



First year student experience Wales

A practice guide

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and First Year Experience Wales project group members



Contents

Introduction	2
Index of initiatives	4
Initiatives designed to encourage communities of practice	
Institution-wide	6
School or faculty-wide	12
Programme, scheme or award level	14
Initiatives designed to encourage student academic engagement	
Institution-wide	18
School or faculty-wide	32
Programme, scheme or award level	35
Module or subject level	38
References	40

Introduction

The Higher Education Academy in Wales regularly meets with several consultative groups from the Welsh Higher Education Institutions. At one such group¹ the desire to share current initiatives and practice designed to support the first year experience was voiced. The University of Glamorgan volunteered to coordinate a special interest group and each institution nominated a member of staff to join the project team. The project became known as the First Year Experience Action Set and over the last academic year participants have worked together to bring a collection of initiatives forward for wider dissemination.

The group has also established a wiki (more details are contained later in this publication) which will now become an open access resource for those interested in the first year experience to add their own initiatives and join the lively debates that the group has enjoyed over the last year.

The group hope you find this publication, and the resources on the wiki, useful for enhancing practice concerning the first year student experience.

Overview and aim of the project

The First Year Experience group wanted this publication to be an open and honest review of things that have worked, and things that could have gone better! Our overall aim was to share experiences of developing initiatives designed to support and enhance the first year student experience in Wales and we have benefitted immensely from the very positive approach that all group members took in willingly sharing the good, the bad (and the sometimes ugly) experiences along the way. We see this publication as contributing to the evidence on how to enhance the First Year Experience in UK higher education.

This publication does not aim to cover every first year experience initiative currently underway in Higher Education Institutions in Wales, but to provide a taster of a wide range of initiatives within the institutions – from something working at module level right through to institution-wide initiatives. Of course each of the initiatives could be up (or down) scaled depending on how you want to apply them. Most of the initiatives include a contact name but if a contact name is not shown, then the representative member of the institution will be happy to answer queries. In this way, the group hope to establish a network of shared views about the first year experience throughout Wales and beyond and we hope that you find this publication a useful starting point for that network.

The group received upwards of seventy initiatives and has had to be selective about those offered in this publication. It should not be assumed, therefore, that because we have highlighted an initiative in one institution that similar work is not underway in others – we just had to stop somewhere! It is also true that the initiatives in place to support the first year experience are always growing and it is perhaps inevitable that HEI are developing their work in this area at different rates. The aim of this publication is to offer something for everyone to consider in enhancing the first year experience in higher education.

¹ The Welsh Institutional Group (WIG), comprising the HEA's nominated senior contact responsible for learning and teaching from each Welsh HEI

Why the focus on communities of practice and student academic engagement as the two themes?

It rapidly became clear that the group would need to narrow the focus of their work in order to set achievable outcomes. After some discussion concerning the many facets of student retention and the volume of work being carried out in HEIs throughout Wales to strengthen the first year experience, the group decided to focus on collecting examples of practice which could be related to either of two themes – communities of practice and student academic engagement.

The literature concerning student retention in higher education has for many years acknowledged the importance of academic and social integration in student success. Whilst this is a practice guide, those interested in the literature concerning student retention and in the themes of communities of practice and student engagement may find the following a useful starting point (Beder 1997, Tinto 1997, Rhodes and Nevill 2004, Wilcox, Winn and Fyvie-Gauld 2005, Crosling, Thomas and Heagney 2008).

It was evident that there were examples of good, innovative and perhaps most importantly, evidence-based practices that were bringing about improvements to the first year experience. Many of those practices involved initiatives designed to make students feel settled and part of the learning community they were joining. Others were focussed on improving student academic engagement.

How to use this guide

The initiatives have been grouped under the two themes and are then presented in the following order:

- Initiatives implemented throughout an institution;
- Initiatives implemented in one School or Faculty;
- Initiatives at programme, scheme or award level;
- Initiatives at module or subject level.

Where appropriate further reading is also suggested.

First Year Experience group members

Aberystwyth – John Powell
Cardiff – Nathan Roberts
Bangor – Sue Niebrzydowski
Glamorgan – Karen Fitzgibbon (Group Leader)
Glyndwr – Bridgett Pugh
Newport – Tony Rucinski
Open University in Wales – Ceri Willoughby
Swansea – Phil Brophy, Sarah Huws-Davies
Trinity – Gwilym Dyfri Jones
UWIC – Nicola Poole

The First Year Experience Wales wiki

<http://firstyearexperiencewales.wetpaint.com/>

The wiki contains details of the initiatives in this publication, plus some additional material which may be of interest. Each institution has their own page and further contributions are welcome.

During the preparation of the case studies, the wiki was available to group members only, but we are pleased that this will now become an open resource for anyone interested in sharing their practice and enhancing the first year student experience in Wales and beyond.

Acknowledgements

The Group would like to thank Gabriel Jezierski (Senior Advisor for HEA in Wales) for his support of the project, and to acknowledge the commitment of the HEA to promoting good practice in the first year student experience. Each group member has been supported by colleagues within their institutions and the group would like to thank those colleagues for their ongoing commitment. The contributors of the case studies have given their time in preparing the materials displayed in this publication and the group would like to thank them for their generous support. Finally, Karen Fitzgibbon would like to acknowledge the members of the group for the spirit of sharing that each member brought to the group, and for their efforts in bringing together such an impressive range of case studies.

Index of initiatives contained in this publication or on the wiki

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Name of initiative	Implementation level	Institution	Page	Contributor
Re-Freshers	Institution wide	Aberystwyth	6	Contact: John Powell
Study Skills Drop in Advisory Service	Institution wide	Bangor	6	Delyth Murphy
Information literacy training	Institution wide	Cardiff	7	Cathie Jackson
Authentic learning clinic	Programme/Scheme/Award	Glamorgan	14	Kieran Vivian-Byrne
Mathematical modelling through group work	Programme/Scheme/Award	Glamorgan	15	John Hayward
Coaching community of practice	Programme/Scheme/Award	Glamorgan	17	Dean Parsons
Student liaison officers	School or Faculty	Glyndŵr	12	Bridget Pugh
Co-ordinated approach to year one activities	School or Faculty	Newport	13	Richard Clarke
Pre-enrolment social networking using NING	Institution wide	Newport	8	Allan Theophanides
Pre-enrolment contact with students	Institution wide	Newport	8	Kerry Bellamy
Money Doctors Project	Institution wide	Swansea	9	Rob Ellis
Arrivals weekend	Institution wide	Swansea	9	Simon Wright
Freshers Helpdesk	Institution wide	Swansea	10	Jenni Soper
Academic Skills Advisors	School or Faculty	UWIC	13	Alex Osmond

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Name of initiative	Implementation level	Institution	Page	Contributor
Personal tutoring – Certificate in Supporting students	Institution wide	Aberystwyth	25	Caryl Davies John Powell
Code of practice for assessment	Institution wide	Bangor	21	Ioan Ap Dewi
Peer guide scheme	Institution wide	Bangor	23	Kim Davies

