Aston Business School

Good Practice Guide in Learning and Teaching

Volume 9

Edited by
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Helen Higson

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EDITORIAL

Editorial

As usual we got very excited when we read the articles in this edition. It is so inspiring to read how colleagues are so committed to the student learning experience. It is also extremely encouraging to see how far the School has come over the last few years in the degree of reflection on the learning experience and also in its use of learning technologies. In the very recent past staff were just putting up their slides on Blackboard™ and thinking that was enough. We now find staff are really engaging with reflective learning and the maximising of student learning and finding technologies to facilitate this.

This edition has showed a big step forward in the use of technology and that is why we have given further details of all the technologies available via the Centre for Learning Innovation and Professional Practice (CLIPP) website as *Appendix 1* to this Guide. Perhaps it will inspire you to take up one of them or you will find a technology which fits a learning issue which you have been perplexed about. CLIPP offer group courses via the Staff and Graduate Development website, but also one to one consultancy for those wishing to develop specific module requirements. The CLIPP team are proactive and understand the needs of those of us for whom technology doesn't come naturally – thank you Kevin, Neil and Adam.

The use of learning technologies plays a big part in this year's Guide: Videos feature (Parkes and Rudd; Tissington) as do Blogs (Tapinos); online web-based resource (Olczak) and the use of Elluminate as a way of interactive learning at a distance (Despic; Terry and Davies). All these methodologies have been adopted to encourage students to be more active learners and the positive feedback shows that students do not want to sit in the classroom passively. The other theme, as ever, is employability. Both Glanfield and Jones and Higson show their concern to fit in with Aston's vision to produce the most employable graduates in the world.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the messages that Joanne Lyubovnikova puts forward in her article. Joanne has felt very supported by the Aston community of reflective practitioners in the development of her modules. She mentions the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice which all new staff at Aston now participate in. This course allows new lecturers to talk to each other in across disciplines and find out about new technologies and learning innovation. This series of Good Practice Guides has a similar purpose. If you have not come across them before, you can find the eight back numbers at http://www1.aston.ac.uk/clipp/learning-innovation/ltr-good-practice-guides/ and http://www1.aston.ac.uk/aston-business-school/research/centres/helm/gpg/ or check out good practice articles on CLIPP's Open Educational Resources site - http://www1.aston.ac.uk/clipp/o4b/

Finally, keep up the good work in making Aston Business School's learning experience inspirational. If you have any good ideas for our tenth edition please get in touch.

Aston Business School encourages staff to publish articles on learning and teaching innovations in refereed research journals. Suggested journals rankings to guide ABS staff who wish to publish in this area are set out in *Appendix 2*.

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By request, we have included a short summary of each article below:

Improving undergraduate employability, the student experience and student satisfaction through practitioner module partnership and the sponsorship of UG modules	In summary, the 'Advanced Marketing Communications' module is delivered to final year undergraduates when students wishing to enter a marketing career within the world of advertising agencies or in marketing operations, will be facing rounds of job applications, interviews and assessment centres etc. In addition to the requirements of organisations for candidates to have the ability frame and understand marketing problems and develop effective solutions on paper, employers will also be looking for evidence that candidates have a practical understanding and experience of a range of practical marketing solutions.
	The challenge was to develop the module to address these pressing and practical requirements. The principal aim was to increase the potential employability of marketing students and in turn their satisfaction with the module.
	In 2010/11 a major London advertising agency agreed to sponsor the module and also agreed to provide additional input to develop students practical skills and experience.
'I know you are satisfied but have you learnt anything?' the use of video in Marketing case study tutorials	This paper deals with the subject of utilizing video as a teaching resource when large student cohorts are involved. Research was undertaken because student feedback in the quantitative end of term survey on the module* had been consistently positive, with very few negatives expressed by students. At the end of the academic year 2009/10, however, the faculty team carried out a review of the delivery methods in line with the desired learning outcomes. One observation was the end of term exam papers did not demonstrate student engagement with case studies and that formative learning through class discussion in tutorials was not occurring. *(Marketing Management is one of the largest MSc Modules within the Marketing Programme)
Interactive virtual tutorials which encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning in an active way	This paper investigates the use of Elluminate to try and to make students be more active in their learning.
	Elluminate is a web conferencing tool which is linked with Blackboard™. It offers the opportunity to interact with the lecturer and other students wherever you are in the world. Elluminate allows lecturers to schedule synchronous virtual classroom and webinar sessions. There are a number of tools for lecturers to use such as a virtual white board, screen sharing, web tours and polling. Participants can communicate through text chat, as well as using a microphone or web cam when permitted.
Reflections of a new lecturer: Teaching innovations and the role of peer support	This paper outlines the key innovations that a lecturer new to teaching introduced to a module that she would be responsible for. This module would now have a mixture of second and final year students from a variety of programmes.
	These changes presented a number of issues which needed to be addressed prior to delivering the module. To address the challenges of a mixed cohort, the content, learning outcomes, structure and methods of delivery used were revised and updated. Key innovations to the module were implemented. These are described more fully in the paper.
E blogspot in the teaching of strategic management	This article presents the use of blogspots in the teaching of Strategic Management as a tool used to create greater linkages between theory and practice, discussing the evolution of its utilisation in modules, the current state of use and a series of reflections on experience gained from its use so far.
Finance E-learning in the virtual classroom	This paper describes the implementation of a customised Finance e-Learning solution to a major French global corporate client. The initial module, was first

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	delivered asynchronously in 2010 via the client's corporate Virtual Learning Environment, and included a final project assessment that participants submitted via email. In partnership with the client, the module was created using the client's own financial reporting documentation, aligning theoretical principles to the actual hard data of the company's own publicly available accounts. Once the cohort had successfully completed the e-Learning package, the client raised awareness of an emerging need for the participants to reinforce and extend knowledge and understanding of some of the fundamental concepts and data contained in the module. A virtual classroom session was proposed that would allow the lecturer to give an in-depth exposition of the concepts in person, and to ask participants to apply these concepts to real data. The synchronous nature of the session would allow for interactivity and on the spot feedback, which would be instrumental in helping the participants gain a real understanding that they could then immediately apply in their respective roles. .
Video clips/Vodcasts	This paper is aimed at showing how video clips can help communication with students. First the paper sets out what is meant by video clips in this context and then by qualifying the conditions in which they can be used to best effect. At the end some examples are given to illustrate how videos were used for the benefit of the students and to make the life of the lecturer a little easier along the way!
Work placements and degree performance	This work builds on earlier research which shows that undertaking a work placement year improves students' degree results (Driffield et al, 2011). This project, funded by the Higher Education Academy, has three main aims: • To reproduced the original research across a wider group of students, in another institution and more subject areas, in order to test the validity and generalisability of the findings across the sector as a whole. • To explore, in more depth via student engagement, the key findings of the original research in relation to those groups which would benefit most from the findings (e.g. less academically strong students and those choosing not to undertake a placement). • To provide some advice and guidance to policy makers in HEIs to inform their decisions around designing and implementing placement programmes.
Using an online web-based resource to set assessed weekly quizzes	MyEconLab is used to provide a range of practice and revision quizzes throughout the course. This resource provides instructors with access to a large bank of questions based on the textbook material. This includes multiple-choice type questions, and other question formats. Particularly relevant for introductory economics classes are tools which provide questions that involve drawing and interpreting graphs.
Appendix 1: Centrally supported learning technologies	Summary of centrally supported learning technologies: Aston Replay, Blackboard™, PebblePad, Turnitin, Adobe Presenter, Audacity, BB FlashBack, Box of Broadcasts (BoB), Elluminate, EndNote, Optivote.

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IMPROVING UNDERGRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY, THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND STUDENT SATISFACTION THROUGH PRACTITIONER MODULE PARTNERSHIP AND THE SPONSORSHIP OF UNDERGRADUATE MODULES

KEITH GLANFIELD

Context and opportunity

Advanced Marketing Communications, a final year undergraduate module, integrates several foundations of the marketing discipline i.e. consumer behaviour, marketing communications and marketing strategy. The module presents students with an opportunity to understand how marketing problems faced by an organisation can be addressed through the effective use of advanced marketing communications techniques. In other words how the effective development of marketing campaigns can address practical marketing issues of repositioning poorly positioned brands to improve market share, extend brands into new market segments and launch new products to combat competitive threats.

The module is delivered in the final term of the degree, the very time when students wishing to enter a career within the world of advertising agencies or in marketing operations of major organisations, will be facing rounds of job applications, interviews, assessment centres and so on for marketing graduate schemes, internships and full-time marketing positions. In addition to the requirements of organisations for candidates to have the ability to frame and understand marketing problems and develop effective solutions on paper, (mostly addressed by the theory and research elements of the module), employers will also be looking for evidence that candidates have a practical understanding and experience of:

- Persuasively pitching and presenting solutions to marketing problems to senior stakeholders and key decision makers
- Taking a solution from paper and delivering a cost effective and innovative campaign
- Campaign development from both a client and agency perspective
- Evaluating new and emerging marketing communications tools
- How client organisations and advertising agencies manage what can be a very tricky relationship.

As the module leader, the challenge was to develop the module to address these pressing and practical requirements. In doing so it was necessary to develop opportunities to operationalize theory and research to demonstrate its relevance and applicableness to developing solutions to practical marketing problems. The principal aim being to increase the potential employability of marketing students and in turn their satisfaction with the module.

The solution – module sponsorship by a major London advertising agency

In 2010/11 Billington Cartmell (BC), a major London advertising agency, with clients such as LloydsTSB, Nestle and GlaxoSmithkline agreed to sponsor the Advanced Marketing Communications module and in doing so agreed to provide the following to develop students' practical skills and experience:

- **Joint review and amendment of module content from a practitioner perspective** The module was reviewed and amended, from a practitioner perspective, to integrate and incorporate the activity set out below.

- **Practical assessment - provide a "Live" and current client problem, being worked on by the agency, for students to develop a commercially compelling marketing communications campaign** BC and their client GlaxoSmithKline provided a live marketing problem, which the agency were working on at the time for the students in groups to develop a campaign solution over the 12 week module period. The challenge was to reposition a well-known fast moving consumer goods brand, "Horlicks", from a night time drink taken prior to sleep to a relaxing and early evening drink".

- **Briefing of students by the agency/client and on-going contact through the campaign development process** Students were briefed directly by the agency and their client on the marketing problem, with discussion and development of the importance of client briefing, how to manage this vital activity, accompanied by follow-up sessions to take questions on the brief and for the brief to be challenged. This included providing students with packs of the product to taste and to get a practical feel to the product's packaging and merchandising.

- **Provide Guest Lectures on related practical skills, "the art of pitching" etc** BC provided practitioner guest speakers to deliver presentations on and discuss the practical challenges of pitching, campaign development, creativity in advertising etc, which were delivered as a component part of lectures in support of relevant theory and research.

- **Provide the main participants of a pitching panel, where each group pitched their solution to the agency/client and a number of industry experts** Each of the 28 groups, over a two day period, pitched their campaign solution to key members of the agency/client, the Regional Director of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and an external pitching consultant. This was not a false, staged environment, rather an opportunity to sell a campaign solution to industry experts with the opportunity for students to gain a paid summer internship at the agency and also for groups to receive a best pitch first, second or third prize. The results of the pitches were considered for incorporation into the agency's on-going development of solutions for their client.

