

# Building Inclusive Academic Communities:

## Case Studies in History, Classics and Archaeology

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**The  
Higher  
Education  
Academy**

**Subject Centre for  
History, Classics  
and Archaeology**



Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

# Building Inclusive Academic Communities

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## Acknowledgements

The Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology would like to thank the CETLs and Nicola Mellor for instigating the development of this project and being part of it while it was in its nascent stages. Their input, expertise and feedback have been invaluable.

This project's inspiration came from many stages of engagement with members of the academy community, postgraduate teachers and early career academics. Their participation in workshops, discussions and conferences has shown the topical nature of how we engage in 'Academic Communities' on many levels.

Members of the Subject Centre team have assisted this project and provided important observations and resources when necessary:

- Lisa Lavender, *co-editor* (Academic Co-ordinator, History at the Higher Education Academy)
- Sarah Richardson (Director of History at the Higher Education Academy)
- Melodee Beals (Academic Co-ordinator, History at the Higher Education Academy)
- Anthony Sinclair (Director of the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology)

We appreciate that without the administrative Subject Centre teams in Liverpool and Warwick, this project would not have been possible.

This project was seen to its completion by the project co-ordinator, Kimm Curran. We would like to credit her invaluable dedication to keeping the project going throughout many challenges.

Lastly, we extend our gratitude to all of the participants who submitted case studies. Their patience, professionalism and optimism in dealing with the many changes and phases of this project have been exceptional.

## Aims and Objectives

The project leading to this publication was instigated by several CETLs and the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) to increase the awareness of important aspects of teaching and learning in the humanities for new and future faculty members.

It combines the expertise of several CETLs and HCA in order to facilitate a greater awareness of increasingly important aspects of teaching and learning in the Humanities, such as work-based learning, and thus actively involve them in developing the future of humanities teaching.

Its primary aim was to use the expertise of members of CETLs to provide examples of new and innovative ways in teaching and learning in Higher Education. HCA invited case studies, aimed at members in established CETLs, and the response we received was surprising. Members of academic communities, from as far as Canada and Australia, also responded.

The resulting collection shows the active involvement and rich knowledge of discipline-relevant CETL work and the wider communities in History, Classics and Archaeology, on areas such as e-learning and employability: key themes in the work of the HCA and Higher Education Academy. For example, the move to constructively embed skills in undergraduate courses, as well as giving students the opportunity to 'take charge' of their own learning. The approach taken by contributors to this collection of case studies shows the holistic and yet varied nature of the Academy to a new generation of academic staff.

The case studies provide future faculty members with examples of good academic practice by those who have experience in the field, but also by those who are 'new to the game' and have tried innovative approaches to teaching their subject(s). Participants have varied approaches to teaching and learning within their subject areas and provide examples of the successes (and pitfalls) of trying something 'new' or 'tried and true'.

However, as the project and publication developed, it became clear that these case studies also appeal to established members of staff more generally, who might want to try a different approach to teaching and/or tools for learning, for example, Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and their practical use on a course.

As a result, it is hoped that the wider outcomes of this collection will help create a stronger community of academic practice in the humanities that incorporates both Subject Centre support, CETL project research and Academy aims, whilst at the same time providing useful tools for those new to teaching in their disciplines.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Nicola Mellor at the University of Reading for sharing the initial aims and objectives of this project.

## Introduction

This particular initiative, undertaken by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Subject Centre in History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) has resulted in the construction of several case studies, developed by committed individuals within the Higher Education sector, and focused on specific issues which those individuals have themselves identified and examined. The details of these case studies are presented here; the intention at this point is to outline an overall framework within which these practical examples can be located and discussed. The approach taken here is derived from the work of the University of Oxford's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), which is based on Preparing for Academic Practice. The text which follows attempts to draw out, briefly, some of the issues which the CETL has been addressing during its existence thus far, and tries to relate the Centre's theoretical constructs to the practical examples provided by the HCA-funded case studies.

The next generation of British academics in the Humanities consists of committed, talented people, with deep reserves of intellectual energy, and wide-ranging, often cross-disciplinary, research interests. But these are also people who feel that their own disciplines tend to be "poor relations" both in terms of research funding, and with regard to employment prospects. The pressures to acquire ancillary skills in teaching, research, and other academic-related areas, and to develop supportive networks within their subject specialisms, become all the greater when the competition for available posts are growing ever more intense.

These were the initial impressions gained from listening to the views of postgraduate research students from a range of universities, who had gathered together in Oxford in September 2007. The session – organised jointly by the HCA Subject Centre and the University of Oxford's CETL – was intended to enable participants to gain a wider understanding of current trends in academic careers in Humanities. Senior specialists and early career academics were also present, so that a range of perspectives were made available as to the various issues involved. But it was perhaps the views and concerns of the postgraduate students – who represent, ultimately, the future of their respective disciplines – that touched most directly on the central theme of the occasion.

Inevitably, the discussions on that September day threw up no easy answers: none had been anticipated. The tension between the competitiveness involved in gaining university appointments, and the collaboration inherent in the conduct of academic life and work, was sketched out, but remained resolutely unresolved. The acquisition of additional skills sets was marked out as being necessary, but by no means sufficient, for the progression of academic careers. And there was sharp debate between the postgraduates as to the timing of such training: some recalled the first year of their doctorates as the only point at which they had any spare time in which to do other things, whilst others saw the commencement of a

doctorate as an undertaking so huge and all-consuming as to prohibit any additional considerations. Straightforward solutions to any of these intricate, thorny issues are simply not to be found, however; acknowledging that this is so perhaps makes for a useful starting point in approaching the issues involved.

The title of the September event was: "Conceptions of Academic Practice: Implications for Future Humanities Academics". In a feedback comment, one of the doctoral students expressed regret that little conceptually-based discussion had actually taken place, and that the overall focus had remained firmly on the identification of skills gaps. The point could well be considered to be a fair one. It may also be indicative of an instinctive tendency within academic institutions to promote a skills agenda as being a whole – rather than a partial – solution to the developmental needs of postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers.

Many universities have subsequently increased skills training provision for postgraduate research students, in response both to the increased prominence of this issue on the national Higher Education agenda, and to the financial resources which have been made available by the UK government for this purpose. One might argue that British postgraduate research students are now held in higher esteem – and that have greater resources available to support them – than has ever previously been the case. However, two factors mitigate this rather rosy view of the present situation. Firstly, and most obviously, the level of competition for academic posts has never been greater – perhaps particularly so within the Arts and Humanities – and any idea that the long-term prospects of a postgraduate research student within the academic world are secure and assured needs to be dispelled forthwith. The second caveat to the positive viewpoint outlined above is more difficult to define – developing an academic career, and growing into acceptance within an academic community, involves rather more than ticking off a list of skills acquisition boxes.

The approach of the University of Oxford's CETL, has been to try to convey a sense of the depth and variety of professional academic identities, and to encourage people seeking to pursue academic careers to engage with a series of "lenses" through which such careers may be viewed. Within this context, skills development is significant, but is by no means the only component: equally important are understandings of identity, knowledge production, values and moral purpose – concepts that are rather deeper and perhaps more subtle than the more traditional decomposition of academic careers into research, teaching, and service. Collectively, this conceptual approach can provide individuals with a theoretical structure within which skills development, and other academic-related activities, can be located profitably. Putting theory first, in other words, can go a long way towards making sense of the sometimes confusing range of resources and support on offer to early career academics.

There has long been an awareness of the importance of conceptions in influencing and developing approaches to teaching and learning. Conception-based models that move

teachers and learners towards “deep” approaches to learning are now well established in the teaching and learning strategies of many UK universities. This mode of operating tends to focus on individual students – including their prior orientation to learning, their views as to what learning involves, their understanding of the design and construction of courses, and the ways in which they go about studying. Frameworks of this kind have been used to explain why it is that students receiving similar tuition in near-identical circumstances can often record widely differing learning outcomes.

Perhaps what was present implicitly in the 2007 Humanities discussions in Oxford was the idea of applying this sort of conceptions model to the development of individuals as future academics. The processes by which people conceive of themselves as having academic identities, and then proceed positively to construct those identities, is imperfectly understood; such mechanisms may often be regarded as belonging to the realm of that which is taken for granted. Yet these are career-defining – even life-defining – events; and it is arguably the case that such decision points are more important for potential academics within the Humanities, given the shortage of research funding and academic posts, and the relative lack of clear career structures, in comparison with those in the harder and more applied disciplines.

If this line of thought is pursued, the critical issue then centres on the ways in which postgraduate research students who wish to pursue academic careers can be encouraged to conceive of themselves as incipient academics, and to structure their developmental activities accordingly. Self-perception of this kind is not an easy or obvious bridge for many individuals to cross. People who are driven to pursue doctorates by essentially noble motives deriving from love for their subjects, or those who, from understandable but less praiseworthy motives, are seeking to defer long-term career decisions, may be equally unlikely to re-imagine themselves as future academics or to align their thinking and their self-development towards these goals. The capacity to reach such people intellectually, and to persuade them to think differently about their future paths in life, is thus of considerable importance.

One way in which the Oxford CETL has sought to address this issue is by connecting those who have been through this process, and who have established themselves in early academic careers at other universities, with current postgraduates and postdoctoral researchers at Oxford. This mentoring programme, which concluded its pilot phase in April 2008, was run in conjunction with the Careers Service and has proved to be very popular both with mentors and mentees. The range of “stories” of people who have progressed into academic careers has proved to be wide and varied, and a first-hand grasp of this variety has been highly beneficial to young people who are grappling with their own developing identities as future professional academics.

It might of course be argued that the kinds of people who are sufficiently interested and motivated to participate in events of this kind, and whose conceptions of themselves as future

academics are already at least partially constructed, are not, in themselves, part of the problem. It is to be hoped, obviously, that they have benefited from their attendance, but they have, clearly, already begun the process of relating their current activities to their potential future careers. Whilst there seems little reason to encourage those who are ambivalent about, or disinterested in, entering academic practice, it is quite possible that there remain groupings of postgraduate research students, and postdoctoral researchers, who want to follow academic careers, but who are not receiving sufficient advice and support to allow them to do so in effective and coherent ways.

Codifying individual experiences into comprehensible collective groupings is at best an uncertain business. Clearly, all journeys into academic careers are different, and the process by which interest in a discipline is converted into a sense of lifelong vocation will vary considerably, in nature and in timing, between individuals. For example, people may come late to academia after developing careers in other areas. Equally, career paths which begin by focusing specifically on research and teaching may veer later into academic leadership, management and administration - areas which are in their own ways just as important. Such variation is undeniable and unavoidable, but what can be said is that, as with other vocational trajectories, those who commit themselves earlier to clear visions of their futures gain at least initial advantages over those who, for whatever reasons, elect not to do so. Skills training and the acquisition of ancillary abilities all make much more sense when understood as part of a structure, or as stages upon a journey.

So, perhaps the induction of postgraduate research students into academic communities – and the re-introduction of postdoctoral researchers into what for them may well be a changed world of activities and responsibilities – should include an element of considered self-reflection as to where, in the long term, their work may be taking them. A greater and deeper understanding of the texture of academic activities may attract some people towards these career paths – whilst perhaps repelling others -, but at least such decisions will be better when made on an informed basis. On the part of higher education institutions, the impetus to provide training opportunities might usefully be tempered with more structured thinking as to what such training is designed to do, and how individuals can more effectively take control of their own career progression. High quality training provisions can still be undermined considerably if they do not align with the attitudes and thinking of the individuals at whom such programmes are aimed.

If such caveats can be taken as setting an overall context, the case studies which follow constitute a rich and diverse range of examples of practical skills development. The studies also demonstrate how the construction of policies and the provision of resources at small, local scales may well be highly effective both in defining problems and in reaching target audiences. A local level approach may in turn suggest an argument for some decentralisation of skills training budgets to departmental units – and, indeed, for further distribution to committed and imaginative individuals within academic departments who have ideas and who are willing to try to develop them.

The particular themes that emerge from these case studies include teaching and learning, particularly in various online forms; the problems and opportunities of assessment; and other applied skills, such as time management and revision. Each study has been developed at the “sharp end”, in that the researchers involved have experienced particular problems and have sought to design achievable strategies for dealing with these issues. These “front-line” accounts of work currently being carried out in British (and, in one case, Canadian) universities are valuable both for the lived experiences which are being shared and for the solutions which are being propagated. And all of these studies can be fitted, quite straightforwardly, into an overall conception of Academic Practice – of what it is that academics do: as practical examples of a theoretical perspective, these examples provide a much sharper focus on the realities of academic life than the broad-brush categories of teaching, research and service. It is thus hoped that this collection of case studies can be read both in terms of interest in the particular issues that they examine, and in terms of their wider, collective contribution to an understanding of the ways in which academic careers are developing and changing.



## Teaching Core Skills in History via WebCT:

### I. Quizzes

#### Short Description

The project used quizzes in WebCT to teach key history skills. Level 1 students on the History Honours core course, 'History in Practice', completed three quizzes: 1) referencing conventions; 2) types of essay question; 3) assessment criteria.

#### Rationale

Many academic staff felt that undergraduates on History programmes at Manchester displayed a disappointing level of competence in certain key skills. For example, many undergraduates had still not mastered academic referencing conventions by Level 3. The delivery of a Level 1 lecture devoted to referencing appeared to have been ineffective. The project intended to exploit the potential offered by the quiz function in the WebCT virtual learning environment (VLE) to teach key history skills. The quiz initiative was part of a series of e-learning pilot projects in the humanities financed by the University of Manchester's 'Strategic E-Learning' fund. The project team (Dr Max Jones, Principal Investigator; Dr Hannah Barker, and learning technologist, Andrew Gold) believed that students' individual interaction with quizzes in WebCT would provide a more effective method for teaching and learning about academic referencing conventions. After considering which other skills might be addressed effectively in quizzes, the team also devised quizzes to promote student learning about both assessment criteria, and the different types of essay question asked in course units.

#### Description of the Practice

HIST 10101 'History in Practice' is the core Level 1 course unit for undergraduates on History Honours, and related degree programmes, at the University of Manchester, and recruits c.300 students per year. All students on the course attend a weekly 1-hour lecture. In addition to the lecture, students are divided into seminar groups of 10-12 led by academic staff. Academic staff members act as personal tutors for their group. HIST 10101 is primarily assessed by means of a 2,500-word assessed essay. The course has three principal aims: first, to introduce students to basic concepts, which they will encounter throughout their degree programme; second, to ensure all Level 1 History students have regular contact with a member of academic staff during their first semester; third, to promote student learning about key skills which they will utilise on their degree programme.

Dr Barker and Dr Jones worked with learning technologist Andrew Gold to develop a set of WebCT pages for the course. These pages both provided basic course information (timetable, reading-list, modes of assessment etc.) and offered a platform for the three sets of quizzes:

1. After a page of instructions, students were asked to complete 3 main quizzes about footnoting. Footnote quiz 1 asked students to select which entry was formatted correctly from a group of five examples. The quiz asked students to consider: a) the first citation of a book in a footnote, b) subsequent citations, c) the first citation of a chapter in an edited collection, d) subsequent citations, e) the first citation of a journal article in a footnote, f) subsequent citations. Footnote quiz 2 asked a series of 'True or False' questions, such as 'Each footnote should only list one source' and 'If I footnote all the time, my tutor will think I don't have any ideas of my own'. Finally, Footnote quiz 3 used the 'matching pairs' quiz option in WebCT, by asking students to read a paragraph of text, and identify which footnote referred to a) the body of historical scholarship about a period; b) a methodological debate between two historians; c) a specific quotation.
2. After a page of background information, students were asked to complete one quiz on the different types of essay question asked in history course units. The background information distinguished between 6 basic types of essay question: the 'Yes/No', the 'Because', the 'Either/Or', the 'Discuss', the 'Value Judgement', and the 'To What Degree?' The quiz asked students to identify which category 11 essay questions belonged to. For example, a) 'How would anyone have known that they were living inside the Carolingian Empire?': a 'Because' essay question; b) 'Would you consider colonial cartography as an 'imperialist' or an 'enlightenment' enterprise?': an 'Either/Or' essay question.
3. Finally, after a page of background information, students were asked to complete four quizzes about essay assessment. Students were presented with extracts from three essays which answered the question 'On what issues did the two main British political parties disagree between 1832 and 1846?' The three essays were graded 51, 65, and 75, although students were not given this information until they had completed the exercise. The assessment quizzes asked students to assign a grade to extracts from each of the three essays, under the four main headings in the published 'Grade Descriptors': 'Structure and Argument', 'Knowledge and Understanding', 'Use of Sources', 'Style and Presentation'. Under each of these headings, students selected one of five brief descriptions, which corresponded to the 1<sup>st</sup>-class (70+); 2:1 class (60-69); 2:2-class (50-59); 3<sup>rd</sup>-class (40-49); and Fail (39 and below) For example, under 'Use of Sources', students chose between:
  - a) Wide-ranging and insightful use of sources, at least some of which are located by the candidate; Engages critically with evidence in secondary sources.
  - b) Critical use of sources, showing ability to make comparisons between different secondary interpretations, to quote aptly and to reference accurately.
  - c) Use of and reference to several sources, though summarizing rather than analyzing; Shows adequate reading but little originality.
  - d) Limited use of sources, with inconsistent referencing.
  - e) Use of lecture notes and own opinion without evidence of adequate reading.

