

A First-Year eLearning Experience at the University of the Western Cape



'First-Year' and 'First-Time' Experiences

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- Aim of the paper
- eLearning Integrated Support Structure
- Functional Teams
- A Training Programme based on an 'Online Creation Model'
- The eLearning Projects
 - Digital Academic Literacy (DAL)
 - Nursing Podcast Project
 - Rip-Mix-Learners Project
- Recommendations



The **eLearning strategy** of UWC (1999) states that:
 “Students will have the necessary skills, attitudes and resources to use technology creatively in taking responsibility for their own learning and becoming independent learners”.



Aim of the paper

- This paper discusses eLearning training and team support for ‘first-year and first-time’ users in relation to three eLearning projects intended to help us foster and achieve the strategy goal
- The importance of an eLearning integrated support structure;
- The blended ICT and eLearning system training programme is presented
- Recommendations for improved methodologies of student training and support



eLearning Integrated Support Structure

- Successful implementation of eLearning initiatives requires: Integrated Coordination and Role-player Support
- eLearning manager needs to ensure the availability of adequate resources, inclusive of scheduled face-to-face training and one-on-one support sessions to satisfy learner’s (student and lecturer) needs
- Through the support of Functional teams training and support are offered.



Functional Teams

- **Instructional Design:** provides support to the academic staff and students in the use of technology to enhance their traditional teaching-and-learning activities.
- **eLearning Student Support:** equips the students with skills that enable them to navigate the eLearning system effectively (i.e. communication; content and assessment eTools).
- **ICT Training Team:** offer training to the students on a variety of software packages that will enable them to apply acquired skills so as to successfully access material and eTools, and navigate their desktops.



Functional Teams

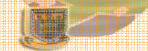
- **Digital Media:** supports the use of digital multimedia such as podcasts (audio-recordings) in support of online teaching-and-learning
- **Digital Academic Literacy:** offers basic computer literacy to the first-year students
- **Materials Development:** produces just-in-time training material such as user manuals; simulations and CD-ROMS support of online teaching-and-learning.



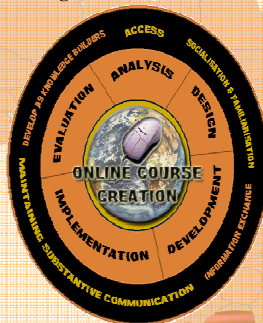
A Training Programme based on an 'Online Creation Model'

The eLearning strategy of UWC (1999) states that:

- "Each student who graduates from UWC will demonstrate a digital academic literacy appropriate to their field and level of study"
- Hence the support team endeavoured to develop a blended training programme for students that would enable them to take control and ownership of their eLearning experiences as well as enhance their computer literacy skills
- This training programme (linked to the steps in the model) is deliberated through the discussion of 'first-year and first-time' experiences in relation to three eLearning projects



An Online Course Creation Model Blending Best Practices and Tools



Online Course Creation Model (J. Stoltenkamp, 2007)
Developed from the generic Instructional Design Model -ADDIE &
Salmon, G. (2004) E-Moderating

Designing for 'knowledge builders'

Ideally the team would like to see students progress through each phase of the model:

- Users require 'information and technical support to get online need information and technical support to get online and strong motivation and encouragement to put in the necessary time and effort' (Salmon, 2004).
- The students are encouraged to post introductory messages whereby they share something about themselves in a discussion forum (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005)
- Students will look to the facilitators to 'provide direction through the mass of messages and encouragement to start using the most relevant content material (Salmon, 2004)
- The importance of individual accountability and responsibilities within groupwork are highlighted
- The students are encouraged as, Perumal, J. (2006) states, to differ in opinions and views with the facilitator and other students



Digital Academic Literacy Programme

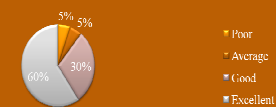
- The DAL course has been designed to teach the first-year student basic computer literacy within one semester and to enable them to word-process assignments for academic purposes.
- Team needs to customise the developed training programme based on a selection of eTools by the lecturer for a specific eLearning course or module.
- Sessions are divided into two manageable chunks over a period of two weeks
- First session the focus is on access, navigation and familiarization of the eLearning environment
- Concentrate on how to access and submit online assessments



Analysis of Content

- Data sampled from a set of questionnaires (evaluation sheets)
- Sample (240 students) from the following departments: Information Systems; Library information Science; Statistics Department; Social Work

Overall, how would you rate the content of this training



- Poor
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Analysis of facilitation

- Fairly good understanding of the training and would be able to apply the knowledge and skills gained in their work environment

To what extent did this training add value to your understanding of the topics covered



'First-Time' eLearning Nursing Podcast Project

- EDSU embarked on a 'first-time' exciting podcast pilot project, with one-hundred (100) 2nd year Nursing students, under the supervision of a subject-matter expert (lecturer); and the eLearning support team.
- This project aimed to look at the pedagogical value of the podcast tool within an academic context



Substantive Discussion and Knowledge Builders

- Interactive Podcast Task linked to eTools
- Interview a 'patient' during fieldwork
- Upload the podcast into the workgroup tool within the eLearning system
- Assess learner's interview skills
- Task linked to discussion topic in a forum

Podcast Project Outcomes



- Identify the pedagogical value of the podcasting tool
- Design an effective podcast training programme with measurable outcomes and relevant content linked to online assessments.
- Enable the Nursing lecturers to become comfortable with the eTools during train-the-trainer sessions

Podcast Project Outcomes

- Enable students to become proficient with Audacity software (audio-recording software) in order to record, edit and package their audio content.
- Enable students to become familiar with the eLearning system in order for them to upload their audio-recording (podcast) into the system for lecturer evaluation and peer-review.