Name of initiative	Implementation level	Institution	Page	Contributor
Home students induction	Institution wide	Bangor	24	Fran Tate
Portfolio of Academic Skills	School or Faculty	Bangor	32	Martha Khan
PDP for undergraduate students	School or Faculty	Bangor	25	Martha Khan
Enhancing pastoral support	School or Faculty	Bangor	37	Sue Peet
Student focus groups on assessment	Programme/Scheme/Award	Cardiff	36	Claire Wardle
Employability and Professional Development	Programme/Scheme/Award	Glamorgan	35	Sam Birstow Mary Broomfield
Computerised peer-assessment	Module or subject	Glamorgan	38	Phil Davies
Voluntary buddy system	Programme/Scheme/Award	Glamorgan	36	David Byfield
GlamStart student simulation	Institution wide	Glamorgan	22	Martin Lynch
Online learner support tools	Institution wide	Glamorgan	22	Julie Prior Karen Fitzgibbon
Pre-fresher workshops	Institution wide	Glyndŵr	18	Bridget Pugh
Peer supporters – guides for new students	Institution wide	Glyndŵr	20	Bridget Pugh
Student Support Mechanisms	School or Faculty	Newport	32	Mike Simmons
SMS text messaging	Institution wide	Newport	21	Michael Webb
School ethos for first year students	School or Faculty	Newport	32	Gary Pritchard
PASS	Module or subject	Swansea	39	Sarah Huws-Davies
Life through a lens	Programme/Scheme/Award	UWIC	37	Nicola Poole
Peer mentoring	Programme/Scheme/Award	UWIC	31	Nicola Poole
Student and Staff expectations project	Institution wide	UWIC	26	Nicola Poole
UWIC Diary room	Institution wide	UWIC	26	Nicola Poole
PDP Using Web 2.0	School or Faculty	UWIC	33	Nicola Poole
Library induction vodcast	School or Faculty	UWIC	33	Nicola Poole
Getting Started Forums	Institution wide	The OU in Wales	27	Ceri Willoughby
Careers Forums and Wikis	Institution wide	The OU in Wales	28	Ellen Cocking Patrick Kelly Ceri Willoughby
Proactive Student Support	Institution wide	The OU in Wales	29	Ceri Willoughby
Library online training	Institution wide	The OU in Wales	29	Helen Clough
Skills for Study website	Institution wide	The OU in Wales	30	Ceri Willoughby

Initiatives designed to encourage communities of practice

Institution-wide

RE-FRESHERS ABERYSTWYTH

Keywords

community, connection, belonging

Aim

The second term of university can be challenging for some students, with an increase in withdrawals and other social problems. The first term brings a new way of living and many students miss the initial bonding that occurs in the first few weeks as they are still trying to get to grips with timetables, campus, moving away from home etc. We highlighted that a month into the first term would be a good time to target students who missed out on the Freshers' Fayre with a "second bite of the cherry" and an opportunity to ask information and advice – we also decided to use sport and exercise as a way to foster a sense of relatedness to the University through fostering friendship, fun and enjoyment. By being pro-active in addressing issues of loneliness and stress with social and group meetings that did not involve alcohol we hoped that students would gain confidence and a sense of identity with the University by taking part in sport or exercise, or through a more cognitive approach by introducing relaxation through music and theatre and finally, adding sound nutritional advice e.g. how to cook a meal for £1, for a complete holistic approach.

Description/approach

A "refresher" (as opposed to "freshers") day was organised at the guild bringing together many university departments to both encourage students to take part in sport or activity, to ask questions or to get students to

volunteer their own advice on how to make friends and settle in. Activities included:

- "Having second thoughts?"
- Money doctor
- University Music Centre
- Signpost Mentoring
- Sports Centre
- Stressbuster
- Union Societies/Athletic Union
- Healthy Eating
- Arts Centre
- AHA card
- International buddies
- Three networked computers for students to test their budget and student survival skills
- Prizes for best ideas – a wall of post it notes and winners chosen at the end.

Anticipated outcomes

Reduction in student problems in second term e.g. less stress.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Not sure!

Reflection/impact

Positive feedback from students involved. Beginning of term is really busy and it was good to run this a few weeks in for those who missed the initial sign ups. Also good to connect with other departments. Followed on from the summer Fit and Well Campaign for staff and led to the Fit and Well month for all staff and students in Jan/Feb 09. 10% more students using the Sports Centre than last year.

STUDY SKILLS DROP-IN ADVISORY SERVICE BANGOR

Keywords

support, retention, achieving potential

Aim

The aim of this initiative was to aid retention by providing enhanced study support in the form of a weekly drop-in, confidential advisory service: support being provided in general study skills, mathematics and statistics. This support was and is available through the medium of Welsh and English to all Bangor University students.

Description/approach

After piloting different study skills initiatives, a drop-in advisory service for general study skills has been introduced. Demand by colleagues and students quickly led to the establishment of further weekly sessions for support with mathematics and statistics. Based within Lifelong Learning, this service provides weekly, confidential one-to-one support both for students who find academic study skills an initial challenge, as well as those wishing to improve their performance and achieve their potential. Reports are given, as relevant, to the Senior Tutor Group and to the Widening Access and Participation Task Group.

Anticipated outcomes

- Increased confidence and self-esteem, thereby promoting retention;
- Improvement in students' academic study skills and understanding of maths/statistics, leading to improved marks.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- Student feedback, indicating improved marks and confidence
- Lecturer feedback, indicating improved skills in students.

Reflection/impact

Having trialled other study skills options and given the limited resources available, it is felt that the drop-in advisory service is the most efficient and effective method of providing much needed study support to those students who need it. Raising awareness of this service amongst students in schools across the university is a challenge but demand is steadily growing. Colleagues have an important, influential part to play in referring students to the service. Basing the service in Lifelong Learning, where the tutors have much experience in support and teaching study skills, provides an opportunity for students to seek confidential advice from outside the Schools where they are registered.

This confidentiality is important as students are sometimes concerned that, if they are seen to seek help, this will label them as 'weak' students. This project adds to students' empowerment and autonomy as they themselves are able to decide when and how much study support they need.

INFORMATION LITERACY TRAINING CARDIFF

Keywords

information literacy

Aim

To develop taught undergraduate and postgraduate students' information literacy to equip them for academic life. The teaching is tailored to and embedded into the curriculum on a course by course basis and learning opportunities are designed by module leaders in partnership with subject librarians.

Description/approach

Subject librarians seek to work with each taught course to deliver not only an orientation to the library and online resources, but to embed the development of information literacy into their studies.

To support tutors and subject librarians as they create information literacy teaching materials, the web-based Information Literacy Resource Bank offers innovative, interactive and interesting learning objects. Each learning object is bite-sized and highly re-usable within any discipline, and most can be adapted for use in both e-learning and printed materials. Interactive exercises, quizzes, cartoons, diagrams, animated sequences and podcasts are all available. Topics include avoiding plagiarism, citing and referencing, evaluating information and search techniques amongst others.

Anticipated outcomes

Through embedding the library's teaching within the academic curriculum, students will better gain an understanding of the kind of information needed for research, be able to locate relevant information appropriate to their discipline and use it with academic integrity to fulfil the outcomes of the programme of study.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The initiative grows from year to year, with 55% of taught undergraduate and postgraduates now provided with information literacy teaching embedded into their curriculum; an increase from 48% last year and 39% in the previous year. This integrated teaching builds on the orientation to the library and online resources already provided by subject librarians to 93% of students.

Reflection/impact

Progress to embed information literacy is dependent on the shared values and successful dialogue between module leader and the relevant subject librarian.

The strategy of integrating information literacy training within the individual programmes requires a wide range of teaching strategies and flexibility in teaching approaches from the subject librarian, and the adaptation of learning outcomes to the needs of the students and programme. Subject librarians need to be supported in this process. Examples of support mechanisms at Cardiff University include the Information Literacy Resource Bank, the Handbook of Information Literacy Teaching (www.cf.ac.uk/insrv/educationandtraining/infolit/hilt) and the sharing of successful lesson materials between subject librarians.

SOCIAL NETWORKING PRE-ENROLMENT USING NING!

NEWPORT

Keywords

student expectation, Learning technology, student communication, student engagement, social networking

The University has launched a social network service dedicated to students who have either accepted a place to study, those having applied late through clearing, or those thinking about coming – <http://newportstudents.ning.com>

The service is a comprehensive social networking facility based on free software available from www.ning.com and was relatively easy to configure and establish in a short period of time.

