



LEAP Case Studies:

Hybrid campus based

Number 4:

Category	Description
Case study title:	WebCT support for undergraduate, level 3, Psychology & Crime Module
Pedagogical Theme:	Hybrid Campus Based
Key Words:	WebCT, e-learning, distance learning, discussion forum, formative assessment, on-line learning support, special needs support
Academic subject area:	Forensic Psychology
Key Conclusions:	Students were provided with this material so that they did not have to copy down this information during lectures and could spend more time listening to the lecturer (and adding additional notes), allowing them to get more from the lectures. Providing this material also facilitates more equal learning opportunities for students with special needs, as they are able to access the materials and adapt these to whatever format best suits them. The main difficulty with providing this material is that some students did not attend lectures and relied solely on the material provided via WebCT, and students did not readily discuss module related matters via WebCT.

Description of e-learning activities:

Lecture notes

Students were provided with overheads prior to lectures. These were provided in the format of MS PowerPoint's outline view, saved and uploaded into WebCT as html files.

Rationale:

This format reduces the amount of paper students use to print copies, and the IT skills needed by them to reduce and edit the files themselves. It also avoids 'time out' errors as WebCT searches for the appropriate package on the server, and allows students to access the material regardless of whether or not they have MS Word or MS PowerPoint on their home computers. Students were provided with this material so that they did not have to copy down this information during lectures and could spend more time listening to the lecturer (and adding additional notes), allowing them to get more from the lectures. Providing this material also facilitates more equal learning opportunities for students with special needs, as they are able to access the materials ahead of lectures and adapt these to whatever format best suits them. The main difficulty with providing this material, is that some students did not attend lectures and relied solely on the overhead material provided via WebCT. To counter this, some of the overheads had some key words/statistics omitted. This still reduced the level of copying of information during lectures without providing all the key lecture material. This practice received some strong negative evaluation from one or two students, but was maintained to encourage students to attend lectures.

Additional resources

The module web was also used to provide students with additional module related material, e.g. crime statistics, links to related web sites, and journal articles tutors had written. As with the lecture overheads, this material was uploaded as html files.

Rationale:

This material was provided to encourage students to engage more fully with the topics/issues covered in the module and to use additional material rather than relying solely on lecture material.

Coursework and advice

Students were provided with coursework, resit coursework and revision advice via the module web. In addition, students were encouraged to ask questions on this via the discussion forum.

Rationale:

This was done to help students achieve their best in the module assessment. It also allowed tutors to provide consistent information to all the students taking the module, without speaking to each individually. Additionally, it allowed advice to be given to resit students, when staff were less likely to be at the University during the summer months.

Discussions

Students were encouraged to use the discussion forum to discuss issues related to the module.

Rationale:

This was done as there were no seminars for the module, and students were encouraged to use the forum in lieu of seminar discussion. Tutors encouraged students to use the forum throughout the year, and they added messages raising issues that could be debated. This worked reasonably well, and a larger number of students read the discussion postings although only a small number of students contributed. Next year, students will be encouraged even more to use the forum, more discussion topics will be raised by the tutors, and guidance will be provided on the style that forum messages should be written in.

Mock offender-profiling

The module web was used to provide students with a mock offender-profiling exercise (in the second year of the case study), which had originally been developed for non-electronic use in previous years. Students were provided with a mock case history in the 'contents' section of WebCT and they were then asked to compile their profile by responding to questions in a questionnaire in the 'assessment' section. Instructions explaining this were provided via the discussion forum. The questionnaire side of this exercise was added as a quiz; however as there were no correct answers to this exercise it proved difficult to compile all the students' responses to each question. I discovered that this could have been avoided by setting the questionnaire as a 'survey' rather than a 'quiz', which will be revised for future years.

Multiple-choice tests (MCTs)

Students were also provided with six formative MCTs; one for each topic area covered in the module. Students were given specific time periods (where possible coinciding with guided study and reading weeks) to complete the MCTs, usually following the completion of each topic in lectures. Students were encouraged to complete the MCTs to inform them of their own learning and the areas that they needed to invest more time in. The MCTs were also made available during the Easter vacation onwards for revision purposes.

Evaluation of case study

What was your perception of the e-learning activity?

I have generally been pleased with the students use of WebCT and been encouraged by the very positive student evaluation of the provision for this module. I have also enjoyed using WebCT to provide students with the information and opportunities described above. However, a potential drawback of WebCT is students' over-reliance on it and their use of the lecture overheads to avoid attending lectures. It has also been noted that students come to expect a certain level of WebCT support for modules and pressure is exerted on staff who do not use WebCT to the same level or extent as other staff. Generally, though, this provision has increased students engagement with the module, slightly reduced the reliance on lecture notes, provided students with the opportunity to discuss module related matters where there is no seminar provision, and provided formative multiple choice tests, and exercises for students who choose to engage more fully with the module. Furthermore it has provided more equal learning opportunities for students with special needs.

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

The Psychology Subject Group at Coventry University has seen the introduction and development of WebCT very positively, and accordingly it has used this provision enthusiastically. Active WebCT module webs support ALL the modules provided by the Subject Group and the Programme Web is also used. Thus, the WebCT provision for the Psychology and Crime module is not that unusual compared with the provision for other modules, although it is more comprehensive.

