VIS1010 - 2D Studio Foundations

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TITLE: Expanding Creative Communities: Facilitating Multimodal Forms of Engagement and Learning in Tertiary Visual Arts

PARTICIPANTS: VIS1010 2D Studio Foundations is a new course, taught for the first time in Semester 1, 2021, as part of the Bachelor of Visual Art (BVSA) program. It is a first year Visual Art Studio Practice course, which is fundamental to students forming a creative and supportive peer network, as well as serving as the first stage in working towards a professional arts practice and profile. The BVSA is the first time that studio courses have been offered both fully on campus and online.

There are fifty-two students enrolled in the course. The majority of these are on campus and full-time students, many of whom are school leavers. The course is supported by two academic staff: Dr Rhiannan Johnson acts as course examiner and printmaking lecturer, and Dr Tanya McLean acts as course moderator and drawing and painting lecturer.

CONTEXT: The teaching of Visual Arts in higher education most commonly emphasises practice and individual student learning through one-to-one, face-to-face, experiential learning. Student expectations also reflect this tendency. These expectations have become challenging as online learning and digital networking are becoming more prevalent in the design and delivery of tertiary level Visual Art. As a consequence, the development of community and its impact on first year student experience was seen as an important challenge. The concomitant opportunity was to develop a community platform that would engender artist self-awareness and identity in a 'safe' space that allowed for positive and meaningful feedback/feed-forward.

At USQ, two gaps were identified as problematic with the current instructional design. Firstly, the absence of a consistent, informal and interactive online platform for the dissemination of key arts information and digital networking was seen to impact on the development of community, professional networks, and artist identity. Secondly, there was an absence of student eportfolios, a rich repository of visual and written information which could become the precursor to artist websites, professional CVs, and blog materia, all of which enhance employability.

Aim of the initiative

The aim of this project is to introduce two digital technologies into VIS1010 to align with the current University, School of Creative Arts, and Visual Art discipline priorities of strengthening the First Year Experience and embedding Graduate Employability.
- The aim of the Padlet was to address gaps in online engagement seen in previous iterations of this first year course. It was hoped the use of Padlet, as opposed to the previously used social forums, would provide an opportunity for the meaningful creation of community, both within cohorts and across modes of delivery. This community could then be utilised for student self-expression and the development of artist identity. It could also provide the opportunity for peer-to-peer and lecturer-to-student feedback and feed-forward.
- The aims of the Wordpress sites were both short-term and long-term. In the short-term (within the time frame of the course), students would have the opportunity to both learn and practise employability skills, such as how to present their work digitally. In the long-term (over the length of their program), the Wordpress sites could evolve into industry ready portfolios.

Online engagement framework

As will later be discussed, many elements of the Redmond et al 'Online engagement framework

for higher education' were considered. While elements of each type of engagement were considered in the design and implementation of each educational technology, the use of the Padlet largely drew upon social and collaborative engagement. The introduction of Wordpress sites largely drew upon cognitive and behavioural engagement. Though focused on these specific elements of the framework in the design and implementation of the technologies, it is affirming to note that student use of the Padlet demonstrated all forms of engagement

Educational Technologies

Intervention 1: Padlets for Social, Behavioural and Collaborative Engagement
Two Padlets were created. The first, the focus of this project, was a work-in-progress Padlet designed for specific course needs.The second was a community Padlet used across all levels of the program.

Course Padlet:
Importantly, though monitored and explicitly addressed by both course examiner and course lecturer, the course Padlet was used primarily by students. It was thus powered by collaborative and social engagement. Students had the opportunity to develop course specific skills and artist attributes through the posting of works-in-progress and providing feedback to others on their works. The Padlet acted as an iterative process for students to collaboratively reflect on their own work and that of others, as well as reflexively developing confidence, capability and community (behavioural engagement).
Community Padlet:
This was used by the course examiner to build collaborative and social engagement, and create a sense of belonging for students through the curation of relevant resources to support the Visual Art program and course content. The content was designed to foster an increased sense of agency and identity for first year students as visual artists. It also sought to promote multidisciplinary skill sets and platforms, which will enhance student's knowledge of industry and their development of employable attributes.