- **Award a number of paid internships for students based upon their performance in the campaign pitches** Based upon students' performance in the pitching assessment, a number of students were invited for interview by Billington Cartmell, with several paid summer internships awarded to students. As a result a number of offers of full-time employment were made.

- **Award prizes for pitch performance** Based upon students' performance in the pitching assessment, the top three pitches were awarded prizes by BC, which were formally recognised and certified by Aston Business School.

Additional support to compliment the sponsorship activity.

With 28 groups developing campaigns, and their associated pitches, over the course of the 12 week module it was essential that each group had the opportunity to discuss their campaign with the lecturer a number of times throughout its development. So each week, three one hour tutorials were scheduled for individual groups to meet with the lecturer on a biweekly basis, resulting in the opportunity for each group to meet five times with the lecturer over the course of the module.

In addition to the guest lectures provided by Billington Cartmell, it was necessary to include guest lectures on specific specialist subjects, delivered by external experts. Guest lectures on brand equity measurement, the internal impact of branding, campaign evaluation and media planning were delivered by practitioners from widely recognised marketing organisations based in the West Midlands including McCann Erikson, Millward Brown, and Cogent Elliot.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing, given its role to develop future marketers in the West Midlands, aided the development of the module in assisting in the development of the pitch assessment criteria and, in the form of their Regional Director, marking and providing feedback on the student pitches.

Learning and teaching benefits

The learning and teaching benefits of the 2010/11 module, when compared to the previous year, were markedly improved in terms of an increase in overall student performance, student evaluation of the module and the opportunities provided to integrate theory and research with marketing practice:

- **Improved student evaluation** The overall student satisfaction of the module, against the previous year, improved from 3.0 to 4.0 scoring 4.3 for "module is valuable", 4.2 for "module is challenging" , 4.5 for "links to practical examples", 4.3 for "student participation" and respectively 4.3 / 4.5 for "good teaching style" and "knowledge of subject".

- **Improved coursework and exam performance** In overall terms the mean mark moved up to 60.53% (sd 8.96) from 51.12% (sd 8.84) the previous year. Exam performance increased by 12% and coursework assessment moved from a mean of 56.74% to 61.75%. Other factors may have influenced this improvement, however, strong narrative student feedback emphasises the value of the practical nature of the module in applying theory and research to practice.

- **Central theme to integrate research and theory with practice** The "live" marketing problem, the repositioning of Horlicks, provided a central theme for lectures, where each week research and theoretical content were discussed and applied in this context. One central theme provided both continuity and the opportunity to integrate practically frameworks and models.

- **Likely increased ability for students to integrate and apply research and theory in an exam setting** Compared to the previous year students demonstrated a greater ability to apply research and theory in an examination setting. The year-on-year increase in exam performance of 12% can be directly attributed to students arriving at definite and relevant conclusions based upon using their experience of the Horlicks assessment to consider the relevance of theory and research, which was a key learning outcome for the module.

- **Opportunity for the lecturer to integrate and build relationships with a large student group.**
  Sometimes it can be difficult for lecturers to build relationships with a large student group, in this case 190 students. Meeting each assessment student group five times during the module, and having a common point of reference for class discussion, built a stronger two-way relationship between the class and the lecturer.

Learning and teaching challenges

Although this model of delivery achieved several important and relevant teaching and learning benefits, a number of challenges accompanied this form of module delivery. Specifically, the increase in time and resource needed over and above taking a more conventional model of delivery:

- **Change module sequence and content to cope with new lecture format** In order to integrate guest lectures into lecture time, change the emphasis of the module in response to practitioner feedback and incorporate the Horlicks live marketing problem, the content and structure of the existing lectures required changing and re-sequencing.

- **Greater tutorial time and out of lecture support** For students to gain the maximum benefit from working on the "live" problem and for each student group to be practically assessed in the form of a campaign "pitch", greater face-to-face time was needed in tutorials.

- **More administration** The sourcing of the partnerships, its on-going management, making arrangements for additional guest lectures etc requires greater administration from the lecturer.

- **Greater lecture preparation** Linking and integrating guest lecture content increased lecture preparation time.

Employability benefits for students

The intention of changing the delivery model was practically to support students in their search for their first role in marketing by providing the opportunity for students to develop specific work-based

marketing technical skills (pitching and pitch development) and experience client and advertising agency specific processes:

- **Internships, employment and incentives** As a result of Billington Cartmell seeing and jointly assessing the 28 student pitches, 15 students were invited for interview. A number of these were offered and accepted paid summer internships that resulted in some full-time job offers. The potential of the internships and the pitching prizes plus the added incentive of working on a "live" practical problem acted as an incentive for students to commit to the module and its assessment.

- **Developed practical work based skills** Students, in a "live" setting were equipped with first-hand experience and knowledge of the client/agency briefing process, translating a brief into a marketing problem that required a solution, end-to-end campaign development (including creative development) and crafting and delivering a pitch to experienced industry and agency practitioners.

- **Experience for use at interviews and selection** Students successfully used the "Horlicks" experience and their exposure to campaign development, along with their placement year, to enhance their case during recruitment and selection. This was especially during competence based interviews that required students to demonstrate how they had addressed practical work based challenges.

- **Network growth** Many students took the opportunity to extend their professional and social networks using electronic media to connect to practitioner guest speakers and their organisations.

Disadvantages

The numerous opportunities presented to students to improve their prospects of employment within the marketing profession brought with them a number of challenges:

- **Increased workload and effort required to optimise the opportunities in their final term** During their final term, where final year students are most under pressure, students had to commit to achieving tight and demanding deadlines in order to deliver innovative and practical coursework. This mirrored the challenges faced in the majority of practitioner marketing roles but required students to work in a professional and organised manner, and substantially commit to dedicate the requisite time and effort to deliver high quality output, if they were to benefit fully from the process.

- **More group work** Although more group work was required in the final term for final year under-graduates, the practical work-related nature of the work positively contributed to the favourable teaching evaluations.

Future application and development of the model based upon partner and student feedback

The application of the practitioner module partnership and sponsorship model is not limited to the marketing communications discipline. For 2011/12 the model was applied and extended in the form of a partnership with McCann Erikson, Birmingham with the joint design and delivery of a new final year undergraduate module in "Strategic Brand Management". Working with their client, National Express, the business problem is to assess development potential and future direction for their corporate brand. The model has the potential to be applied outside of the marketing discipline to other disciplines within Aston Business School and in other Schools of the University. Broadly its transferability is dependent upon the presence of a number of factors:

- Partnering with an organisation that is willing to share commercial information and open up their organisation to the University in return for gaining access to a pool of undergraduates and receiving a diverse set of solutions to a business problem that is central to the organisation's future success.

- Sourcing a business problem or organisational issue where a suitable solution can be developed at a distance i.e. without students having to work in the organisation for a significant period of time or become directly immersed in its day-to-day operation.
- That the business problem lends itself to a practical form of assessment that mirrors a real-life professional experience i.e. the presentation of an advertising solution to an advertising agency client in the form of an "agency pitch".
- That the academic is willing to recognise and work within the practical commercial and operational constraints of the partner organisation. Making the necessary trade-offs to accommodate the need for students to develop a practical solution to the business problem and make themselves available for press and PR activity.
- That the partner and sponsoring organisation is willing to invest time and resource in briefing in the business problem, delivering guest lectures, supporting the students in development of their solutions and participating in the marking and evaluating the module assessment.

The success of the model can be gauged from the very positive feedback received from Billington Cartmell, the sponsoring organising of the 2010/11 Advanced Marketing Communications Module:

> *"The partnership allowed us to generate a wide variety of practical options on how to develop the Horlicks brand into the future, which were both valuable to us and our client. Importantly the sponsorship meant we could recruit talent into the agency based upon seeing students pitch in a real-world setting and having experienced at first hand the quality of their practical commercial thinking ".*

Student feedback, from the module evaluation sheets, was also very positive. Examples of which were:

> *"This module has a lot of real life value".*

> *"I am about to work for an advertising agency, the course really prepared me for this".*

> *"Real life application of the coursework was great and made the experience a lot more exciting".*

> *"Guest lecturers give great insight into industry practice and applying theory to real working companies".*

> *"Thoroughly enjoyed the coursework and guest lectures from industry – would like to see this adopted across all lectures".*

> *"Use of journal articles and results of research was interesting, better than only learning theory without relation to practice".*

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Example used with Undergraduate Students on BM3382: Advanced Marketing Communication

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'I KNOW YOU ARE SATISFIED BUT HAVE YOU LEARNT ANYTHING?'

THE USE OF VIDEO IN MARKETING CASE STUDY TUTORIALS:

GEOFF PARKES AND JOHN RUDD

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Context and outline

This paper deals with the subject of utilizing video as a teaching resource when large student cohorts are involved. One of the largest MSc Modules within the Marketing Programme is the Marketing Management Module. BMM601 is a compulsory core module for students studying the specialist MSc Marketing degree. This module is designed for students with previous experience of studying marketing, or those that have chosen a Marketing specialism pathway; in this content a wide and challenging range of theory is introduced. Circa 200 students enrol on this module each year.

The Module is delivered through a series of lectures and tutorials; teaching is over 10 weeks in Term 1. Assessment is a 3 hour Open Book Exam based on a Case Study. The case is given to students two weeks prior to the exam and questions are presented to students on the day. A summary of the module structure is attached in *Appendix 1*. No changes were made to the lecture content or format as part of this review.

For Tutorials, each Syndicate Group would alternate between preparing a case study (and not attending a tutorial) and then attending a tutorial the following week. Three different case studies were prepared in this way, however, due to the numbers of students involved, not every Syndicate Group could present their solution (using a power point presentation) each week – typically students would present two of the three cases. Following the student presentations and feedback, the Tutor closed the tutorial with a short powerpoint 'solution' to the case which was subsequently posted on Blackboard™.

The objective of this approach to tutorials was firstly to illustrate how marketing concepts can be applied to 'real life' business situations and also to prepare students for the exam which is similarly a case study based assessment.

A Problem?

Student feedback in the quantitative end of term survey on the module had been consistently positive, with very few negatives expressed by students. At the end of the academic year 2009/10, however, the faculty team carried out a review of the delivery methods in line with the desired learning outcomes. One observation was the end of term exam papers did not demonstrate student engagement with case studies and that formative learning through class discussion in tutorials was not occurring.

To resolve this inconsistency between positive feedback in quantitative student surveys and faculty perceptions, a number of qualitative face-to-face interviews were then carried out with students, and the following issues emerged:

Student Perspective Research
Not every Syndicate Group presented each case
Low student input (due to time constraint) on case presentations.
No real opportunity to ensure students struggling with the lecture material really understood
'Solution' Case Study limited to short powerpoint presentation
More confident students dominate the Syndicate Group discussion in and out of class

From this initial feedback, it appeared very clearly that more resource, in terms of case study tutors, was required on the module. This would allow more discussion and a better lower student to staff ratio. Obviously from a commercial perspective, this would mean less revenue per student for ABS/Marketing Group.

At this point, however, we considered whether we had missed something in the first wave of data collection, as we had focused on what module faculty HAD NOT done, as opposed to examining student participation in the learning process. A second wave of qualitative feedback was sought from students and this revealed an interesting underlying issue.

It was clear from the second wave of interviews that students were choosing not to engage with case study reading and preparation outside formal tutorials as:

1. The case study discussions were reviewed in class but were non-assessed and therefore did not contribute to the final mark.
2. Faculty would go through the answers and recommended an approach and there was a sense of 'why put in the effort, let's wait for the solution' attitude from some students.

