the project and provide a discussion forum for all of the research teams to generate and capture discussions throughout the project. The purpose of the Moodle page is two-fold;

- To document all aspects of the project including overall management; and
- Secondly, to expand the use of Moodle in the USP learning and teaching environment to project management.

### 5.1 *Describe how the project will be managed?*

This research project will have its own Moodle page in the Moodle Research Portal and will be accessed by the project team members, nominated Research Office

personnel and the Moodle administrators. All project documents will be posted on the Moodle page which will also have a discussion forum to capture the dialogue between the project team members across the region.

**6. Implementation Plan/Timeline**

6.1 **Refer to page 8**

**7. Budget**

**Refer to page 9**

**8. Project Evaluation and Reporting**

1. The Project Coordinator will monitor the timeline and ensure that the project operates within the scheduled milestones.
2. Reports from the regional teams will be discussed at debriefing sessions that occur **within 3 days** of the team returning to the Laucala campus.
3. Any revisions to the project plan will be posted in Moodle to keep all of the project members and the Research Office informed.

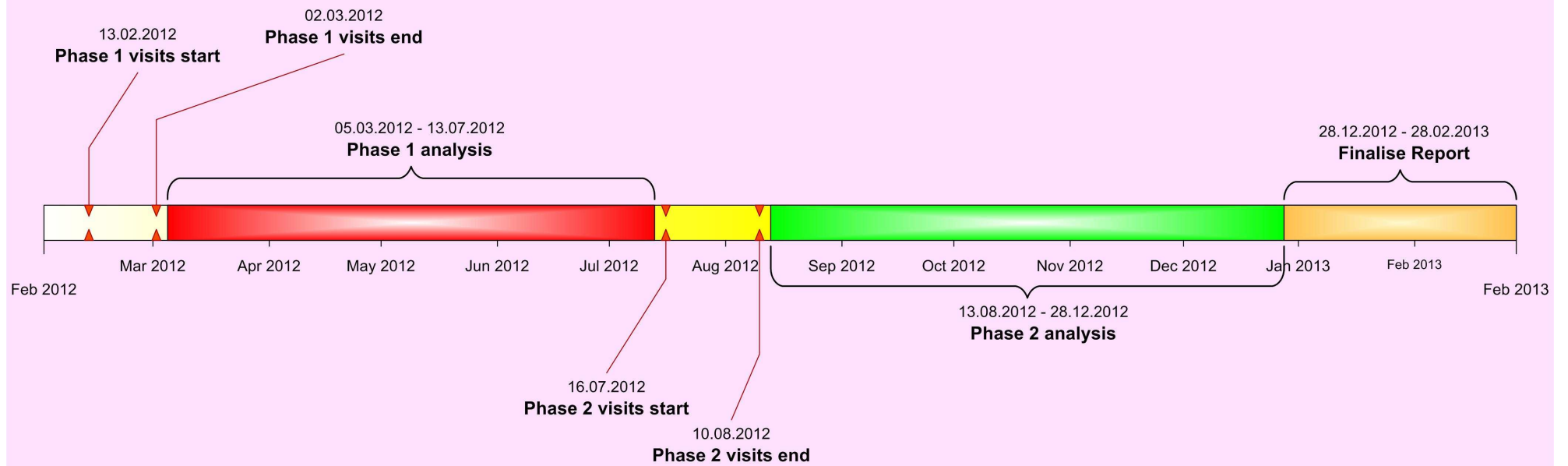
At the end of semester 1, 2012 the results from Phase 1 will be ready and the analysis will provide feedback which will guide the mid-term evaluation of the project before Phase 2 resumes. This same process will be repeated at the end of the project to inform the final report and 'flow-on' projects.

**9. Other supporting documents**

**Refer to the attachments sent with this application.**

# How does a DFL Student Succeed? Research Timeline

**Phase 1:** Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tonga & Samoa  
**Phase 2:** Nauru, Tuvalu, Labasa, Lautoka, Niue, Cook Island, Marshall Islands & Laucala





## PROJECT BUDGET

PHASE 1	Campus	Air fare (F\$)	Per Diem (F\$)	Refreshment (F\$)	Transport (F\$)	Visa Fees (F\$)	Contingency (F\$)	Total/pax (F\$)	Total 2 pax (F\$)
	Tonga	1,253.00	2,140.00	320.00	200.00	-	1,500.00	5,413.00	10,826.00
	Vanuatu	1,960.00	2,505.00	600.00	60.00	-	1,500.00	6,625.00	13,250.00
	Solomon Is	1,891.00	3,322.00	320.00	70.00	-	1,500.00	7,103.00	14,206.00
	Kiribati	2,500.00	1,954.00	320.00	150.00	40.00	1,500.00	6,464.00	12,928.00
	Samoa	1,320.00	2,010.00	320.00	65.00	-	1,500.00	5,215.00	10,430.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,924.00</b>	<b>11,931.00</b>	<b>1,880.00</b>	<b>545.00</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>7,500.00</b>	<b>30,820.00</b>	<b>61,640.00</b>

