Capturing E-Learning Practice: Gathering Tutor Case Studies at

University of Worcester

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EUNIS E-Learning Task Force

• Case studies working group started at the ELTF meeting in 2006 and reported at EUNIS2007. Led by Stephen Clarke, University of Birmingham

• Members had explored approaches but group activity has now diminished for a variety of reasons

• Stephen now has a new job with Blackboard
EUNIS E-Learning Case Studies

- Start again
- Original idea still valid
- Enables similarities and differences in e-learning styles across Europe
- What I did at Worcester
Why case studies?

- reification of practice to invite discussion and reflection on approaches taken
- reinforcement of a particular model
- connection with the experience of others
- Vicarious learning opportunities
- glimpses into tacit knowledge
- effective practice can then become embedded practice
“Case studies have the capacity to inspire but also to provoke and to challenge.”  

(JISC: Joint Information Systems Committee)
Our experience at Worcester

A sample tutor survey revealed that:-

- 70% said they would welcome good practice demos from colleagues

- Case studies were published
- A booklet for every lecturer
- E-learning development and discussion groups
Our approach

• Teaching Fellowship Project – examples of best practice to which teachers can refer
• Participatory action research (PAR)* collective, self-reflective enquiry
• Phenomenographic approach** - interviews were conducted with staff, open-ended questions
• these were written up and compared
• tutors were asked to read and check details
• four main considerations were defined
• these formed the basis of a template

Four main considerations

- *The ‘problem’ or objective for the tutor.* A need really. The ‘issue’ creating the challenge was voiced in the form of a quote from the lecturer.
- *The type of learning which gave the focus to the case study.* This provided the headline or title.
- *How the learning was organised.* This explained what actually happened in each case.
- *A section on what WebCT, as a virtual learning environment had enabled.*
Images aid deeper understanding to promote active cognitive learning

Darren Aldridge lectures in the History Department at University of Worcester. He has been using WebCT for two years and has taken a distinctive approach which uses images and paintings extensively.

Paintings
Paintings of a certain age may be reproduced without infringement of copyright, but Darren has obtained written permission from the Web Gallery of Art to use these images. (http://www.wga.hu/) There is also the Getty Museum collection which the institution has permission to use. In some instances Darren uses a small thumbnail of an image which when clicked allows a much larger picture to be viewed. The advantage of this is that students can view this in more detail and comment on the digital image in a way that would not be so easy in a book.

Learning Design
On HIST1002: “Reformation to Civil War”, the assignment is presented online together with detailed guidance notes and encouragement for students to make contact if any aspects are unclear. Students receive an introductory demonstration of the WebCT area to ensure that they can access and use this facility. Darren uses online discussion topics to add depth to face to face sessions, keeping one topic specific for general comments and posting thought provoking questions for students to respond to separately.

How was the learning organised?
- Visual
- Students evaluate resources
- Rewards for contribution

I want to encourage my students to make connections as they learn

Actively seeking out students’ conceptions and understanding of the current topic area through out-of-class web-based activities is one of the benefits of a blended learning approach.

A prize is sometimes offered as an added incentive to contribute.

There are currently 46 students on the module and they are presented with a wealth of resources and notes and encouraged to make connections to support their learning. They are asked to discuss the strengths and limitations of the sources available.

Blended learning
On MECS 3005: “Evil”, Darren has retained the same consistent approach and powerful use of images. The home page is divided clearly into areas: Resources, Seminar Notes, Module Documents and Discussions. In Seminar Notes students are reminded:

“These notes are provided in advance to help you to prepare for meetings and to supply a record of the themes covered. Please remember that attendance at meetings is compulsory.”

Darren has created a range of discussion areas with the comment:

Evaluation
Darren has applied for funding to undertake evaluation of his use of WebCT with his students.

WebCT enabled:
- Digital images to be used
- Assignment details online
- Tracking of student activity
- Access to resources
- Student preparation before sessions

“You are invited to offer your thoughts on the themes covered in this module. All polite and sensible contributions are welcome...there may be prizes!”

This one of his files is sure to encourage curiosity!
Help from the learning technologist is invaluable when re-using learning resources developed by another institution to design a module.

Karen’s experience in using WebCT for her Sport Enterprise module and re-using resources from another institution was included in a recent publication of E-Learning Case Studies at University of Worcester. All 8 of these case studies can be downloaded and read at:

http://www.worc.ac.uk/elearning/index.html

Re-use of content
Icons from TE3010 were adapted for re-use in SPOR3031 without the need to design these from scratch. "the nature of the content, its been very hands on and I feel that I can get the most out of it like that" "advantages include that all the lecture information is there for you before each session so you know what the lecture is going to be about".

Karen also noticed the group were able to define a subset of entrepreneurial skills leading to deeper understanding by the end of the module.

Use of WebCT
The focus was to develop an interactive on-line learning module in a WebCT format to include discussion groups, on-line surveys, materials and activities in order to support the development of entrepreneurial skills. Karen now feels that the time invested last year has allowed her to reap the benefits this year and work on development of a DVD and also a Masters programme. A Sports Management degree is planned for next year and an Outdoor Recreation Degree now includes ‘Enterprise and Innovation in Sport’ as one of the modules.

Karen found the funding to be invaluable in enabling the project to be developed.

What did the students think?
Students felt their IT skills improved:

The UoW Content Repository is a new initiative. You can:

- Share teaching materials
- Link from WebCT
- Access resources

For more details email the team at eos@worc.ac.uk
What might a EUNIS group do?

- how might information be gathered? A common set of questions or issues might be devised subject to group discussion/agreement
- a publication template could be devised after data collection. What ideas might people have for the format for this?
- can anyone here offer a case study?
- does anyone have a colleague whose activities we might feature?
Targets and aims

• could 12 case studies be gathered using contacts from this meeting?
• Could these be gathered and reported at EUNIS2008?

Thanks for listening…hope you can join the Case Studies group

Any questions?