The importance of tutorial preparation and participation was made clear in the Module Outline, in the Week 1 Lecture and in tutorials, but despite this some students clearly believed there was no incentive to participate in the case study learning process. For them this part of the module sat outside the rubric of assessment (ie the end of term exam) and, therefore, there was a perception that a degree of 'spoon feeding' would occur by faculty.

In sum, it was clear that more faculty was in fact not required. A solution, however, that encouraged students to engage with the case study material was needed. Additionally, it was important that the perception of spoon-feeding was altered.

So what did we do?

For academic year 2010/11 faculty set about changing the Module in order to address three objectives:

1. Increase student awareness of faculty expectations
2. Increase student engagement and engender an appetite to engage
3. Dismantle the notion of spoon-feeding and encourage students to 'take charge' of their own learning.

In seeking ways to increase student engagement, the team considered the use of Panopto (Aston Replay) video recordings as a possible technique to increase contact time with the student, thereby increasing student engagement, but allow video solutions to be readily accessible out of the tutorials.

For the new tutorial format, all groups attend each tutorial; these follow a bi-weekly cycle. In the first week, students are sent an electronic copy of the case study and are presented with the appropriate

questions on the day of the tutorial (thus reflecting to a degree the exam situation). Students are expected to read the case prior to the tutorial. In the tutorial, they work in groups and begin to address the questions. Tutors spend time with each group linking lecture material to the case and questions.

In the second week of the cycle, the students come to the tutorial having worked further in their groups and bring solutions to the case study questions. The tutor then addresses each question in turn with the group and works through – using student interaction – the solutions to the case, again integrating theory and practice.

After the tutorial students can access an Aston Replay Tutor Video which provides a powerpoint presentation illustrating a 'case study solution'

The next bi-weekly cycle then begins with a short review of the last Tutor Video to ensure students were happy with the solution. The next case is then considered.

The new format was designed to address the issue as follows:

- **More emphasis on up-front expectations and engagement** Faculty made it clear to all students from the outset of the Module they would need to arrive at the tutorial prepared to engage on the case study. Faculty drew a very clear relationship for students between exam performance, preparation and engagement in tutorials.

- **Check understanding** All Syndicate Groups study each of the three cases and faculty challenge group members' understanding of the concepts and theories behind each solution.

- **Relating tutorials to assessment** By replicating the tutorial format to the exam – distribution of case study then assessing questions – the emphasis is changed to students taking responsibility for their own learning and exam preparation.

- **More student feedback** The use of the Tutor Video allows for 'anytime learning' for the student and means there is more time in class to check understanding. Individual students were encouraged to reflect on class discussions and the Tutor Video and to use the Discussion Board, office hours and e-mail to address any outstanding concerns.

Results of the new format

The qualitative feedback for 2010/11 indicate the video case studies have been well received:

'It was absolutely brilliant, I have just spent about 100 minutes going through your lecture online because I kept stopping and starting to write notes. It was incredibly helpful being able to listen to you again, as it introduced me to several ideas ready for our team work assignment."

"This is going to be incredibly helpful towards the time of revision, as I can go over your thoughts and examples again, some of which are not written up on your slides."

"The tutorials have been very useful to prepare us for our exam and on what type of questions to expect"

"Clear learning and assessment through tutorials – very effective part of the module"

"The video lectures really help me understand the case studies"

"The case studies are very challenging and interesting; makes you analyse and implement what you have learned"

The new format was also of particular use to overseas students and those with learning difficulties, who found it useful to replay case study solutions and confirm understanding. Interviews with students on the new format indicate although they found the new format challenging, it did encourage them to 'own the learning process' The format of the learning was made explicit as support was less structured and based on student interaction drawn from their own work.

Prior to introducing the changes, the teaching team were concerned that participation would reduce, as there was more opportunity for groups to self-regulate the quality of their own case discussions. In the 2010 exam, however, there was evidence of greater involvement of students in case study analysis.

In addition, the new format provides the teaching team with higher levels of manpower utilization, and can now expand numbers using existing resources.

Prior to making these changes to the module delivery, faculty did consider wider research where these methods of tutorial teaching have been used.

Use of video in tutorials – Peer reviewed empirical evidence

Empirical results suggest that students are highly motivated by convenience, speed and familiarity (Holliday et al, 2006). Anderson's (2003) notion of 'equivalency of interaction' also adds a useful perspective on the issue of on-line learning. It claims that no single medium supports the educational experience in a manner that is superior in all ways to other media. Therefore, deep and meaningful formal learning is supported as long as one of the three forms of interaction (student-teacher; student-student; student-content) is at a high level. The other two ways may be offered at minimal levels, or even eliminated without degrading the educational experience. For the Marketing team involved in this project, at the centre of the changes was the opportunity to increase the student-teacher contact time. Under the old method, the Tutor involvement was primarily through a 15 minute review at the end of the tutorial. In the new method the Tutor is involved throughout the tutorial.

In a study evaluating on-line tutorials compared to classroom based delivery methods (Seabury, 2005) almost all of the students (92%) felt the learning experienced was enhanced by the use of video. This research split a group of Social Studies students in two groups – one taught in class and one utilizing on-line video. All of the students in the 'video group' felt the learning experience was enhanced by this delivery method and that it was a positive learning experience facilitated by the computer format. One benefit of the on-line video was students could examine this 'at their own pace and in their own time and are not tied to a classroom presentation'. At Aston Business School the use of on-line resources are extensive, either through the library or through Module Leaders through Blackboard™. These resources are expected of the new 'Ipod' generation of students.

In a similar study by Sweeney et al (2004), more on-line tutorial delivery methods offered the facility to teach a greater number of participating students, reduced hierarchical divides, reduced race and gender based inhibitions and encouragement of more collaborative learning. In short, students were encouraged to take a more active role in their own learning. In this study an on-line 'bulletin board' was also used to encourage students to achieve a better understanding of the material and achieve a deeper level of learning. It is important to stress in this study that students believed on-line resources should augment and not replace classroom lectures as a means of teaching delivery. For the Marketing teaching team providing a high level of quality delivery to an increasingly larger number of students was a key challenge. The new form of presentation has provided further capacity for growth, through the use of new technology.

In an age increasingly dominated by the internet and social networking, and with faster broadband speeds, it is inevitable that web-based learning is 'much sought after by students' (Chang, 1999). Some evidence also suggests it can lead to improved performance. Bartini (2008) used web-based tutorials for a group of Child Psychology students; on-line material included quizzes and

comprehensive instructional material. In this study, compared to a control class of students who did not have these resources, students in the 'web enhanced group' achieved a higher exam score. Again, for an Aston MSc cohort, the use of technology is a feature they embrace and can add value to the student-learning experience

Future Development

Students appear to have responded very positively to these innovations and it is intended to build on these initiatives further. For the MSc Marketing Module in 2011/12 it is proposed all lectures will be Aston Replay recorded and available on Blackboard™, thus presenting a complete suite of lecture and tutorial material. In addition, consideration is now being given to use Illuminate Webinar Software to move the actual tutorial themselves onto a live web format, offering on-line individual interaction between Tutor and the student cohort.

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Example used with Postgraduate Students on BMM601: Marketing Management

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Appendix 1: Traditional Module Structure

Week	Lecture 1 hour 30 minutes duration (approx)	Syndicate 1 hour 30 minutes duration (approx)	
1	Marketing in the Modern Organisation		
2	The Marketing Strategy Process	Introduction to case study analysis in Marketing	
3	Market Dynamics and Competitive Strategy	Syndicate Groups(1) Present & Discuss Kingsford Case Study	Syndicate Groups (2) Syndicates Prepare Kingsford Case Study
4	The Organisation and its Customers	Syndicates Prepare EasyJet Case Study	Present & Discuss Kingsford Case Study
5	Market-Led Innovation	Present & Discuss EasyJet Case Study	Syndicates Prepare EasyJet Case Study
6	The Market Offer	Syndicates Prepare Xelibri Case Study	Present & Discuss EasyJet Case Study
7	Marketing Communications	Present & Discuss Xelibri Case Study	Syndicates Prepare Xelibri Case Study
8	Pricing and Distribution Strategies	Individual Study	Present & Discuss Xelibri Case Study
9	Course Review	Revision	
10	EXAM	EXAM	

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INTERACTIVE VIRTUAL TUTORIALS WHICH ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN LEARNING IN AN ACTIVE WAY.   ## OZREN DESPIC

Context: Elluminate

Elluminate is a web conferencing tool which is linked with Blackboard™. It offers the opportunity to interact with the lecturer and other students on your module wherever you are in the world. Elluminate allows lecturers to schedule synchronous virtual classroom and webinar sessions. There are a number of tools for lecturers to use such as a virtual white board, screen sharing, web tours, breakout rooms and polling. Participants can communicate through text chat, as well as using a microphone or web cam when permitted. It can be very useful in distance learning as well as when using a blended approach. Aston has integrated Elluminate with Blackboard™ to allow for easy scheduling of sessions as well as convenient user management.

What I was trying to do?

I was using Elluminate with my first year undergraduate students – ABS module BN1105 (Quantitative Techniques) with about 900 students in total. We had more than 20 live sessions during the first term of the 2010-11 academic year and these sessions were all structured as "a gathering place to help each other by asking and answering questions relating to the module material".

There was an average of about 20 to 30 students participating in each session, but sometimes as high as 140 students per session. Essentially, these live sessions were something in-between "office hours" and "tutorial sessions" where my role was mainly to moderate the sessions. BN1105 module is very specific in a sense that every year we have many students who need any help they can get to help them improve their rather weak numerical skills. At the same time we have many students who are bored by the subject (since the level of maths and stats for them is like going back to GCSE level and they have A-level maths or stats). This diversity in the first year quantitative background was the main idea behind the live sessions – to enable weak students to get more help and support in their learning effort, while also allowing good students to demonstrate and further solidify their knowledge by helping the weak ones.

I was trying to make all students be more active in their learning. I was aware that about a quarter of them were bored and yet another third needed a lot of help. Both groups needed the motivation to be more responsible for their learning. This was difficult in the large lecture sessions and even in the tutorial classes.

Sessions are announced via Blackboard™ and are always live. By attending these live sessions students were also able to collect some points toward a small portion of their assessment (10%) and Neil Cocklin in CLIPP helped me with this all the way by sending me the list of participants for each of our live sessions.

I was also using Elluminate occasionally for my other modules (two second year modules and one MSc module) but this was done occasionally and mainly to clarify any questions students may have had relating to their coursework or final exam. I guess these were more like "group office hours".

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What worked well?

I am quite happy with Elluminate and I hope we will be able to keep it for the future years. In general, I think this worked well considering that this was not mandatory for students (students were able to collect points towards the same piece of assessment through the Discussion Board). I was particularly happy with the "chat box" which was just fantastic. It was good with 10-15 students but even better with larger numbers. It was wonderful to see many questions going on through the chat box virtually at the same time and the majority being answered by other students rather than having to rely on the lecturer.

There are probably many reasons why students were much more active in these sessions than in any of the regular tutorial sessions, but one of the reasons has to do with the fact that most students are participating in these sessions directly from the comfort of their home. In addition, Elluminate environment facilitates many different ways for on-line communication at the same time and allows students to take more time to express themselves freely (without being disturbed in their thoughts by the students who normally dominate regular tutorial sessions). The students were very inactive before and I know if I could make them more active, more of them would achieve their potential in the module. I am confident that this method made them more active, made the module more interesting for them, and, in the end, it certainly helped some of them to learn and understand things faster and in a more fun way than what would be the case without Elluminate sessions.