Intervention 2: ePortfolio for Cognitive, Behavioural and Emotional Engagement
Wordpress sites were selected for VIS1010 students to create an emerging artist website. These sites both form part of each student's assessable outcomes for the course and equips them up with an eportfolio space that can be enlarged in each practical studio course throughout a Visual Art degree. These sites can then continue to be used upon graduation. Students will be encouraged to use the eportfolio to: document the progress of their work; encourage critical reflection; and, develop a product to ultimately bring to industry that effectively communicates and showcases professional outcomes and employability skills.

Padlet was selected for its capacity to address all elements of the engagement framework. Not only was the key focus of the Padlet the generation of community through social and collaborative engagement, but it was also the generation of a community with agency, as students were encouraged to post and respond to posts that linked to their own artistic practice (behavioural engagement). By doing so, students acknowledged their shared experiences as students and artists. Their sense of belonging and relationships with peers were enhanced through the vulnerability of sharing creative outputs as works-in-progress. The process of iterative peer-to-peer feedback gave students the opportunity to articulate and justify the decisions they had made in relation to the development of their own work. Student learning was progressively recorded in the Padlets alongside that of their peers, and because of peer feedback, their sense of community was enhanced as were their future professional networks, which are frequently found amongst peers in the Creative Arts.

The Wordpress site was selected to give students multiple opportunities for emotional engagement, as they were encouraged to think critically about their own creative identity and how this could be communicated to others in a digital platform. The platform necessitated students develop a deep, discipline understanding, not just of their chosen art form, but of how this form is positioned and commodified within wider professional networks (cognitive engagement). The

agency that this gave students over the construction of their own artist identity promoted clear behaviour engagement.

Project approach

The *Course Padlet* is housed within the course StudyDesk, displayed centrally on the course activity, or main, page. Both modes of delivery were provided with equivalency of experience in the enmeshing of the technology. QR codes were publicly displayed within the campus classroom. After each module and exercise on StudyDesk, there is a text based cue to prompt students to engage with their new learning through posting on the Padlet (either through posting their own artworks or reflecting on those of others). On campus and Zoom classes provided the opportunity to additionally encourage students to share their experiences on Padlet. Implicitly adopting a Vygotskian approach to scaffolding of Padlet usage, teaching staff initially modelled the use of the course Padlet through a discussion of their own works-in-progress. As students adopted this and began to likewise share, teaching staff then modelled the provision of feedback, before students felt comfortable with both the process and the technology and organically began to provide peer-to-peer feedback without the need for teacher intervention.

The *Discipline Padlet* was an interactive information board embedded in the course activity page under the "further information" heading. Though content on the Padlet was largely shared by staff in these initial stages, its presence on multiple StudyDesks, within all programs across the School, allowed students to experience consistency and community.

Information on the *Wordpress* sites was displayed on the course activity page, in a section devoted to building an artist website. As it was linked to an assessment task, it was likewise included in the assessment tab and students were provided with timely prompts as part of the study schedule. Support materials were included on StudyDesk. These were two-fold, linking to the artistic/design elements of the website, such as how to photograph works, as well as to the digital literacies related to building the website. In response to student feedback, guest speakers provided Zoom classes to address the technical processes involved in building the website.

Padlet:

Key to the success of the Padlet was teacher engagement, which was an iterative process. Initially, teachers modelled the process of posting their own works-in-progress. Their "buy in" encouraged students to engage in a similar fashion. Teaching staff then modelled collaborative engagement by responding to students' posts. The feedback staff provided in these posts was not only an integral part of developing students course specific knowledge and skills, but a means to developing more widespread social engagement within the cohort, as many were initially more comfortable responding than posting. Over time, teaching staff no longer needed to post or respond, as student agency developed and was demonstrated through collaborative engagement with the Padlet, seen in rich discussions and greater openness within the community of learners. Though the Padlet largely became a student-driven collaborative engagement tool, teaching staff were able to monitor it for trends in student learning needs, which they were then able to address.

Wordpress

With its key focus on employability, the Wordpress site is more formative at this early stage of the program. The Wordpress site allowed the students to develop and express their emerging artist identities in a way that would engage meaningfully with their future career opportunities.

As this is a studio course, where 90% of the course/assessment is practical, traditional data analytics, though a measure of engagement with the online course, could not account for the students' engagement with their artistic medium. Thus, a mixed methods approach to data collection was taken, including:

- Ethics permission was obtained for an online survey of students to be completed after the final assessment. Survey questions gathered both qualitative and quantitative data on student use of both Padlets and the Wordpress site.
- Data analytics from the course StudyDesk were obtained. As there is no historical data on this course, it was compared to prior course data analytics for commensurate courses.
- Padlet analytics including number of posts and responses.
- Reflection of course examiner (researcher).