Essay Assessment quizzes 1, 2 and 3 asked students to select the most appropriate descriptions for the 'Introduction', 'Body Paragraph', and 'Conclusion' of each essay. Essay Assessment quiz 4 asked students to review their answers to quizzes 1-3, and choose a final numerical grade for each of the essays.

After saving and submitting their answers for each quiz, students received a score and feedback. In most cases, students viewed an annotated copy of the questions they had answered, with the annotations explaining why a particular answer was correct. The WebCT pages and quizzes were only completed in the week before the course began in September 2007. After some discussion with the head of department, it was decided that the completion of the quizzes would be optional during this initial trial. All academic staff were notified by email (and in personal conversations) about the quizzes, and encouraged to direct their students to complete them.

### Implementation

During the process of preparation, the team realised that the quiz function in WebCT was quite restrictive. For example, students could not simply click on a link to the quizzes at the bottom of a page. Instead students had to find a separate link towards the top of the page, or select the quiz option from a drop down menu. The quiz format itself was also quite restrictive. For students and staff spoiled by the smooth interactivity of many commercial websites, the WebCT quiz interface appeared primitive. This problem remained after the unit was transferred to the Blackboard VLE in 2008-09. It is to be hoped that new VLEs such as Blackboard Learn, which incorporate the interactive aspects of so-called Web 2.0, will include an improved interface.

We were also surprised by the reluctance of both staff and students to complete the quizzes. Only around 20% of academic staff appeared to have encouraged their students to take the quizzes, and only around 20% of students completed the quizzes. This relatively low take-up, indicated the importance of integrating the quiz component more formally into HIST 10101 in the future.

### Impact

Specific feedback on the WebCT quizzes was provided both by an anonymous online questionnaire in WebCT, and by an anonymous focus group of students who took the course. The feedback on the quizzes was positive. Responding to the statement 'The Footnote Quiz improved my understanding of academic referencing conventions', 6 students responded 'Agree', 4 students responded 'Mostly Agree', 3 students responded 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', and 1 student responded 'Mostly Disagree'. Responding to the statement 'The Essay Question-Type Quiz improved my understanding of the different strategies required to answer different types of essay question', 5 students responded 'Agree', 5 students responded 'Mostly Agree', 1 student responded 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', and 1 student responded 'Mostly Disagree'.

Responding to the statement 'The Essay Assessment Quiz improved my understanding of what I need to do to gain a good mark in my essays' 6 students responded 'Agree', 4 students responded 'Mostly Agree', 1 student responded 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', and 1 student responded 'Mostly Disagree'.

The focus group offered particularly positive feedback on the Essay Assessment Quiz:

**Facilitator:** Apart from the fact you thought it was a bit long did you find it useful knowing how your essay would be assessed?

**Student 2:** Oh yeah that was a good part of it  
**Facilitator:** Would you have found that out any other way?

**Student 2:** It is written in our handbook, isn't it?

**Student 3:** Yeah, yeah

**Student 2:** I thought it was quite good seeing it how you actually had to do it almost and I think that made you think about it more because you can read something and it can not go in

**Student 3:** Its clearer and marking handbook is quite subjective it is like "good, better, excellent" and it is a little bit too subjective to read it and say that's exactly what we're looking for, but having an example in front of you makes things much easier to do

**Student 2:** Also it was broken up into 60 to 60 something, so broken into each individual band, whereas in the book it was only in the four levels

**Student 3:** It helped to understand that some of the classification system which I didn't really know much about before I came to uni and from that I've learnt a lot about how it works

The principal complaints expressed in the focus group concerned the course unit's integration of lectures, seminars and exercises in WebCT. Students felt that these elements had not been integrated effectively.

Based on the focus group discussion, the WebCT questionnaire, and informal discussions with staff and students, the team concluded that the project had demonstrated that quizzes provided an effective method for teaching and learning about key history skills.

The content of compulsory first-year course units remains under review at Manchester. The project suggests that quizzes should be made compulsory and effectively integrated into the broader course structure to promote student engagement. If you would like to be provided with further information on the project please email Max Jones.

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# Embedding Time Management Skills

## Short Description

A structured series of short, simple interventions were deployed throughout a core first year module, with the aim of raising awareness of the importance of time management. As a result, students actively engaged with the issue and showed evidence of critical reflection.

## Rationale

The desirability of encouraging good habits of time management in undergraduate students is self-evident to lecturers and employers. It is also becoming an important factor in student progression and attainment. This is because late submission of assessed coursework is a frequent cause of failure on many modules, and dissertations are often rushed and do not fully demonstrate student ability.

The *Methods of Archaeology* (ALGY 101) module at Liverpool University has been the core module for the delivery of essential learning and transferable skills, including time management, on our Archaeology programmes. Teaching for this module is in twice weekly large group lectures, with weekly small group tutorials starting in Week 3. These tutorials discussed academic issues associated with the module, but a number were also dedicated to study skills. One of these, in Week 5, was dedicated to study skills, including essay-writing, research, bibliography, plagiarism and a brief discussion of time management.

It became clear that:

- There was limited student engagement with time management skills. This may be because it is a subject covered in key skills teaching in many schools.
- Students felt patronised when they were given direct advice about how to manage their time better.
- Students could not see the relevance of time management to the current task in hand (i.e. learning the academic subject matter of the ALGY 101 module and performing the necessary assessment tasks).
- There was insufficient time to discuss time management in a skills tutorial that was also attempting to cover many other issues simultaneously.
- To be effective time management skills needed to be delivered earlier in the module and be revisited throughout the first semester.
- There needed to be a framework against which the student could chart their own activity, to form an evidential basis for them to reflect on their personal time management.
- There was often reluctance to discuss time management, even when prompted by tutors.

It was therefore decided that students would be involved in series of short, simple interventions that engaged them in active reflection on their own time management. These would be embedded in both lectures and tutorials throughout the module rather than didactic handouts or tutor-led discussions delivered relatively late in the module.

## Description

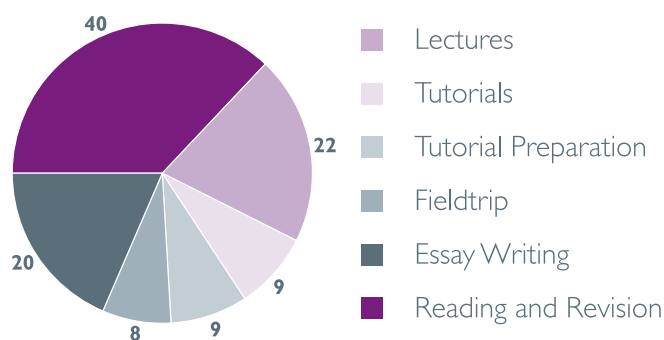
The new scheme consists of a series of small interventions throughout the module, from the very first lecture to the very last:

First Lecture:

The first lecture acts as a welcome to the module, explaining its structure and assessment regime. During this lecture, a few minutes are dedicated to explaining the importance of time management (following immediately after a description of the very strict penalties that exist for the late submission of work!).

In the PowerPoint presentation, a pie chart is used to explain how students on the module are expected to divide their time between the different tasks that make up the learning and teaching scheme of the module (i.e. lectures, tutorials, preparation for tutorials, fieldtrip, essay-writing and revision).

**See Figure One.** This is used as a point of discussion, highlighting the large proportion of students' time that it is expected will be dedicated to background reading. It also highlights the importance of essay-writing as an integral part of the module learning and teaching scheme.



**Figure One: Pie chart of hours to be spent on the ALGY 101 module**

This pie chart was reproduced in the module handbook, together with a table laying out the amount of time (in hours) that it was expected that students dedicate to each task. The table included a blank column in which the students were told to record how many hours they dedicated to each particular task. **See Figure Two** (page 8). Students were encouraged to re-visit this table and fill it out at intervals during the module.

Lectures	22	
Tutorials	9	
Tutorial Preparation	9	
Fieldtrip	8	
Essay Writing	20	
Reading	40	

**Figure Two: Table of actual hours spent**

Also included in the module handbook and on the VLE resources that accompanied it is a scheme of reading, built around the recommended text book that acts as a guide to the students' private reading and helps them to prepare for tutorial topics.

In Week 5:

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Near the middle of the module and as part of a general skills tutorial, tutors on the module are encouraged to ask students how they are managing their time and to remind them to keep a track of it using the table in the module handbook and comparing it to the pie chart. In particular, students are encouraged to share with their peers the things that they are finding hardest, or most unexpected (e.g. just how frustrating it can be to find source materials for an essay, and how rare it is to have a block of time in which to work on assignments).

Last Lecture:

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During the last lecture of the module, the pie chart slide is shown again and students' experiences of using the tables in the module handbook are discussed. Students are invited to share their experiences with the group (e.g. Have they found they were spending longer doing one particular form of work than it said in the module handbook? Have other people had the same experience? How do they juggle the demands of several modules at once? And commitments outside the university?). Finally, the group are asked to consider how they might have managed their time differently in regard to the module.

## Implementation

The effects of this series of short, simple interventions were:

- To raise the issue of time management early in the module, and to keep it raised by repeatedly re-visiting it.
- To validate the importance of time management as a skill by raising it at points throughout the module (it was also listed as one of the module learning outcomes). The fact that the lecturer and tutor are often different people also validates the learning because it shows that time management is a concern for the department as a whole and not just the module co-ordinator.

- To provide students with a means of measuring how they managed their time on the module (via the table) against a standard module (the pie chart), which could be used as a basis for reflection.
- To give students opportunities (in the tutorial and in the last lecture) to discuss and reflect on the experience of managing their time on this module and to reflect on this in relation to future modules.

## Impact

Effective time management will continue to be an issue for many students adjusting to the multifarious demands, both social and academic, of their new life at university. The need for such skills is particularly apparent in Arts subjects that typically have a limited number of contact hours, and there is therefore more scope for students to mismanage their time.

Anecdotally, the implementation of this model of interventions appears to have served to raise the general level of student awareness of the need for effective time management. In particular, a number of students explained how they had found the pie chart a useful and effective way of clearly spelling out the need for private reading. They also reported that the table had been a useful tool to help them realise where they may have been spending too much, or too little, time on certain tasks.

The most important feature of the introduction of this style of intervention is that the emphasis is on student-centred learning. Given that time management is now taught in schools, a traditional didactic approach to the subject is likely to be deemed repetitive or patronising and is therefore unlikely to actively engage students. This method, which is remarkably simple for teaching staff to implement, actively engages students in reflection on their recent concrete experiences (i.e. their action in relation to the module) and, as such, is likely to result in more effective deep learning than traditional approaches.

## Further Information

<http://www.liv.ac.uk/sace>

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## Divide and grid

### Short Description

Using an empty grid with topic-specific headings students divide the primary and secondary literature that they are reading into categories reflecting exam questions. When they prepare for their exams, they can use it to recall their reading and specific examples supporting scholarly views and opinions.

### Rationale

College tutors and lecturers at Oxford typically teach tutorials to undergraduates to prepare them for their university exams. In these exams, students have to write translations, commentaries and essays in a very tight time frame. Therefore, more important than the depth at which they studied the subjects is the accessibility of the material in their minds during the exam. Ideally, they come to the exams with one to three examples and one to three opinions/views per exam question ready in their minds. For the purpose of preparing them well for their exams I designed a grid which allows students to fill in facts, opinions and examples from the primary and secondary literature according to categories reflecting past exam topics.

### Description of the Practice

Using an empty grid with topic-specific headings students can divide the primary as well as secondary literature into categories which are connected to exam questions. The grid enables them to record information and examples in a format in which they can store and access their knowledge later on. Compared to their usual practice, which is to summarize primary and secondary literature, it saves time and facilitates effective exam preparation. While the grid is subject-specific, it can easily be adapted to almost any subject and be used either for teaching a subject or revising it.

### Implementation

I was surprised to find that the one student with whom I first tried out the grid lost it and my instructions straightaway. This may show that she did not expect to be taught anything else beside the subject matter, but maybe it just shows her level of personal organisation.

### Impact

Due to the nature of the course, it has been difficult to gain written feedback from students on the usefulness of the grids. However, face-to-face comments were positive and students found them helpful in studying and organising for the course.

### Further information, including any website links

I have attached two examples, one used to teach Ovid (selection of his works) and the other to teach Greek Literature of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC. In both cases, the grid can be used to a single text (e.g. *Ov. Amores* 1.1) or a collection of texts (e.g. *Ov. Met.* or Pindar's epinician odes).

### Ovid HT/TT 2008 – Divide and grid while reading primary and secondary literature

#### Genre (What? Who used it before/invented it?)

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

#### Metre (What? Relevance?)

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

#### Structure (What? Groups? Means of Transition?)

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

#### Unity (Yes or no? Means?)

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

#### Poetics (What does the narrator say about his work? Effect?)

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

#### Style (Characteristics?)

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Important Themes (list)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Gods (Who? Relation to humankind? Characteristics?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Women (Who? How many? Relation to men?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Narrator (Who? What kind of person?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Characterisation (Means? Functions?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Geography (What? Where?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Myth (What? Who? Functions?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Greek models (Callimachus? Others?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Latin models (Virgil? Others?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Greek Literature of the 5th c. TT/MT 2008 – Divide and grid while reading primary and secondary literature**

**Genre (What? Who used it before/invented it?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Writer (Who? When? Where?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Date (if known)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Metre (What? Relevance?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Structure (What? Groups? Means of Transition?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Addressee (Who? Relevance?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Narrator (Who? What kind of person?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Narrative techniques (Which? Effect?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Poetics (What does the narrator say about his work? Effect?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Style (Characteristics?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Characterisation (Means? Functions?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Myth (What? Which version? Function(s)?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Public vs. private (Where on a scale? Why?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Oral vs. written (Where on a scale? Why? Performance?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Religion (Relevance?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Polis/Politics (Relation? Relevance?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Homer (Relevance? Relation?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Important Themes (list)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Gods (Who? Relation to humankind? Characteristics?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

**Women (Who? How many? Relation to men?)**

Description, scholars' opinions	Examples from text

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## Using Virtual Learning Environments To Improve Student Learning In Large Humanities Courses

### Short Description

The project aimed to improve student learning in a large undergraduate course unit, by asking students a) to view a set of primary and secondary sources accessed through virtual learning environment (WebCT then Blackboard), and b) to complete a 'Seminar Worksheet', before attending their weekly seminar.

### Rationale

Traditional methods of small group teaching remain a significant part of the History lecturer's armoury, but new approaches are necessary to achieve excellence in teaching and learning in large undergraduate humanities courses. The University of Manchester is not alone in having to cope with increased staff: student ratios, particularly at Level 1 and Level 2. The standard format for such courses at Manchester involves 22 contact hours, divided between a weekly one hour lecture for all students, and a weekly one hour seminar for a group of c.15-students, led either by a member of academic staff or by a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). After convening a Level 2 British History survey course for three years, I became concerned that seminars were not as effective as they might have been. In particular, both from my own experience, and from discussions with students and GTAs, it became clear that many students adopted a passive role during the course, attending lectures and seminars, but doing little reading beyond their preparation for assessed essays. The project established a set of WebCT pages for the course, which clearly set out the work expected of each student prior to their weekly seminar. The project intended a) to improve student learning in seminars, b) to improve the integration of lectures and seminars in the teaching of the course unit; c) to improve the support available for Graduate Teaching Assistants; d) to inspire student learning by harnessing the rich online resources available for modern British history; and e) to provide a model for the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) in large humanities courses. The reform of HIST 20151 was part of a series of e-learning pilot projects financed by the University of Manchester, which funded the employment of a dedicated learning technologist, Andrew Gold.

### Description of the Practice

HIST 20151 'Politics, Society and Culture in Britain, c. 1885-1990' is one of the most popular Level 2 History course units at the University of Manchester, attracting c. 120 students each year. All students attend 11 weekly one hour lectures, and are also divided into groups of c.15-students for a further 11

weekly one hour seminars, led by a member of academic staff or GTA. Lectures took place on Wednesdays at 11 in Semester 1 2007-08. The timetable was arranged so that all students attended their seminar on the Monday or Tuesday following each lecture. The course was assessed by a 2,500 word essay (50%) and a 2 hour/2 essay examination (50%).