What were the most useful Elluminate features?

First of all, there are so many of them and I hardly scratched the surface in using all the features there. A large number of features, however, is probably a natural requirement for such software, which is trying to address many different teaching needs. I guess some features, such as white board and chat room are the core of Elluminate and it is hard to imagine not using these.

In my particular case, there was a huge hurdle in effectively using the tool due to difficulties in writing mathematical symbols. For this reason, I found Application Sharing tool in particular useful. With this tool I was able to project to a student's screen any application I was using on my screen. In combination with tablet PC where writing math is very smooth and easy, this created a perfect solution. The figure below shows a part of Elluminate screen, which illustrates Windows Journal being shared through Elluminate along with students' chat running in parallel (the question being answered in Windows Journal is typed at the top of the chat box by a student. I am sure, the same tool (Application Sharing) can be fantastic in demonstrating how to use any software.

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With my students, I did demonstrate the use of WolframAlpha (www.wolframalpha.com) but since this is web-based software, it was much more convenient to use Web Tour, which is a bit more flexible way to share applications but it works only for web-based material.

Next to these, there is a Polling tool, which is very useful when you have some questions for students and you want all them to answer. I have never used Breakout Rooms tool but I can imagine that this would be a great tool for less quantitative subjects and for more structured tutorials where there is no great diversity in terms of students' pre-existing knowledge of the subject. Still, all these tools would be many times more useful if we were able to ensure that each student has an easy access to Elluminate. Right now, this seems to be still a rather challenging task for some students and therefore it is difficult to make Elluminate sessions part of the regular, not to talk about compulsory programme.

Feedback from students

Qualitative feedback from students taking the module in 2010/2011:
- *'Many students quoted that they liked the live sessions'*
- *'To do more live sessions in other modules like in this module'*
- *'Liked the online discussion board'*
- *'Liked the interactive system'*
- *'Great and interactive teaching, Thanks Ozren'*

What did not work so well?

As with all innovative ways of working, this approach does not always fit in with ways of more traditional ways of assessing students. In my first attempt I linked engagement with the Elluminate sessions (10% of the assessment) with achievement in the end of term test. If students did not pass the end of term test they would not get their marks for the Elluminate sessions. This policy was supposed to ensure that it is still the knowledge of the subject that counts the most for passing the module. The examination board unfortunately had to overturn this approach. This year I have amended the percentage allocated to this activity to 5% for pragmatic reasons so that it is not so easy to get marks by being an active learner in this way this year (a shame in some ways). This would have worked well if it had not been for the problems with updating to Blackboard 9™ at the end of the year. Also, on the technological level, if you want to use all the capabilities of Elluminate it is better for each student to have a headset and when I did it, not many had them.

Would I use it again?

I would certainly do it again. It has created more active learners and it has helped me cope with the very mixed ability in my class. I was, however, very disheartened after the Examination Board had to amend my assessment package. I still am but this has nothing to do with what the students need and it is not the reason for me not to keep using things that work well for students.

Wider application

I can see a great deal of application for other staff. It would be wrong to say that there is not some initial investment in time but the reaction I got from students far repaid this.

The link to further information and how to use Elluminate at Aston:
http://tlc.aston.ac.uk/tool/elluminate
Here's an interview that I did for CLIPP on this activity if you prefer to listen rather than read:
http://www1.aston.ac.uk/clipp/video-clipps/virtual-classrooms-to-support-peer-learning/

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Example used with Undergraduate Students on module BN1105: Quantitative Techniques

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REFLECTIONS OF A NEW LECTURER: TEACHING INNOVATIONS AND THE ROLE OF PEER SUPPORT

JOANNE LYUBOVNIKOVA

Introduction

Due to on-going turbulence in UK higher education, including the forthcoming rise in tuition fees, reduced financial support from the state, changes to the research excellence framework, rapid advances in teaching technology, increased work demands, a cultural shift towards managerialism, and the perceived deterioration of collegiality in academic life (Higher Education Management and Policy, 2004; Hodkinson & Taylor, 2002), lecturing staff are under more pressure now than ever before. In this short paper, I will describe how I adjusted to my new role as a lecturer at Aston Business School (ABS) and outline the key innovations that I introduced to a module for which I was responsible. Based on an ethnographical narrative of my own experiences, I will also discuss the crucial role that peer support, mentoring, and participation in the PGCert has played throughout this transition.

Module Background

In January 2010, I began my first post as a lecturer at ABS and immediately took over as module leader of BH2286 Effective Teamwork. Prior to 2010, this was a second year module attended by approximately 30 students, all from BSc Human Resource Management. However, when I took over the module, it was also opened up to final year students from other programmes, predominantly those studying BSc Computing for Business. The new learning cohort therefore consisted of 55 second and final year students from a variety of programmes. These changes presented a number of issues which I needed to address prior to delivering the module.

Firstly, the newly diverse student composition meant that the course content and assessment needed to be reviewed to ensure that it remained fit for purpose. Final year students are typically more conscientious and concerned with the requirement of group assessment (which accounted for 30% of the module), given the importance of final year module performance in determining degree classification. Secondly, the mix of students from different degree programmes meant that the cohort was no longer homogenous with regards to prior knowledge and academic background. Some students had a lot of insight into organisational behaviour and psychology topics, whereas others had no experience at all. The 80% increase in class size also meant that teaching methods which had previously been used to deliver the course material in a small group setting may no longer be feasible or effective.

To address these challenges, I began by reviewing the learning outcomes of the module. It was important to ensure they used adjectives which reflect the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of Education Objectives (1956), meaning that on successful completion of the course, students will have developed evaluation and analysis skills relating to the module content, as well as mastering basic cognitive skills relating to comprehension of the topic area. In order to achieve these learning outcomes with the new learning cohort, the content, structure and methods of delivery used needed to be revised and updated. I therefore decided to implement some key innovations on the module, each of which are summarised below.

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Key Innovations

New teaching methods.

Given that the class size had increased from the previous year, I decided to use a variety of teaching methods during the two-hour weekly lectures in order to capture all types of learning style, some of which had not previously been used. These included open group discussions, mind mapping exercises, case study activities, audio and video content (such as DVD and YouTube clips), a team climate questionnaire (which gave each team unique feedback on its group processes), and class quizzes. This variety was favourably viewed by the students. For the revision quiz for example, I used Optivote to engage each student individually and provide a novel and exciting class activity. This activity was particularly valuable for students' with an 'active' learning style (Honey & Mumford, 1982) and students seemed to appreciate the quiz as an interactive activity which helped with revision. The only disadvantage was the challenge of getting the Optivote software to work properly!

Incorporation of my research.

Research in the field of organisational behaviour is expanding at a rapid pace, and I therefore revised the module reading list in order to reflect to most recent trends in the literature. In doing so, I included a number of my own papers on the topic of effective teamwork, thus recognising the important of the 'research teaching nexus' (Jenkins, Healy & Zetter, 2007). For example, a book chapter that I recently published became a core reading for the module and I used the activities and discussion questions from the chapter in several tutorials. This not only underpinned my teaching approach on the module, but also served to enhance my credibility and expertise on the topic in the eyes of the students.

Management of group assessment.

Given the subject matter of the module, I decided to retain the group-based assignment (which counted for 30% of the assessment) for a number of reasons. Most crucially, group work gave the students an opportunity to test out and critically evaluate the practical principles of effective teamwork covered in the lectures in a collaborative learning environment. Group assessment involves grouping learners with various abilities to work together on a common interdependent task, whereby the success of one learner depends on the success of another. This task structure fosters conditions of 'cooperative outcome interdependence' (De Dreu, 2007) which facilitates team member helping behaviours, joint responsibility for learning and helps groups reap the benefits of their compositional diversity (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Indeed, developing intercultural awareness via cooperation and teamwork is a crucial learning outcome in Aston's diverse student body.

Group work, however, is a common concern for students. I, therefore, applied principles covered in the PGCert to ensure that the group assessment was well-received and supported. I began by setting all groups a task to complete on Blackboard™ in the first two weeks of the course, in which they were required to provide a group name and agree upon five specific behavioural norms and objectives that the group would follow throughout the term. These included norms for equal effort and contribution, consequences for non-contribution, regularity of group meetings, and expectations for group performance. This acted as a group contract and ensured commitment to group-based work from the outset by guiding expectations of group member behaviour. I also encouraged students to report any group member problems early, and worked with groups experiencing conflict to help them find positive solutions, drawing upon the module content. Part way through the module, groups also completed a team questionnaire which provided unique feedback on their processes and effectiveness. Groups then completed a second Blackboard™ task to reflect on their objectives and revise them accordingly. Finally, I ensured that all students were fully aware of the consequences of non-participation. As a result, the group work went smoothly and students did not report any dissatisfaction or concerns with the process.

Mid-way reflection on learning outcomes.

Based on my learning from the PGCert, I recognised how important it was that the module was underpinned by a set of clear, realistic and relevant learning outcomes which could be used to benchmark individual learning and performance. To raise my students' awareness of the importance of the learning outcomes, I decided to not only present the outcomes at the beginning of the module but also spent some time re-visiting the learning outcomes in week 5 of the course. Here, I distinguished between learning outcomes which should have already been achieved, and those which were yet to be covered so the students could get a sense of their progress. This also helped me to reflect on how the module was going, allowing me to take a step back and consider if the learning outcomes were in fact being achieved. I also asked the students what aspects of the module they were enjoying, and probed for elements which could be improved. Students emphasised how much they were enjoying practical examples and DVD and YouTube clips to demonstrate psychological phenomenon in practice. I therefore made a concerted effort to incorporate this teaching method into the remaining lectures, demonstrating to the students that I was willing to act on student feedback.

Group discussion forums.

As well setting up a cohort-wide discussion board on Blackboard™ for all students to access, I also set up group pages which allowed group members to communicate internally regarding their assignment. In the early weeks of the module, this facility proved important as it allowed group members to make initial contact with one another and to easily share information. As the module progressed, however, active use of the group pages decreased dramatically. I was initially concerned that this was an indicator that groups were not collaborating between lectures. Nevertheless, on discussion with the students, it became apparent that most groups were switching to other forms of technology, namely social media such as Facebook, Skype and MSN messenger, as a means of making between-lecture contact and working electronically. While this form of working is likely to enhance participation and reflects common tendencies in the Me generation, one key disadvantage is the reduced access and insight that teaching staff have in the on-going monitoring group progress. In future years, I will be more aware of the prevalence and importance of social media as a learning tool for students.

Peer support

Common sense and insight from the PGCert certainly go a long way in helping lecturers make decisions about their teaching. As a new lecturer, however, with minimal experience in module leadership, at first it was difficult to envisage which methods and approaches might work, and which might not. What I found most valuable in the first few months of my new job was the informal peer support and guidance that I received from the previous module leader; also a lecturer in my academic group. Peer mentoring refers to a mentoring model in which the mentee and mentor have broadly comparative status in their organisation. It therefore capitalises on the identification and empathy that is derived from their shared experiences (Chesler, Single, & Mikic, 2003; Luecke, 2004). Mentoring has been shown to be most influential and beneficial early in one's career, as well as during significant transitions into a new job role (Christman, 2003; Daloz, 1999).