Project impact

The Course Padlet (see Fig 1) was successful in its aim to address gaps in online engagement, specifically addressing social, behaviour, and collaborative forms of engagement from the Redmond et. al. framework. This success was founded largely on instructional design, teacher modelling, and pre-existing student behaviours.
Social engagement:
- There had been limited posts to social forums in past versions of the course. In 2020, VSA1002 had four posts and VSA1001 had no posts in social forums. In 2021, VIS1010's Padlet had 319 posts. This is an exponential growth in student social and collaborative engagement.
- Student survey results (see appendix 2) confirm the use of the Padlet as an engagement tool, with 80% of respondents strongly agreeing they preferred Padlet to social forums, and 80% of respondents strongly agreeing that the Padlet enhanced the quality of, and their engagement in, the course.
- 80% of survey respondents either agreed, or strongly agreed, that the Padlet gave them the ability to connect with peers and staff in a way that has fostered a sense of belonging, supporting their transition into tertiary studies.
Collaborative engagement:
- In addition to the original posts, there were 403 comments and 1164 reactions to posts and comments within the Course Padlet.
- Teaching staff noted anecdotally that, as a result of collaboratively engaging with each other's works in progress on the Padlet, there was enhanced growth of students as artists, not just in the development of their work, but in their capacity to receive and use feedback in a meaningful way.
- Overall, teaching staff noted that student confidence was enhanced through the use of collaborative feedback in the Padlet. Students demonstrated an openness and transparency surrounding their creative and thinking processes.
Behavioural engagement:
- Upon reflection, it was found that the success of the Padlet was partly founded on its utilisation of pre-existing behaviours. Many of the students were familiar with the use of social media, and thus both the pragmatic and affective behaviours underpinning posting and commenting. This heightened acceptance and use of the Padlet.
- The Padlet created a sense of accountability in student engagement. Students were self-motivated to be part of the active and supportive community. They were thus motivated to post at the same time as peers, often prompted to do so by the work of others. As a consequence, students remained consistent with course timelines. Whilst online learning can often mean asynchronous learning, the Padlet, in some ways, provided a collaborative prompt for synchronicity.
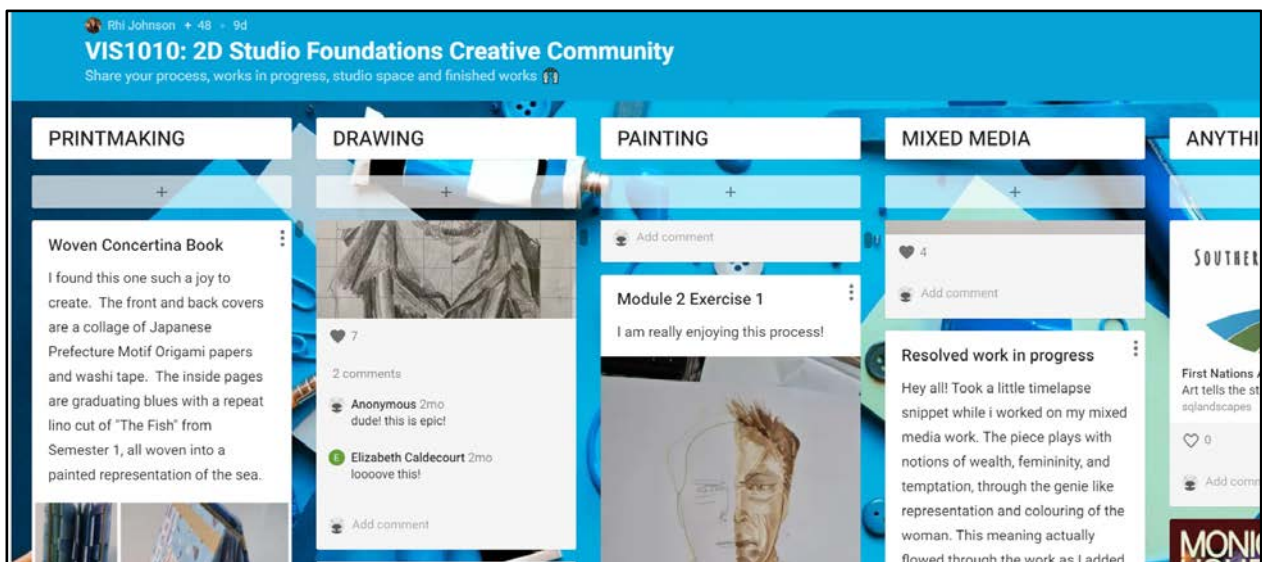
Fig. 1 Course Padlet screenshot