The project established a set of WebCT pages for the course, which offered standard information: lecture timetable, essay questions, reading lists, assessment details etc. In addition, students were required to visit a dedicated page in WebCT prior to each weekly seminar. The seminar page offered students specific instructions for the week. These instructions directed students a) to analyse 1 or 2 secondary sources; b) to analyse a related set of primary sources; and c) to complete a 'seminar worksheet'. For example, students were given the following instructions following a lecture on 'Empire, Race and Immigration':

In preparation for this seminar, students will be expected:

- To read the key text: Panikos Panayi, 'Immigration, racism and multiculturalism', in F. Carnevali & J.-M. Strange (eds.), *20th-Century Britain* (2007), pp. 247-61.
- To read Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech (20/04/1968).
- To read press reaction to Powell's speech.
- To prepare a 'Seminar Worksheet', which students should print up and bring to their seminar. The link to the 'Seminar Worksheet' is at the bottom of this page.

Student complaints about access to key texts are sadly familiar in large humanities courses. All recommended secondary sources were, therefore, either taken from the Carnevali and Strange text-book, which students were directed to buy, or from articles available online. The seminar pages directed students to primary sources (audio files, films, transcripts of speeches, press reports etc.) from a wide variety of outlets, including the *Daily Mirror* online archive, Film and Sound Online, the National Archives website, Screen Online, *The Times* Digital Archive, YouTube and the No. 10 Downing Street website. Links to all primary sources were placed directly below the instructions.

A link to the week's 'Seminar Worksheet' was placed at the bottom of the weekly seminar page. Clicking on the link opened a single A4-page in MS-Word in a new window. The page consisted of a series of 5-6 questions related to the week's primary and secondary sources, with gaps in which students could insert their responses. For example, the worksheet for the 'Empire, Race and Immigration' seminar included the following questions:

1. List the 3 principal acts which restricted entry to Britain between 1950 and 1975.
2. Give two examples from Panayi's article of ways in which racism has been promoted in Britain since 1945:
3. What policies towards immigration did Powell suggest in April 1968?

4. Select two passages from Enoch Powell's speech, which aroused particular controversy. Briefly explain why they proved controversial.
5. Select one passage from the press coverage of Powell's speech in *The Times* and the *Daily Mirror*. Explain why you think the passage offers insights into British attitudes towards race and immigration in the 1960s.

Students could either fill in the worksheet online, save the worksheet to their own PC, or print it up and fill it in by hand. Students were instructed to bring two copies of the worksheet to their seminar, one for themselves, and one to hand to their seminar leader. Seminar leaders were instructed to use the worksheets as a basis for discussion.

## Implementation

I estimate that I spent 2-3 hours preparing the WebCT instructions for each of the 11 seminars for the course (selection of primary and secondary sources + composition of worksheet). I sent a series of MS-Word documents (text and instructions) to learning technologist, Andrew Gold, who set up the pages in WebCT. For 2007-08, I delivered all 11 lectures for the course, while 5 graduate teaching assistants led 7 seminar groups. I met with the GTAs in mid-September, to go over the project with them. The GTAs embraced the project and offered a positive assessment of the 'Seminar Worksheet' model.

The use of WebCT for HIST 20151 proceeded smoothly. A few students encountered difficulties in accessing the WebCT site. These registration difficulties were resolved when the University of Manchester switched to the Blackboard VLE in September 2008, as the university course registration system and the Blackboard registration system are much more effectively integrated.

The principal revision of the plan during implementation concerned the precise way in which GTAs used worksheets. I had been wary of increasing GTA workload, by asking them to view worksheets in advance of each seminar. I therefore suggested that GTAs collect worksheets at the beginning of their seminar, and then set a question for students to discuss amongst themselves to open the seminar. During this opening discussion GTAs would have time briefly to review the worksheets. Some GTAs found this method did not allow sufficient time for them to review the worksheets. They therefore asked students to email their worksheets to them in advance of the seminar. GTAs were happy to do this. This model has been adopted since September 2008.

## Impact

Feedback on the course was received primarily a) through an anonymous online survey in WebCT, and b) through an anonymous student focus group. Students offered very positive assessments of both the WebCT pages for the course, and the worksheets. The focus group, for example, praised the easy access to both primary and secondary sources provided through WebCT:

**Facilitator:** Where did you find the resources that you used for it?

**Student 1:** There were lots of links from Webct to like all the primary stuff was really, really good because it just made it a lot easier I mean because you could link directly to lots of the primary resources and lots of the primary articles and all the stuff, and there weren't any books on like the bibliographies and reading lists that weren't available. I mean I've had a couple of courses where they say "read this, read that" and you can't find it anywhere like

**Student 2:** yeah like there's one copy of it to go around, what 50-60 people.

**Student 3:** I mean but there was a couple of books but I suppose the only reason we couldn't get a copy was because the library had lost it or it was out of print and it was only 2 books out of a 100 or so on the course.

**Student 1:** it was definitely the most student friendly course.

Some History undergraduates at Manchester have expressed concerns that the expansion of e-learning serves as a cover to reduce student contact-hours with academic staff. But the HIST 20151 focus group believed the e-learning component of the course was a valuable addition to the student experience, not an attempt to reduce contact-time:

**Facilitator:** ok, you mentioned about face to face and contact hours earlier; does the use of Webct make you feel like e-learning at the university is replacing contact time spent?

**Student 3:** it doesn't replace it, it almost seems like a subsidy but in most history courses especially in second year, there's very little contact time, and that's across the board for these courses. It's nice to have something to supplement that.

**Student 1:** yeah I don't ever get the feeling that I was sort of being fobbed off onto Webct

**Student 2:** no

**Student 1:** if anything I think it makes, on this course it made your contact time more valuable because you've really sort of, you don't have to ask a lot of basic questions because it was all there for you.

The focus group strongly praised the 'seminar worksheets' for offering a framework to guide their research, which encouraged them to spend more time preparing for seminars than they usually did.

**Facilitator:** did you prepare more for your seminars because of them [the 'seminar worksheets']?

**Student 1, 2 and 3:** yeah

**Facilitator:** what sort of things did you prepare? How did you prepare differently because of them?

**Student 2:** for modules in the past when you've not had any sort of framework you don't really know where to start, and what direction to take. But when you've got questions, like "examine this article or explain this, that and the other" it gives you a more focused approach to how you're working and narrows it down a bit on what you need to know.

**Student 1:** you read in a different way because you're looking for something specific, or a few specific things. So, I dunno, I think it gives you extra confidence because you kind of don't come away from an article thinking "god I don't know what that was about" and you know what you're looking for so you tend to find it easier to find it.

**Student 1:** I think I've definitely, because of all the resources were so available, I just definitely read everything properly, I mean with like all the questions and worksheets I haven't skim read any the articles you're meant to read, you can't get away with it, so you don't do it, it, so it was quite good.

Students also found that the worksheets proved a useful revision aid: **Student 1:** in the end it made it much easier for revision notes because you've had to make at least some and that was probably the most useful thing about them.' Students disagreed as to whether the 'seminar worksheets' should be summatively assessed.

Two students in the focus group singled out HIST 20151 as their favourite course at Manchester: **Student 1:** no I feel I definitely got the most out of this course than I got out of any history module I've done I think just...**Student 2:** yeah'. The focus group's very positive assessment was supported by an anonymous online survey in WebCT. Responding to the statement 'I learned more in my weekly seminar, if I had completed a seminar worksheet', 38 students responded 'Agree', 7 students responded 'Mostly Agree', 6 students responded 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 3 students responded 'Mostly Disagree', and 5 students responded 'Disagree'. Responding to the statement 'The seminar worksheets helped me engage with and analyse primary sources (films, speeches etc.)' 39 students responded 'Agree', 16 students responded 'Mostly Agree', and 4 students responded 'Neither Agree nor Disagree'.

Both the focus group and the online survey strongly supported the suggestion that 'seminar worksheets' should be used for other History course units:

**Facilitator:** so how would you feel about them if they were introduced to other courses you're taking?

**Student 2:** what the worksheets?

**Facilitator:** yeah, would that be a positive thing?

**Student 2:** yeah

**Student 3:** yeah I think they would be a good idea certainly.

**Student 1:** I think it's cos most other seminars were kind of read this, and there's... you're not given a framework to why you've got to read it and it is useful to go into a seminar and already have your ideas down like what you've got from the source, where as you get and someone asks you this and you have to think about it for ages. It means that you're writing, I really like them

Responding to the statement 'History course units at Manchester would be improved if more course units used seminar worksheets', 22 students responded 'Agree', 17 students responded 'Mostly Agree', 14 students responded 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 2 students responded 'Mostly Disagree', and 4 students responded 'Disagree'.

In response to these positive assessments, the 'seminar worksheet' model pioneered in HIST 20151 has been to other large Level 1 and Level 2 History course units at the University of Manchester since 2008-09. One of the advantages of the HIST 20151 approach is that it offers a relatively straightforward way to incorporate e-learning in large lecture courses. Although the identification of primary and secondary sources, and the composition of a series of questions for the worksheet, is time-consuming, these activities do not require specialist technical expertise. Learning technologists can establish sites in VLEs for course units based on instructions sent to them in MS-Word, if necessary. Many historians remain suspicious of the benefits of e-learning. This pilot project has provided persuasive evidence to show how the adoption of a straightforward e-learning strategy improved student learning in seminars in a large History lecture course. As more course units at Manchester are delivered through VLEs, it is to be hoped that lecturers will explore the more advanced learning tools available in Blackboard.

Since completing the project, the University of Manchester has switched to the Blackboard virtual learning environment. Migration of the course unit to Blackboard proved straightforward. Improved registration and designer capabilities have enhanced the course in Blackboard. If you would like further information on the project, please email Max Jones Dr Max Jones, University of Manchester

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# Weblogs and module journals in History

## Short Description

The uses of online module journals or weblogs in undergraduate history modules using the Blackboard virtual learning environment provide useful learning tools. These are some conclusions from a four year trial in the History Programme at the University of Dundee.

## Rationale

Weblogs were implemented principally in an attempt to counteract a perceived tendency by students at all levels towards strategic learning. Many students seemed to learn little in core modules beyond the specific subjects upon which they had written essays or made a presentation. It was not unusual to ask a student about a particular topic that was included in an earlier module, only to be told 'I didn't do an essay on that topic.' By requiring students to write short logs on their reading and to reflect on tutorial or seminar discussion the aim was to encourage students to read more widely across an entire module and to reflect on topics that they did not intend to revise for final examinations or study for essays.

Weblogs were also introduced to allow tutors to monitor student progress throughout a module and to provide formative feedback to a student as the module progressed, in particular at early stages in a module. This was felt to be particularly important in a semesterised timetable where students often did not receive formal feedback on written work until late in the semester and thus it was quite difficult for them to address weaknesses in their work at this late stage.

Finally, the system was also implemented to encourage students to attend lectures and tutorials more consistently, in particular in modules that did not have a final examination. There was a clear tendency for students to skip lectures and tutorials at the end of the semester when they were preoccupied with writing essays especially if the lecture topics were not topics that they intended to study. This was a particular problem in the Level 1 core module 'The Making of the British Atlantic Empire' that does not have a final examination. It was not unusual for attendance in some modules to drop to only about 30% of class enrolment for the final two lectures. This meant that students did not see how all issues fell together and did not consider some of the concluding issues in many modules.

## Description of the Practice

Over a number of semesters beginning in autumn 2003 weblogs were implemented in a number of undergraduate modules across all levels, from core Level 1 modules to Level 4 Special Subjects. By academic year 2007-2008 weblogs were included as one of the means of assessment in a majority of

history modules offered at the University of Dundee. Students are required to complete one or two short entries each week, between 250 and 500 words in length using the virtual learning environment. The exact number and length of the entries depend upon the level and nature of the module. In these entries students are required to reflect on a number of issues including tutorial or seminar discussion for that week, core reading or the acquisition of skills. At the beginning of the semester students are provided with clear guidance of what is expected in the journal, the marking criteria, and in many cases some 'dummy' entries. Students are normally not required to write entries every week—they can skip two or three entries—but are expected to complete the rest of the entries in a timely fashion, although there are no late penalties for individual entries just for the final completion of the journal. The number of students writing journals is thus about 230 at Level 1; 180 at Level 2; about 100 at each of Levels 3 and 4. A total of over 600 students were therefore writing module journals in some of their modules during the academic year 2007-2008.

Entries are submitted through the virtual learning environment, in this case Blackboard. The entries can either be typed directly into Blackboard or cut and pasted from word processing software. Entries are dated and any changes that students make to their entries are recorded by Blackboard allowing a tutor to see if a student has made major revisions. As soon as a student has completed an entry it can be viewed by the tutor, and the tutor can make informal formative feedback immediately via the VLE, and tutors provide regular online feedback to students on their entries as the semester progresses. Thus a student may be receiving formative feedback on their progression from week 1 of the semester. The entries are not 'blogs' as such as they are not public and can only be viewed by the student who had written the entry and by module tutors.

At the end of the semester students are required to print off their complete module journal which is then summatively assessed. In most modules, journals account for approximately 15% of the final grade.

## Implementation

Weblogs have been introduced over the past four years in a range of different modules. The implementation of weblogs certainly has not reduced the workload of academic staff and indeed in many cases weblogs may require more input from academic staff than more traditional forms of assessment. For some staff members this has been an obstacle in their adoption. We did have concerns about student IT skills in using such a form of assessment, but this has proved not to be an issue at all and students feel very comfortable with the software.

While the History programme does not provide any formal training in the use of the virtual learning environment, all incoming students are required to attend an IT 'induction' session organised centrally, and students who feel that they need further support are offered the chance to attend specific sessions, again organised not by the programme but centrally.

Similarly we have encountered few problems with the reliability of the software—few students claimed that they could not get online to complete their journals or that their journal entries had mysteriously disappeared, far fewer than might claim that they had handed in an essay but it had never been received. One of the principal problems of implementation was that of determining late penalties for individual entries. Many students leave entering their journal entries until well into the semester, even though they admit themselves that it is much easier to write the entries as the semester progressed and they greatly appreciate the opportunity to get formative assessment at an early stage. Many students themselves have asked for some sort of late penalty for individual entries to force timely completion. However, with perhaps 18 entries over a semester it has proved difficult to assign a meaningful and workable late penalty for an individual entry. We are currently considering having a number of deadlines during the semester by which a set number of entries must have been completed and imposing penalties on students who are late at each of these stages. However, again there are problems with exactly what the penalty would be for a student who did not submit one or more of their entries.

## Impact

It is quite apparent that module journals have increased student attendance at lectures, tutorials and seminars. Tutors also report that students are much better prepared for tutorials and seminars and that the quality of discussion has increased. From the student perspective, at first glance the reaction appears to be relatively negative. In module questionnaires students have complained about the workload required to complete module journals, in particular at Level 1. However on closer investigation, students have admitted to working only between seven and nine hours per week for a twenty credit module - one third of the full-time load of sixty credits.

Students also feel unsure about staff expectations and the marking criteria for module journals. This seems to reflect the fact that while students have written essays and studied for exams at school, few of them have completed study journals. However, we also feel that we need to develop much clearer criteria as an academic programme on what we expect from journals, to be more consistent in our expectations across modules at a similar level, and to do more to communicate our expectations to students. However, these student concerns do decrease markedly over the course of the degree programme and have all but disappeared at Level 4.

Perhaps the most dramatic and in many ways surprising impact of weblogs has been in the student 'enjoyment' of modules. Module questionnaires for the core Level 1 module in particular reveal that 98% of students who studied the module in 2007-2008 claimed to have enjoyed the module, a surprisingly high figure for a core module which is also studied by many non-history students. This figure is a substantial increase from that before module journals were introduced to

the module when around 70% of students claimed to have enjoyed the module. Our perception is that module journals have been central here. By encouraging students to read more widely and prepare for lectures and tutorials, students have clearly been more prepared for discussions and the quality of discussion has increased noticeably. (This is the same preparation that causes students to complain that module journals are too much work.) Consequently, students are able to participate more effectively in tutorials and seminars, they can place lectures in context and thus 'enjoy' the module much more. Thus while students express a mild dislike for the work, this is more than counterbalanced by the extent to which they appreciate the module as a whole.

It has been rather more difficult to assess the deeper academic impact of module journals. There is certainly evidence that all students now acquire an understanding of a broad range of topics across a module and not just a few focussed issues. Students do seem to remember issues which were discussed in earlier modules. However, students still remain overly focused on their essay topics. Similarly, it is clear that the better students are able to reflect on key issues and to develop some insights into the historiography and core issues of modules and relate disparate issues to one another, making connections between different components of the modules. Indeed, one of our external examiners commented on how good it was to see the development of student understanding and ideas over the course of a special subject. However, some students seem to struggle a little more here.

