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Working with E-Champions to Enhance Flexible Learning

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Summary: In September 2009 the Faculty of Business, Sport and Enterprise (FBSE) were successful in gaining funding from the Higher Education Academy (HEA), Business Management Accountancy and Finance (BMAF), Discipline focused Learning Technology Enhance Academy (DfLTEA) on a proposal to design a framework for blended learning delivery and pedagogic guidance for academics embarking on blended learning. A gap was identified as lecturers take traditional delivery methods and attempt to make them fit the blended learning model of delivery. The project aims to provide a better teaching and learning experience for the non-traditional adult learner by appointing e-champions on two blended delivery courses, to enhance our provision of blended learning courses and units. This case study describes the development of the blended learning framework.

Institutional, Course and Team Context

By definition of Southampton Solent University (SSU) mission statement; “SSU is committed to inclusive and flexible forms of Higher Education that meets the needs of employers and prepares students to succeed in a fast changing competitive world” One of the cornerstones of this commitment to flexible learning relies on the use of e-learning and the virtual campus. This is underpinned by the University’s Strategic Development Plan (SDP) which is committed to the development of flexible modes of delivery and offering new forms of e-learning.

The project is centred around two FBSE based courses: Foundation in Business (FdA) and Masters in Business (MABS), which were originally validated in 2006 and have been running since 2007. Both of the courses are aimed at the non-traditional adult learner and both courses recruit strongly from the Army, where the Business School has developed strong links. Students on these courses attend weekend on-campus session, four times per year. The gap between campus sessions requires directed self study supported by a combination of E-learning, E-tutor support, E-discussion and E-exercises via the University’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE); myCourse. Two units from both FdA and MABS were chosen in order to

develop blended learning case studies. The table below outlines the project team, their role, background and application.

Table 1: Project Team Context

Name	Role	Background and Application
Susan Patrick	Team Leader and E Champion	<i>Susan has experience of blended learning research from a previous TQEF project titled “Transition into or back into HE by Blending Learning: Students’ Perceptions and Expectations within FBSE.” Susan is MABS Course Leader and produced a one unit for the blending learning case study.</i>
Christina Dinsmore	Team Leader and E - Champion	<i>Christina is FdA course leader and produced one unit for the blended learning case study. Christina is undertaking a MProf, which includes a unit on blended learning.</i>
Timos Almpanis	Team Member and Learning Technologist	<i>Timos is undertaking a PhD in this area. Timos gives support, advice and training on technology to enhance and enable learning.</i>
Ruth McLellan	Team Member and E-Champion	<i>Ruth produced two units for the blended learning case study (one for MABS and 1 FdA.) Ruth is undertaking a PGC in Blended Learning.</i>
Andrëa Faustino	Team Member	<i>Andrëa provides a student’s perspective. Andrëa is enrolled on MABS and is in her second year. Andrea is also employed part-time in FBSE as Faculty Academic Quality Officer.</i>
Dr Whysnianti Basuki	Research Assistant	<i>Whysnianti is undertaking a PGC in Blended Learning.</i>

Project Outcomes

The following list details the intended project outcomes:

1. Design a framework of blended learning delivery and pedagogic guidance for academics embarking on blended learning.

2. Improve blended learning units by developing four case study units within FBSE.
3. Hold a showcase event on this project and invite other DfLTEA recipients to present.
4. Provide a 1 day IT training workshop for blended learning tutors teaching on MABS and FdA courses.
5. Provide information and guidance for the new lecturers' induction.
6. Disseminate project outcomes both internally within SSU and externally via conferences, networking, journal articles, etc.
7. MABS is being used as a case study example for a university wide online staff resource through the Flexible Delivery Support Team.
8. MABS is migrating to the new myCourse Pro platform as a pilot case.
9. Produce a final case study in January 2011, to be included in the BMAF website.

Support for Change

As part of the HEA, BMAF, DfLTEA commitment to this project, 3 days were spent at a 'Change Academy' residential in Leeds in January 2010, providing the team members with the time, space and personal development skills in order to clearly define and plan the project. A project action plan and evaluation plan was submitted and approved by the HEA in February 2010.

Development of the Blended Learning Framework

Initially a literature review was conducted on blended learning definitions to enhance our own pedagogic understanding of blended learning. The final agreed definition which was developed by the team was presented at the showcase event on the 10th June:

Characterised by the balanced application of learning technology building on sound pedagogic practice with the purpose of enhancing the learning experience of the student.

Characteristics of blended learning include the selective use of learning technologies used in

appropriate measure to complement traditional face to face teaching and learning methods.

Three key pieces of primary research were conducted with different stakeholders in order to develop the blended learning framework. The initial framework was presented in May 2010 at the FBSE Research and Enterprise conference. Attendees were asked for their feedback on the framework during an interactive workshop. This feedback from future E-champions was subsequently fed into the framework. Current FdA and MABS students were involved in an on-campus focus group in order to discuss their experiences of the blended learning approach to the course and good practice that they had experienced. This invaluable feedback helped to define support both on and off-campus required by the students which the framework would address. The FdA and MABS course teams were also involved in a course focus group to identify their understanding, challenges and blended learning practice. Based on the feedback and outcomes of the primary research a work in progress blended learning framework was presented at the project dissemination showcase event on the 10th June 2010. This event also included presentations from the University of Plymouth and Hull. Feedback from attendees on the framework was also obtained.