PHASE 2	Campus	Air fare (F\$)	Per Diem (F\$)	Refreshment (F\$)	Transport (F\$)	Visa Fees (F\$)	Contingency (F\$)	Total/pax (F\$)	Total 2 pax (F\$)
	Marshall Is	4,778.00	1,613.00	400.00	60.00	270.00	1,500.00	8,621.00	17,242.00
	Niue	2,064.00	2,889.00	500.00	200.00	170.00	1,500.00	7,323.00	14,646.00
	Cook Islands	2,238.00	2,102.00	320.00	70.00	170.00	1,500.00	6,400.00	12,800.00
	Tuvalu	1,340.00	1,397.00	320.00	200.00	-	1,500.00	4,757.00	9,514.00
	Nauru	3,575.00	3,465.00	320.00	150.00	406.00	1,500.00	9,416.00	18,832.00
	Lautoka	-	1,575.00	500.00	200.00	-	1,500.00	3,775.00	7,550.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,995.00</b>	<b>13,041.00</b>	<b>2,360.00</b>	<b>880.00</b>	<b>1,016.00</b>	<b>9,000.00</b>	<b>40,292.00</b>	<b>80,584.00</b>	

OVERALL BUDGET for PHASES 1&2	No. of Campuses	Air fare (F\$)	Per Diem (F\$)	Refreshment (F\$)	Transport (F\$)	Visa Fees (F\$)	Contingency (F\$)	Total/pax (F\$)	Total 2 pax (F\$)
	11 Campuses	22,919.00	24,972.00	4,240.00	1,425.00	1,056.00	16,500.00	71,112.00	142,224.00

### Notes

CFDL has already started accumulating information (February-November 2011) that will be used for this project by multipurpose training visits to the region throughout the year. Funding was provided by the CFDL budget which will also continue in 2012 for any shortfalls in the Project budget. Some of these shortfalls may result from fluctuating exchange rates, political unrest and other reasonably unforeseen circumstances.

**Attachment 1 Project Title**

**Logframe Matrix**

<i>Narrative Summary and Intervention Logic</i>	<i>Performance Indicators</i>	<i>Means of Verification</i>	<i>Assumptions</i>
<p><b>Goal</b> To evaluate the capacity of the USP IT infrastructure at the regional campuses to deliver optimal operating systems that support DFL, and identify the challenges that contribute to lagging regional DFL student success rates.</p>	<p>(1) The capacity of the USP IT infrastructure is evaluated against its current operations in delivering DFL materials. (2) Challenges to delivery are identified and compiled for further analysis. (3) Current DFL student success rates.</p>	<p>Research reports for the regional campuses in Phases 1 and 2 of the project.</p>	<p>(1) Research Project Budget approval (2) Support for the project from key stakeholders is essential.</p>
<p><b>Objective 1</b> To ensure that reporting and timeline protocols for ensuring that the USPNet infrastructure and support services are kept at optimal operational levels.</p>	<p>(1) All USPNet operators and relevant support staff in the region will be trained in the ‘Moodle for Beginners’ workshop; (2) All USPNet operators and relevant support staff in the region will be trained in IDeL using REACT; (3) Reporting and timeline protocols will be developed for all USPNet and relevant support staff in the region to ensure effective and expedient fault and service interruption reporting, response and resolution of IT-related issues.</p>	<p>Approved budget allocations by the Leader of Research Cluster 6  (1) &amp; (2) Training Workshop reports  (3) Reporting and Timeline Protocols operational document</p>	<p>(1) Specific, objective-oriented training will enhance the success of this project; (2) The Project team will be supported by key stakeholders; (3) Multipliers from the training programmes will: (i) Ensure trained and informed regional IT and support staff in the learning technologies (ii) Positively influence future funding proposals for mLearning and other learning</p>

			<p>technology training and reporting protocols</p> <p>(iii) Lead to optimal operation levels of IT supporting DFL</p>
<p><b>Outcome/Result 1.1</b> USPNet capacity operating at optimal capacity when delivering online DFL learning materials (Moodle, REACT, mLearning and current multimedia components).</p>	<p>Trained USPNet operators and relevant support staff in the region; reporting and timely problem-resolution protocols in operation as best practice strategies.</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p><b>Objective 2</b> To investigate the factors that will contribute to raising the levels of DFL students' retention, success and completion rates at USP.</p>	<p>DFL learning materials that are based on international best practice design models and adapted to address directly, the needs of the USP-DFL student in the USP Learning and Teaching environment</p>	<p>DFL Online and Blended Learning Materials</p>	<p>Support for this project from the key stakeholders is confirmed and that sufficient resources are available for further research to be undertaken in a timely manner and to achieve its objectives as indicated in the timelines.</p>
<p><b>Outcome/Result 2.1</b> Contributing factors to DFL students' retention and completion rates at USP are identified</p>	<p>Mitigation strategies are implemented through learning designs that increase the current, lagging DFL student retention and completion rates</p>	<p>As above</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p><b>Objective 3</b> To consolidate the research culture at CFDL in order to make significant and ongoing contributions to USP's DFL programmes - particularly those online - by raising DFL student all-round success rates and place USP's DFL programmes on par with our comparator institutions.</p>	<p>CFDL staff are regularly involved in research projects that inform and enhance their primary function as USP's learning designers</p>	<p>Continued research projects that are designed specifically to inform best practices at USP for DFL online and blended</p>	<p>The project is successful and the key stakeholders agree that the research project will inspire similar projects as more learning technologies are incorporated in</p>

		learning materials.	USP's L & T environment. Moreover, resources are available for further research to be undertaken in a timely manner and to achieve its objectives as indicated in the timelines.
<b>Outcome/Result 3.1</b> Embedded research project culture at CFDL and improving DFL student retention and success rates	Selected research projects are undertaken to evaluate USP's capacity to support L & T as more learning technologies are integrated into USP's L & T environment	As above	As above
<b>Outcome/Result 3.2</b> Publication of results	Conference presentations in 2013; A paper in a recognised international DFL/ODL journal on "How does a DFL student succeed at USP?"	Documents	As above