Overall, our experiences of weblogs have been positive. Despite student concerns of workload expressed in questionnaires, the student experience also appears positive. The two key issues appear to be getting students into a rhythm of writing journal entries at an early stage in the semester and also getting the right balance between guiding students in how and what they write for their journal entries and being too prescriptive in outlining what is required. Weblogs are clearly not appropriate for every module, and we would not want to see universal adoption across all modules, but as an additional assessment component they are a useful item both for tutors and students.

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# Blended Learning in the Delivery of History Skills: engaging the distant learner

## Short Description

A history skills course – focused on primary sources – that was previously offered only on a face-to-face basis was adapted to be offered via blended learning: two study days with six weeks of online learning in between, plus post-course online discussions, including specific Information Technology training at the first study day.

## Rationale

The initiative was part of an attempt to expand the use of Blended Learning, which combines face-to-face teaching with e-learning as a way of getting the best of both worlds, within courses offered by the Department of Continuing Education at Lancaster University. Blended learning has the potential to help to overcome problems of recruitment, where interested students may be spread across a wide geographical area, or find it difficult to attend regular face-to-face classes because of health problems, family or work commitments. This is a particular problem where courses form a compulsory element of a qualification, as it can become impossible for a student to complete the syllabus. Meanwhile, within courses offered purely through distance learning there can be problems building relationships between the students, and between the students and the tutor: those who do not feel confident will often act as 'lurkers' rather than joining in with online discussions.

A website which is modelled on the Virtual Learning Environment associated with this course is available at <https://ktru-main.lancs.ac.uk/archive/Conted/HistorianToolkit.nsf/> This website contains some of the original postings from the course, along with a range of explanatory and discursive materials relating to this case study.

## Description of the Practice

The module concerned is the first compulsory element in the Certificate in Historical Studies, which is worth 60 credits at level 4 (first-year undergraduate level). It is worth 10 credits, and is followed by a 5 credit course on secondary sources and a 15 credit supervised research project, plus elective courses totalling 30 credits. The courses are set up with generic learning outcomes so that the tutor can deliver them according to their chronological expertise: in this case the tutor chose to use course materials relating to the late medieval period, which are provided in a course reader.

The learning outcomes for the course are:

**Knowledge and Understanding** – on successful completion of the module students should be able to ...

- Demonstrate familiarity with a range of types of primary sources, and discuss the ways they can be used by historians

- Debate issues of objectivity and subjectivity in relation to primary source materials
- Show knowledge of means of accessing primary sources, including relevant websites.

**Skills and other attributes** – on successful completion of the module students should be able to ...

- reason critically
- apply relevant theoretical concepts
- synthesise information from a number of sources
- apply key methods and concepts of historical analysis
- structure and communicate ideas effectively orally and in writing
- find information and use IT as appropriate

## The syllabus is:

- Issues of creation and survival: why were documents and other types of primary sources created? Why do they survive?
- Are primary sources inherently reliable?
- Can primary sources ever be viewed as objectively 'true'?
- Scribal errors and deliberate falsification
- Transcription and translation issues: censorship and accidental errors
- Extrapolation: how far can we legitimately construct an argument from inevitably limited evidence?
- The investment of the historian: can we rise above our subjective interpretations?
- Access to primary sources: where to find them and how to begin to interpret them. This topic will include reference to relevant websites

Teaching methods are varied, and include various types of discussion, of both set documents relevant to the tutor's chronological expertise and the specific issues stipulated in the syllabus, using wikis and online discussion as well as face-to-face work. Other activities include use of a personal learning log (visible only to the student and their tutor), role play and a virtual field trip (filmed on location in Carlisle).

Students were assessed through a portfolio of responses:

- (13%) Your response to the topic of objectivity in history, based on your contribution to the online discussion in unit 1 and your reflections in your online learning log.
- (13%) Your response to the topic of the investment of the historian, based on your contribution to the online discussion in unit 2 and your reflections in your online learning log.
- (14%) Your response to the topic of the use of images as historical evidence, based on your contribution to the online discussion in unit 3, the group reflection on this at the second study day and your reflections in your online learning log.

- (20%) A discussion of extrapolation, based on your contribution to the group discussion at the second study day and your reflections in your online learning log.
- (40%) A portfolio of 2 reflective pieces, totalling 1000 words, chosen from the following topics:
  - Can primary sources ever be viewed as objectively 'true?'
  - Extrapolation: how far can we legitimately construct an argument from inevitably limited evidence?
  - The investment of the historian: can we rise above our subjective interpretations?
  - An overall reflection on issues such as creation and survival and sources, scribal errors, deliberate falsification, transcription, translation, censorship and accidental errors.

The final portfolio was submitted 4 weeks after the second study day, and the course website was kept live during that period to allow students to continue their discussions and to consult their tutor.

Nine students were enrolled onto the course, with four completing successfully. The students came from a wide geographical area, some travelling for several hours to attend study days, but all live within our catchment area of Lancashire and Cumbria.

### Implementation

*Did you encounter any surprises?*

It was more difficult than we anticipated to give students confidence to interact online. All nine students attended the first study day and took part in the Information Technology training, and all had self-selected themselves for the course on the basis of having some level of familiarity with IT, as well as an interest in History. However, two of the students never took part in online discussions (and one of them dropped out of the course fairly quickly after the first study day, though she said that this was to do with the late medieval focus of the set materials rather than because of the IT component). By contrast, five of the students were very keen online discussants: all but one of them completed the course successfully (the fifth failed to submit a portfolio).

*Were there any obstacles or difficulties, and if so, how did you address them?*

The main obstacle we encountered was around the students' health problems and other issues which could not have been predicted. Two of the students (who are a couple) were initially very active on the site but eventually had to give up the course because of deteriorating health, whilst a third completed the course successfully despite having a serious accident on the morning of the second study day which prevented her attending.

Another obstacle which arose was in relation to students having IT problems at home. One student completed the

course despite losing her home internet connection at an early stage, and having to access the course website in her local library. We had anticipated some problems with students accessing the site via dial-up connections, but this does not seem to have been a problem, perhaps because we designed the course website to be relatively simple to use.

### Impact

Anonymised feedback was sought from students via a Questionmark Perception site - and received from a proportion of them - some weeks after the end of the course. A generic online feedback form was used, which included a range of response formats such as scaling, multiple choice and narrative answers.

The students who responded indicated that they had each taken part in a wide range of activities offered during the course, including both face-to-face and online exercises. They had each submitted work for assessment. This indicates that the students who responded were highly motivated, and that whilst their responses were accurate for them as individuals, they would not necessarily reflect the views of those students who chose not to give feedback.

Those students who completed the course found its structure useful, although in some cases they struggled with the IT component and most of those who did not complete the course had previously reported that the IT component was a real problem for them. All the students valued the face-to-face teaching, and some of them stated that they would have preferred to have had the entire course delivered face-to-face. Our overall feeling is that Blended Learning is a useful approach to take, especially where students are scattered over a wide geographical area or cannot commit to regular face-to-face classes, but that more time needs to be devoted to training students in the use of the course website so that they can develop confidence in using it. In relation to transferable skills, it is clear that there is real potential here for students who are seeking to improve their employability, but this issue was not relevant to the group of students who self-selected for this course, for nearly all were of retirement age.

The challenge that remains is to find ways of supporting those who are less confident online to overcome their difficulties - through the way that the Virtual Learning Environment is designed as much as through specific support to individual students - to enable them to engage as fully as possible with the subject matter of the course. In the final reckoning, we should aim to direct students' energies towards the content of the course rather than the means of presentation.

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# Part 3

## Active Learning & Student Led Learning

### Does Inquiry-based Learning increase student engagement?

*The case of a first year history survey course*

#### Short Description

This case study describes the introduction of an inquiry-based element into lectures and seminars in a first year core module – *The Peoples of Early Medieval Europe* – at the University of Manchester in the autumn semester of 2006-7. Students worked collaboratively in lectures and presented the findings of their research in a poster format to their peers in subsequent seminars.

#### Rationale

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is a process that puts student inquiry or research at the centre of the learning experience. It is usually active and self directed and is often carried out in collaboration with others. As such, it has been shown to develop a range of disciplinary and transferable skills, such as autonomous learning, critical thinking, team-working and information literacy. IBL can be supported to a greater or lesser extent by the tutor, depending upon the context (year group, learning aims and objectives, time available, etc.).

In previous courses I had utilised group work, inquiry-based learning (IBL) and poster presentations in varying combinations and to varying degrees, mainly in seminar conditions (20 students or less). I found that the vast majority of students enjoyed this and gained a range of skills and experiences out of the process. They improved their presentation skills, were more quickly socialised, developed group-working abilities and were generally more willing to share with and listen to their peers in the seminars. At the same time as this broad range of skills was being developed, subject knowledge could be augmented and reinforced by focussing the collaborative work on subject-specific questions.

I felt that the approach had significant benefits and wanted to experiment with it, in conjunction with the course Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), when I was given the chance to lead the *Peoples* course. The nature of this lecture course (22 x 1 hour lectures; approximately 50 students) posed some challenges, but also created new opportunities and had significant positive effect, which we will outline subsequently.

#### Description of the Practice

This was a 12 week course, consisting of 2 x 1 hour lectures a week and 1 x 1 hour seminar per week. 1 week was set aside as a reading week. The course was assessed by means of a 2 hour written examination, which consisted of two essay questions. In addition, each student was expected to submit

two non-assessed essays of roughly 2,000 words. 48 students took the course; these were divided into three seminar groups. The majority of these were History students, a minority were from cognate disciplines such as Classics.

The lectures were divided into two basic units:

- 1 A section dealing with the histories and historiographies of the Later Roman Empire and various peoples of Early Medieval Europe;
- 2 A section that tied together the different strands of the earlier case studies in a series of thematic lectures.

For two of the lectures (one in each section) we decided to introduce an IBL component. This meant that one of the weekly lectures was devoted to group discussion of a question pertaining to a particular topic. The work done in the 'lecture' prepared the students for further discussion in that week's seminar, during which they also prepared a short presentation and a poster to illustrate their points to the rest of the seminar group.

In terms of practicalities, this involved

- in the **lecture**:
  - dividing the students up according to their seminar groups (we [the GTA and I] did this in advance of the session, projecting the names, together with a plan of the lecture room, on the OHP so that students could easily find their way to their groups);
  - subdividing the seminar groups into smaller groups of 3-5 students (so, 4 groups to each seminar group x 3 seminars = 12 groups);
  - providing resources:
    - a booklet that explained the task and included a variety of resources (primary sources, links to secondary resources);
    - further resources to allow them to prepare for the task (e.g. pens, flipchart paper);
    - giving a brief talk (5 minutes) explaining the task and the historical context;
    - facilitating, together with the GTA, the groups' activities;
- in the **seminars**:
  - reinforcing/ further supporting the above;
  - providing resources for students to produce posters (pens, flipchart paper again);
  - keeping to time;
  - facilitating presentations, discussion and feedback;
  - collecting posters.

#### Session 1

The first IBL session, in week 4, dealt with the Arab Conquest of Visigothic Spain in the early eighth century. This is a particularly interesting topic because several different accounts of the event exist and it allows the students to engage with a variety of conflicting accounts. We provided the students with a booklet of primary sources containing extracts from each of these sources. Each of the individual groups within each

seminar group was given the same set of questions to answer, but were asked to do so for a different source. These questions were designed to encourage the students to realise that various people at widely varying times had described the same event differently and to get the students to think about possible reasons for this. They were then to present their interpretations of these differences to their wider seminar group, so that all of the students received some idea about the different causes that have been proposed for the conquest and the possible underlying reasons for these different interpretations.

In this session the students read a brief (1 page) narrative of the conquest, then to look over the source that they were to analyse and begin discussion. Half way through the session I gave a brief (5 minute) talk on the basic narrative of the conquest and the contexts within which each of the sources might have been produced. They were then left to finish their discussion. A list of possible further reading was provided for those who wished to conduct further research between the lecture and the seminars (roughly 2 days). When they reconvened at the seminars the task was explained to them again, they broke down into the same discussion groups, and then prepared a poster and presentation (a couple of minutes), which was delivered to the wider group at the end of the seminar. Time was allowed for discussion and feedback.

## Session 2

The second session, in week 10, dealt with the issue of Kingship in Early Medieval Europe. This formed part of the final, thematic section of the course. I outlined the task, but gave minimal historical background. This was because the topic of kingship had been mentioned repeatedly in previous seminars and, because the students had experienced this type of session before; I felt that they were more familiar with both the content and the process. Clarification was provided to individuals and groups as part of the facilitation process.

For this session I had sourced a number of extracts that dealt in both abstract and concrete terms with the qualities and achievements of kings and emperors. In order to prevent duplication, although each group was given the same set of sources, they were given different questions (four in total). This meant that they had to divide up the task, particularly the reading, between different members of the group. They also had to decide which sources/ issues they wanted to focus on in the seminars as there was too much material to discuss in the time they were given to present. This developed negotiation and decision-making skills. Again, the students came back together at the weekly seminar, had the task clarified for them, further discussed their responses to the questions, and prepared and presented these back to the wider group. It is interesting to note that in this session some of the groups sourced relevant material from elsewhere in the course which had not been in the handout for the seminar, demonstrating that they were beginning to think about the course as a whole rather than simply the task in hand. This made the task of some value as a revision exercise.

## Implementation and Impact

### Methodology

In order to analyse whether IBL does increase student engagement in the subject I decided to collate the numbers of students who, in their essays and exams, responded on questions associated with the IBL session on the Arab conquest of Spain. I felt that if students were confident enough answer set questions this was a good test of their engagement with the topic for two reasons.

- Firstly, they would have to have made a conscious choice to select those questions. They thus had to reject the majority of questions, which asked them to address questions on which they had received 'content' in the lecture(s).
- Secondly, as very little content was delivered to the students in the IBL sessions they would have had to read around the subject independently and to learn from what their fellow students had to say in the presentations in order to feel confident enough to respond to such questions.

As the session on kingship was thematic, occurred after the deadline for the final essay and cannot be closely related to significant parts of any of the exam questions it does not form part of this analysis.

### Non-assessed essays

Each of the students was supposed to answer two non-assessed essays from a list of twelve. Two questions (Q4 and Q9) could be related to the IBL sessions. 45 students submitted the first essay, while 35 students submitted the second essay, 34 out of these 80 answered the questions that related to the IBL sessions, significantly more than answered any other question (the majority of which had received direct coverage in 'content' driven lectures. Of the 35 students who handed in two essays, 26 did Q4 or Q9 (74%), while of the 10 students who handed in only one essay, 6 answered Q4 (60%). 24 of the 45 students who submitted the first essay chose Spain as their topic; given that the essay questions were given out on the day of the seminar presentations, the accessibility of the Spain topic and the success of the IBL exercise probably played a key role in many of the students deciding to choose Q4 for their first essay. This suggests that the IBL sessions were nearly as interesting for those students who were not motivated to hand in the full complement of essays as they were for those who submitted both essays.

### Exams

The course was summatively assessed by means of a two hour exam. The students were each expected to answer two questions. 45 students took the exam. Of the ten exam questions, two could be reasonable, but not entirely, related to the IBL session on the Arab conquest of Spain (Q7 and Q8). 11 students answered Q7, while 23 students responded to Q8 even though there had been less direct content delivery for this part of the course. The next most popular questions, Q1 and Q6, both received a great deal of coverage in a number of lectures and seminars as well as in the revision session as they dealt with fundamental elements of the course. The same patterns therefore hold here as for the essay questions:

students were most comfortable with material that had been repeatedly mentioned in class or had been delivered via IBL means. It is also important to note that because the essays were not assessed they were allowed to, and hence likely to, revise from and reuse the same material in the exam.

#### Informal feedback

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Informal student feedback was elicited in the penultimate lecture of the course. There were a total of 24 responses. There were two negative comments: one student disliked the 'group work in lectures e.g. kings and Arabs', while another had the following to say about 'presentations': 'did not find them particularly helpful – only helpful in understanding the source/topic that your group covered'. However, of those who referred to the IBL sessions the majority were positive:

- 'group activities – should have been more'
- 'class activity such as that on Visigothic Spain and the Arab conquest was good; enabled us to use sources'
- 'I liked the source exercises, they were good to have in a handout'
- 'enjoyed the practical stuff, the king, Arab groups' 'would have more group work because I enjoyed what group work there was'
- 'I enjoyed the group work we did, and the subsequent presentations in the seminars'.

There were also a number of positive general comments on IBL type activities in the seminars. One person liked 'group work in seminars', someone else found 'one-to-one discussion' engaging, while another favoured: 'discussion led seminars and lectures'. Perhaps the most telling comment was 'sometimes lectures contain too much 'talk' and not enough interaction or 'excitement'.