Anticipated outcomes

The aims were to present students prior to attending the University, with an opportunity to become part of the organisation and make friends, meet peers and ask questions well before they arrived physically. The site would allow for individual profiles to be tailored with pictures and information, discrete discussion groups to be established and informal social networks to be formed.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The first pilot which was not heavily publicised resulted in over 700 new students subscribing and participating actively before the beginning of the new academic session.

Along with these students, members of academic and administrative staff along with students' mentors joined in to develop a plethora of virtual activity and newly formed friendships. Topics discussed and groups formed on subjects ranging from "Which accommodation should I apply for" to course related discussions – and even preferences (or otherwise) for 1980s cartoons!

Reflection/impact

To our surprise and delight, the new service saw many users participating (staff and students) who had never previously used a social networking facility. The ease of use, flexibility and dedicated nature of the site seemed to have a lasting appeal – along with the fact that it was predominantly pink! Even so, the site was and is intended as a stepping stone into use of the University's "main stream" virtual learning facilities including School blogs, wikis, online forums and of course the MLE.

CONTACT WITH STUDENTS PRIOR TO WELCOME WEEK

NEWPORT

Keywords

student mentors, pre-enrolment student engagement

Aim

To put all pre-enrolled full-time undergraduate students in contact with other students (mentors) prior to enrolment, and thereby smooth the transition into the institution and help manage expectations.

Description/approach

Student Mentors currently telephone applicants who have accepted places at the University prior to their attending the campus at the beginning of the first term. This activity is done over the summer months as people accept. Additionally Student Mentors are involved with interview days and a new initiative involving the sending of a congratulations card from the mentors along side any offer letters that go out from Admissions, offering contact with Student Mentors via email if students have queries about anything prior to arrival. Mentors are also active on "Newspace" (see social networking initiative) during the summer.

Anticipated outcomes

A friendly contact from somebody who has recently "been there and done that" is intended to give new students

reassurance from a warm and sympathetic perspective. This in turn is aimed at helping the student to overcome any transitional obstacles as they move into HE and to assist them in what to expect when they arrive and how they can adapt to the new environment.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Several hundred students have been contacted via the mentors' initiatives mentioned above and, while it is still too early to identify definite trends from statistical information in terms of the influence of this activity over time, feedback from students on the approach of the mentors has been overwhelmingly positive and very well received.

Reflection/impact

With such a diverse student body and a prominent widening access agenda, the initiative is an obvious benefit to any students who may be feeling trepidation or uncertainty over what to expect having accepted a place at University. Importance has been placed on the use of different communication methods and media so as to reach the widest possible audience with the scheme – phone, letter, email and social media.

MONEY DOCTORS SWANSEA

Keywords

budgeting, debt advice, overdrafts, bank charges, credit cards, statutory student support, financial responsibilities and financial capabilities.

Aim

Swansea University was selected by the Financial Services Authority (FSA) as an 'Early Developer' of 'Money Doctors', an innovative programme to help students develop money management skills. The programme offers workshop sessions and advice to help students confront debt, take control of their money and plan for the future. Money Doctors now constitutes part of an accredited module in some first year degree programmes within the School of Business and Economics and the School of Arts.

The target audience is university students and young people before they reach University.

Description/approach

- lectures as part of "study skills" modules in Languages and Business schools

- university open days
- events based in University aimed at trying to engage students to think about their finances
- interactive presentations to new and prospective students based within the University or FE colleges or Schools
- 1:2:1 advice sessions, helping students with budgeting or as part of our debt counselling service.

Anticipated outcomes

- increase confidence, knowledge, skills and understanding of personal finances
- help students take control, make choices and not ignore money problems for fear or embarrassment
- encourage financial capabilities for life.

Reflection/impact

- lectures have highlighted importance of taking control of finances at an early stage and improved knowledge of assistance available, both on statutory and non statutory basis
- not all schools within the University have agreed to lectures as part of "study skills" modules within their courses
- website used to provide information on services offered and use of Blackboard to be developed over the course of the coming months to increase accessibility of information
- ability to interact with students on 1:2:1 basis assists with getting the message across that simple measures can be taken to keep budgets under control.

ARRIVALS WEEKEND SWANSEA

Keywords:

meet and greet; welcome speeches; informal chats; students and parents; information; reassurance; social networking opportunity; orientation; cultural, faith and information stalls; international students welcome event.

Aim

- to welcome new students to the University;
- to provide an opportunity for parents to participate in a welcome event and take a refreshment break before returning home;
- to enable the Vice Chancellor and key University and Students' Union staff to welcome students and provide key information;
- to provide information, assistance and reassurance to new arrivals;

- to enable new students to meet each other and help them settle in;
- to start the Orientation process for new international students;
- to provide a Civic welcome to new international students.

Description/approach

Arrivals events take place on the main campus and in the student village. New students and their parents are invited to take free refreshments and mingle with staff of the University and Students' Union. Welcome speeches are made by the Vice-Chancellor, Students Union and Athletic Union. Student Services staff are on hand to provide information and advice, a range of information resources are available and on the main site campus tours are offered.

The International Student Advisory Service organises a cultural, faith & information fair and local trips. The weekend culminates in the International Students Welcome Event on Sunday evening. A buffet and cultural entertainment are provided and the evening is hosted by the VC and Lord Mayor of Swansea.

Anticipated outcomes

That students settle in more easily and make a smooth transition to studying at Swansea. That anxieties and difficulties are identified and appropriately referred at the earliest opportunity. A range of useful information resources are available. That students identify appropriate sources of support at an early stage.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Verbal feedback from parents indicates that the event gives them a welcome opportunity to engage with the institution, meet key staff and feel reassured about separating from the young people they will be leaving behind.

Changes in arrival satisfaction

Autumn 2007 to Autumn 2008:

Most improved elements for arrival satisfaction (improved satisfaction ratings by 5 percentage points or more):

- Other Friends – satisfaction increased by 14.5 percentage points
- Meeting Staff – satisfaction increased by 11.2 percentage points
- Local Orientation – satisfaction increased by 10.4 percentage points
- Welcome – satisfaction increased by 9.1 percentage points
- Registration – satisfaction increased by 7.2

- percentage points
- Study Sense – satisfaction increased by 6.7 percentage points
- Finance Office – satisfaction increased by 6.6 percentage points
- Formal Welcome – satisfaction increased by 5.6 percentage points
- Arrival Average – satisfaction increased by 5.7 percentage points

Arrival elements with most reduced levels of satisfaction (reduced satisfaction ratings by 5 percentage points or more):

- Social Activities – satisfaction decreased by 5 percentage points

FRESHERS' HELPDESK SWANSEA

Keywords

freshers, arrivals, helpdesk, warm welcome, friendly face, to inform advise and assist, clarification of procedures, campus/library/one-to-one tours, information pick up point – printed and verbal, 'how do i' and 'i where can i' answers.

Aim

To be a very visible presence – being 'there' throughout arrivals weekend and Freshers week to welcome all arrivals to Swansea University during the start of term, including new students/parents/friends/relatives who may be bringing new students to join us.

To chat and promote the friendly (and memorable) face of Student Support Services, to alert people to our existence (who we are and what we do) and the availability of our service, through finding satisfactory resolutions to any kind of query face to face, regardless of how great or small the problem may be.

Description/approach

A stand in one of the most prominent places in the University, ensuring our presence is seen by as many people as possible both specific visitors to the desk as well as passers by. Maximising the opportunity to publicise our individual support services, their availability and how the services interact and work as a one stop shop (to staff as well as students), through flyers, display boards/posters and exhibition stands.

Information/help desk there to answer any enquiry, manned by Student Support Staff and Student Ambassadors (approx 15) employed and coached by us for specifics and Student Recruitment for more generic University stuff. Frequently asked questions, prepared in advance and provided to Ambassadors as part of preparations.