The aims of the Wordpress sites were both short-term (the opportunity for students to both learn and practice employability skills) and long-term (the Wordpress sites could evolve into industry ready portfolios before graduation). Though not seeing the same degree of engagement as the Padlet, the Wordpress sites were successful in their short-term goal.

- Many students have created highly engaging artist websites (see appendix 1).
- The use of Wordpress to develop artist websites has been carried over into the complementary courses, indicating that they will be sustained through the program structure.
- Data gathered from student survey indicates that 100 percent of respondents either agree or strongly agree that having an artist website would be an asset to their future career and/or professional undertaking. Only 50% of respondents, however, found the technology easy to engage with.
- As the Wordpress was implemented as part of an assessment task, it has allowed teaching staff the opportunity to follow up with students who did not achieve success on the task. In this way, first quartile students have gained an awareness of the importance of artist sites and will receive additional support moving forward in the creation of their own. First quartile students, however, have already demonstrated an eloquent use of the tool.
- Anecdotally, teacher reflection indicated that students were more strategic and critical in how they finished and presented their works. They likewise demonstrated an enhance ability to photograph and express their work. Each of these is a marketable skill for artists.

There were several positive outcomes that, though not the stated aim of the project, were important outcomes.

- Data analytics reveal greater engagement in the course overall (see tables 1 and 2). In 2020, there was an average of 265 clicks per student by semester on StudyDesk. In 2021, the average was over double at 588 clicks. (It must be noted, however, that the implementation of these technologies did not occur in isolation. They are part of a larger university wide incentive to improve the StudyDesk experience for students and align with School aims.)
- The use of Padlet and Wordpress has been embraced by both program and School staff. The lead researcher has presented at both a School forum for staff, and also School forums for students (online and oncampus) to highlight the use of the Padlet. Additional Padlets have been created to operate within additional courses, and at the program and School level. The use of Wordpress sites and the creation of individual artist sites will continue through the remaining levels of the program.

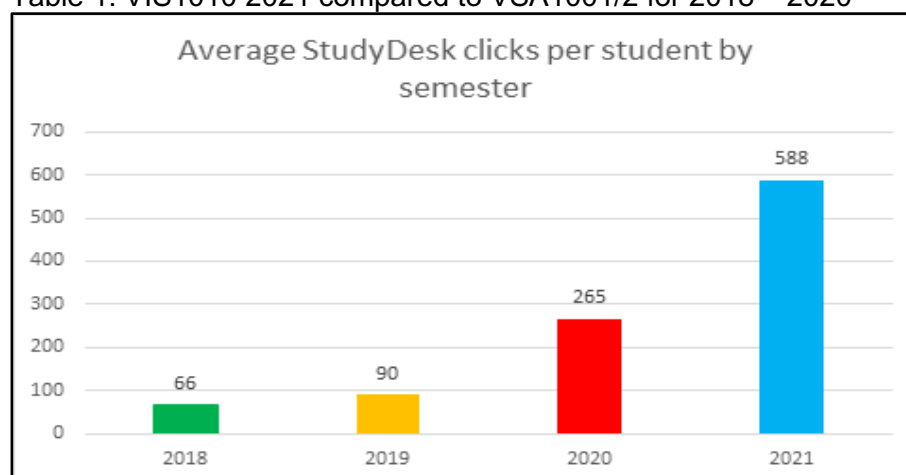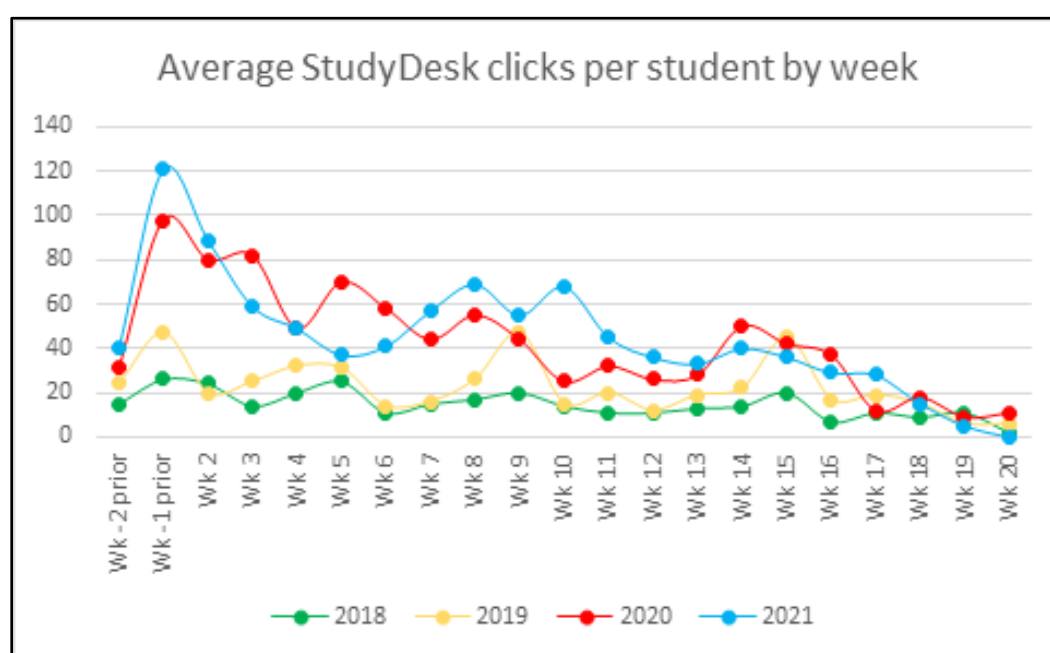Table 1: VIS1010 2021 compared to VSA1001/2 for 2018 – 2020