#### Personal reflections

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**Lecturer:** From my perspectives the sessions that we ran in the lectures went very well. The students seemed engaged with the questions they were set, the sources in the booklet and the process as a whole. Most of the groups organised themselves independently and did not need prompting to use the resources or move through the different stages of the process. When they felt that it was relevant they asked questions, which the GTA and myself answered. When the question was relevant to the wider group, I stopped the session and relayed the information to the class as a whole. The layout of the rooms was important to the sessions running effectively. The lecture rooms were not tiered; instead students were arranged in rows of tables which greatly facilitated group work, as the layout could be altered and students and facilitators could move around freely. I did not attend the seminars, at which the student groups presented to their individual classes, because I felt that it was important that the students were left to complete the process without feeling that they were being assessed.

**GTA:** I felt that the seminars ran smoothly, and required only a few minutes of explanation of the task before the students split into the groups they had been put in during the lecture.

In the first session I gave out spare copies of the booklet containing the primary sources to any of the groups who might have forgotten them, as well as any students not present in the lecture. It was pleasing that the vast majority of people who attended the lecture were also present in the seminars, meaning that only one group out of 12 were unable to present a poster; I resolved this problem by assigning the remaining members of the group to of the other groups in the class; I then used the relevant poster from the previous class in order to illustrate the problems surrounding the particular source that should have been covered by the missing group. It was also pleasing that a number of students in the seminars were noticeably more active in the IBL session than in other seminars; in particular a number of students were very creative in terms of illustrating their posters and presenting their findings. I feel that session 2 ran smoother than Session One in the sense that the students were more comfortable with what was expected of them; it was also pleasing that a number of groups made connections with other source material that had been discussed in both the lectures and seminars.

#### Possible future changes

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We would have more IBL sessions, maybe four in total, spread evenly throughout the course. The students would get used to the format and those that felt less engaged would hopefully become more familiar with it. Such an addition would also have met the requirements of those students who desired more interactive/ group work elements. It might also have been a good idea to do a 'dry run' in one of the earlier sessions on a very general topic ('Romans and Barbarians') to engage them with both the subject and the topic. We could also have experimented with running an entire 'IBL week' (or weeks), so that the two weekly lectures and the seminar were entirely given over to an IBL task. This would have provided the students with the opportunity to carry out more independent research and to develop their own research skills, as well as allowing for greater iteration. It would have been interesting to see what effect the slightly extended time frame would have had on the presentations and student experiences of the process and outcome.

In terms of the tasks they were asked to do, some students were unsure as to what they were expected to produce. The GTA reported that students responded positively to being given examples of posters produced by previous groups, although this obviously increased risked replication and possibly reduced creativity. With this in mind, a range of posters have now been photographed for use as illustrative exemplars at a later time. As the students are meant to decide for themselves how their posters are going to look, we would advise that the examples are not given until after the students have had the opportunity to think about what they are going to do – the examples would therefore be provided for the benefit of those groups who were showing particular anxiety or who claimed to be 'stuck' for ideas. One way to minimise the chance of students simply copying work (or styles of presentation) from the exemplars would be to provide examples from classes on other courses.

In terms of the process, the timings within the lectures could have been structured more rigidly. We could have specified that the students drafted a first version of the poster by the end of the 'lecture' period – this would then have formed the basis of discussion at the subsequent seminar. It might also have been possible to begin by dividing the groups of four into two pairs, who would then each produce a prototype poster and present it to the other half of the group. The group of 4 would then have had to resolve any differences in the process of producing a final 'group poster'.

The students could also have been encouraged to reflect more fully on why they were being asked to do these exercises and what (if anything) they felt they had gained from the process. Some form of peer-group (non-assessed and anonymous) evaluation of each other's posters may also have been valuable as it would have enabled the students to realise what they could have done better as well as to think about what worked and did not work in posters other than their own. It would also have enabled them to think in more generic terms about the skills they were using and developing.

(2007-2008)

**GTA:** Based on the success of the IBL exercise in 2006-2007, I ran the same exercise in 2007-2008 in my capacity as GTA on the *Peoples of Early Medieval Europe* course. The number of students on this course in 2007-2008 was double that of 2006-07, around 90-100, meaning that the seminar teaching was split into eight groups, four of which I taught, and four by a colleague. Due to the expanded numbers in 2007-2008, as well as the nature of the lecture rooms (traditional lecture theatres) and the timetabling of the course (lectures and seminars on the same day), it was not possible to run the IBL exercise in the same way that it had been run in 2006-07, i.e. in the lecture and then in the seminar; consequently, the exercise was adapted to run only in the seminars. I did this by giving out the booklet with the sources in the preceding class, and asked the students to read the sources in detail prior to the actual exercise. I then split each class into groups at the beginning of the class and explained the task. Generally, the IBL exercise was again successful in 2007-2008; students responded positively to the exercise, and produced effective posters. The exercise did perhaps suffer from its compressed format; this year there was substantially less time for group discussion and planning, meaning that each group only really had time to focus on the specific source they had been assigned. From my point of view it was easier to teach the IBL exercise to three larger seminar groups last year (2006-2007) than the four smaller groups I had this year – this may have been because the students had longer to prepare last year, but might also mean that in this case the larger group sizes actually facilitated discussion. In terms of un-assessed essays, 16 students out of 45 students (42 essays submitted) chose to do the Spain essay question for their first essay, which was again the most popular topic in the first round of essays.

### Other materials

If you are interested in finding out more about Inquiry-Based Learning, please explore the following websites (alternatively, feel free to send us an email):

Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences (CILASS), University of Sheffield:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/> (accessed 26.03.08);

Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning (CEEBL), University of Manchester:

<http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/ceebll/> (accessed 26.03.08).



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# Group debates as a form of assessment

## Short Description

This study focuses on the use of a group debate in assessment of students studying ancient Greek law. The debate encourages teams of students to work together to create arguments in support of important scholarly debates and to present them effectively to fellow students. Through debating students also better understand the importance of rhetorical skill in the presentation of Athenian legal cases.

## Rationale

The debate was developed as a way of helping students to understand how to construct arguments based on primary and secondary evidence and deliver them in a clear way to fellow students. At the same time, it was a useful way of thinking about how trials would have worked in ancient Athens and what kind of factors might have influenced ancient jurors.

## Description of the Practice

The debate constituted a compulsory, but unmarked element of the Violence and Law in Ancient Greece module (a second-year module on the Classical Civilisation BA programme at Roehampton University). It was decided that it would be difficult to assess individual efforts in a team project and so the students received marks for a written report based on the issues raised in the debate (60%). They also sat an unseen exam paper containing gobbets from primary sources (40%). Experience from other modules has shown that students feel unhappy to be assessed in a group especially when they feel that the amount of work each individual contributed to the team effort is not equal. By assessing through essay and exam students feel satisfied that they are being marked on their own efforts and are not anxious that the failings of team members penalise them. Marks on second-year modules are used to calculate a student's final degree marks at Roehampton.

Students worked in groups of 4 (teams of 2 arguing on each side), but in practice the groups worked together to construct arguments on both sides. Classmates voted with pebbles for the side they felt had made the better arguments.

Topics debated included:

- 'Did the Athenian legal system help to resolve disputes or did it cause them to escalate?
- 'Did you have to be a relative to prosecute for homicide at Athens or could anyone prosecute?
- 'Was Euphiletus' attack on Eratosthenes civic punishment or private revenge?
- 'Was funerary legislation designed to curb women's influence or for economic reasons?

- 'Were slaves seen as humans or objects in Athenian law?
- 'Were Greek interstate relations during wartime motivated by justice or pragmatism?

Students were expected to refer extensively to both primary and secondary material in their debates and in their written reports. Primary set texts for this module are Chris Carey's *Trials from Classical Athens* (1997, Routledge) and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (1954, Penguin).

## Implementation

The extent to which a good rhetorician could win with a less convincing argument was noteworthy and was an important part of the exercise as students could gain an understanding of the importance of rhetoric skill in delivering trial speeches in antiquity when they studied the speeches in class.

One student did not attend her debate and did not work with group members on the debate. This caused the group to be lopsided with 2 on one side and 1 on another. However the absence of one group member did not seem to affect the quality of the arguments offered. It was decided that it would be necessary to penalise the written work of students who did not attend their debates.

## Impact

Students reacted well to the debate element and those who debated in later weeks worked especially hard on the rhetorical elements of their speeches as they had understood that the winning argument was often the one which was delivered in the best way. Students provided a written evaluation at the end of the course and they felt they could understand the arguments better when they were voiced by their classmates.

The debate was very effective in making students read relevant scholarly material and understand the main arguments associated with their topics (a substantial reason for the setting up the debates). The use of primary material by students in both debate and report was excellent.

The extent to which students worked well in groups towards this assessment was also noteworthy. By combining efforts they managed to cover quite a substantial amount of material and they shared notes well with one another.

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## Using the Oral Examination for Promoting Undergraduates' Learning in Roman Archaeology: A New Lecturer's Improvised Experience

### Short Description

A new lecturer was hired to teach someone else's course, one that required a final oral assessment. How does one conduct an oral examination, and prepare students to face it? The solution adopted here was to regard oral exams not as 'vivas-in-miniature' but rather as part of a continual stream of formative and summative assessment.

### Rationale

This case study documents an instance where a new lecturer faced the problems of student assessment in the context of a course designed by somebody else. Because the course syllabus was already set when the new lecturer was hired, he had to assess the students as per the course design, which in this case was 'oral examination'. Having never conducted an oral assessment before – nor having been assessed this way outside of language classes – it was a process of continual evolution within the framework set by the original course designer.

### Description of the Practice

The module 'Cities of the Roman Empire: History, Architecture, Planning & Society' was part of a degree program in Classical Civilizations, offered during the third year of the program. There were 14 students in the class. In its original formulation, it seems to have been conceived as a 'show-and-tell' type class: here is a Roman city, these are its walls, these are the characteristics of temple architecture during the period. This would have made the oral examination simple, in that the questions would be straightforward, 'what are the characteristics of a Republican temple?' type, with similarly straightforward answers. The original course design was a combination of lectures, student-led seminars, oral examination, and a written examination with a slide identification section.

### Implementation

The first month was mostly lecture based, with occasional wide ranging discussion. Halfway through the first month, I assigned the first seminar topics. I encouraged students to move beyond show and tell in their seminar presentations, to consider what effect these sorts of structures would have had on life as it was lived in these places. After each session, I scheduled feedback

to discuss with the student their presentation, privately. I asked them to self-assess, based on a list of their objectives for the seminar prepared before hand. I also asked each other student to assess their peer during the seminar. The objective was to use this formative assessment to train the students in what makes a good presentation, and to make clear to everyone (myself included) the way the assessment worked.

The oral examination was therefore cast in terms of these earlier seminars, with each student being assigned a topic for presentation in the exam room based on what had not gone well the first time. If during their seminar they had taken a broad approach to a topic, I assigned them a narrow topic for the exam. If they had concentrated on something narrow, I asked them to present on a larger theme or issue connected to the original presentation. My intention was to build on their own self-directed learning, in such a way that the feedback given after their original seminars became the key to their success.

The oral examination was conducted by me, the head of the department, and an outside examiner from the education department. Because each examiner had a different level of knowledge about the subject, the questions asked tended to follow a certain pattern. One would ask detailed questions about the topic, very specific 'facts' oriented questions. The second tended to ask questions which required the student to fit the facts into a wider framework for studying antiquity. The third, having no specialist knowledge of antiquity, was able to ask questions which made the student clarify their meanings and explain themselves more fully. Using a rubric, each examiner marked for 'information', 'clarity of argument', 'analytical ability', and 'relevance of answer'. The examiners would spend five minutes after marking each individual, comparing their marks, debating any significant discrepancies to arrive at a consensus mark for the student.

In terms of feasibility, the examination of 14 students took five hours. Clearly, with bigger class sizes, it would be difficult to examine every student quickly. If, however oral examination were reserved for critical upper year courses which typically have fewer students, students would gain the benefit of a deeper assessment at an important junction of their academic life.

### Impact

The programme of formative and summative assessment through oral presentations resulted in a mark for the student which was negotiated in a very real sense at every step of the way. Through peer, self, and tutor feedback, the student received a mark for their seminar presentation. The oral exam was then tailored to each student's particular situation, and the students were made aware of this. The mark received for the oral exam was not a mark awarded for questions correctly answered, but a mark which reflected the quality of a dialogue between students and examiners, and a negotiated mediation of the subjective experience of three individual examiners.

However, student feedback after the exam (which cannot be considered anything other than anecdotal, since only a minority

of students completed the forms) felt the oral to be both 'a waste of time' AND 'a valuable experience'. The student who felt it a waste indicated that she would've preferred to have just written essays, which perhaps points to the problem of what students expect from a university class (lectures, essays, written exam) versus what we might try as lecturers to improve the experience.

### Feedback Questions

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In the final analysis, if the oral examination had been the sole basis for assessment, it would have resulted in more Firsts and 2:1 marks than if there had only been a written examination. While strong students were in no way disadvantaged by the oral examination, weaker students typically benefited from the opportunity to expand their discussion and ideas under questioning.

- Q1.** Did the seminar presentation/oral exam deepen your understanding of Roman cities?
- Q2.** What were the good points about the seminar presentation/oral exam combination?
- Q3.** What were the bad points about the seminar presentation/oral exam combination?
- Q4.** Did the way the seminar presentation/oral exam was structured make sense to you? Explain why?
- Q5.** The oral exam was used in place of assessing you by essays. Which do you feel enables you to demonstrate better your knowledge of the subject, an oral exam or an essay?
- Q6.** Do you feel you have a better understanding of the subject (i.e. did we meet the learning objectives) because of the oral exam?
- Q7.** If you saw that a course was going to be assessed partially through an oral exam, would you be inclined to not sign up?
- Q8.** Did the oral exam help or hinder your preparations for the final exam?
- Rate: \_\_\_\_\_
- Q9.** Your experience of this course 1 being worst, 5 being best
- Q10.** Your experience of the course tutor (i.e. did he do a good job or not) 1 being worst, 5 being best
- Q11.** The clarity of instruction regarding the oral exam (i.e. what to do, why we were doing it, what it was intended to accomplish) 1 being worst, 5 being best

**Q12.** Your overall experience of the oral exam process 1 being worst, 5 being best

**Q13.** Any other comments you'd like to make about the oral exam that this questionnaire hasn't addressed?

This case study was originally part of my own course work for a Postgraduate Certification in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education; part of that work required a reflective diary on my own teaching practice as I taught this class, which may be read here:

<http://electricarchaeologist.wordpress.com/2008/02/06/from-the-vault-reflections-of-a-first-time-lecturer/>

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## A Thousand Years in One Semester: the application of good practice to design, teaching and assessment in an historical 'survey' course.

### Summary

This case study deals with the application of good practice principles to a specific 'survey' history course. This course was designed by the writer, and taught by her from 1991-2004. The elements of practice considered are design, teaching practice, and assessment, and their evolution within the course is discussed.

### Rationale

Historical survey courses remain a fact of life for many faculties and students. This case study presents evidence that it is possible to design, teach and assess an historical survey course in a way that engages students who are new to the study of history, caters for those who already have some experience of the discipline, and establishes a foundation of knowledge and research practice from which historical specialisation can develop. In short, this case study provides evidence against the criticisms often made of such courses, namely that they necessarily rely on banal generalisation in design, excessive narrative in teaching, and a lowering of academic standards in their assessment.

### Description of the Practice

**Background Information (student numbers, etc.)** The Western Medieval Church 500 – 1500 CE is a course I taught through a member school of the Brisbane College of Theology (BCT), from 1991 - 2004. The BCT, an ecumenical consortium, was affiliated to Griffith University, Nathan (Brisbane), as the university's School of Theology, from 1991 – 2005. The BCT offered, and continues to offer, fully accredited undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Theology and Ministry.<sup>i</sup>

By university standards, the BCT classes were very small: twelve – twenty-five students was the typical enrolment in the course under consideration. The point of the BCT's independent accreditation, however, is that the Queensland Office of Higher Education (OHE) required sound academic practice according to national and international standards. Class size would not have been recognized as an excuse for inadequate planning, a poor pedagogic rationale, or under-resourced teaching. The good practice principles applied to the design, teaching practice and assessment of the course under consideration may be regarded as applicable in any accredited tertiary setting.

One last bit of background: this case study may be of added interest because, in the course under discussion, postgraduate and undergraduate students attended the majority of classes together. Readers who consider this odd, or even educationally scandalous, will be reassured to know that the all three elements listed above were examined exhaustively by the same Office of Higher Education which subsequently granted full tertiary accreditation to the subject.

#### Element 1: COURSE DESIGN

**Getting Started: practical parameters.** These should be obvious, and, possibly because of this, they are sometimes overlooked in the discussion and practice of course design. If given due consideration, however, their being factored into design yields benefits. In the case of the Western Medieval Church course, I needed to consider the following.