I found having the opportunity to discuss potential plans and new ideas for the module with a more experienced peer invaluable, and the advice I received gave me confidence in my own decision making and teaching approach. I also sought on-going help and guidance from my group head, which was also a very helpful source of support. In conclusion, I would encourage all new lecturers to engage with their peers and mentors to seek advice and obtain feedback on their teaching methods on a regular basis, especially given that student satisfaction is now more important than ever before.

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Example used with second and final year Undergraduates on BH2286:Effective Teamwork

Aston Business School

E BLOGSPOT IN THE TEACHING OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

STATHIS TAPINOS

Abstract

E-learning and e-learning applications/tools are available to all educators thanks to the evolution of technology and the internet. Although a great variety of technologies are available it is not always obvious how these can be integrated in traditional teaching to support and enhance the learning experience. The majority of the existing literature proposes the use of blogging as an activity that students should do in order to increase their active participation in learning. This article presents the use of blogspots in the teaching of Strategic Management as a tool used to create greater linkages between theory and practice, discussing the evolution of its utilisation in my modules, the current state of use and a series of reflections on experience gained from its use so far. Overall, I have found that there is limited literature on how blogging could link to teaching activities and its utilisation should be viewed as learning by doing which is evaluated and improved by critical reflection of the user.

The Context - Background

My teaching on Strategic Management ranges in terms of levels: including Undergraduate and Postgraduate and various forms of Executive Education/Development; and contexts, with a variety of class size, from as little as 12 students (Executive Development programmes) to less than 100 (Postgraduate) and to less than 600 (Undergraduate); and a variety of teaching lengths; from 2 full days (Executive Development), to 1 week/5 full days (Postgraduate), to 11 weeks (Undergraduate). In all these circumstances the desired learning outcomes are very similar and they include understanding a series of theories and familiarising students with the use of strategy tools which would help their strategic analysis and decision making skills. A critical parameter for the successful achievement of these learning outcomes is being able to appreciate the practical relevance of strategic management theories and this can only be achieved by providing real life examples.

Most of the textbooks include real life examples for the concepts covered but no matter how regularly they publish new editions (see for example Johnson, Whittington and Scholes, 2011, Exploring Strategy, who have a new edition every 2 years) their examples are not very up to date and are not always relevant for all the different classes I am teaching. Bestseller textbooks have to 'serve' a variety of 'markets' and therefore their examples are not always appropriate and meaningful for my students. Other textbooks (see for example Grant, 2009, Contemporary Strategy Analysis) have more North American orientation in their examples which again is not useful for my teaching. Recently, some textbooks have started uploading examples on their online resources which are more recent, however they either lack the discussion that links them to the concepts taught or they are provided as in-class exercises.

Luckily Strategic Management is one of those disciplines and subjects that there are lots of examples available every day in the press which I am trying to use for my teaching.

Evolution of Blogging for Strategic Management

Pre-Blogging Phase

When I first started teaching at ABS, I used to collect articles from popular sources such as Business Week, Financial Times, BBC Business in the 'Favourites' of my computer and every week I would select those that I would use for my teaching. Although this worked quite well, there were some weaknesses. The advantage of this approach was that I had several examples for each concept. The weaknesses were associated with the decision of whether to include the examples on the slides or not. If I were to include them on the slides I would have to update all examples every year and to find an optimum solution on how to make available examples from previous years. If I would not include them in the slides but would mention them in the class, there was a possibility that some of the students would miss it or not capture it adequately for revision. The greatest weakness of this approach is that every day new examples from the corporate world occur in the news and it is not possible to make them available if the relevant lecture is finished.

Blogging Phase 1: posting articles

To resolve the weaknesses of the previous approach, in August 2008, I started experimenting with Blogspots. Although, Blackboard™ had and still has a blog application, I have selected to use an external source because not all my students have access to the ABS intranet and I wanted a source which would not require yearly transition to another system. My blogspot is available at: http://strat-man.blogspot.com .

The construction of the blogspot is a straight forward process which requires no technical skills. Most of blogging sites have a great variety of templates and an increasing number of applications to enhance the use of the blogspot (-my advice: keep it simple!). The only weakness of blogspot.com, in 2008, was that it did not provide the statistics of the site's views and some effort was required to link it with google.analytics.com (in our days this is a standard function).

The first version of my blogspot include: i) the title of the article; ii) the first 2 lines from the article; iii) link to original source; iv) the keywords which relate the article to a specific concept/lecture from my module.

Blogging Phase 2: posting articles with tags

A few months after the launch of my blogspot, I started using Tags (I have now edited all phase one postings and included Tags for them, too). Tags is a very useful function of blogspots as they create lists of topics. For example, all articles which concern a Merger & Acquisition have the M&A Tag, which means that by pressing the M&A Tag, the user/student would have a list of all M&A articles only without having to search for them. This makes the blogspot more user-friendly and consecutively it should increase its utilisation.

Progressively the list of Tags has increased and I now have about 70 Tags which link to as many concepts from my modules.

Blogging Phase 3: hyperlinks in the slides

At the end of academic year 2008, I reviewed the use of the blogspot (more details on this in the following section). I deduced that not enough students were using my blogspot. Thus, I searched for an approach to increase its 'visibility'. The best option available was to create hyperlinks in my lectures' Powerpoint slides to the blogspot. Hyperlinks is a very easy to use function in all Microsoft applications where the user copy+pastes the web address as a link on a word or symbol. My approach was to create hyperlinks for each Tag. So, now all Tags from the blogspot are directly linked to the slides; when a student downloads my slides and they see a hyperlink (different colour and underlined) they would press Ctrl and the link to be taken to the Tag with all the relevant articles. For

example, in the lecture of Network Level Strategies, Mergers and Acquisitions have a hyperlink to the M&A Tag and all the articles that include examples of M&As.

In terms of the evolution of my blogspot, I have noticed that my commentary in the beginning of each article has increased, as I am now providing a short discussion on why I consider the example provided relevant and in some cases, multiple sources have been used to provide a more holistic examination of the concept.

Assessing the effectiveness of the blogspot

As mentioned before the beginning of the academic year 2009-10, I reviewed the effectiveness of the blogspot with two methods: i) posted an online survey for all (550) UG Final Year students on Strategic Management, ii) reflected on the statistics of the daily access/view of the website. The survey was answered by very few students (about 20) who provided positive feedback and suggested that they used the blogspot for preparing for the exams. The review on the statistics confirmed the survey; in the academic year there were approximately 20 visits per week during term 1, when I am teaching, about 5 visits per week during term 2 and about 100 visits per day the last three days before the exam. The use of hyperlinks has increased slightly the average viewing per week but not significantly. This can be attributed to the fact that I am not posting articles as regularly as I did in the first two years. Concerning the statistics of visibility, it has to be mentioned that according to the 'traffic access' and 'referring sites', my blogspot is viewed not only by ABS students but from users from around the world. I assume that the profile details that link to ABS and Aston University are also good free PR.

It is worth mentioning that when I launched this blogspot, it was not even on the second page of google search for 'strategic management blogspot', now it is second (even above the Business Week/Bloomerg's Strategic Management blog).

Reflections on this use so far

My blogspot is not 'essential' reading/material for any of my modules; it is an optional supporting tool for students who wish to have quick access to examples related to my teaching. Designing the blogspot is not time consuming, updating it with examples and writing the commentary requires a level of time commitment which depends on how much information one wants the blogspot to provide. Although, my blogspot allows for comments and discussions, and even if, I have encouraged them, in all these years I have not received any. It is within my future plans to develop the blogspot as a discussion forum for analysing current developments of business events. Given that it is available outside ABS intranet, I envision that it could be evolved as a 'keeping in touch' with past students and could potentially create better linkages between ABS and its alumni.

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Example used with Undergraduates/Postgraduates/ Executive Development
students on Strategic Management Modules

> # FINANCE E-LEARNING IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM
>
> # RICHARD TERRY/MATT DAVIES

Introduction

The Centre for Executive Development was asked to supply a customised Finance e-Learning solution to a major French global corporate client. The initial module, authored by Matt Davies of the Finance and Accounting Group of Aston Business School, was first delivered asynchronously in 2010 via the client's corporate Virtual Learning Environment, and included a final project assessment piece that participants submitted via email to Matt. The intended audience for the module comprised non-financial managers in various departments within the client organisation, who needed to gain in-depth understanding of accounting and finance concepts used in the client business, and a deeper understanding that would have direct impact on their own working practice. In partnership with the client, Matt created the module using the client's own financial reporting documentation, aligning theoretical principles to the actual hard data of the company's own publicly available accounts.

Once the cohort had successfully completed the e-Learning package, the client raised our awareness of an emerging need for the participants to reinforce and extend knowledge and understanding of some of the fundamental concepts and data contained in the module. Our response to this need was to propose a virtual classroom session that would allow Matt to give an in-depth exposition of the concepts in person, and to ask participants to apply these concepts to real data. The synchronous nature of the session would allow for interactivity and on spot feedback, which we hoped would be instrumental in helping the participants gain a real understanding that they could then immediately apply in their respective roles. Since participants were employees located over a wide geographical area ranging from North America to China, we decided to repeat the session four times, and scheduled them to allow participants in multiple time zones to benefit from information directly related to their jobs and roles.

Design

The virtual classroom sessions were designed to supplement and enhance the original e-learning module. The e-learning package, with interactive quizzes and an e-workbook, was followed up with an action learning project in which each participant was required to address specific accounting and finance issues from the perspective of the client's own accounts and those of key competitors. The purpose of this exercise was to give participants the opportunity to apply the concepts and skills learned during the finance e-learning course.

Evaluation of the 2010 package showed that, based on pre- and post-package test scores, 98% of participants had increased their financial knowledge and understanding. This success prompted us, in partnership with the client, to go one step further to help participants increase their learning impact on their own workplace practice, and so yield greater benefits to the business as a whole. To this end, given the geographically dispersed nature of the participants, and the fact that we were dealing with a cohort located across all main poles of global economic activity (North, Central and South America; Europe, Middle East and North Africa; and Asia Pacific), we created and remotely delivered a virtual classroom shortly following completion and marking of the action learning projects. Solutions to the exercises would thus be provided and discussed during the virtual classroom workshop as a culmination of the course, supporting situated learning in which new concepts and understanding could immediately be applied in the participants' every day working practice.

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In order to provide the best interaction possible, we decided to limit virtual classroom size to thirty participants each. Another constraint that guided the design of the virtual programme was the fact that we were dealing with a cohort located in all three of the main poles of global economic activity: North, Central and South America; Europe, Middle East and North Africa; and Asia Pacific. To accommodate this we decided to run the one hour virtual session twice in the same day, once at 9am BST and once again at 5pm BST. Further demand from participants meant that we ran two instances of the session, once in September 2011 and once in October 2011, a total of four virtual workshops in all, each designed for up to 30 participants. The economic and environmental cost savings to the client organisation of this approach compared to face to face intervention are obvious, given the travel and accommodation savings as well as out of office opportunity costs. The virtual classroom sessions took place on 21st September 2011 and 21st October 2011, at 9am and 5pm BST in both cases. In all cases the sessions were one hour in duration.