We contact local organisations/tourist information for 'free stuff' that will attract people to the stand but will also be useful to the students, for example Mini Rough Guide to Wales, alternative travel maps (public transport and cycle routes), wall planners incorporating security tips, drink spikeys, personal alarms and UV property markers from the Police and related safety partnerships – they also have a friendly approachable uniformed staff presence for a small part of the ten day period.

Specialist training given to staff ambassadors, should it be required. For example relating to disabled student intake if numbers are high for that year – i.e. working with students with visual impairment.

Routes set and speaking notes given for campus and library tours. However, personal 'one to one' option available during less busy times i.e. 'sports' tours, 'school' or 'course' specific tours available on request.

A 'how to do' of specialist proceedings happening during the course of the week, for example *enrolment* – enrolment timetables held at the desk containing information of where students need to be and when, guidance on what they will be doing through the process, to ensure they have carried out all stages successfully.

Letting space also works specifically to groups working alongside you i.e. Police and Safety Partnerships.

Welcome Pack; pick up point for Students staying off-campus.

Anticipated outcomes

Everyone who encounters the helpdesk and / or its staff achieves a satisfactory response (immediate or possibly delayed for more complex enquiries) to any questions/queries they may have and learns a little about Student Support Services (who we are and what we do).

Evidence of actual outcomes

New students returning time after time during the full duration of the ten days, to use and re-use the services of the desk and covering staff, to obtain answers, resolve problems and queries. Students visibly moving around

campus, carrying or using our literature to get them around. Students popping back to the desk, speaking with Ambassadors / staff on campus, or popping into the office to say thank you.

Reflection/impact

We find staff that manage the desk and new arrivals alike, both make many friends during the week, the feel good factor excellent for the morale of new students, who may not know anyone else on campus - costs nothing, great for morale and no impact on the environment.

Ambassadors receive training / learn skills they can use else where. They get more sociable hours and slightly better rates of pay than most of standard work aimed at students. There is also the possibility of earning themselves recommendations to work events, carry out tasks during the course of the rest of the year.

Lots of tourist information distributed, not only for Swansea but South Wales as a whole.

Police have the opportunity for a face to face welcome – making them more approachable should the need arise.

Student Support Services then have good bank of student ambassadors to call on for future events.

Through the door numbers increase annually and we continue to be a well used, successful department with a great reputation offering an excellent service.

School or faculty-wide

STUDENT LIAISON OFFICERS GLYNDŴR

Keywords

student liaison-tracking and monitoring, student attendance, student progression, advice and support

The role of Student Liaison Officer was initially piloted within the curriculum area for Built Environment in February 2008 as part of the School of Science and Technology. In July 2008 the role was later extended to cover Science and Engineering. Plans are in progress to introduce this initiative into the Schools of Business, and Computing/Computing Technologies.

Aim

The aim of student liaison is to ensure students are monitored for attendance and assignment submission, in order to provide early intervention for those who may be experiencing problems. This role is performed by a student liaison officer who monitors student attendance and assignment submission. The target group is primarily 1st year undergraduates, but second and third year students may be included.

Description/approach

Following successful interview one person was appointed to the role of Student Liaison Officer in February 2008 whose job is to monitor student attendance and contact those who fail to attend lectures or meet assignment deadline dates. The appointed person acts as a liaison between students and academic tutors, and works to ensure that students are referred for the appropriate support, or are able to gain access to tutors in order to obtain academic advice. In summer 2008 the role was expanded to provide a summer support scheme to track and monitor 'at risk' students required to re-submit assignments or re-sit exams following June/July assessments boards.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcomes will be that as a result of regular monitoring and early intervention, there will be an eventual improvement in first year progression, and fewer students having to re-sit assessments. Of those students needing to undertake re-sits it is anticipated that through regular liaison

the likelihood of returning to study will increase thus avoiding disillusion and drop out.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The role of student liaison is not as yet well established enough to judge the longer term effects on student progression. Despite this evidence from the extra monitoring and support undertaken during July/August 08 does suggest the role having some impact on at risk students.

Data evidence suggests a correlation between this monitoring role and an increase in students returning following re-sit or repeat year requirements from summer 2008 assessment boards. In September 2008 there appeared to be a 13% increase (as a percentage of enrolments) in this type of student returning to continue into the second year of their course. There also appeared to be a direct correlation between the type of contact and the likelihood of students returning. The student group were monitored, and of those where successful personal contact was made and guidance provided, 85% returned to resume their studies, compared with a 51% return from those students e mailed, and 41% of those who could not be contacted. Longer term evidence of outcomes will continue to be monitored.

Reflection/impact

Within the university the role of Student Liaison is a new organisational development which could serve to bridge a gap in student support. Currently both teaching and administrative staff have to focus on their main role – academics with teaching assessment and research, and administrative staff supporting the clerical and organisational needs within their particular courses. It is felt that the student liaison role gets lost with the consequences of risking early student withdrawal. Agreement has been reached about the need for a first point of contact for students experiencing difficulties, and once the role of student liaison becomes established it could be subsumed as part of a tutorial system for first year undergraduates. Students would receive the additional advice and guidance needed and the innovation could become vital in improving the student experience as well as impacting directly on student success.

Plans are in place to develop this role further and appoint persons in the areas for Business, and Computing/Communications Technology.

YEAR ONE CO-ORDINATION IN EDUCATION & HUMANITIES USING BLOGS NEWPORT

Keywords

student expectation, learning technology, blogs, professional practice, reflective learning, student communication, student engagement

Description/approach

New students who attend teaching placements remote from the University are invited to coordinate in the development of online reflective journals (blogs) with the rest of the cohort and members of the academic staff.

Anticipated outcomes

Several weeks away from the University on placement and away from newly found friends and academic support can often be a pressurised and disorientating experience for new teaching students. The aim of this activity was to use learning technologies to maintain the supportive group atmosphere irrespective of geographical divides.

Evidence of actual outcomes

While it was hoped that the online blogs (replacing more conventional hand written reflective journals) would allow all members of the cohort to appreciate that they were not alone in what they were doing, it's fair to say that nobody on the group really expected the extent of the positive outcome that followed. Many students used the opportunity to share teaching ideas, concerns, seek advice on dealing with difficult situations and generally relished the opportunity to discuss their experiences in real-time. The interaction resulted in some much deeper reflective practice than might otherwise have taken place. The value of the activity can be seen principally in the use of journals as a shared formative learning tool rather than simply as an individual reflection on experience.

Reflection/impact

Use of a relatively simple online tool allowed for the creation of a democratic space which allowed students to share ideas and common experiences in a way that is not normally possible given the constraints of available time together at the University. Students from similar subject backgrounds were also able to share ideas in an ad-hoc and informal way that undoubtedly improved their approach to practice in the classroom.

ACADEMIC SKILLS CLASSES IN THE SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION & HEALTH SCIENCE UWIC

Keywords

academic skills, first year, foundation year, key skills, study skills, academic style, exam preparation, revision, citation, referencing, giving effective presentations.

How was the initiative introduced

The initiative – lessons on key academic skills – took place across the Schools of Education and Health Sciences in a foundation course involving full and part-time students from both schools and first year Community Education students in the School of Education. The lessons were set up following a fairly standard process.

Aim

The subjects of the lessons were: citation and referencing, giving effective presentations, revision and exam preparation, and academic style. The aim was to raise students' awareness of the skills levels expected of them in an institute of Higher Education, and to give them confidence in the different skill areas.

The Process

1. Lecturer contacts academic skills team

Meeting takes place to determine how team can meet the desired outcomes e.g. are we solving a learning problem, teaching a new skill, or reinforcing an existing one? Logistical aspects include finding date and suitable place in curriculum (usually within a study/research skills or PDP module).

2. Appropriate format for lessons is discussed/decided, e.g. f2f, e-learning, blended learning

A one off, or a series, as was done for Community Education. Circumstances determined e.g. large lecture hall and large group, studio or classroom space.