Podcast Project Outcomes



- Enable students (who receive mp3 players) to become proficient with the tool in order for them to record their specific interviews in the field
- Enable the eLearning support team to collect data and analyse findings to determine how we can improve our support and teaching-and-learning methodologies



Blended Training 'Self-Help' Package

- eLearning support team provided a blended training 'self-help' package
- A CD-ROM was developed to provide off-line access. It entailed the following:
 - A welcome video featuring Lorraine Fakude (lecturer)
 - A basic explanation of podcasting and its benefits
 - Pictures taken at the student training sessions
 - Narrated PowerPoint slides used in the training of the mp3 players
 - Narrated PowerPoint slides used in the Audacity software training
 - Audacity simulations/screen recordings of 'how to':
- A suite of training manuals.



Analysis: Training Content

- Completed questionnaires – reflect a very high rate of satisfaction with the training content they received during the Podcast project (100 students)

Overall, how would you rate the content of this training



- Poor
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

Analysis: Facilitation

- Students could be placed into two categories
- Computer literate - enjoyed the training
- Others struggled at first to create podcasts –lack of computer literacy skills
- A consistent theme emerged - the acknowledgement that through continuous practice and application, skills would improve.

To what extent did this training add value to your understanding of the topics covered

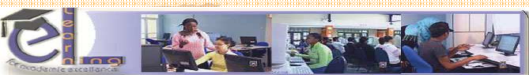


- Poor
- Average
- Good
- Excellent



Students reflecting on the podcast training

- *'All I need to do is practice'.*
- *'Practice will make it perfect. Help/assistance is 100% but it will not help me if I have to do it by myself'.*
- *'It was an exciting training and I learned a lot from what I've expected'.*
- *'Well I can say that I expected a very boring session but it turned out to be helpful'.*
- *'The session was fantastic. I wish we can work with these people more often; they make me feel more computer literate'.*



Need for 'deeper analysis'

- A limitation in terms of our evaluation sheets is that students are only able to state their satisfaction in terms of a numerical rating system and often do not deliberate on their selection
- The way forward for the eLearning team would entail the preparation of an evaluation sheet that allows for a more in-depth qualitative analysis.
- Further research could focus on the gender acceptance



- The **'Rip-Mix-Learners' Project** was launched as a hands-on research intervention at UWC in June 2007.
- Pilot Project is aimed at students to become producers of their own knowledge, rather than consumers of information prepared for them.
- A student-driven Open Courseware Publishing Project encouraging students to create educational resources
 - Docuwiki was used for a pilot (Rip-Mix-Learners)
 - <http://www.freecourseware.uwc.ac.za/ripmixlearners>
- To share with their student counterparts
- Ideal situation: perhaps lecturer will use the content

BACK



Project Outcomes

- The expected outcomes of the project:
- Students will be skilled in the use of Audacity (audio-recording software)
- Students will be able to scan and upload documents in Pdf formats
- Students will be able to use their iPods to record classroom lectures and upload the contents thereof online.



Indicators

- The set of indicators applied in assessing the (ongoing) project were as follows:
- Were the learners able to use the given technology for the transfer of knowledge: Audacity; scanning; iPod usage
- Has the training methodology applied, contributed to the expected outcomes of the project?
- Are the learners able to apply these skills?
- What challenges are faced by the learners in this Project?
- Do the learners feel empowered by the Project?



Findings: 'Familiarisation and Socialisation'

Were the learners able to use the given technology for the transfer of Knowledge?

- All learners felt comfortable with using the technology provided. And 70% of Learners indicated that they actually transferred knowledge through posting notes and recorded lecturer's online (wiki).

Has the training methodology applied contributed to the expected outcomes of the project?

- Majority of learners indicate that they were provided with training on:
 - How to record lectures using iPods
 - The use of Audacity
 - How to transfer information and upload it online



Findings: 'Develop as knowledge builders'

- How were the students able to apply the skills?
 - Audio-editing (recordings of church sermons)
 - Felt a sense of Leadership – custodians of information
 - Communication skills: One student noted: "Besides just recording the lecturers here at school, down in our communities I do recordings of my people, you see. You know, to ask people about the community, their experiences and everything. And I try to make CDs for people, you see, so that it can be available as a way of disseminating information amongst the people in our community".



Challenges: Resistant Lecturers

- Sixty-percent (60%) of learners indicated that their lecturers were resistant and not willing to participate in this project
- The lecturers objected to being recorded:
 - A feeling of discomfort in being recorded
 - The view that posting lecture recordings online would encourage students to miss classes
 - The view that it remains yet to be proven that recording lecture and posting it or sharing it can improve knowledge



Recommendations

- We suggest that HEIs consider the commitment to an integrated support structure
- Having the 'Big Brother (Sister) available' as a Possible Sounding Board
- eLearning Projects Opens Boundaries
- First-Year eLearning Collaborative Research eLearning enables collaborative research projects. South Africa currently, is not able to spread its restricted expertise to different Universities across the country (Pouris, 2005: 9).
- Strategic Changes for Institutional Transformation



A variety of eLearning Tools: Impact on support

- Anybody can do eLearning, however...
 - Docuwiki was used for a pilot (Rip-Mix-Learners)
 - <http://www.freecourseware.uwc.ac.za/ripmixlearners>
 - For scalability purposes – impact on institutional support – docuwiki outside the eLearning system
- Hence pertinent issues about stakeholders; and institutional support needs and requirements need to be addressed in the planning phases of eLearning initiative



Thank You

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