The sessions were designed collaboratively by a Centre for Executive Development team that included Matt Davies as the faculty subject matter expert, Richard Terry as the networked learning and technology expert and Terry Hodgetts as programme director. The client organisation was closely involved in the process: two scheduled teleconferences conducted with the client's learning and development manager and a senior finance executive ensured the pertinence of the detailed design discussions. We benefitted from positive and constructive advice from the client at all stages in the design and development process.

Participants to the virtual classroom were recruited by the client from the original e-learning cohort as it was a non-compulsory module. We provided the client with a web-form registration process on our web site, which enabled us to track registration of interest and capture email addresses that we could use to send out invitations and reminders to the virtual session. This also provided a register that the client could use to check against their own lists, to assess the proportion of the e-learning cohort who registered and then attended the virtual session.

To provide an effective platform in which to run a synchronous virtual classroom, we made use of Aston's Elluminate Live! Tool (now branded as Blackboard™ Collaborate), part of the suite of course tools available through Blackboard™. Elluminate contains a well-established feature set that can be tailored to suit the requirements of most virtual classroom sessions. The Centre already had experience of other uses of this technology, especially in the context of promotional webinars and remote lectures, but this was the first opportunity to devise a more complex virtual classroom structure for a web event, and make it both pedagogically compelling and valid in terms of the original learning outcomes.

We decided that because each session would potentially involve more than eight participants, and in order to keep the technical requirements to a bare minimum, we would deliver the session using audio for presenter and moderator only, with a text channel open to all participants through the chat window. This would allow for questions, comments and responses from participants, but would also allow them to informally use a 'back channel' to the main presentation if they wanted to explore issues further with their peers.

We took advice from a number of sources, and found the JISC publication on designing for participant engagement particularly helpful. We prototyped the structure on paper, and Matt was careful to outline the specific pedagogic goals of the various sections. Once these requirements were clearly articulated and agreed, Richard was able to match specific features within Elluminate to meet them. In particular, Matt was keen to make use of the quiz feature, as he felt that this would engage participants more fully in the section based around unpacking of the key concepts. The quiz feature enables a session presenter to release questions to participants in a controlled manner, and easily monitor all of the responses. This allows the presenter to be aware of the total number of responses as they come in. The tool also allowed us to reveal the answers to each quiz to all of the participants, including the proportions of correct answers and the most popular incorrect answers, which again provided useful markers for discussion if necessary.

The second half of the session was focussed around a series of slides, each of which led to a short question and response using the chat window. This again was designed to encourage engagement of the participants in co-creating the knowledge and understanding by applying the concepts learned immediately to the context of their organisation, and reinforce the learning that had been gained during the project stage of the programme.

We held a dry-run session as a proof of concept for the structure and the various features that we were making use of. This also helped us gauge the overall timing of the session and led to a number of minor tweaks to the presentation and our delivery plan.

The aims of the session were to provide opportunities for participants to develop skills and confidence in interpreting key financial ratios against appropriate benchmarks and to emphasise the client organisation's definitions of these ratios. This was designed to reinforce participant understanding of key accounting and financial concepts and be in a position to apply this to real world client and competitor scenarios.

We also wanted to provide as much opportunity as possible for participants to engage in discursive interaction during the session's duration, in the form of answering and raising questions and issues, and commenting on the applicability of the concepts to their own professional practice. To satisfy these aims we therefore set the following agenda for the session:

- Definitions of key financial ratios
- Interpretation of the client's key financial ratios
- The client's definition of Return on Capital Employed
- Summary/conclusions.

The content of the session was derived from key areas of the e-learning course, focussing in particular on key financial ratios and their application to the specific accounting practices of the client organisation. This information was supplemented with a section that focussed on key financial ratios within the publicly available accounts of the client and its main competitor organisations. In order to maximise understanding of these areas, the content was structured in the following way:

- A series of ten quizzes and feedback on key financial ratios
- An analysis of the client's historical ratios
- A series of comparative analyses and questions about the client and competitor ratios for the last financial year
- An analysis of the client's working definition of Return on Capital Employed.

Matt as session presenter introduced the agenda in the form of an uploaded slide set, and then worked gradually through the content. Milestone markers throughout the content allowed us to control the time allocated to each section, and to stay on schedule. As each concept was introduced and analysed, a question was put to the participants inviting response either through a quiz tool or through the chat window, depending on the section. The presenter could also ask ad hoc questions, respond to unscripted questions or invite discussion throughout the session.

Delivery

Participants were each emailed two reminder invitations prior to the session, containing the link to the session they were to join and also links to more information on how to use Elluminate. This latter was important to anticipate and therefore minimise any technical difficulties reported during the session itself. We delivered the sessions remotely through each participant's web browser. Richard Terry set up and moderated each session, introducing the presenter Matt Davies in each case.

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The session was set up with a one hour window prior to the published start time to allow for uploading of the presentation and for welcoming participants. Richard welcomed each participant individually through the chat window, and urged them to check their audio settings, and then started each session with a short two minute audio introduction, running through the Elluminate features required in the session. Richard then introduced Matt, who gave a short introduction with video, before returning to audio-only delivery for the remainder of the session.

During the presentation, Matt worked his way through the slides, controlling and varying the pace according to context and the amount and nature of feedback from the participants. He initiated quizzes and prompted Richard to launch the Elluminate quiz manager, allowing quizzes to be handed out and results to be collected and published visibly in the virtual classroom.

At each stage in the process, participants were offered opportunities to engage in discussion with the presenter, and to ask questions or comment on the conceptual information presented. The quizzes gave the participants the opportunity to test their knowledge and understanding in the immediate context of the presentation, and the chat window was used to invite their comments, questions and responses to the topics under discussion, passing the locus of control to the participants. The session was planned so that there were many iterations of 'present and respond' as well as opportunities for more free flow questioning and discussion.

A total of 45 participants took part in four virtual sessions, at an average of just over 11 per session: Session 1 – 8 participants, Session 2 – 11 participants, Session 3 – 18 participants , Session 4 – 8 participants.

All attendees were employees of the client organisation, and were from the following geographical locations: Iraq, China, Germany, Greece, Vietnam, Kenya, India, Malaysia, Philippines, France, Canada, USA, and UAE.

Technical requirements for the session were minimal: a web browser on an internet-enabled PC, capable of running Java applets. This latter component (Elluminate is downloaded as a Java run-time environment application) created the only technical difficulties, in that two participants were initially unable to log on because of a connection timeout. This is a known issue for Elluminate, related to firewall settings, and for which they provide a workaround on their web site. In the event only one participant was prevented from joining the session because of this issue.

The only other difficulty encountered was that Matt was disturbed in his office despite posting a reminder on his door and informing colleagues. Fortunately, this did not throw him off his stride, though it does suggest that dedicated space set up for the running of virtual sessions might be ideal.

Evaluation

Participants voiced their positive feedback immediately after the presentation, with comments such as "thank you it was amazing", and a number of participants were keen to pursue certain concepts with Matt in detail after the session, suggesting that a second session might have been potentially beneficial. The client organisation also reported a positive response to the sessions. They also conducted their own more detailed evaluation of the impact and communicated a summary of their findings to us.

Quantitative evaluation data showed that over 80% of the participants had fully completed the e-learning course prior to attending the virtual classroom. This had implications for how much of the content they would be able to engage with and apply. Participants were invited to rate the virtual classroom on a five point scale, with 5 being the highest score. The scores for the individual elements within the categories of program content, facilitation and classroom environment were each well above 4, indicating a very positive impact and valuable experience for most of the participants. The only element where a score of less than 4 was recorded was 'Possibility for Active Participation',

which scored 3.81. This latter score suggests that participants are willing and ready to engage in further activities of an interactive nature, and we will be exploring ways of satisfying this demand in future interventions. Examples of this might be the use of the breakout room and whiteboard features within Elluminate to allow participants more control over the process of analysis and synthesis during the session.

The qualitative evaluative comments of participants have been perhaps even more valuable to us in terms of improving future sessions and helping us gauge the impact of the intervention. Participants were invited to respond to four evaluation questions in their own words. Participants reported particularly liking the emphasis on the link between financial concepts and their daily responsibilities, and the fact that they could readily apply these concepts. They also enjoyed the participation and interaction with the facilitator. Less satisfactory attributes were the time allocated – participants reported that they would have liked a longer session to address the issues in more detail, and more time to answer the quizzes as few participants spoke English as a first language. Participants reported gaining key insights into financial information and, importantly, the impact this had on their daily working practice. Intentions for follow-up activities included discussing financial rations with the finance team, applying the concepts to the current year's accounting data and other forms of immediate application.

Conclusion

The evaluation data shows that there have been a number of positive outcomes from the virtual classroom session. Participants seemed to enjoy the format of the session, especially the opportunity to interact in real time with each other and the presenter, questioning and commenting on the content of the presentation. In fact some participants expressed a wish for more interaction in future sessions. A number of key learning outcomes were flagged up by participants, particularly with regard to a deeper and improved understanding of a number of important financial concepts. There is a real sense that the participants are applying what they have learned in meaningful and significant ways within the context of their working environment and day to day practice. From our point of view as the session designers this last outcome is both gratifying and a real proof of concept.

In terms of the overall programme structure, and when considered alongside the e-Learning module, we feel that the virtual classroom intervention has provided a valuable added factor in creating a distance learning opportunity for the client organisation. This experience has prompted us to seek to improve our delivery of virtual classroom sessions, and explore some of the more interactive pedagogical modes, such as using breakout rooms to encourage participants to engage more fully and reflect on the impact of their learning. We hope to write a more complete analysis of the sessions, which will help us to create future interventions for the same client, and which we also envisage allowing us to extend this capability into similar programmes with other clients.

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Example used with Centre for Executive Development Clients

VIDEO CLIPS/VODCASTS

PATRICK TISSINGTON

Background and context

This paper is aimed at showing how video clips can help your communication with students. But first I will set out what I mean by video clips in this context and then by qualifying the conditions in which they can be used to best effect. I will end by giving some examples to illustrate how I used videos for the benefit of the students and made life a little easier for myself along the way.

What do I mean?

One thing most lecturers report is that communicating important information to students outside the lecture hall is difficult. Students are reluctant to check their Aston email accounts very often since most of the traffic is 'boring'. There are various methods that we might use to get round this blockage – announcements in class, email, text, Blackboard™ announcements – but somehow the important messages are still difficult to get through. Having tried all the means I could think of, I experimented with simply recording a video clip of me making the announcement and then uploading it to Blackboard™. The upshot is that this is popular with students and has been mentioned specifically in their feedback. Sadly, I cannot report exact statistics on usage since it appears that this facility in Blackboard™ is not available at present. I have, however, noticed a distinct decline in the number of emails asking basic questions which indicates strongly to me that they have been effective.

When can they be used?

The main condition is that you need to be using Blackboard™ as the primary communication means with students on a particular module. From my personal perspective, this tends to mean large groups and is more likely to be undergraduate rather than postgraduate - the latter of course usually being in smaller groups and perhaps not needing so much handholding. In my undergraduate group, I set out my 'contract' with the students at the start of the module and part of this 'contract' is that the primary source for answers to questions is the discussion board. I make guarantees in return that all threads will be checked every day (weekends included) so students quickly realise that the fastest way to get a response is via the discussion board rather than email. This seems to have a spin-off effect of getting the students acclimatised to finding things out for themselves. The pull to Blackboard™ is reinforced by providing a vast array of support material on Blackboard™ so students also find that they don't need to ask so many questions. For example, I upload documents with advice on study skills, links to websites, book reviews, video clips not used in the lectures and details of resources on campus. Apart from the educational benefit, there is a pragmatic benefit to the lecturer as there are far fewer emails to answer.