Table 2: VIS1010 2021 compared to VSA1001/2 for 2018-2020

Your skill development:

Previously, due to barriers imposed by time and the complexities involved in the identification and implementation of new technologies, I have been resistant to their adoption. Now, however, through the supports offered in the Technology Demonstrators project, I feel confident and competent in the use of these technologies and with the exploration of others that may suit future student/course needs. It has been beneficial to develop a new skill set that not only benefits students, but the School as a whole, as I share my practice with colleagues. Pivotal to my skill development was that the technologies were not taught in isolation. They fulfilled a specific need, were embedded in course design, and underpinned by sound theory. Thus, I was allowed to engage with a digital first technology whilst still engaging with the integrity of practical based arts learning.

Application of your chosen elements from the online engagement framework:

The online engagement framework was key to both the implementation and interpretation of the digital technologies. Upon analysis, it was found that each of the actions within the Padlet, from

posting, to providing and receiving feedback, as well as simply viewing the Padlet, acted as a layer of engagement, with each layer combining multiple elements of engagement (see fig 2). Interestingly, the Padlet, though not initially considered as utilising behavioural engagement, was found to rely on pre-existing behaviours transferred from the students' experiences with social media. Thus, behaviour engagement was a key to success, prompting initial uptake of the Padlet.
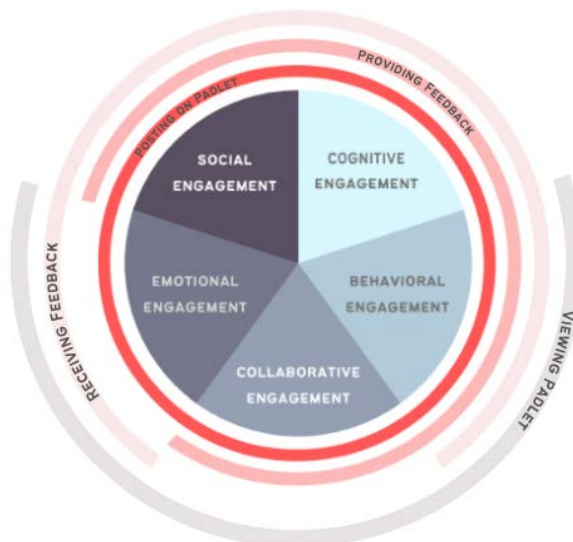

Fig 2 Layers of engagement in Padlet

The effectiveness of the educational technologies used to achieve your project aims.