- **Class membership:** typically made up of members of the Anglican, Roman Catholics and Uniting Church, some of whom will be preparing for ordained or lay ministry. In the Medieval Church course, I developed a module on heresy and heterodoxy which helped prepare students for study of fifteenth century church reform across the Radical Protestant – Roman Catholic spectrum.

Foreknowledge of class composition helps alert the lecturer to likely areas of interest and debate. It may also legitimately affect actual course design, if students will be directed later into particular study streams.

- **Class size:** 12 – 25 students. This factor helps determine the amount, and type, of small group work to be incorporated into the course. It can also determine the number and type of site visits that the lecturer may want to include in the teaching.

- **Class includes undergraduate and postgraduate students.** This has obvious effects on course design, some of which are discussed below e.g. at **Teaching Practice: Peer-Directed**.

- **Age of students:** typically covered mid-twenties – mid-sixties. In the Australian context, I found that a wide age mix meant also a great mix of ideas about what 'learning history' really means. I have discussed this elsewhere,<sup>ii</sup> so suffice to say here that the sheer variety of expectations in any student group underlines the need for clear course objectives.

**Teaching location/s:** took place in the same lecture room each week

**Teaching hour/s:** same period, on same day, each week.

Use of multi-media may be limited by the availability of equipment in the assigned lecture-room/s. If small group work is to happen within the lecture periods, this needs to be planned in ways suited to the physical lay-out of the room/s.

- **The chronological period covered by the course:** 1,000 years.
- **Length of teaching term/semester/year:** one semester of 13 weeks.
- **Contact hours per week:** 3

These last three factors, of course, place constraints on content volume. I include the first, because readers may wonder why I did not shorten the period of time to be studied. The answer is that, for in-house reasons, on which I need not elaborate here, the 1,000 year content had to remain the case for the foreseeable future.

The division of teaching time is also important. The BCT organized teaching in three-hour blocks; and I taught the Medieval Church course once a week, from 6-9pm. I chose this timetabling because the course usually attracted part-time students, many of whom worked during the day. Over that three-hour period (which included one short, and one longer tea break), the intensity of the students' concentration had to be allowed to wind-down, ending with a final period of small group work which helped them sustain a constructive focus on the evening's content. In other words, low blood sugar may influence course design!

With these practicalities noted, let us turn to the more academic aspects of design.

**Getting started: what are your objectives?** It may seem somewhat abrupt to begin discussion of design with some thoughts on course objectives, but if design might be termed the 'integrating genre' of teaching and learning,<sup>iii</sup> then I suggest that objectives are the integrating factor within design itself. Course design becomes difficult if we are overly-focused on course content. This can be all the more so for conscientious new faculty who usually begin their teaching career with an encyclopedic quantity of historical material that needs urgently to be reduced to teachable proportions. We need to decide what it is we really want to achieve through the medium of the content i.e. what knowledge, skills and awareness do we want the students to have developed by the end of our teaching? What, in other words, are our teaching objectives?

'Objectives' benefit from being kept simple. A good starting point is to check one's objectives against Light and Cox's definition of the term, this being, 'what the students should be able to do having successfully completed the course.'<sup>iv</sup> This underlines the vital point that **assessment of a course of study must test the extent to which the students have achieved the designated objectives.** I shall provide further detail on this in the section dealing with **assessment** itself. It is enough to mention here the types of assessment applied to particular objectives. The objectives for the Western Medieval Church course ran thus (with the style of assessment for each indicated in brackets).

On the successful completion of this course, the **undergraduate student** will be able to:

1. Identify the central issues in the history of the medieval Western Church (four short papers, each discussing a principal point of learning for the student, to be written and assessed during the semester);
2. demonstrate informed understanding of medieval Western Church History through analysis and discussion of secondary sources dealing with any one of the central issues discussed (one semester essay, to be assessed at the end of semester);
3. demonstrate ability to apply basic interpretative skills to a variety of relevant primary sources (given partial demonstration through work in class, the short papers and the semester essay).

On the successful completion of this course, the **postgraduate student** will be able to:

- demonstrate informed understanding of medieval Western Church History through analysis and discussion of a particular central issue (one semester essay, to be assessed at the end of semester).
- demonstrate an ability to use critically primary sources by working analytically and extensively with these (four primary text commentaries, to be assessed at the end of semester).

Whilst there are certain elements in the course that are designed specifically for the postgraduate students, the two groups spent the majority of classes together. As the objectives indicate, the two specific areas of learning which distinguish the undergraduate from the postgraduate focus are

- the degree of specialized research in which the student engages; and
- the nature of the student's use of primary sources.

## Implementation

### Application of Objectives: course design issues raised

Once the course objectives are established, one can apply them reductively to potential teaching material. I am the first to admit that my course title, *The Western Medieval Church 500 – 1500 CE*, suggests that it could be a case study for 'content overload', and the usual product of this, 'transmission teaching'. How, you might wonder, could 1,000 years of history be covered appropriately in one semester other than by three hours of fact-packed lectures every week, for thirteen weeks?

The problem here is exacerbated by the fact that the medieval Church was interwoven with virtually every aspect of western Christian society, in ways and to a degree that can now seem quite remarkable. This means that the course dealt with not just 1000 years of 'church' history, but 1000 years of contiguous social and political history as well. I focussed teaching on France, Germany and Italy, which provided some limits on content, but even so, the design for this 'survey' course posed a challenge.

I clearly could not design the course to be purely chronological. The historical material yields certain central themes, suggesting compulsory modules such as 'Empire', 'Outsiders', 'Devotion' and 'Heterodoxy, Heresy and Reform'; and, indeed, my most recent teaching of the course used such modules. Yet Light and Cox, although writing about the use of **optional** modules, nevertheless sound a warning that applied to my own situation. They say, 'The integration of the different "modules" into an overall coherent programme of study can be difficult for students, particularly with respect to making and understanding key relationships and links between the modules.'<sup>v</sup> When I first taught the course in modular design, I found this to be the case: some students found connections difficult to establish between the thematic strands.

Part of this difficulty for my students, especially the younger ones, is that they often had little or no historical consciousness before they began the course, and had an often equally vague notion of western Continental geography. In short, they had neither the academic nor the practical basis for a study of European history (and I shall later discuss how Teaching Practice can address this). Yet the course was not compulsory across the BCT, so I knew that at least some of the students were led to enrol through curiosity, through a desire to know something about a period and a part of the world that was largely a mystery to them. In short, they were looking for 'connection', connection that would help them to make sense of something they had read or heard, or glimpsed in passing, that struck them as being, somehow, worth their while to understand.

### Application of Objectives: course design issues resolved

The concept of 'sequencing' proved helpful here, not least because it provided an explicit structure for something that I had been seeking to do anyway. To quote from Light and Cox's discussion of a 'spiral curriculum' approach,

...students revisit themes and concepts which they have considered earlier but in revisiting them they come from a different perspective, developing both a facility for handling multiple conceptual frameworks but also for confronting and/or integrating them to construct new perspectives.<sup>vi</sup>

This, I found, can be done effectively within an individual course. If one considers heresy, for example, as material for sequential teaching, this is a theme which necessarily straddles all four of the modules mentioned above: it was a concern of Empire, it was advocated by those whom the arbiters of Christian society called 'outsiders', it was both an expression of devotion and an affront to devout orthodox believers, and it is of course an eponymous topic in the module dealing with heterodoxy, heresy and reform. There are at least two ways in which the sequencing of heresy (to stay with that example, because of its complicated nature) could be done.

- Particular heresies could be tracked quite explicitly by the lecturer through each of the modules, with comment invited from the class.

- The module which names heresy as a topic could follow the other modules. With prior notice, students could be required to do some basic reading about the nature of a particular heresy, then, in class, they could view the heresy through various lenses provided by each of the previous modules, discussing disparities, points of similarity, present-day parallels, and any other aspect which struck them as significant.

Of these two possibilities, I chose the second. The first could become overly dependent on the lecturer for a pedagogic context, whereas the second is conducive to meaning-making by the students themselves. I found that sequential design, with its thematic focus, plus the guidance given in preparatory reading,

- addressed the chronological sweep of the course, and
- encouraged elements of deep learning. For example, the diversity of students' life experience created a rich vein of human resources when the class worked collaboratively to identify modern-day equivalents to medieval 'heresy' – definitive, condemnatory exclusion from 'the group', allegedly for the health of the group. It was encouraging to hear students say to one another, 'I hadn't thought of that – it reminds me of [such-and-such] in my own experience'. In this environment, learning for both undergraduates and postgraduates could flourish the latter being able to contribute historical connections to contemporary phenomena, based on their further reading of primary and secondary sources.

One could ask, but what about the earlier modules? Learning and discussion within let us say, the very first of these – that dealing with Empire - cannot draw on prior contextualisation within the course. That is true, and it means:

- that the first module needs to be designed in such a way that the students' attention is directed to future connection-making within the course e.g. the idea that imperial monarchy brought about a unity conducive to the restoration of the Golden Age of justice, or the second coming of Christ. Heresy was seen by some of its critics as fracturing this unity and seeking to compromise the divinely-ordained *telos* of empire. Furthermore:
- the deepening of student learning as one module follows another taps into the usual, if more haphazard, patterns of human learning in general. Intellectual categories are formed gradually, and, as links are established amongst these, so knowledge is subsumed, or held to the fore, as required.

### Impact

To refer again to the combination of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the class, I am persuaded that this mix helped a degree of mutual teaching to take place within the modular design of the course. The undergraduates' assumptions and questions put the postgraduates on their mettle, whilst the latter's self-directed research and academic discipline offered new historical – and cognitive – connections

for the undergraduates. I could actually hear some undergraduate students start to question the rag-bag of SOLO level 3 learning, and make the first tentative moves to level 4. And, without wishing to oversimplify (or idealize) the learning processes, a couple of the postgraduates found the undergraduates' sometimes off-the-wall perceptions stimulating – as one said, 'I don't know how to begin to answer, and then I have to ask myself *why* I don't!'<sup>vii</sup>

In short, the sequential model of design moved the course beyond the technical aspect of the objectives, to the connection-making of deep learning. It enabled students to begin to shift beyond the 'nuts and bolts' of historical information to critically-grounded analysis of historical issues, and of important issues in their own life. It promoted the skill of contextualising and encouraged informed, creative extrapolation from 'history' to their situation, and vice-versa. It avoided fragmentation of learning, and content overload. It helped considerably, I believe, to overcome the problem of disjunction experienced by some students when I taught the pilot modular version of the course.

I would not claim that every student in the course benefited equally from the above, but I hope that, for most of them, their new understanding would keep evolving, helped along by their study in other courses. The point I want to make is that, with the application of good practice to course design, one can foster self-awareness in student learning, and at least *begin* to see the resultant changes and developments take place.

**Evaluative (Written) Evidence for Effective Design** in The Western Medieval Church 500 – 1500 CE, following my reinterpretation of the modular design. The OHE provided forms for the Student Evaluation of the Course (SEC), which I found generally very helpful in my ongoing work in course design. The first time the revised course was taught, it evoked the following comments in the SECs, in response to the question, 'What have you found most helpful about the course?'

- 'I enjoyed the thematic breakdown of the course. Enjoyed the discursive nature of course because I learn well through discussion.'
- 'The thematic way in which we explored the history of the Medieval Church.'
- 'Organisation of the course into "themes" that related to unfurling historical eras – this helped to focus my reading and to give me some clues when listening in class ... I'm no historian but you've helped me develop some greater understanding of how medieval church issues and society have helped shape our current church(es) + world.'
- 'The wide historical scope – 1000 years in 13 weeks! ... attending classes was really helpful because lectures were so incredibly well-structured, interesting + very entertaining!'
- 'Connecting Early Church to 16/17C. – and the development of concepts and ideas which came to shape the later Church.'

10 SETs were returned for my most recent teaching of the revised Western Medieval Church course. These included consideration of the statement, *The lecturer structured and presented the course content in ways that helped me to understand*.

On a scale of 1 (very low achievement of task) – 5 (very high achievement of task), responses were as follows:

5 – 80%

4 – 20%

## Element 2: TEACHING PRACTICE

### Description of the Practice

**Background Information.** Long before I read Brian J. Mahan's 'Critical Reflection on Teaching', I had realized the truth of the following: '...student resistance over time, especially if the patterns of resistance repeat themselves from ... year to year, needs to be taken to heart'.<sup>viii</sup> From 1994 onwards I used student feed-back sheets for all my courses, eventually replaced in the OHE re-accreditation process with Student Evaluation of Course (SEC) and Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) forms. With each teaching of that same course – continuing here with the example of the Western Medieval Church – I have tried to build on the discoveries I made the previous year. In this section of the case study I shall draw out the most important discoveries I have made about practice facilitating connection and depth in learning. These deal especially with Teaching/Learning Activities (TLA), following the categories established by Biggs.<sup>ix</sup>

### Implementation

#### Teaching/Learning Activities (TLA)

##### a) Teacher-directed

Given that many of the students began the course with little or no historical knowledge, I found that lectures were an important TLA for my class, and I worked to ensure that my own content knowledge, preparation and praxis were maintained. One hour of the three hour teaching block each week enabled me to check that students had grasped the historical basics on which their subsequent discussion, analysis and reflection rested. As this suggests, I invited students to ask questions during the lecture presentation. When using a PowerPoint presentation in a lecture, I always gave students full copies of the slides, to facilitate reflection and discussion.

In the *first class of semester*,

- 'I provided students with a statement of the course's rationale, aims, methods, and assessment; a weekly outline giving lecture topics and discussion areas, and required reading; and a general bibliography.'
- 'I adapted the concept of an 'advance organizer'<sup>x</sup>, not least to help meet the needs of students, mentioned in the section on Course Design, who were quite ignorant of the geographical and chronological basis of the course. This was a folder of photocopies, paid for by each

student: a time-line, essential maps, appropriate graphics, primary texts, and core journal articles, including some basic material for sequential development. When students have this material in common, there is more likelihood of casual discussion about it developing into intentional and reflective peer-directed learning i.e. the latter can take place outside as well as inside the classroom.

- I invited the college Librarian to give a thirty minute presentation to the class on using the library's electronic and other resources for historical research. I planned this presentation with the Librarian, so that a couple of discussion topics included in the course could be used as teaching models by her.

### b) Peer-directed

I am interested in Raymond B. Williams' comments about the 'apprenticeship programs' that have been instituted by some graduate theological faculties.<sup>xi</sup> Whilst I understand Williams' reservations about these, and would not wish to introduce such formal structuring into the lecture-room, I nevertheless would like to adapt the notion to work as a TLA. Postgraduate facilitators within triads (for instance) could deepen learning for themselves and other students, particularly when these small groups were operating within a sequential course design. The simple accessibility of a peer leader or facilitator can help other students to grasp how particular analytical and reflective conclusions are reached, to a degree that may not be possible in a plenary group, or in a formal lecture.

### c) Self-directed

As the Medieval Church course developed, I decided to talk to the class at the start, and at mid-point, of semester about the 'generic skills' of tertiary study. They were encouraged to think about alternating note-taking with reflective listening in lectures. Due dates for written assessment were given to them in week one of semester, to enable them to plan good use of their preparation time.

I sought to monitor the students' development of meta-cognitive skills<sup>xii</sup> in the following ways: by

- asking maieutic questions of an individual whom I realized had half understood some new construct, but needed to validate what s/he had grasped so far;
- encouraging students, as a class or as individuals, to seek a reformulation of some apparently unanswerable but important question;
- referring to methodological considerations in my construction of meaning.

## Impact

### Evaluative (Written) Evidence for Effective Teaching Practice

10 SETs were returned for my most recent teaching of the Western Medieval Church course. These included consideration of the statement, 'The lecturer is skilled at developing a learning environment conducive to learning. [The classroom atmosphere encouraged participation.]'

On a scale of 1 (very low achievement of task) – 5 (very high achievement of task), responses were as follows:

- 5 – 80%
- 4 – 20%

## Element 3: ASSESSMENT

### Description of the Practice

This section deals with its topic under two main headings, weekly assessment and semester assessment.

**a) Weekly assessment:** I use this term to describe the weekly use of the Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) that provided me, as lecturer, with feedback on my teaching practices, and the students with feedback on their learning practices. In its simplest form, this required me to ask the class members at the end of each lecture to write a response to two questions, namely 'What was the main point of today's lecture?'<sup>xiii</sup>, and 'What was the "muddiest" point in the material covered today?'<sup>xiii</sup> I then collected the CAT forms, for my own reading and reflection over the coming week. The CAT's effectiveness, as summarised by Gaeddert, lies in the lecturer reviewing the students' responses, 'so that misperceptions, miscues or answered questions can be addressed at the beginning of the next lecture before the teacher moves on to new material.'<sup>xv</sup> CAT responses also help the lecturer to check regularly that students find the course objectives clear, and are engaging with these.