What sort of clips worked?

The main usage I found was in terms of how the module operated – what the coursework was, when it needed to be handed in and so forth. I also used video clips to cover frequently asked questions about essay writing techniques or, perhaps, a particular point made in the lecture had been misunderstood and needed to be made again in a different more detailed way. By way of illustration, I have uploaded one such video clip to YouTube which you can find at http://youtu.be/H8MVYIt9C08 or search on YouTube for "essay writing tissie" and you should get there.

How do I know it worked?

My key success criterion was a reduction in questions by email – especially many similar questions. Another success has been the reduction in plagiarism cases from a peak of about 20 (out of 1000) to about 3. Admittedly, this is not an infallible measure but it is one indication that students now understand more about how to write essays correctly.

What I found did not work (although it might in other circumstances!)

The predecessor to the use of video clips was a series of audio clips. These included short lecture summaries as well as material on essay writing and so forth. I had positive feedback about these but an analysis of access showed extremely limited usage (it seemed about 3 students were listening to them). This of course begs questions about the actual audience for the video clips and when this becomes possible, I will carry out that analysis. But the indirect evidence leads me to believe the video was far more popular.

In the past I have also run a Facebook group based solely on the lectures which aimed at generating discussions in a less formal setting than Blackboard™. My reasoning was that one has to make a definite decision to log in to Blackboard™ whereas the students can, of course, access Facebook more readily. Surprisingly, this initiative had almost no take-up which I suspect is due to the students thinking of Facebook as their private social space and not for university work. Oddly, many students are keen to be my Facebook "Friends" but apparently don't want to use the medium for their learning.

I also conducted an experiment using "opt in" text messaging. This was useful in a smaller group to prompt the group to do the reading before lectures. But other techniques – in particular making a point of discussing the week's reading at the start of every lecture – seemed to have more success.

A further possible development was a dedicated lecture Twitter feed but I carried out some research into the usage of Twitter amongst students, and it was almost non-existent at about 5%. Things move so fast in social media that it is possible that this figure (from a survey three years ago) has changed. I suspect, however, to date, very few students have signed up to follow my general Twitter feed which I have promoted in the lectures on Blackboard™. My sense is that the social media of choice remains Facebook with almost total usage amongst first years (well over 90% usage). Recent experience with second years applying for placements indicates very light use of LinkedIn at least before the final year, so the most effective method of electronic communication with your students remains Blackboard™.

Some feedback

Students reported that they liked the informal approach of the clips. I did no editing – if I made a complete mess I would re-record them but almost all were done in one take. This means there are imperfections and I made no real attempt at high production values – I recorded using the built in camera on my desktop or laptop. They also reported that they liked that I recorded them from different places (sometimes from a hotel room, sometimes my office, sometimes from my "garden office" – i.e. shed). In fact, I recorded them wherever I happened to be. This had a side benefit of showing students that we academics do lots of things besides lecturing which several students reported was interesting and not something they had previously thought about.

Finally

This brief paper was written with the aim of sharing one personal perspective on the use of short video clips to communicate with students. It is by definition subjective and colleagues may well have had different experiences. If so, I would really like to hear what other people's view is. Please do contact me either on p.a.tissington@aston.ac.uk or via LinkedIn (it seems there is only one Patrick Tissington listed) or on Twitter (@tissington).

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Example used with Undergraduate students on BH1107: Introduction to Organisational Behaviour

Aston Business School

WORK PLACEMENTS AND DEGREE PERFORMANCE: DO PLACEMENTS LEAD TO BETTER MARKS OR DO BETTER STUDENTS DO PLACEMENTS? HOW CAN WE INCORPORATE FINDINGS INTO WIDER PRACTICE?

CHRIS JONES AND HELEN HIGSON

Overview of the issue

Over recent years there has been a strong move to make UK degrees more applicable to the world of work and to include work placements as an integral part of a degree programme is one way of achieving this. Many universities, particularly in professional and professionally-related disciplines, have incorporated such kinds of work experience for some years, although there is evidence of a decline in placements (Little and Harvey 2007, Blake and Summers 2007). More recently the work placement has again been under scrutiny in the UK as such activity becomes central to government policies (Higher Ambitions 2009).

Studies suggest that there is a causal link between improvement in employability and academic achievement after completing an integrated work placement (Arnold and Garland 1990). There are two main assumptions about the efficacy of such work experience. The first is that placements make you more employable. The second is that placements improve the final quality (class) of degree. Evidence to support the former premise has been actively researched and the case has been strongly supported by a number of studies (e.g. Hadfield 2007 and Phillips 2007).

Summary

This work builds on earlier research which shows that undertaking a work placement year improves students' degree results (Driffield et al, 2011). This project, which is funded by the Higher Education Academy, has three main aims:

- To reproduced the original research across a wider group of students, in another institution and more subject areas, in order to test the validity and generalisability of the findings across the sector as a whole.

- To explore, in more depth via student engagement, the key findings of the original research in relation to those groups which would benefit most from the findings (e.g. less academically strong students and those choosing not to undertake a placement).

- To provide some advice and guidance to policy makers in HEIs to inform their decisions around designing and implementing placement programmes.

We have currently completed Strand 1 of the project (quantitative) which has expanded the data across disciplines and institutions. All of the key milestones have been completed to plan. Data has been collected on two cohorts of students from Aston University and Ulster University's Business School to answer the three original questions set for this stage of the project. These were:

- Does undertaking an integrated work placement improve your degree classification?
- Do the 'better' students do a placement?
- Do the 'better' students gain more from a placement in terms of degree classification?

The data has been assimilated into two separate datasets and econometric estimation has been completed. The results have been written up and a first full draft of the paper that reports our quantitative findings will be completed shortly.

Milestones

We are currently ahead of schedule. A large database of 5,700 students has been developed from Aston's student information System (SITS). This was completed at the end of October. The Ulster data took more time to construct because three data sources had to be linked. This was completed during mid-November and includes information about 730 Ulster Business School students.

Data analysis for Aston began in early November and initial results were discussed between the team. This enabled us to think clearly about how to do the analysis for Ulster. Once the Ulster data had been finished it was possible to construct a comprehensive set of results for both Aston and Ulster

We currently have a draft working paper that includes a methodological section, data section and a results section.

There is one theoretical change to our original project plan. We have decided to use the term 'engaged' student instead of the term 'good' student. This is because we have now included a variable that is a better measure of engagement. The pilot project did not include this. We believe that this adds an additional dimension to the study.

Findings

A number of significant outputs have already been achieved:

1. We find that 'engaged' students are more likely to choose to do a placement.
2. In contrast to the pilot study, we find that the self-selection term is irrelevant. Engaged students choose to do placements but it does not matter whether you are 'engaged' or not. If a student does a placement they improve their performance in finals by approximately 5%.
3. All of the results are statistically significant.
4. The result is remarkably robust across both Aston and Ulster.
5. The result holds separately across Aston's Schools and a range of discipline areas. This is a positive finding which will help us to make some clear recommendations for the whole sector.
6. We find that out of the students who choose to do a placement, students who have a pre-placement year average of less than 60% benefit more from a placement compared to students with an average greater than 60%. This suggests that placements make students more engaged.
7. We find that better quality placements improve performance in their finals.

Impact

We have not entered the dissemination phase of this project yet, but it is already having implications for Aston (the original institution) and the wider community (via Ulster).

At Aston we have reorganised our support to placement students in order to increase the uptake of placements, particularly from under-represented groups. The original pilot research was in the area of Business and Management where we have a track record of placing large numbers of students in placement companies. This research has provided us with some data which encourages us to see that the patterns for Business and Management are similar to those in other disciplines. In doing this we have created a new set of KPIs for the placements team and in doing this we have used the initial findings on this project.

The next impact of this Strand 1 is to inform the second Strand of the project (qualitative). We will now try to explain some of the initial findings. Focus groups will be used as they rely on the interaction of participants in the group to bring out views without the intervention of the researcher. The focus groups will be held both at Ulster and Aston. These are being run by Jane Andrews and are being conducted this term. She has now developed the focus group protocol.

Dissemination

The dissemination phase was planned to commence in May 2012, but we have already started this work.

- Initial sector-wide dissemination by a presentation of the pilot work and proposals for the wider research was given at the Association of Sandwich Education and Training (ASET) annual conference in September.
- As seen in the previous section, we have already been influencing practice internally.
- We have submitted a paper to the Higher Education Academy national conference
- We are preparing a paper for the Academy of Management: Learning and Teaching journal (4*)

Issues and Challenges

Currently there have been no issues and challenges.

There have, however, been some unexpected advantages of the research project. These have included:

- Bringing together new colleagues to collaborate together
- Making links between researchers across institutions who had not met before
- Bringing together quantitative and qualitative researchers
- Producing some publishable research data before we had planned
- Our work has been show cased in the soon to be released Wilson Review on HEI/Business collaboration.

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USING AN ONLINE WEB-BASED RESOURCE TO SET ASSESSED WEEKLY QUIZZES

MATTHEW OLCZAK

Introduction

BS1163 is an introductory microeconomics module taken by over 400 first-year undergraduate students in the Business School. The course introduces students to a number of threshold economic concepts. Motivating and engaging students on this module, however, is particularly difficult because class sizes are large and, whilst some students are experiencing economics for the first time, others have some experience of the subject.

Contact time on the course involves two hours of lectures per week delivered to all the students together and a series of fortnightly one hour tutorials in groups of around 20 students. These tutorials cover a range of exercises which students are encouraged to attempt in advance. Prior to the 2009/10 academic year, alongside the required reading from the core course textbook, these tutorial exercises were the only supplementary material and practice questions made available to students. Furthermore, the module was assessed solely by an examination at the end of the course. Given the large number of students, administrative issues made it difficult to introduce additional and more varied forms of assessment.

A significant issue in this module was that there was little opportunity for students to become actively engaged in the learning process and it was difficult to provide the large number of students with individual feedback on their learning. In an attempt to address these issues, for the 2009 intake we experimented with introducing the MyEconLab[1] web-based resource into the module.

Using a web-based resource to provide students with practice material

This resource provides instructors with access to a large bank of questions based on the textbook material. This includes multiple-choice type questions, however, other question formats are also provided. Particularly relevant for introductory economics classes are tools which provide questions that involve drawing and interpreting graphs. In addition, the resource also provides a range of other supplementary materials such as a news blog and video clips to complement the textbook material.

We used MyEconLab to provide a range of practice and revision quizzes throughout the course. Whilst these quizzes were optional and did not count towards the module assessment, we tried to provide clear incentives to use this resource by guaranteeing that a number of the multiple choice practice questions would be replicated in the exam at the end of the module.

We hoped that introducing MyEconLab into the module would enable the students to become more active in the learning process with increased opportunities to check and enhance their understanding of the lecture material and to receive rapid feedback. In addition, for each student MyEconLab automatically generates an individually tailored study plan based on the areas their quiz performances suggest they are finding more difficult.

Students could obtain access to MyEconLab using a code provided with a purchase of the course textbook. However, we could not require all students to purchase the textbook. Therefore, the Business School purchased additional access codes which were made available for free to the students at the start of the module and for a limited period towards the end of the module. All students

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[1] www.myeconlab.com

were, therefore, able to register and were encouraged to attempt the optional practice and revision questions set as well as to make use of the individual study plan and other supplementary resources provided.