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

Students have evaluated the WebCT provision for this module very positively. In 2000-01 the mean rating to the question 'I find the WebCT site for this module to be helpful' was 1.4 where 1 was 'strongly agree'. Similarly, in 2001-02 the mean rating to the question, 'I find the online learning support for this module helpful' in 2001-02 was 4.3 when 5 was 'strongly agree'. The students who use WebCT, and particularly those that engage with all aspects of the site, provide very positive feedback and seem to benefit from the additional material. Students value the speed at which replies are provided on the discussion forum and the MCTs were found to be useful. The students who completed the mock profile exercise (although quite few in number) really enjoyed the exercise and seemed to get a lot out of it. The following comments were provided in the module evaluations for both academic years: "I couldn't say what needed to be improved. It was lovely having WebCT discussion forum"; "The WebCT provision for this module is excellent. It works well because of the commitment to it"; "I found webct a great help and was very impressed with both the information, handouts, extra advice and the discussion forum." "I have found the notes on webct to be a great benefit as it means I am able to concentrate more on what is being said rather than rushing to get all the notes down."

Activity Statistics (if applicable)

No activity statistics are available for 2000-01, although the use of WebCT by the students has increased from this year to 2001-02. In 2001-02, of 138 students, only 2 students (and one of these was completing the module as a resit without attendance) failed to access WebCT at all. Most students used the site throughout the year and into the Easter Holidays or summer vacation. More students read and posted to the discussion forum than in previous years, and this year students engaged in more discussion related to the topic/issues covered in the module. There is variability in the extent to which students engage with the material on WebCT, although the general minimum level of engagement seems to have increased in 2001-02. Given that the formal delivery of the module has not been altered, this is acceptable given the 'add-on' nature of the material on the site.

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

I have developed my computer and information technology skills during the course of this case study. In addition, I have enhanced my teaching skills, particularly those related to providing supportive learning material. I have also discovered that it is difficult to get students to discuss module related matters via WebCT and that students need a great deal of encouragement and support in this regard. Without this extensive encouragement students do not readily discuss module related issues, although they are happier to ask specific questions of the module tutors (particularly questions regarding technical difficulties, and coursework and revision advice). However, I have learned that students can be encouraged to use WebCT to support and enhance their learning. I have also found that there are some negative aspects of providing extensive WebCT support. It has been noted in some students' assessment that lecture overhead material provided on WebCT had been utilised with very little understanding, which perhaps reflected a lack of attendance at lectures. The second negative aspect seems to be that the more material that is provided for students via WebCT, the more material they come to expect and demand.

What were the expected outcomes?

This WebCT provision was expected to have:

- enabled students to utilise their preferred learning styles through access to lecture overheads prior to lectures
- enhanced learning on the module by providing students with information additional to lecture material, such as coursework and revision advice, relevant statistics and theoretical models, formative multiple choice assessment

- facilitated electronic discussion of module related issues in lieu of seminar discussion
- provided more equal learning opportunities for students with special needs
- increased communication between module tutors and students, which is consistent and available to all students studying the module
- increased off campus communication between students, and tutors and students, throughout the academic year
- developed students and tutors computing and information technology skills

Course Details:

Name of course: Psychology and Crime
 Course level: Undergraduate, level 3
 Number of students: 140
 Case Study Running Time: October 2000 – September 2002
 Course Compulsory: No
 Software used: WebCT

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

100% complementary/supplementary

Is the course assessed: Yes (formally by essay (40%) and exam (60%), and informally via WebCT multiple choice tests)

Academic Staff Development:

What existing skills were required?

General computing skills, e.g. being able to use MSWord, and MSPowerPoint, and being able to save files as html files etc.

What new skills were required?

Learning how to use WebCT, uploading files, using discussion forum, module mail and assessment facilities

How much time was required to develop new skills?

As someone who is computer literate, I tended to learn as I tried to do things - probably 4 - 5 hours of 'training'/'learning' time

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

Things were added to the module web throughout the case study. At the start of each year it takes three to four hours to reset the site, updating material, removing unwanted material etc. I usually spend one to two hours a week checking the discussion forum and adding new lecture notes and other material. It took a good day's work to add the six formative multiple choice tests to the web and several hours to develop the questions for each test (although many of the questions were developed for another purpose). Adding the mock profile questionnaire took two to three hours.

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

None

What skills have been learned from the experience?

Using WebCT, more general web page development skills (e.g. html formats etc.)

Future work:

Do you intend to further develop this case study?

Yes

If yes, why are you intending to develop it?

The site will be developed to further allow students to engage more actively with the issues covered in the module. This will involve trying to develop more active use of the discussion forum to discuss issues related to the module and also to provide access to journal articles related to the module.
If yes, how do you intend to develop it

The site will be used for future cohorts of students as it has been for the last two years. In addition, work will be continued to try to get the students to use the discussion forum more actively to discuss issues related to the module. It has been noted by the external examiner that students have a tendency to over rely on textbooks in the assessment for this module. It is hoped that providing access to journals electronically will help to improve students use of journal articles.

If no, why not?

N/A

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