As evidenced by the previous section, the Padlet was highly effective in its capacity to provide an opportunity for the meaningful creation of community, both within and across cohorts and programs. The Padlet's use has exceeded initial aims. In contrast to the Padlet, the use of Wordpress sites has had less student engagement. Its goals were originally both short-term and long-term, with the Wordpress sites themselves evolving into industry ready portfolios only at the end of the program. Short-term aims for Wordpress have, in the main, been achieved, with several recommendations (please see following section) to improve the overall implementation of Wordpress as artist sites.

Student outcomes.

As noted in the previous section, student outcomes have been diverse. There are several of note. The use of Padlet has allowed students to be able to more clearly articulate their ideas. Reflective and reflexive practice has been heightened. Students are better able to engage as a network of peers. Wordpress sites that were developed show a sense of online professional identity. Those students who are yet to fully engage with Wordpress are aware of ways to communicate with a consumer base and global audience,

Both the Padlet and the Wordpress will remain part of VIS1010. In the main, the Padlet as it was initially implemented requires no enhancement, though it is currently being extended through its implementation in other VIS courses. There are several recommendations for the enhancement of the Wordpress sites, both with regard to its initial implementation in the next iteration of VIS1010, as well as its development across the remaining courses for students in the program.

The Course Padlet has already been implemented in semester two courses. The Discipline Padlet has been embraced throughout visual arts staff and is utilised throughout the breadth of the program. Finally, the School Padlet is in use across the broader School of Creative Arts. It is recommended that the Padlet remain enmeshed in the StudyDesk in the same manner and

location. Additionally, staff modelling of Padlet behaviours will be repeated as necessary, and its use as a formative assessment tool to identify and address student needs will likewise be repeated. It has already been noted, however, that students who used the Padlet in semester one, and who continue to do so in their semester two course, did not require the initial teacher modelling that was a part of VIS1010, and have thus already demonstrated greater engagement and collaboration at these early stages.

The implementation of the Wordpress sites would benefit from additional support in the initial phases. Students found this technology the hardest to use as it did not rely on previously existing behaviours and is somewhat more complex in its initial set up phases. Thus, it is recommended that additional live classes (both face-to-face and Zoom) be timetabled at the beginning of the next iteration of the course to allow students to work through the initial set up stages with the support of both teaching staff and relevant support staff. Additionally, as the program rolls out and students continue to refine and extend their Wordpress sites, there is an opportunity for direct instruction on finer details of Wordpress, such as how to add plug ins.

In many ways, through the inclusion of the Padlet and Wordpress technologies in other Visual Arts courses, spanning the entirety of the program, as well as the use of the Padlet as a tool to build collaborative engagement and community across the entire School of Creative Arts, I am already recommending the use of these technologies as a means of engaging students, enhancing employability, and developing community. Within these discussions, my greatest recommendation for Padlet use would be the importance of teacher modelling of behaviours. As it is a long term project, instead of a course specific undertaking, consideration of the end goal is important with the use of Wordpress, so that the appropriate supports can be implemented for learners.

Finally, and most importantly, I would recommend ongoing support for early adopters of educational technologies. Without the support of the Technology Demonstrators program, the implementation of these technologies, and the engagement and community that they developed, would not have been feasible. The imperative is for ongoing support for staff and students so that gains made through this program continue to grow.