**b) Semester assessment:** I considered assessment of students' written work handed in toward the close of semester to be the final phase in my formal teaching of a church history course, and, therefore, the final phase in the students' formal learning in that course. In general terms, I set out, in my assessment, to provide the 'feedback' which Susan Toohey identifies as the springboard for praxis, and hence the underpinning of both teaching and learning. She says, in part, 'The degree to which [feedback] facilitates further learning depends on whether mistakes and misunderstandings are clearly identified and whether any suggestions are provided as to how performance might improve.'<sup>xv</sup> In my assessment of students' work I sought to ensure that misunderstandings and mistakes were pointed out, and discussed briefly but constructively.

### Implementation

**Assessment:** At one level, then, it is a simple matter to say what I believed I was doing when I assessed: I was looking for evidence of a student's ability to make meaning from the matter of history. I wanted to see if the student has written an essay or document commentary that demonstrates knowledge transformed, not just repeated.<sup>xvi</sup>

At another, more significant level, I had to decide how to assess the quality or standard of what I found in students' work. The



BCT's annual Handbook provided a list of assessment criteria, outlining what was needed for grades from Pass to High Distinction. Each set of criteria for each grade contained a distinctive adjective e.g. for a Pass, 'satisfactory', for a High Distinction, 'outstanding'. There was Faculty consensus on the choice of words; and I found, through cooperative teaching with faculty from the other two member schools, that we shared a common understanding of what these adjectives mean. Yet this understanding operated at an almost intuitive level, which made it difficult to communicate to students! When I last taught the Medieval Church course, there were two ploys available to me by which this inherent difficulty might be at least partially overcome.

- BCT essays were regularly benchmarked against those from other fully accredited tertiary providers, nationally and internationally.
- Student essays from previous years might be made available, with their writers' permission, to current students, as practical indicators of what constituted Pass level work, what constituted Credit level work etc.

Establishing valid criteria for quality is an ongoing issue for a number of teaching institutions, and hence teachers too. I can only say that, in my case, I took the following steps to ensure that I prepared my classes as fully as possible for assessment of their written work.

a) In my teaching I modelled the 'active analytical model' that I encouraged in their own work. For example, in class discussion of models of medieval empire, we decided what the characteristic arguments for imperium were. We considered how and why these fed the power of imperial myth, and noted the myth's survival long after the medieval empire has ceased to be a potent political force.

We then nominated later examples of empire (I encouraged the class to include the EU), discussed how far the ancient myth can be read forward into these, and tried to uncover the reasons for its potency.

b) I provided written advice about assessment. Amongst the handouts that I gave to students at the start of each course was one that outlined the component parts of the written work that they were required to complete for credit. These component parts together provided structures for essays and other written work which linked the course objectives to course assessment.

**For examples of these outlines, see Appendix A below.**

c) I provided assessment comment sheets to accompany each piece of written work that I marked and returned to a student. These comment sheets dealt with the component parts of the written work that were identified in the handout noted above (e.g. for essays, these components were bibliography, methodology and method etc.). In this way I was able, to a significant extent, to illustrate students' learning to them.

## Impact

Evaluative (Written) Evidence for Effective Assessment: 10 SETs were returned for my most recent teaching of the Western Medieval Church course. These included consideration of the statement, *'The criteria on which the assessment items would be marked were clearly set out at the beginning of the semester'*.

On a scale of 1 (very low achievement of task) – 5 (very high achievement of task), responses were as follows:

5 – 90%  
4 – 10%

The same SETs included consideration of the statement, *'I found the comments and feedback from the assessment tasks were helpful'*.

On a scale of 1 (very low achievement of task) – 5 (very high achievement of task), responses were as follows:

5 – 90%  
4 – 10%

## Conclusion

My motive in writing up this particular case study is, in the first place, to offer some general guidance to new and future faculty members in the areas of historical course design, teaching practice and assessment. I have done so through the medium of a particular 'survey' course, which adhered to certain universals of good practice.

Readers will have noted that Student Evaluation of Course, and Student Evaluation of Teaching, forms provide useful, sometimes invaluable, feedback for the individual lecturer in these three areas.

Secondly, I hope that this study will encourage faculty at smaller tertiary institutions to continue to aim high in their pursuit of academic excellence. And I hope too that those same faculty members may be encouraged to publish their own case studies and reflections.

Finally, generic aspects of course design, teaching practice and assessment included in this case study could be useful to lecturers in other disciplines.

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- i Most BCT students come from the Anglican, Roman Catholic or Uniting Church traditions, reflecting the nature of the three member schools of the consortium. Some, though not all, were training for ordained or lay ministry in their church. Teaching was organized across the three member schools, so that students from the three traditions attended classes together, and were taught by staff from the other schools, as well as from their own. The BCT also attracted General Academic Students from Griffith University, and elsewhere, who enrolled in courses for credit toward their university degree programme.
- ii Rosemary Gill, 'Minding our Prompts and Cues: some thoughts on how to recognize, and respond to, tertiary history students' indicators of deep learning', Briefing Paper, The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, December 2007.
- iii Greg Light and Roy Cox, *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, Paul Chapman, 2001, 95.
- iv Light and Cox, 86.
- v Light and Cox, 93.
- vi Light and Cox, 93.
- vii John Biggs, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: what the student does*, Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1999, 47-8, referring respectively to the Multistructural and Relational levels. For discussion of SOLO (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome), see Biggs, 37 ff.
- viii Brian J. Mahan, 'Practice Talks Back to Theory: A Critical Reflection on Teaching', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 5.4. 2002, 205.
- ix Biggs, c.5
- x Biggs, 74.
- xi Raymond B. Williams, 'Editor's Note', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 5.4. 2002, 189-91.
- xii Biggs, 92-3.
- xiii Barry K. Gaeddert, 'Improving Graduate Theological Instruction: Using Classroom Assessment Techniques to Connect Teaching and Learning', *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 6.1. 2003, 48-9.
- xiv Gaeddert, 49
- xv Susan Toohey, *Designing Courses for Higher Education*, Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press, 1999, 155.
- xvi Biggs, 173.

## Appendix A

**Undergraduate Assessment: handouts provided for students in week 1 of The Western Medieval Church 500 – 1500 CE**

**Each undergraduate student is required to complete:**

a) **FOUR SHORT PAPERS:** these will cover four weeks of the unit. Each paper should be typed and should be approximately **750 words** in length. Please base the four papers on your choice of weeks **2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11**.

You may choose your own topic for each paper by following this guide.

**Step 1.** Begin each short paper with a sentence identifying

- one key issue from the readings/lectures/discussion for that week.

**Step 2.** Follow this with a couple of sentences explaining

- why this particular issue stands out for you. Why do you think it is historically important?

**Step 3.** Go on to outline briefly

- one historian's treatment of this key issue. Why does s/he think the issue is important? (Where do you find such an historian? Refer to the weekly readings, or to an author listed in the relevant section of the main bibliography for the course. And please – rather than falling into panic and despair about this, ask the course convenor for some guidance!)

**Step 4.** And finally

- you have almost completed the paper – well done! In the last paragraph identify your one most important piece of learning that has come out of your work on the topic.

Each short paper is to be typewritten and double-spaced. Please ensure that you retain at least one copy yourself.

**Due date:** these papers will be marked progressively. **Please hand in each no later than a fortnight after the topic week e.g. if you write on a key issue from week 2, the paper must be handed in by week 4 at the latest.** This is to give the marker time to prepare comments on these and assess them, and to give you the option to rewrite any paper that might not make the grade of Pass the first time around.

**Due date: as explained above. 50% of semester total**

b) **A SEMESTER ESSAY:** the essay is to be 2,000 words in length. It is to be written *either* on one of the given topics or on one developed in consultation with the lecturer.

The essay is to be typewritten.

**Week due: Due date: 50% of semester total**

### GENERAL CRITERIA FOR ESSAY ASSESSMENT

This will be done under the following headings. **Those marked with an asterisk carry the heaviest weighting.** Bear in mind, however, that all six aspects of the essay are interdependent: for example, a poor literary style can obscure a good argument, and an inadequate bibliography compromises even a well-written essay.

#### Bibliography

Does this show that you have consulted more than one historian recognized as an authority in the topic area? Does the bibliography do justice to your research? Have you included all the books, articles and websites that have assisted your reading for the essay, and your writing-up?

#### \* Methodology and Method

The first of these terms alarms some students. Try thinking of it like this:

**Methodology:** this is the **'why'** of your approach to the topic. So, your methodological statement, which should introduce the essay, explains why you have chosen to deal with the topic from a particular perspective, and why you are using particular tools to do this.

Reasons for your choice of methodology might include:

- your own religious background and experience;
- your current work e.g. if you're engaged in mission of some type, you may well decide to view an essay topic through the lens of missiology;
- your awareness of a gap in your knowledge which will be filled if you research the topic in a particular way;
- your awareness of a gap in the written history of the topic area – you can begin to fill that gap;
- availability of resources – these are, of course, predisposed to historical-religious research.

**Method:** this is the **'how'** of your approach to the topic. Remember the old school essay 'plan'? This is a more advanced version: 'This essay will deal first with ... It will go on to discuss ... The conclusion will sum up the major points made and offer a final analysis of these ...'.

#### \* Analysis

This is of prime importance to the development of your argument in the essay. What is your argument? It is the reasoning process that leads your discussion of the essay topic to a well-grounded conclusion. It often involves consideration of opinions that run contrary to yours. Good analysis sorts the historical material discovered in your research and includes only what is strictly relevant to your argument, and to the issues and questions raised by the topic. (Note how a sound methodology helps create a sound analysis.) Resist the temptation just to 'tell the story' of the general historical period surrounding the topic.

**\* Content**

Make the essay lean and keep it focussed on the topic. No padding, no waffle – include material only if it helps advance your analysis, and, please note, this may mean including material that doesn't fit your pre-established historical theory about something or someone.

**Literary Style**

Not everyone is Jane Austen, and not everyone would want to be, but you too can write clearly and economically. Choose shorter sentences in preference to longer ones. Never use jargon when English will do. If you wonder how well the meaning of a sentence comes across, try saying it out aloud. And keep reading: keep noting the style of authors whom you find particularly clear and helpful (it doesn't matter if they're historians, novelists, theologians, travel writers, as long as they are eminently *readable*).

**Technical Presentation**

This covers matters like the writing of footnotes/endnotes and bibliography. Is the essay well-presented, with numbered pages and adequate margins? If in doubt about any of these points, consult Lawrence D. McIntosh *A Style Manual for the Presentation of Papers and Theses in Religion and Theology*, Centre for Information Studies: Wagga Wagga, 1994. There is at least one copy of this in each of the BCT member school libraries.

**Postgraduate Assessment: handouts provided for students in week 1 of The Western Medieval Church 500 – 1500 CE**

**Each postgraduate student is required to complete:**

**1) FOUR DOCUMENT COMMENTARIES:**

Each commentary is to be 1,000 words in length. You will be introduced to these documents, or document extracts, in class. Each text will be integral to a particular central issue within the historical period covered by the unit.

You are required in each commentary to demonstrate the following.

- a) Ability to identify the central issue to which the text relates.
- b) A concise understanding of the historical background to the issue.
- c) A concise knowledge of the immediate historical context in which the text was written.
- d) A critical understanding of the text's place in the history of the issue.

The commentaries are to be written progressively during semester. Each student will complete and hand in **a draft** of at least one commentary by the week preceding the mid-semester break. This will be returned to you with my written comments.

The commentaries are to be typewritten.

**Due date for all document commentaries: 50% of semester total**

**2) A SEMESTER ESSAY:** the essay is to be 2,000 – 3,000 words in length. It is to be written **either** on one of the given topics **or** on one developed in consultation with the lecturer.

You are required in the essay to demonstrate the following.

- a) Critical selectivity and analytical ability in working with appropriate primary and secondary sources. **Please note that the majority of the topics are shaped around a particular primary source document.** You are expected to show in your essay that you are conversant with the relevant document.
- b) Skills in specialized research i.e. show that you can sustain a particular focus within the broad perspective of the unit.

These two briefly stated requirements (a and b) may be broken down into the following component parts of the essay. So far as formal assessment is concerned, you may wish to note that those marked with an asterisk \* carry the heaviest weighting.

Bear in mind, however, that all six aspects of the essay are interdependent: for example, a poor literary style can obscure a good argument, and an inadequate bibliography compromises even a well-written essay.

[In the student handout, there followed the **GENERAL CRITERIA FOR ESSAY ASSESSMENT**, shown above.]

## Part 5 Employability Issues

### History and Employability

#### Short Description

This study looks at current practice at an individual institution and possible future developments and enhancements to subject modules to reinforce the employability agenda in the study of history. The role of the Centre for Employability Through the Humanities (CETH) to raise the relevance of academic study in history for future employment prospects is highlighted.

#### Rationale

We in history at Preston have always tried to show the relevance of academic study to getting jobs and doing well in them, since there are careers which do build directly on the study of history and the skills acquired while doing it. Our strong contribution towards the initial CETL proposal rested primarily on what we had been doing for some time, not what we hoped to do in future.

Given the almost universal teaching of history in some form right across the HE sector; and given the general tendency among those entering HE direct from A levels to follow established names as a guide to applications, it has always been clear to us that recruitment depends very much on establishing a distinctive and attractive profile. Indeed, even for local mature students who have restricted choice of destinations, a sense that we are oriented towards the real world of getting jobs may tip the balance towards taking a degree at all, or towards us instead of another north-western university.

Subject meetings regularly discuss these issues, and ways we can address them, and I am unaware of any significant division within the group over their importance. Teaching and museum and heritage work are the most obvious career routes that we pay attention to. At the same time, feedback on many levels and from many sources has always supported our contention that history is also one of the most respected non-vocational degrees in the job market. Building employability into history therefore first of all requires respect for what is intrinsic, and also what has been achieved already.

#### Description of the Practice

Our programmes, from three-subject entry to single honours, all build on a spine of core courses that teach at level 1 what history is and what it does; how it does it at level 2; and requires students to implement what they have learned in their dissertations at level 3. Beyond that, in level 1 we try to make students aware of the fundamental importance of communication skills; to accept and act on constructive criticism of the standard they have reached on this; and to seek remedial help if it is needed. We have tried to deliver PDP within this format, using the departmental approach. Level 2 requires a balance of skills-based and content-based modules so that students think about processes as well as facts and interpretations. Levels 2 and 3 offer options that allow direct

engagement with vocationally oriented study that vary from those that are classroom-based to work placements, via more informal individual investigations of professional issues. A key module in the past which has faded entirely due to a steady decline in student response is the *Community History Project* (HY2068), which ideally gets small teams of students to address a real commission from an outside client relating to some historical issue. They are assessed primarily on the appropriateness of their response and some final mode of delivery whereby the results are communicated, most obviously via a display. If sufficient real commissions are not available, staff simulate them and this can be very successful, as in last year's *Friargate* study. The dissertation can also be slanted towards issues relating to a vocational approach rather than purely academic topics.

However, lest this all appear too neat and easy, it must be said that significant numbers of students, do not engage readily with the process, and effectively spend much of their energies trying to subvert it, consciously or unconsciously, rather than engaging with it as something that will ultimately be of great value to them. In addition, some of the most instrumental mature students have such a stereotyped idea of the irrelevance of the curriculum to the real world, even when they enjoy it, that they also paradoxically are hard to involve. The most recent Staff-Student Liaison Committee meeting (admittedly with a very poor attendance) registered what can only be described as zero interest in Personal Development Plan (PDP) as it is presently structured. There was recognition that what lies behind PDP could be important, but there was no sense of how this could be harnessed at the moment, and no sense that it is important to students to find a method.

To extend and improve this requires a two-pronged approach:

- 1) Identifying those aspects of study which directly contribute to careers, and reinforcing their impact. Over the last decade, therefore, we have developed new specialised modules designed to prepare students for the transition to teaching or working in museums and heritage if that is where their interest lies. We now even have a small degree programme titled, History, Museums & Heritage (HMH), and we should have our first graduate this year.
- 2) Showing all students what it is about the degree programme that makes it so much more than a rite of passage. We must get students to accept that research and analytical skills are generic, and that the general problem-oriented approach of historical study transfers readily into administrative and managerial roles. Moreover, the emphasis on investigating actual events and causal chains, which has been central to history for at least the last two centuries, rather than accepting received wisdom is also vital in business and administration.