3. Planning

What existing material can be used? Lessons are made subject-specific using material provided by Course Programme Leaders (CPLs) e.g. old student work, exam questions; sometimes research is done by team members who are writing material.

Task-based approach nearly always taken, with focus on learners doing guided discovery tasks with feedback after short inputs from instructor. Learners will always take away a completed worksheet for future use: we try not to

provide handouts which are just for reference.

4. *Material submitted for verification by CPL.*

5. *Delivery.*

6. *Feedback from tutors/students*

This comes in different formats e.g. email, informal focus group.

7. *Future action decided*

Decision whether the same lesson will be staged again with next year's cohort, and what improvements need making to material.

8. *Material stored in team document library.*

Description/approach

The lessons all took the form of one to two hour sessions in which, after short periods of teaching by me, the students were divided into groups, which then completed various tasks. The tasks were all completed on a worksheet, which the students then took away from the session.

Anticipated outcomes

An improvement in the quality, and the awareness, of the Academic Skills discussed in the sessions.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The primary indicator of success was student feedback to tasks within the sessions, which was mostly very positive. Tasks usually became more difficult through the session, and the fact that students still responded well, suggested that their awareness and confidence with the skills were both improving.

Reflection/impact

It seems that many students entering University are not fully comfortable with the skills expected of them; whether or not these skills are actually presented to them in face-to-face sessions seems to vary massively from school to school. Awareness of these skills 'from the ground up' can't help but improve performance throughout the degree, as more complex skills (research and critical thinking, for example) become needed. Most students respond very well in the sessions, and this is backed up by evidence from the tutors who ask us to set up these sessions, and who, of course, go on to assess the students' work.

Programme, scheme or award level

BSC COUNSELLING AUTHENTIC LEARNING CLINIC GLAMORGAN

Keywords

authentic learning; collaboration; team work; practicum

Aim

The aim of the initiative is: "To move towards greater 'embodied' awareness of 'counselling' as a practice within a community of practices".

What is an Authentic Learning Clinic?

An authentic learning clinic is a simulated environment set up for the purpose of offering students an experience of practice which resembles and is isomorphic* with an actual clinical experience.

(*Isomorphism from the Greek isos = equal and morph = form. This means that its parts and processes are similar in form and relation).

Who is the client?

The clients are played by students who take on the role (i.e. the sociological part) and the character (i.e. the psychological presentation – or the "mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual" Oxford Dictionary) in practice contexts of their own choosing.

Does the student use his or her own personal material?

No.

But the student in role as client draws from their own imaginations and from research, composite stories and personalities for the client they play. The student will create scenarios based on a range of sources. Research in this context might mean case studies in counselling literature of clients presenting with difficulties in relation to particular themes e.g. drug and alcohol misuse; eating problems, relationship difficulties; or stories drawn from art, literature, films and tv; or composites from life experience.

Who is the counsellor?

The counsellor is the student in training practice. Each student will have an opportunity to practice 'live' in an Authentic Learning clinic with the benefit of input from their Practice tutor and their team. Each session will be recorded so that the student can analyse their practice in detail after the event.

Are the ALC's assessed?

No.

The ALC is a learning workshop only. Assessments for practice are carried out within Case Presentations, which take place at key points in the course (midpoint and end of Year One, end of Years Two and Three). However we are hopeful that the ALCs will enhance the ability of the students to complete successful case presentations.

What is the role of the consulting team?

The consulting team works to maximise the learning of the whole group. They are responsible for actively participating with what they are observing through reflections, questions, and suggestions and through making connections with the wider theoretical ideas in the field and their own understanding of the counselling process.

What is the role of the practice tutor?

The practice tutor is responsible for managing the whole learning process in general by providing opportunities for students to participate at a number of different levels in relation to the counselling scenario. This will include improvising coaching opportunities with the key role-takers; using techniques, which will help students, make links between practice and theories.

Anticipated outcomes

1. We expect that students will have a more embodied awareness of counselling as a practice which sits within a community of practices which involve their clients, colleagues and wider significant systems.
2. We expect that students will have developed sufficient skill and confidence through participation in ALCs, to be a 'competent and safe enough' practitioner within the training placements which begin in Year Two.
3. We expect that students will have developed awareness, skills and confidence in taking up their roles within practice teams.
4. We expect that students will have a more thorough awareness of the importance of the relationship

between theory and practice and greater ability to transfer skills within counselling practices.

Evidence of actual outcomes

We are still in the pilot stage – reflections and evaluations to follow.

At the end of each day students have an opportunity to evaluate their own experience and participation with the following guide questions:

Reflect on your experience of participating in the Learning clinic using the following headings (be specific):

- What theoretical ideas did you notice you and your colleagues practice today? What theoretical ideas will you wish to explore in more depth in order to make more sense of your experience?
- What did you notice in the sessions about how clients and counsellors engaged with one another to develop a therapeutically useful relationship? What evidence of engagement did you see or experience?
- What ethical implications might need to be considered in relation to the sessions? What issues of difference and diversity were most evident to you as active in the sessions e.g. gender, race? How did these show themselves?
- What are the implications for you in what you experienced today in relation to personal self awareness? What implications might this have for your ongoing learning and development?
- What did you notice about how the team worked together today? How might the team continue to develop itself as a practice and learning team?

MATHEMATICAL MODELLING THROUGH GROUP WORK GLAMORGAN

Keywords

mathematical modelling, team work, problem solving, leadership, communication, self reflection

The module is aimed at first year undergraduate mathematics students. It is designed to help them relate the abstract mathematics of their studies to problems in the real world, to work in teams, and to communicate their results to interested parties. Thus it integrates problem solving, team work, communication and career aspirations

into one taught module. As such creates a sense of bringing learners together.

Description/approach

Students work in teams of four. They are set four problems/ assignments during the year which require a variety of mathematical techniques, data gathering and just general problem solving skills. Typical problems are listed below.

While working on the problem together each student takes it in turns to be leader, secretary, report writer and presenter in addition to trying to solve the problem. Thus after all four problems are complete each student has performed each role once. Thus they get experience of how to interact with others in a team and develop communication, negotiating and leadership skills, and realise the mathematics is not something done in isolation from the world.

Once an assignment has been marked the group then report back on how they believe the marks should be split between them, according to their individual contributions.

To be successful students in each group need to learn to work together and be supportive of each other. The support may be in carrying out individual tasks and reporting back, or it may involve helping others in the group to learn. For example in one of the modelling assignments a significant amount of computer work is involved. The person in the group strongest in computing takes the initiative to help the others in the group to get up to speed in computing. As this always related to work elsewhere in the curriculum there are clear benefits to the other students in terms of the help they receive.

Groups meet twice a week in class time and usually frequently outside. Blackboard is used as a depository of common material and mobile phone and Facebook used for group communication. The groups build strong friendships where people can support each through out the week. Thus learning together is not confined to the classroom but is part of their social life.

At the end of the module the students have to produce a CV and letter of application for sample jobs, referring to their experiences on this module of team work and modelling projects. In addition they have to right short reports on reflecting on their roles as leader, secretary, presenter and how well they worked in groups.

Sample problems:

- If you tie a knot in a piece of string how much shorter does it get?
- How fast will the 100 metres sprint ever be run?
- How often do the university's re-cycling bins need emptying?
- How fast can G block be evacuated when the fire alarm goes off?
- How can you design a depth gauge for oil tankers?
- How far apart should street lamps be?