After using MyEconLab in this way for one year we evaluated its impact on the module. We observed that just over 50% of students had registered for the resource. Furthermore, the results show that these students performed on average 10% better on the final exam. Whilst this suggests using the resource was beneficial for student learning, it may also be a result of self-selection bias i.e. the better students may have been the ones that chose to use the resource and they may have performed well on the exam regardless of this. We therefore estimated the impact using the resource had on student learning using an econometric model which takes into account the possibility of such self-selection bias[2]. Crucially, the results still suggest that using the resource had a positive and highly significant impact on student learning. In addition, the results show that the students that used the resource did not just perform better on the multiple choice section of the exam but also on the short answer type questions. This suggests that that the practice questions provided within MyEconLab can help to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the material.

Overall this empirical analysis alongside additional anecdotal evidence suggested that introducing MyEconLab had improved the module. For the subsequent academic year we decided it would be beneficial to further integrate the resource into the module. Consequently, we have now made the online quizzes a formal part of the module assessment.

Using a web-based resource for assessed tests

We now require all students to register, via either of the methods described above, for MyEconLab. Then, over the course of the term, six quizzes are assigned based on material covered in earlier lectures. The large bank of available questions, which are algorithmically generated, allows the quiz questions to be randomised across students so that each student faces a different set of questions. Each quiz is made available for one week with students allowed to complete it in their own time; however, they are only allowed one attempt.

In order to allow for technological and other potential issues, each student's best five marks across the six quizzes is counted, and in total the quiz marks contribute towards 15% of their final module mark. Along with the randomly assigned questions, this relatively low weighting helped to alleviate our concerns over team-work and possible cheating. Furthermore, our experience suggests that this is still a high enough weighting to provide sufficient incentives to motivate students.

Following completion of the tests, students immediately receive their marks and once the deadline has passed are able to review the correct answers. This, therefore, provides the students with rapid and detailed feedback on their level of understanding.

MyEconLab also provides the instructor with detailed data in order to monitor student engagement and performance. It is straightforward to monitor which students have not completed the assessments and email reminders can be sent to these students prior to the deadline. In addition, data on student performance by question makes it straightforward to identify particular areas many students are finding difficult and these can then be addressed in class time. Following the assessment we also made the quizzes available for practice and revision purposes, with students able to undertake a different random set of the questions as many times as they chose.

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[2] Olczak, M., (2011). Evaluating the impact of a web-based resource on student learning, Working Paper. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1822665

Conclusion

Web-based resources such as MyEconLab are an excellent way to provide students with a wide range of practice questions and also allow continuous assessment to be introduced even when class sizes are large. Overall, anecdotal evidence from teaching this module suggests that introducing MyEconLab in this way has been extremely beneficial. Student engagement has been increased and students benefit from the opportunity to check and enhance their understanding of the lecture material as well as receive rapid and detailed feedback. Instructors are also then able to identify and respond to areas that students are finding difficult. Furthermore, student feedback has been extremely positive.

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Example used with Undergraduate students on BS1163: Introduction to Microeconomics

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APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF CENTRALLY SUPPORTED LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

EXTRACTS FROM CENTRE FOR LEARNING INNOVATION AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE (CLIPP) WEBSITE COMPILED BY JULIE GREEN
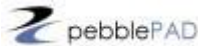
Introduction

Aston University's Centre for Learning Innovation and Professional Practice (CLIPP) has created a web site that provides support for staff and students for learning technologies. It contains user guides, case studies and pedagogic advice for all of centrally supported tools. Guides, tutorials, and effective practice of the application of these tools are either created by CLIPP or externally sourced. Details and training materials for all centrally supported learning technologies – such as e-portfolio and lecture capture systems- can be found on this Technology and Learning Community website which is complemented by a range of face-to-face training sessions bookable through the Centre for Staff and Graduate Development

This web site provides advice and guidance on appropriate and potential uses of technology enhanced learning (TEL). It is aimed at academic staff or students who want to know more about a particular technology and those new to TEL, who would like to understand the potential of certain tools. This web site provides multiple points of entry covering pertinent information contextualised to specific audiences, essentially answering three primary questions relating to any particular learning technology. Namely the "what", "why", and "how" of effective learning technology use.

If you want to learn more then visit the following link for the Teaching and Learning Community website http://tlc.aston.ac.uk/ , click on the technology tool to see the information given including Guides and Tutorials or use 'control and click' on the relevant 'tool' below:

Core Aston Tools	
Aston Replay	Aston Replay (powered by **Panopto Focus**) is a new pilot service which allows staff to record their teaching sessions. Registered students can then search and replay sections to enhance understanding and review for revision purposes. Available in the majority of pool teaching rooms
	Aston University's **Virtual Learning Environment is Blackboard™**, version 9.1 as of Sept 2011. This core supported tool links to the student registry system to provide a secure and robust learning platform. This SITS <> VLE link ensures all students access their correct modules. Blackboard provides methods of supporting and enhancing face to face delivery of blended learning experiences. Aston also delivers distance learning, and work based learning courses in variety of modes, primarily hosted via Blackboard™.

PebblePad *Aston e-Portfolio is powered by PebblePad*	At Aston our e-portfolio learning platform is PebblePad. The word e-portfolio has become **synonymous with a personalised learning system** or personal learning spaces. PebblePad has a wide range of tools, together with a comprehensive assessment system (Gateway) that allows varied and flexible assessment and feedback modalities. A true e-portfolio learning platform is a wholly student owned and controlled. Therefore the focus of control in the learning journey moves from teacher to learner. An e-portfolio platform affords a true student centred learning approach, enabling a much more facilitated approach to guiding the learning process. It is the student who controls what, how, and who can access their learning artefacts/evidence/records, and reflections of the learning journey.
Turnitin Check text for plagiarism, mark and feedback electronically, peer assess.	Turnitin is one of the core centrally supported tools available for Aston staff and students. It is comprised of three interrelated tools; 1. **OriginalityCheck** - Text matching 2. **GradeMark** - Electronic marking & feedback 3. **PeerMark** - Peer assessment Turnitin has evolved from a text matching tool into a complementary suite of e-assessment and e-feedback tools. Used either as a standalone tool via a vendor hosted website, or deeply integrated (recommended) with our **Blackboard™ VLE**, Turnitin offers a wealth of opportunities to use the features to enhance academic writing skills. As a hosted solution Turnitin continues to grow its features, recently adding an automated rubric tool. The three main features listed above can all be used independently, but operate more effectively if used as an approach to teaching students about effective scholarly writing – as part of a holistic strategy to deter plagiarism and collusion. More recently, staff are beginning to exploit the potential that both the GradeMark and PeerMark features can offer. The potential of offering electronic submission and electronic marking and feedback to students is now reality, using these tools. These features can support and enhance established teaching and learning methods. They have the potential to save time for lecturing staff by enabling more timelier and quality feedback to students within our agreed four week time span. Turnitin and Blackboard™ both have the capability for enhancing feedback and assessment using innovative and creative methods. Aston students who study full time, part time, and at a distance can all benefit from features offered by Turnitin. The integration of Turnitin with Blackboard VLE now means that Turnitin assignments can be set up easily for a designated cohort per module, and grades can be allocated within GradeMark. These grades are passed back into the Blackboard Grade Centre.
Other Tools	
Adobe Presenter	Adobe Presenter allows you to easily convert PowerPoint presentations into engaging, media rich learning objects that can be distributed online. Adding narration, animations, interactivity, quizzes, and software simulations to your existing presentations is a straightforward task, using Presenter. A linear PowerPoint presentation can now be accessed by students in a non linear format, containing supplementary audio explanations. Adobe Presenter also enables authors to add simple self assessment assessments into the presentation at various points. These assessments can then be recorded in the **Blackboard™ Grade Centre** for further assessment and feedback options. If you would

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Convert your existing PowerPoint presentations into engaging, media rich learning objects.	like to record the results of any embedded self assessment questions you will need to **export the completed presentation in a format** that links to the Grade Centre.
Audacity An easy-to-use, free and open source audio editor/recorder for Windows, OS X and Linux	You can use Audacity to: • Record live audio. • Convert tapes and records into digital recordings or CDs. • Edit Ogg Vorbis, MP3, WAV or AIFF sound files. • Cut, copy, splice or mix sounds together • Change the speed or pitch of a recording. And more! See the complete **list of features**.
BB FlashBack **Blueberry** software	Record your screen to create tutorials, software demonstrations, learning objects or feedback. Aston has a site license for this software so it can be installed on any Aston computer. Contact the **ISA Helpdesk** to arrange installation. You should be aware of the **copyright implications** of using this tool.
Box of Broadcasts Record upcoming TV and radio programmes and search an expanding archive.	Box of Broadcasts (BoB) is an on-line service providing staff and students access to recordings of TV and Radio. **With BoB, you can** • Record programmes from over 50 TV and radio channels from Freeview • Book recordings seven days in advance • Choose from tens of thousands of programmes in the archive • Create playlists and clips • Share programmes, clips and playlists with your colleagues and students
Elluminate Schedule synchronous virtual classroom and webinar sessions for teaching, assessments, and remote meetings.	Elluminate allows lecturers to schedule synchronous virtual classroom and webinar sessions. There are a number of tools for lecturers to use such as a virtual white board, screen sharing, web tours and polling. Participants can communicate through text chat, as well as using a microphone or web cam when permitted. It can be very useful in distance learning as well as when using a blended approach. Aston has integrated Elluminate with Blackboard™ to allow for easy scheduling of sessions as well as convenient user management.
EndNote	EndNote is a tool that assists in publishing and managing bibliographies. It allows you to create searchable databases of references that can be published into word processing packages such as Microsoft Word. There are also tools that allow you to make searches of on-line databases reducing the time spent collating references.
Optivote Give your audience the opportunity to respond to questions displayed on your presentations	Optivote voting systems use hand held devices to give all members of your audience the opportunity to respond to questions displayed on your presentation screen. These questions can either be built in Optivote's own software or integrated into PowerPoint.

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APPENDIX 2: HIGHER EDUCATION JOURNALS

Education Journal Rankings

Journal Title	Impact Factor	Aston Ranking
Review of Educational Research	3.361	4*
Academy of Management Learning and Education	2.889	4*
Journal of Learning Sciences	2.433	4*
Health Education Research	2.31	4*
Computers and Education	2.19	4*
Sociology of Education	1.594	3/4*
Journal of Higher Education	1.25	3*
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis	1.133	**3***
British Journal of Educational Technology	1.041	3*
British Journal of Educational Studies	0.977	3*
Studies in Higher Education	0.938	3*
Journal of Educational Policy	0.933	3*
Research in Higher Education	0.871	3*
British Educational Research Journal	0.791	3*
Journal of Educational Research	0.667	3*
Higher Education	0.6	3*
Harvard Educational Review	0.619	2/3*
Economics of Educational Review	0.804	2*
Educational Research	0.75	2*
Comparative Education	0.741	2*
Review of Higher Education	0.613	2*
British Journal of Sociology of Education	0.573	2*
Journal of Economic Education	0.237	2*
Educational Studies	0.516	1*
Education and Urban Society	0.5	1*
Educational Administration Quarterly	0.477	1*
Educational Review	0.473	1*
Educational Policy	0.4	1*
Adult Education Quarterly	0.387	1*
Innovations in Education and Teaching	0.25	1*

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