



LEAP Case Studies:

Collaborating with Communities

Number 11:

Category	Description
Case study title:	Group online assignment with mixed mode delivery (distance and campus based students)
Pedagogical Theme:	Community Development; use of WebCT; learning communities; action learning; communities of practice
Key Words:	WebCT; group and individual assignments. Online learning; learning communities
Academic subject area:	Community Development
Key Conclusions:	Hard work, lots of twists and turns; heartache, frustration but ultimate recognition that the benefits outweighed the 'costs'/difficulties.

Description of e-learning activities:

Group online assignment using online bulletin board

Bulletin board allowing asynchronous discussion was used to facilitate interaction between full time (campus-based) and part time (distant) students; development of a 'community of practice'.

Rationale:

Use of the asynchronous discussion supported the establishment of an 'online community', provided support and a link to 'local tutors' based across the UK. Supported the Learning by doing approach – group online assignment negotiated and completed by students, thus enacting many of the concepts of the module *Action with Communities* – ownership, integration, inclusion, mediation etc.

The e-learning activities enabled a large number of students, scattered across a wide geographic area, to pose questions, seek answers, share references and information relevant to the assignments and to the module as a whole.

Guest lecturers via Asynchronous Discussions

Through the use of asynchronous discussion students were able to interact with guest lecturers with specialist knowledge in related topic areas.

Evaluation of case study:

What was your perception of the e-learning activity?

Broadly speaking a 'success' – in terms of student-centred teaching and learning. And in terms of reflective learning and continuing professional development (CPD) of staff!

What was your colleagues' perception of the e-learning activity?

Hard work, lots of twists and turns; heartache, frustration but ultimate recognition that the benefits outweighed the 'costs'/difficulties.

What was your students' perception of the e-learning activity?

Students commented favourably about the experience – particularly following reflection on the module experience. Some students felt that the random distribution of students to groups had created problems – with some non-contributors; ‘passengers’ etc. Some uncertainty surrounding whether non-WebCT (e-mail, telephone etc contact) was ‘allowed’/encouraged – it was!

Activity Statistics (if applicable)

28 groups = 112 students undertaking (group) assignment 1 of which:
16 groups (64 students) completed essay as team of 4 = 55%
6 groups (18 students) completed essay as a team of 3 = 16%

5 groups (10 students) completed assignment as a pair = 9%

5 individual submissions = 4%
TOTAL SUBMISSIONS = 97 (84%)

15 individuals failed to submit the essay = 13%
1 group (4 students) failed to submit anything (e.g. evidence of discussion re essay content) = 3%

Monitoring using WebCT showed that this course generated a lot of student activity, for example generating 41734 hits on the course in semester two 2001/2 (112 students).

What have you learned from your experiences (good and bad)?

Higher education module delivery (module EL106 Action with Communities) using WebCT. Mainly centring on preparation, negotiation and delivery of student group essays (40% of module marks).

Use of WebCT requires a lot of careful planning, regular monitoring and feedback to students on draft work.

What were the expected outcomes?

Successful completion of module EL106 (*Action with Communities*) by 112 students. Practical experience and a ‘taste’ of community development – by negotiating and completing a group online assignment. Also knowledge gained from contributions by ‘guest’ community development practitioners.

Course Details:

Name of course:	Module <i>Action with Communities</i>
Course level:	Level I
Number of students:	112
Case Study Running Time:	Semester 2 (2001-02), but course will continue 2002-03 session. Module also ran on 3 previous occasions.
Course Compulsory :	Compulsory only for Community Development BA (Hons) major and joint route students (and for those undertaking postgraduate, professional, <i>Diploma in Advanced Study in Community Development</i>)
Software used:	WebCT

Please describe whether the e-learning activity was complementary/ supplementary (indicate %age):

WebCT materials = essential supplement: complement classroom sessions, residential school contact; use of hard copy course book. For distance learning students = 80%. Group online task is compulsory as it is an assessed part of the module.

Is the course assessed: Yes. 100% continual assessment: group online task and individual report submission.

Academic Staff Development:

What existing skills were required?

Patience; consistency of response across substantial number of students; personal organisation; dependability (doing what and when you say); clear and concise writing, and commentary on student contributions. E-mail responses to student queries

What new skills were required?

Dealing with students and staff via 'distant' ICT; (even more than usual) regular encouragement/reassurance to students on progress with assignment. Clear comments back to students on draft ideas/assignments posted via WebCT. Co-ordinating with a number of 'local tutors' across England.

How much time was required to develop new skills?

A fair amount of time to develop new skills - Tutors learned as we went along. Continuous process. Valuable technical and training support from University Learning Technology Support staff.

How much time was required to develop the e-learning activities?

A substantial time initially, to develop WebCT site; add hyper links; details of tasks, key references/texts reproduced on site for easy student access. Subsequent years = modest updating. Initially = say 30 hours.

Evolutionary learning process, in terms of adjusting module content and WebCT design over last 3 years of delivering EL106 *Action with Communities* module.

How much support staff time was required? (please describe job roles if possible)

Important technical support to students – e.g. technical queries re document attachments, accessing WebCT from home computers etc. dealt with by Learning Technology Support staff in addition to some web site design.

What skills have been learned from the experience?

Staff ability to respond quickly to student queries posted in WebCT; students generally feel much more confident about using WebCT/internet. Recognition of different student 'cultures' – e.g. full time campus-based students tend to start assignments much later than distant, part-time distance learners.

Future work:

Do you intend to further develop this case study?

Yes – evolutionary approach to module/WebCT use.

If yes, why are you intending to develop it?

To address issues of (a minority of) students not being committed to WebCT use and team working related to module assignment.

If yes, how do you intend to develop it?

Try to cement student commitment to working with group colleagues from a very early stage of the module

If no, why not?

N/A

Contacts:

James Derounian BSc (Hons) Mphil MRTPI ILTM
Elisabeth Skinner BA (Hons) Cert Ed ILTM
School of Environment
University of Gloucestershire
jderounian@glos.ac.uk
eskinner@glos.ac.uk