Anticipated outcomes

1. Improved problem solving skills
2. Improved ability to work in groups in a variety of roles
3. The ability to reflect on their newly acquired skills
4. A sense of belonging to the course and to their fellow students
5. The ability to help fellow students academically and socially
6. To be able to receive help
7. To make friends
8. To find ways of learning mathematics through exploration which are different from "watch and repeat" method of worked examples and exercises
9. To more effective in selling themselves to potential employers.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- 1 and 8 have been seen in their ability to solve problems using a level of mathematics that would not normally be part of their course. Submitted work
- 2 and 3 have been seen in their reported feedback. Submitted work
- 4 has been seen in the current high retention. Only one student has deferred out of 39
- 4 has been seen in the very high module attendance. Class register
- 4 has been seen in the maths work room where students choose to work together on their own initiative. General observation
- 7 has been seen in the high amount of Facebook traffic and general observation of students outside class
- 5 and 6 have been seen in the class group meetings. General observation
- It is hoped 8 will be seen in the marks and pass rate of the other modules
- It is hoped 9 will be seen in the quality of jobs and industrial placements obtained.

Reflection/impact

The initiative was introduced in the last Mathematics programme revalidation, 2008 in the form of the mathematical modelling module. It was warmly supported by the head of division and others on the revalidation team. I was given complete freedom to develop the module and affirmed at every stage. The request for additional class time was also supported immediately. The staff teaching other subjects have been supportive in supplying information about teaching schedules so that the mathematical module could stage assignments to fit the overall curriculum.

The attempt to creating a friendly working environment with a sense of belonging has worked. I clearly expected too much on a first run through though. Details like secretary's minutes and reflections need clearer aims and marking schemes. As the second term has progressed some of the fun has gone with a sense of "we have seen all this before". Some ideas are need to induce a sense of variety between the assignments and hence keep the freshness. One of the assignments should include out of building expeditions in order gather data. Perhaps another assignment should be a review of other people's work.

It is clear a small amount of equipment will be needed in future. If this could be kept in a classroom which is the same room always used for the modelling class – so that it is "their" room – this would also have the spin off of completing their sense of belonging. Such a course "home base" should last throughout their course.

I totally underestimated the amount of marking and some rationalisation of student deliverables that would be needed. Perhaps the electronic automation of peer group marking and marking of presentations might assist with this.

DEVELOPING A COACHING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE THROUGH RUGBY GLAMORGAN

Keywords

empowerment, autonomy, approach to innovation.

Aim

Climbing Higher (Jan 2005) recognises that it is vital that children have positive experiences in physical activity to ensure that the habit of healthy life-long participation is secured. In July 2006, Climbing Higher – Next Steps

detailed areas that would be targeted, that included, the important role that coaches could play in contributing to physical activity targets. The document reports that "we must improve the identification, training, qualifying and retaining of coaches" and successful sport requires strong and effective National Governing Bodies to provide the appropriate sporting infrastructure. This will be achieved through effective partnerships with local authorities and higher education. Therefore the aim of the partnership was to establish a sustainable programme to significantly increase the quality of rugby coaching at grass roots level in Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT) and impact on physical activity.

Description/Approach

A partnership between the University of Glamorgan, RCT Sports Development, Cardiff "Future" Blues Community Rugby and the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) was formed to increase participation in rugby in RCT, Thirteen year one University of Glamorgan students as part of their Rugby Coaching and Performance Foundation Degree, delivered to seven secondary schools and their cluster primary schools (31). The students were empowered to take ownership of coaching within the schools and develop existing school-club links. Students were mentored by a University of Glamorgan WRU Level 3 coach educator and RCT/Cardiff Blues Rugby Development Officers. Teachers within the schools were encouraged to work alongside the students. Coaching was delivered through a combination of school based programmes six "Tag" rugby festivals, Urdd Festivals and pre-junior Rugby World Cup events throughout the year.

Anticipated outcomes

Our intended outcome was to increase the level of the Cardiff Blues "mass participation" targets by 15-20% by delivering quality coaching to a much wider audience than currently existed in the RCT region.

Evidence of actual outcomes

By establishing this community of coaching practice, over 6,000 primary and secondary children, both male and female were delivered to. This has provided a 60% increase in the participation of young children accessing high quality coaching and physical activity through rugby in RCT.

Reflection/impact

The community of coaching practice is addressing numerous policy goals identified through Climbing Higher. This community of coaching practice is clearly providing opportunities for students, young children, mentors and teachers to engage in effective and meaningful learning through participation. The programme will continue to

develop next year with 20–25 new coaches entering the programme and being mentored by the second year coaches.

Partner profiles

“This initiative gives students not only the qualifications in Sports Science, but also the tools and the knowledge gained in practical situations”.

John Schropfer, National Community Rugby Coach
Education Manager for the Welsh Rugby Union.

“This is a course for aspiring players and coaches who are keen on progressing through respective pathways, giving them options in their professional development. Some players and coaches will not have considered university as an option, but will now be able to gain an internationally recognised qualification, both academically and within coach education. This is a significant move to professionalise coaching, within our community.”

Richard Hodges, Cardiff Blues Community & Coach
Development Manager.

Initiatives designed to encourage student academic engagement

Institution-wide

PRE-FRESHER WORKSHOPS GLYNDŴR

Keywords

student engagement, study skills, familiarisation, group work, confidence, student bonding

The initiative was originally introduced as part of the learning support available within the remit of student support services. Over the last twelve months the emphasis has moved towards enhancing the first year experience as well as addressing the widening participation agenda and hence improving student retention. Workshops are open to all prospective undergraduates following confirmation of offers, and include a wide range of student groups from Science and Engineering (including EU students) to those intending to follow Art and Design courses.

Aim

The aim of the pre-fresher workshops is to provide new students with a positive and welcoming introduction to higher education, and familiarise them with university services and support staff. The key priority is to organise these workshops prior to students starting their chosen programme of study, in order to help identify the skills needed to work at HE level. Of major importance is the fact that participants are able to meet other new students which helps in overcoming first day nerves, and easing the transition into higher education.

The specific target audience is all prospective first year students following confirmation of offers.

Description/approach

As the workshops are open to all new students, information together with booking forms are included in the induction pack and distributed from the university admissions office following A-level results. Three one day workshops were held in the last week of August and first two weeks of September 2008 prior to the start of the academic year.

The format for the day workshops included:

Morning

- Introductions to key support staff – student services – study skills tutors – library services – student ambassadors
- Icebreaker activities – “Juggling for Students” – enabling students to get to know one another and to consider and prepare for the demands of student life
- Introduction to Information Literacy
- Short campus tour – Q and A session with student ambassadors.

Afternoon

- group work – students divided into groups where they worked on a mini research task involving library research and planning and presenting results to peers using class-based materials
- presentations – individual groups presented research in their chosen format
- evaluation and feed back session
- QA with staff members.

Anticipated outcomes

By the end of the workshops it is anticipated that students will feel more familiar with the process of studying in higher education and have increased confidence about starting their university degree programmes. Students will have gained insight into university life and started to develop a sense of belonging to Glyndŵr University, thus enabling a successful transition period.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Completed evaluation forms following the workshops provided a short term measure and evidence of achieving the anticipated outcomes. Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive with all responses circling 'agree' and 'strongly agree' when asked if the session had helped them gain confidence, made to feel welcome, and provided useful information.

Comments were:

“staff were friendly and reassuring about starting university”

“helpful to know what staff were available to help”

“feel a lot more confident about the 22nd”

“good to use library and see how it works”

“the presentation was good-forcing me to interact and gain confidence”

The main aim of the pre-fresher workshops is to enhance the first year experience and subsequently improve student retention. A longer term measure of achieving outcomes is to track student withdrawal and workshop attendance in order to see if there is a correlation between the two factors. It is anticipated that this will be undertaken during May and June 2009 in order to gain a more objective measure about the true impact of pre-fresher workshops.

Reflection/impact

Pre-fresher workshops can work on two levels, as an enjoyable one day activity and social event for new students, or as an initiative recognised to support student retention. Feedback forms indicated that the event was both enjoyable for students, as well as having some impact on the transition stage into higher education. Student participation in the workshops promotes empowerment as they instil confidence about starting university life. Observation of the workshop days revealed a strong sense of student engagement, and as the day progressed an increasing sense of relaxing into the university environment. This also had the consequence of some students willing to discuss their own support needs and make early appointments with support services.