#### Implementation

The CETH allows us to develop both aspects in ways that we could not do alone, especially as we have been overstretched lately. CETH's Realistic Works Experience programme (RWE)

and its manager clearly fit very well with pathway (1), preparing directly for careers, and I see my role as Subject Champion being partly in (2) and partly in making sure that the two prongs do not peel away from each other over time and become rivals. Therefore I think it is a virtue of the system that I remain firmly rooted in the subject area, linking it to the CETH, rather than vice versa. It should also be pointed out that employers in neither teaching nor museums would give credit for training given to students in particular skills at our stage, and that we must keep the primary focus on academic history if we are to fulfil the expectations of most students.

The delayed appointment of an RWE manager means the programme is not as far on as in some subject areas. Moreover, I was unable to take on these duties before semester 2, so we are still in the early stages.

However, the fortuitous success of the 2005-06 Community History Project on the history of Friargate that was undertaken by two HMH students and a historian has given us a flying start in some respects. The students managed to secure a site for their final display in the Harris Library which demonstrated that people are very receptive to history when it is put where they see it, and which talks about things they are interested in. It demonstrated to the students who took part that they had very practical skills, and could take on project management. The history student commented that the module dovetailed perfectly with the level 2 core course in showing the links between academic skills and practical applications, and wished that everyone experienced this.

However, it is unclear whether this will spark a renewed interest in taking the module outside those who have to, while the follow up on several possible new projects that came out of it demonstrated just as clearly the difficulty of delivering a rapid response to public suggestions for collaboration, or sometimes any response at all within the existing degree structure.

The RWE manager, Billy Frank, and myself have been engaged in discussions as to how to put our time to best use, individually and collectively, and agree that the solution is not new modules for the sake of it. They would soak up all his time very quickly; they would compete for what is already a relatively small number of FTEs; and only students who opted for them would get any benefit from the work that went into creating them.

Instead we propose a mixture of making the most of the modules that exist, and the development of pedagogical elements that could be incorporated into many modules, including ones not related to history. The most obvious example of this last is work on improving the ability to communicate which all academic staff identify as a chronic problem, and which employers always place great stress on. Staff quite legitimately find it hard to provide remedial teaching in the use of English, especially as many of the least capable are also the most resistant to correction. Methods of identifying such students, giving them guidance on what they are doing

wrong, and offering help in putting it right are clearly needed, and they must not depend on individual action by module tutors or everyone will be swamped. Information sheets, standard codes for use during marking, and better links to existing skills courses, plus the possible development of remedial self-help systems delivered via WebCT could all make a real difference here.

We hope that together we can revitalise many aspects of the career-related modules within history:

- 1) Work placement module – we can become more proactive and seek out placements with key institutions rather than making students find their own in every case (though many may still do so). I would also like to explore the possibility of medium and long-term relationships with organisations that would effectively offer standing placements over several years, and where the university's contribution could be recognised as an important part of projects, rather than a make-work exercise as it can so easily be. This should increase both the number of students who wish to take up this opportunity, and the quality of their experience on it.
- 2) Restart a second-level half-module to be retitled *Insight into Museums and Heritage*, which was dropped when the History, Museums and Heritage degree began operating. It was hoped that more advanced students would join the new first-level core course to see what museums and heritage had to offer, but this has not worked, and experience suggests that the half-module format was probably ideal for its purpose. As such, it can be combined with an equivalent half-module on teaching and the National Curriculum by those unsure of where to go, or intending to try to become educators within museums.
- 3) Finish developing a stalled initiative to allow students from the half-modules just mentioned to follow them up by identifying a practical issue arising from the teaching, and investigating it in the real world. In schools this would probably mean a classroom-based project, while for museums it is envisaged as being based upon observation, which could involve contact with museum staff but does not depend on it. This has been trialled via SIMs with great success, both in educational terms and in student response. Neither is a placement.
- 4) Develop the *Community History Project* (CHP) into a vehicle capable of more flexible running, and designed to encourage a wider view of involvement with communities. Find ways to engage students with it.

I would also expect to be involved in developing the concept of the display space for the RWE, and have made initial suggestions about how we might simulate a museum staff experience in a fairly rounded way while preparing and putting on show exhibitions of a better technical standard than was possible with Friargate. This will presumably require the creation of a separate module to allow students to take part, but as yet there is no need for this.

In general terms, my aim is to link performance directly, visibly

and inherently (ie, not only via assessment by academics) to rewards and to reinforcement of the sense that studies do matter outside the university. My rather peripheral involvement with PDP-type approaches over more than a decade has convinced me that however much we believe in their value (and in the abstract I do), students only engage with them in situations where there is a clear benefit to them and where the completion of records over a long period fits with their mode of study. This also has the possibilities of reaching those who are initially very sceptical, whereas relying on optional modules only reaches those motivated enough to choose them. Given that many students perceive such modules as a distraction and as a waste of an option within their home subjects, they are unlikely to make a major impact in a subject like ours.

Thus, in the *CHP* module, the Friargate team all deserved and duly got exceptional marks – high enough to affect their degree classification – but also received external praise that had nothing whatever to do with academic standards. The benefits to their CVs was absolutely obvious, and the boost to their self-esteem as historians was just as clear. We were not telling them that people appreciated history; people were visibly appreciating it, and outside professionals held the display over for two weeks after it was due to close. The leaflet had to be reprinted several times. Perhaps we will struggle to replicate this impact, but it shows it can be done.

Equally, if we can start students off on a road to improved communication, this should be reflected in their marks and in their ability to undertake tasks like the *CHP*. An effective display requires an effective text, and that means knowing how to write grammatically, how to edit ruthlessly, and how to shape an argument. Building such improvement on real examples and practical steps rather than on sweeping statements and theoretical approaches is far more likely to pay off.

This also applies to the RWE. If it is perceived to be doing something that reaches other students at least, and hopefully the wider world as well, then those involved will have a different attitude to the norm. This is why I want to begin by perpetuating the Friargate display through spending more money on it and locating it in a central area of the university. Keeping the website readily available also matters, though it made less impact due to problems in getting it working. Its implicit links to a council-run regeneration scheme and the concept of a history trail down the street, plus the possibility of other initiatives dealing with the same area give it a reality most of our modules cannot compete with. It could become a role model for later *CHPs*, and an incentive not to let the department down. If the website's structure can be improved, it would provide a functional framework for other efforts.

It also shows that there is the possibility of creating several long-running projects that could act as the focus for a significant part of the work associated with the CETH. If most projects are free-standing and isolated, they absorb far too much energy and effort at the start-up stage, whereas established equivalents show students what can be done and

offer obvious opportunities at little continuing cost. This is not only true of the *CHP* module: I am discussing a regeneration initiative taking place in Avenham which is intended to run for at least two years and could go on for longer. Apparently it is struggling and the team would welcome at least one placement as well as team projects. There is also potential for summer playschemes with children, and dissertation work. Whereas Friargate paralleled a council scheme, this would explicitly link up with one. It also offers opportunities for staff to undertake serious research, and to involve staff from other disciplines, all in a real world setting.

A major support that the CETH could offer to this strand which would have a major, general impact would be to support a resource and work area, combining what the Fylde Resource Centre does now with a place where students can meet and talk and do the practical work for projects. Teams need interaction, and work best within a generally collaborative atmosphere, so quite apart from the vital practical role that such a space could play, it would increase the sense of being part of a cohort, a subject, and a wider field of humanities.

## Impact

From the preceding, the importance of action along these lines for recruitment should be obvious, but also retention would be improved if employability could reinforce the motivation of our students. I also think it would improve our image locally and regionally in ways that might lead to increased research funding since we would be perceived to be capable of delivering advice and action plans that are relevant to practical issues and projects.

It should also have a direct impact on teaching since the more motivated students are, the more they wish to learn, and the more they wish to participate actively rather than to endure their programme of study as some do now. If practical elements and support structures are available, then we avoid requiring individual teachers to endlessly reinvent the wheel, something which I believe is far too prevalent in British HE.

Obviously, the more this plan is discussed and worked upon, the more robust it is likely to become. There may be career options we have overlooked. There may well be existing structures that I can tap into that I am not aware of, or examples that can be studied in other subjects that have relevance. This is especially true if my ideas are taken up outside the history group, since many of them are relevant throughout humanities teaching. Moreover, if it led to an increase in interdisciplinarity among students, it would lead to a sense that subjects are not free-standing entities, but aspects of something much bigger. This in turn stops students perceiving their studies as so artificial, a prime factor in divorcing them from employability.

We must also beware of the dangers of group thinking, which were outlined in a previous awayday for CETH. If we stress the value of critical thinking and working from evidence in a

generic to our students, we must practice this ourselves with regard to employability. Taking it on rather than leaving it to others allows us to stress to students that seeing their careers in passive terms, that is that they must simply conform to a stereotype, is not something to be taken for granted, and which does not promote innovation and a healthy society generally. Many current, rather glib definitions of employability assume that individual success validates all actions that produce that success, and that is very dangerous. In contrast to this, at a deeper level, history encourages people to be aware of the wider results of their actions, and that individuals are always embedded in a society. As we move ever further into a system that encourages individualism in many practical ways, but also increasingly celebrates it in a crude ideological way that denies the possibility of any harm stemming from it, this also matters. Corporations readily create a morality and ethics-free zone for their managerial employees, and recent corporate scandals show this is not a beneficial trend, but one to be tamed.



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## Conclusions

We hope that this collection of case studies gives example and inspiration to enhance your teaching strategies. We appreciate the willingness of academics, at all stages in their careers, to share their teaching practice.

Examples from new lecturers, as the original focus of the project, revealed the varied ways they have tried to engage learners and how they have also learned valuable lessons in their method of teaching.

It is significant that contributors shared successes and concerns for others to learn from. In theory, some ideas and methods looked great on paper, but in practice, student groups shaped the outcome. Feedback from learners was by and large positive with some departments implementing changes suggested by the practitioners. The fact that a new student group could alter this was highlighted on a number of occasions, a useful point to make to encourage, yet warn, colleagues planning innovative strategies.

Lecturers and graduate assistants are frequently faced with the challenges of how to get students to be more pro-active and recognise their responsibility in the learning process. Contributors provided examples of practical methods to engage learners to reflect on their learning and actively think about the time spent on particular areas of the course, e.g. reading, seminar and group work, essay writing, revision for exams and assessment. The feedback from learners, overall, was positive and indicates that learners have ability to shape their own learning and are willing to reflect on their activities in and outside the classroom.

Other contributors offered particular tools that lecturers and course coordinators can use to provide access to learning, such as methods of e-learning. Virtual learning environments are being implemented and utilized at all levels of teaching. These have allowed learners to actively take responsibility for their own learning by engaging with primary and secondary sources, other learners and members of academic communities on varying levels. One case study, however, highlighted that even with specific tools to give students' wider access to learning there are pitfalls that come with different kinds of courses, no matter how good the intentions of the lecturer might be.

The combination of implementing the tools to engage learners and how to get learners to reflect on their learning often comes down to the course itself and the nature of the objectives set by the course leader or convenor. Course structure, assessment and tools are often determined by university policy, departmental culture and university resources. Despite these challenges, contributors offered advice and tools needed to make decisions on shaping the aims and objectives of the course, how to use a number of methods to engage with student learning and more importantly, the research and teaching linkages desired by universities and departments alike.

Lastly, and more importantly, contributions focused on the real factor of what we do and how it impacts on learners. Skills such as critical thinking, writing, team work and time management can provide learners with the abilities needed to gain graduate jobs. Further to this, for those willing to take the next step, skills learned in humanities courses provide the learners with the capacity and confidence to progress to postgraduate degrees and take their first steps into wider participation in academic communities.

## Useful links

Here are a few links that postgraduates/early career academics (ECAs) might find useful.

### Postgraduate History Networks in Britain

#### The Midlands

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##### Postgrad Forum

'The Postgrad Forum was set up in 2005 by postgraduates at the Birmingham University History Department. The concept behind the forum is to provide an informal setting to discuss ongoing research and an opportunity to share ideas and resources. Monthly seminars are held in the History Department at the University of Birmingham, and are open to all interested postgraduates. The seminars have been a real success and have proved to be an encouraging and constructive environment for those students giving academic papers for the first time.'

Contact: [bhamhistpostgrads@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:bhamhistpostgrads@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

Website: <http://www.postgradforum.org>

#### The North

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##### Histfest

'Histfest is the ideal forum for presenting work in progress to a welcoming and constructive audience. Our aim is to bring together a wide range of postgraduate students working on any aspect of history. We are particularly interested in hearing from students studying in related disciplines.'

Contact: [histfest@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:histfest@lancaster.ac.uk)

Website: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/history/postgrad/histfest.htm>

##### Arts, Media and Social Sciences Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Seminars

'Hosted by the University of Salford and supported by CIDRA at the University of Manchester, this is a forum for presentations in fields such as politics, philosophy, religions and theology, sociology, social anthropology, psychology, literature, history, human geography, classics, visual and screen studies, and the performing arts. Presenters usually speak for 20 minutes. The event is a friendly occasion where presenters gain experience and make contacts. Participants not wishing to present are warmly welcome.'

Contact: [cidra@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:cidra@manchester.ac.uk)

Website: <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/cidra/events/postgraduateinitiatives>

##### History Postgraduate Discussion Group

'An inter-disciplinary discussion group, this network aims to bring together students from the five north-eastern universities- Sunderland, Teeside, Durham, Northumbria and Newcastle: studying history, politics, theology, music literature, sociology, law and the sciences.'

Medieval, Early Modern and Modern Discussion Groups and History Society

Website: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/history/events/>

##### Graduate Seminar and Postgraduate Conference in History and Classics

'This weekly seminar series is organised by and for MA and PhD students. Papers are twenty minutes in length, and no abstract is required. The seminar is preceded by a wine reception and followed by drinks and a meal. We welcome attendance and presentations from graduate students at other institutions. Our main research interests are the history of ancient Greece and Rome and the cultural history of Britain and France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.'

Websites: <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/history/postgraduatestudy/conference/>  
<http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/subjectareas/history/postgraduatestudy/pgseminars/>

## Sheffield Postgraduate History Forum

'The Forum is an informal setting for the presenting of papers regardless of level of experience or academic position. Seminars are held, according to interest, fortnightly or monthly on Thursday evenings in the Department of History at the University of Sheffield. We would like to encourage papers dealing with open-ended topics of wide appeal and are keen to provide scope for collaborative or roundtable presentations. Further details about the Forum, along with other Sheffield Postgraduate discussion groups in Medieval, Early Modern and Imperial history, can be found through our website.'

Contact: [history.postgrads@shef.ac.uk](mailto:history.postgrads@shef.ac.uk)  
 Website: [www.historypostgrads.group.shef.ac.uk](http://www.historypostgrads.group.shef.ac.uk)

## Scotland

### Historical Perspectives

'Historical Perspectives is a student-run initiative, involving postgraduates from Glasgow, Stirling and Dundee. Our 'Work in Progress' seminar series, aims to provide an informal and friendly platform for postgraduates to present their research. Our annual conference aims to stimulate postgraduate research by developing the existing network of postgraduate students in Britain. Speakers gain experience of presenting their work in a formal setting, acquiring key oratorical and debating skills while attendees have the opportunity to participate in practical workshop events.'

Contact: [histper@arts.gla.ac.uk](mailto:histper@arts.gla.ac.uk)  
 Website: <http://www.histper.co.uk/>

## The South

### Philosophy of History

A reading group on the Philosophy of History, Birkbeck College, London.

Website: <http://philohist.wordpress.com>

## Career Advice

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/>

Vitae is a national organisation championing the personal, professional and career development of doctoral researchers and research staff in higher education institutions and research institutes.

## Jobs

<http://www.prospects.ac.uk>  
<http://www.jobs.ac.uk>

## Funding

<http://www.britac.ac.uk/funding/guide/pdfells.cfm>  
[http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/grants\\_awards/grants/early\\_career\\_fellowship](http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/grants_awards/grants/early_career_fellowship)

## Training & Information

School for Advanced Study:	<a href="http://www.sas.ac.uk/rt.html">http://www.sas.ac.uk/rt.html</a>
Institute of Historical Research:	<a href="http://www.history.ac.uk/study/training">http://www.history.ac.uk/study/training</a>
IHR History Lab and History Lab +:	<a href="http://www.history.ac.uk/historylab">http://www.history.ac.uk/historylab</a>
AHRC:	<a href="http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Pages/default.aspx</a>
ESRC:	<a href="http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/index.aspx">http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/index.aspx</a>

To find out more about HEFCE's CETL programme visit: [www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/tinits/cetl)  
Or for the Higher Education Academy's work with CETL's visit:  
**[www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/cetls](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/cetls)**

**The  
Higher  
Education  
Academy**

**Subject Centre for  
History, Classics  
and Archaeology**

Subject Centre for History,  
Classics & Archaeology,  
Hartley Building,  
Brownlow Street,  
University of Liverpool,  
Liverpool.  
L69 3GS

**tel:** 0151 7950343

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ISBN 978-0-9564603-6-3



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