Appendix One - Exemplars of Student Wordpress Sites

Please note: As this is a report for internal use only, consent has not been sought from students for the use of these screenshots. Their use here is an important demonstration of the success of Wordpress, but is not for external use.
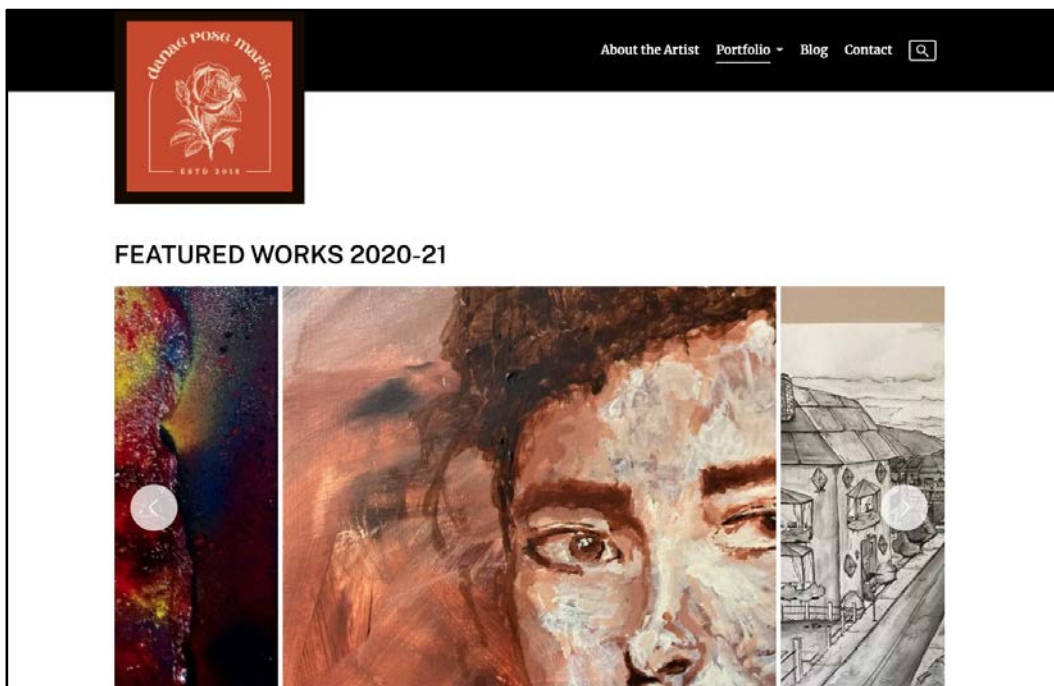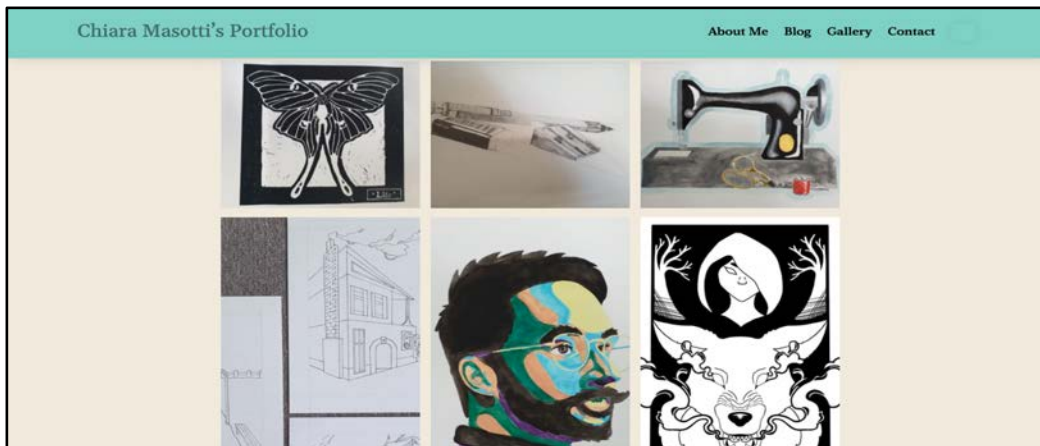
Appendix Two - Summary tables of student survey responses

VIS1010, S1, 2021 – Padlet Survey Data

Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
The use of the 'Your Creative Community' Padlet has allowed me to share my works and ideas, and to communicate with my peers.	0	0	0	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	5
I have found the 'Your Creative Community' Padlet a supportive platform.	0	0	0	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	5
The ability to connect with my peers and staff in this way has fostered my sense of belonging and has supported my transition into tertiary study.	0	0	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	5
I prefer the use of Padlet as an interactive tool than text based StudyDesk forums.	0	0	0	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	5
I found the Padlet technology easy to use and engage with.	0	0	0	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	5
The 'Everything Visual Art' Padlet was a useful tool when seeking information about industry professionals, galleries, artist interviews, blogs, suppliers, workshops and other relevant information.	0	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	5
Overall, the use of Padlet in VIS1010 has enhanced the quality of and my engagement with the course.	0	0	0	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	5

VIS1010, S1, 2021 – WordPress Survey Data

Responses	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
I think that having an artist website will be an asset to my future career and/or any professional undertakings.	0	0	0	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	6
I found the technology easy to engage with.	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	0	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	6
There were sufficient resources and support services provided.	0	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	6
I have learned new skills related to presenting my work and myself as an artist.	1 (17%)	0	0	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	6
Overall, the use of WordPress in VIS1010 has enhanced the quality of the course.	1 (17%)	1 (17%)	0	3 (50%)	1 (17%)	6