There is a need to increase numbers attending the workshops and target the harder to reach students who may not recognise the value of this type of activity. The intention is to provide an extra two workshops in July 2009 in order to widen the net and encourage attendance of students who may not usually attend for this type activity.

Pre-fresher workshops were delivered by the Widening Participation Manager (Student Retention), Student Liaison Officer, and three Study Skills Tutors. Whilst student evaluations were very positive, workshops could be further enhanced through the involvement of 1st year tutors thus enhancing the process of student engagement.

PEER SUPPORTERS – GUIDES FOR NEW STUDENTS

GLYNDŴR

Keywords

peer support, guidance and advice, induction, transition to HE

The initiative was introduced in September 2007 in selected subject areas where staff members felt new students would benefit from being supported by peers. The programme areas involved in Peer Supporting are Sport and Exercise Sciences, Business, Nursing, Science, and International Students.

Aim

The aim of the scheme is to provide peer guidance and support for new students during the initial phase of settling into university life. The main purpose is to support the transition into higher education and provide a positive start to the first year of university study.

Description/approach

The role of a Peer Supporter is to offer support and advice during the initial settling in period for new undergraduates. This period usually last between six to twelve weeks when Peer Supporters will help with induction activities and become an identifiable person for new students to approach.

The role of the Peer Supporter is to:

- provide an early point of student contact for information and advice prior to start;
- act as a guide to new students about all matters relating to enrolment and induction;
- advise new students on facilities at GlyndŴr University and surrounding Wrexham area;
- provide a link between new students and academic tutors;
- give peer advice on effective time management required for studying;
- play an active role during student induction week.

Peer supporters are recruited in May following a series of information talks from the Widening Participation Manager to existing students who may wish to consider themselves for the role. Academic tutors agree the suitability of students for this role.

Qualities recognised in order to fulfil the role are:

- a friendly and outgoing personality
- good communication skills

- reliability
- initiative
- ability to work with people
- capacity for discretion and confidentiality.

A one day training programme is delivered in early September where Peer Supporters undertake communication exercises, group work on case studies and discussion on setting boundaries and 'dos' and 'don'ts'. The logistics of induction week are confirmed and Peer Supporters liaise with first year tutors about meeting new students and setting up meeting times and information sessions. The demand for the length of time needed for active support varies between subject areas – the demand for peer support in Business and Sports Science appears less than the period of support needed for nursing students who undertake practice placements six weeks from the start of their programme. A small gratuity for undertaking the role is paid.

The rationale for using peer support is that new students are less likely to feel intimidated by asking for help from existing students rather than academic tutors.

Anticipated outcomes

The anticipated outcome is that new students will experience a smooth transition to higher education through the peer support available, and take a shorter period of time to settle into their programme of study. Consequently new students will be able to focus on their studies earlier; and develop a positive orientation towards successfully completing their first year of study.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Peer support has now been in place for 18 months and feedback from academic tutors is very positive about the use of students for this purpose. There are increasing requests to have more Peer Supporters in place for September 2009. The latest I-grad survey results show very good feedback about the university induction, so the scheme could be deemed to contribute to those successful results and hence resulted in a positive outcome. However, the use of Peer Supporters beyond the first week of a new start is varied (as outlined below) therefore difficult to gauge the impact of this one initiative in isolation.

Reflection/impact

The role of Peer Supporter promotes a sense of empowerment for participating students, contributes towards professional development and can add to work experience CVs. All Peer Supporters through their involvement with

induction activities are able to utilise skills acquired in their time at university, as well as acting as an extra pair of hands for academic tutors. Help and advice is regularly sought by new students during induction week in particular from those supporting International Students. Following the induction phase the impact is more minimal and apart from those students supporting International and Nursing Students, peers supporting other areas reported a sharp drop in the need for contact beyond induction week. No new students attended the drop in support sessions organised for the first four weeks of term in the areas of Business, Sport and Exercise Sciences and Science. Those peers supporting the nursing students however were kept busy beyond induction week providing help and advice to students setting up professional development portfolios, and accessing library information. International students were also provided with Peer Supporters and extensively used, providing back up support with library services, and bringing course related issues to the attention of Programme Leaders.

Overall it is considered that students undertaking the role of Peer Supporter, newly arriving students, and academic tutors alike benefit from the Peer Supporter scheme. This contributes to the overall well being of new students and serves to enhance the first year experience. Consequently plans are in place to extend this role to other curriculum areas for the September 2009 where possible.

SMS TEXT MESSAGING

NEWPORT

Keywords

student expectation, Learning technology, student communication

Description/approach

Embedded into the Managed Learning Environment (MLE) is a method whereby academic and administrative staff have the ability to send instant text messages to cohorts of students who have submitted mobile telephone numbers to the University for this purpose. The idea is simply a method of giving students timely access to changes in timetabling or other arrangements that may have occurred without the benefit of prior notice.

Anticipated outcomes

In the event of unplanned or unavoidable short-notice changes to timetabled arrangements, the University wants

to be in a position of maintaining excellence in its student experience by enabling students to avoid unnecessary journeys or delays, and delivering up to the minute real-time information directly to the students' mobile phones or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) devices.

Evidence of actual outcomes

While curriculum changes are avoided wherever possible, sometimes they are inevitable and this can be disruptive – especially for new students. The service though relatively new has proved invaluable in allowing the University to contact students at short notice when these events occur. The student response has been very positive towards the use of such technologies above the old fashioned methods of a notice on the lecture theatre door!

Reflection/impact

This activity has been augmented with other technologies in use within areas of the University such as social networking sites and Twitter as a means of instant message type contact methodologies. The University has been careful to use SMS only for urgent messages so as not to dissuade students from divulging personal contact information of this nature.

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ASSESSMENT

BANGOR

Keywords

standardisation, practice experience, assessment

The aim was to enhance our practices by producing a comprehensive code of practice covering assessment. Target all staff and student (undergraduate & postgraduate).

Description/approach

The work was conducted by a working group that reported to the Quality Assurance and Teaching and Learning committees. It conducted a thorough review of assessment practices, taking into account the range of disciplines at the University.

Anticipated outcomes

A Code of Practice was produced and there is evidence of adherence to the code via our QA monitoring processes.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The code is viewed as a valuable document that facilitates rather than restricts initiatives and developments. It was a particular achievement to have a code that has sufficient flexibility to make it applicable throughout the University.

GLAMSTART STUDENT SIMULATION GLAMORGAN

Keywords

game-based learning, GBL, educational multimedia, gaming, simulation, simulation-based learning, induction, role-play, student support

The initiative targeted applicant and enrolled first year students entering the institution.

Description/approach

Students enrolling at the University of Glamorgan are able to access a simulation-game which attempts to synthesise the enrolment information they have received into a single experience.

GlamStart offers users a choice of student player to control over a simulated five-day experience. Users are invited to guide their student avatar and attempt to collect points. Points are awarded for behaviours in the academic, social and financial realms which were seen as positive, modelling on behaviours known to foster successful study and life in higher education. These include regular attendance at academic lectures and tutorials, additional study, use of educational resources, as well as the use of leisure and social facilities. Random daily events occur adding or deducting points. The accumulated points totals can be posted on a leader board at the end of a game session and prizes are offered (branded USB memory stick and t-shirts) for posting a score. A simulated campus is available to the students to explore via an interactive map and many university locations can be accessed offering additional information, articles, FAQs and video interviews with students relating their 'survival stories'.

Anticipated outcomes

By presenting induction information in a simulation game context we anticipated greater engagement with the information. We also anticipated a positive impact on the perception of Glamorgan as a trusted, contemporary and supportive institution.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The project has run for two years and each year we have conducted a questionnaire. The result of the evaluation has shown us that while uptake is lower than expected (around 15%-20% of new students used the game) approval is high amongst those users. Users found the orientation information (via the map) especially useful whilst expressing a preference for the media rich environment offered by the game as a means to receive this kind of induction information to traditional web page and text alone.