The diagram below presents the framework outcome of the research undertaken. The framework provides academics with four different approaches to blended learning and we are not advocating that teaching staff have to reach ‘Approach 4’. The choice of approach will be fundamentally based on pedagogic understand of the group being taught, plus the tutors own knowledge of using myCourse to support technology enhanced learning. See ‘Useful Links’ below for further information on this framework.

Flexible

Blended

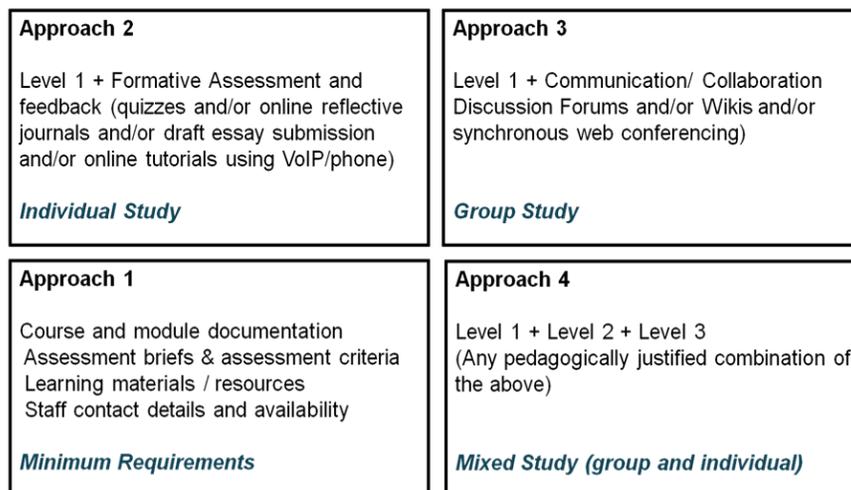


Diagram 1: Blended Learning Framework

Reflections

In order to support and assist other academics in becoming E-champions in their own right, we offer the following advice:

- Use support of the E-Development Team via Timos Almpanis/Roger Emery and the Flexible Delivery Support Team via Andrew Doig.
- Use E-assessment tools e.g Turnitin, Grademark and Peermark. Please contact Lorry West for more details.
- Use on-campus technology and book IT suites and use Learning Information Service (LIS) resources available, i.e. subject Librarian to deliver a session on research databases and how to access off-campus.
- Use on-campus session for recall and plenary activities, not solely information giving. This requires a complete rethink of how we spend our time in front of the students.
- Think about how you assess your students. Break it down into contained parts and provide plenty of formative feedback opportunities.
- Enrol on the PGC in Blended Learning - this will allow you to become a 'the student' and obtain a firsthand view of the difficulties involved in being a student on blended learning course. In addition, this course provides you with a much needed 'Community of Inquiry' which allows you to talk to others about your and their experiences. Please contact the course leader, David Moxon.
- The library stocks a number of excellent books from lead academics which are accessible and practical. Please refer to links in 'Useful Resources' below.

Limitations

There are important limitations to acknowledge. The ability to become an effective E-champion depends upon your willingness to understand and utilise the pedagogy behind teaching in a blended learning format. As outlined in the initial summary, it is not just a case of taking a traditional unit and putting it on the VLE. There are a number of ways that you can develop your understanding, and these have been outlined in the 'Reflections' above.

Whilst the framework has been developed, it is still yet to be fully tested on a complete cohort of students for an entire academic year. We would welcome any feedback on the framework that would help with our ongoing evaluations.

Future Developments

The four case study units will be available to view via myCourse from October onwards. Please refer to 'Useful links' below for more details. It is hoped that new lecturer's induction will include the blended learning framework and guidelines from this project.

Useful Links

HEA BMAF Link: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/business/projects/detail/discipline-focused_learning_technology_enhancement

MyCourse Link to Case Study Sites

Unit Code	Unit Title	Course	Developed by
BUS108	Business and Academic Skills - Blended Learning	FdA	Christina Dinsmore
MKT310	Marketing Principles-Blended Learning	FdA	Ruth McLellan
BUS104BL	Personal Development Planning	MABS	Susan Patrick
MKT408BL	Principles of Marketing Principles (BL)	MABS	Ruth McLellan

Textbooks

GARRISON R., and N.VAUGHAN., 2008. *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles and Guidelines*. San Francisco: Wiley.

MACDONALD, J., 2006. *Blended Learning and Online Tutoring: a Good Practice Guide*. Aldershot: Ashgate

SALMON, G., 2000. *E-moderating. The Key to Teaching and Learning Online*. London: Kogan Page

SALMON, G. 2002. *E-tivities. The Key to Online Learning*. London: Kogan Page.

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