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in the face of diminishing resources**

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**PROBLEM SESSION: FACILITATING PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES FOR THIRD YEAR  
COMPUTING STUDENTS IN A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY**

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## **PROBLEM SESSION: FACILITATING PRACTICUM EXPERIENCES FOR THIRD YEAR COMPUTING STUDENTS IN A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY**

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### **The reality of parallel sessions**

Any presenter at a conference with parallel sessions runs the risk that too many, or too few, participants will attend the scheduled session. The experienced conference presenter prepares sufficient materials for somewhat more than the anticipated audience and hopes for the best. It is a more difficult matter to plan for a non-formal session at a conference which is attempting to provide novel and alternative presentation formats.

While the topic I was proposing for a problem session was important to me and my institution, I would have been surprised if it had attracted a large number of participants. In preparing for the session I accordingly assembled sufficient photocopies of a number of appropriate documents (subject profile, etc.) for 10 participants, and obtained several copies of the *Departmental Handbook*.

My session planning included several questions that I wished to ask, particularly with regard to assessment, management of large groups of independent students, and motivating staff. I was hopeful that some of the HERDSA conference participants would have had experience previously with a similar problem and could share those experiences.

Unfortunately, the timing was wrong, or the description of my problem was too daunting, for no one came to the advertised session. I say 'advertised session' because one individual did come, a colleague from another institution who had some questions on an unrelated topic, but one of interest to both of us.

We therefore spent almost two hours, more than twice my allocated time, exploring his questions. These questions primarily dealt with copyright and the management of educational materials development projects within a university, an area where we both have some experience.

### **What is success?**

This abstract provided the promotional information for the advertised problem session. While the session failed to attract any participants, it was still a productive session for the author. It could easily be said that my problem session had not been a success. Certainly I did not get any answers to my advertised problem. On the other hand, my colleague and I did have a very useful and thought provoking session discussing his project.

Perhaps our discussions were not as elevated as they might have been with a larger group of participants, but we discussed, in depth, several problems that were causing implementation difficulties for one practitioner. To my mind at least, that is what collegiality and conference networking is all about.