Reflection/impact

The innovative aspect of using a simulation game to promote induction information is important and has been recognised by the project winning the National Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) and EDUSERVE Innovation Award 2008.

The development process used on the project was important. The working group steering the project consisted of support staff from a diverse range of departments engaged with the first year experience. This group ensured that the key messages were appropriate and consistent with those of their own section and significantly contributed to the project's success. There is evidence within our feedback that the experience of using the application has encouraged reflective thinking in many users with respondents reporting that they have reflected on their decision-making and time management as a consequence of using GlamStart.

ONLINE LEARNER SUPPORT TOOLS GLAMORGAN

Keywords

orientation, integration, student retention, student achievement

Description/approach

Two online learner support tools were developed, one for orientation in the first few weeks of term (Early Days) and one later in the academic year to encourage students to assess their motivation levels and extent of their integration with their studies (Study Health Check).

The questions were taken from a range of experienced academic staff and were informed by the Yorke and Longden (2007) First Year Experience Project questionnaire.

The online tools were developed using QuestionMark

Perception which provided us with an opportunity to give immediate personalised feedback to students.

Anticipated outcomes

We want to encourage students to seek support if they feel they would benefit from it, as well as use the tools to provide information which will help assist their orientation to He and to develop good study habits.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Approximately 1200 students have accessed the two learner support tools and the data gathered has helped us understand more about how our students integrate with their studies and with the university experience.

Reflection/impact

So far, we are delighted with the way students have engaged with the tools. The feedback has been very positive, with just over 80% of respondents saying the exercises have been useful. The level of mature reflection from the students about their own approach to their studies and how this could be improved has been a very positive outcome.

The University's approach to encouraging innovative use of technology-enhanced learning has certainly helped with this project, as has the support of colleagues in the University's Learning and Corporate Support Services.

PEER GUIDE SCHEME BANGOR

Keywords

students supporting student; institutional wide, high ratio of recruitment and therefore broad support offered

Aim

To offer peer support to new students as they make the transition to life in Bangor. The main emphasis is on the welcome period but Peer Guides continue longer if needed.

Description/approach

The Peer Guide Scheme has a dual structure in that it is co-ordinated centrally so that it is identified as an institutional wide scheme. The central co-ordinator's role is to take overall responsibility for the scheme and to ensure a standard of operation across the institution. Screening of applicants, training, and evaluations are undertaken centrally and there is a ceremony every year

where the institution shows its appreciation of the Peer Guides' hard work. All Peer Guides receive a certificate and there is a special award for Peer Guide of the Year.

In addition to this, there is a co-ordinator in every academic school who takes the lead on recruiting the Peer Guides for the school and who allocates duties to the individual Peer Guides once the referencing and training has been successfully completed. This gives the scheme the flexibility to meet the needs of the individual schools.

Peer Guide activities

Peer Guides meet and greet new students at the Halls site and organise evening socials for over the Welcome Weekend. They are then on hand throughout Welcome Week in the academic schools making sure the new students find their way about and attend all the sessions they need to. They organise tours, take them to Serendipity (the clubs and societies fair) and offer friendly and informal advice wherever needed. This support also extends to tours of the town and various social events.

After the Welcome Week, Peer Guides are expected to maintain a looser contact with the new students 'for as long as needed.' Many new students do not wish to continue but significant numbers are still in contact with their Peer Guides when the annual evaluations are undertaken at the end of the first semester. Throughout, should the new students be experiencing particular problems, the Peer Guides refer them to more professional support.

The Peer Guides also help out at Open Days by again giving tours and a student perspective on life at Bangor.

Anticipated outcomes

It is anticipated that the scheme will help to ease the transition process for new students. This in itself is likely to aid retention. The Peer Guides' involvement at Open Days is also important to recruitment.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Annual evaluations show a consistently high level of appreciation of the Peer Guides. Although the precise figures do vary slightly from year to year, typically Peer Guides are rated as good or very good by 75% or more of new students. The Peer Guides give support to significant numbers of students who are experiencing problems settling (15%) and or who are thinking of withdrawing (20%) – as said before, they support these students by referring them on. The current evaluations have been altered so that it should be able to identify to whom the new students are referred.

Anecdotal evidence from the comments on the surveys suggest that the Peer Guides are appreciated for the way they make the settling in process easier with many commenting on their friendliness, their willingness to listen and to help where they can. Some go as far as to say that they 'take away the pain' of the settling in process and there are occasional comments that people would have left without their Peer Guides' help. It is also suggested that Peer Guides do make a positive impression at Open Days and that for some the Peer Guide scheme is quite important in their decision to chose Bangor.

Reflection/impact

Retention is obviously a complex issue and Peer Guiding is only one aspect of the Bangor experience. Generally Bangor performs well in relations to its benchmark and given the above evaluations it is reasonable to conclude that Peer Guiding is one of the contributory factors. Similarly it is reasonable to conclude that the Peer Guides also aid recruitment.

The success of the scheme depends on support form all levels. The ceremony is supported by senior Management, the Central Co-ordinator is based in the Centre for Careers & Opportunities which is part of Academic Registry and it is expected that every academic school will provide a member of staff to act as the co-ordinator for the school and to undertake the relevant duties. The latter is normally a member of academic staff but it is occasionally a higher level administrator.

HOME-BASED STUDENTS' INDUCTION BANGOR

Keywords

forming supportive networks; early engagement with the university, fostering a sense of community and identity.

Aim

To provide home-based students with an opportunity to engage with the University at an early stage; to help them to establish a sense of identity both with the Institution and with fellow students; to foster and establish networks of support prior to Welcome Week; to overcome fears.

Description/approach

We hold a one or two day induction event prior to Welcome Week to which all home based students are

invited. Our approach is informal: we aim to give students as much opportunity to meet with fellow new students in their School/Department as possible so that they begin to form supportive networks, and to meet with existing students who are also home based to provide them with hints and tips on being a home student.

We have a full day of activities which are not based on presentations; these include ice breakers; information sessions with fellow students and existing students (peer guides); tours of the University; forming groups studying in the same department with lunch to which members of staff are invited; question and answer sessions; money advice. On the two day induction programme we have also included sessions led by counselling staff 'home but not alone' (an initiative following the lead of the Student Retention and Retention (STAR) project) and careers staff.

The Student Union are invited, and last year the event was planned by an existing home based student, using her own experiences to prepare the programme, who, having found the event extremely useful for herself, was anxious to be involved.

Anticipated outcomes

A survey of students who had withdrawn, undertaken four years ago, gave us evidence that home based students felt less connected with the University than their peers, and had much less knowledge of the support services and provision (such as study skills provision) available to them. They also seemed to lack supportive networks of fellow students. The programme was devised to address these issues; to aid the formation of supportive networks; to increase knowledge of the University, its facilities and Student Support provision; to reduce anxiety. Although retention rates are not a particular concern for the University, improved retention rates for this group is an anticipated outcome.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Evaluations have been undertaken each year with much positive feedback; student withdrawal is monitored. Follow-up work is being undertaken this year through focus groups.

Student feedback indicates that valuable friendships and supportive networks have been formed over these days, which have lasted throughout the students' course. Attendance at further events e.g. mature student sessions has been much higher; knowledge of, and engagement with, student support services such as counselling is higher amongst this group than previously.

Having indicated that home-based students seemed isolated at events during welcome week – academic staff and school administrators report that those who attended the induction have now formed early connections and are more engaged.

Reflection/impact

The pre-entry induction event for home based students has had a significant impact we believe in allaying the fears and anxieties of studying at University for this group of students; who are mainly mature aged students. It has helped them to form supportive networks prior to the start of term, which often last throughout their course; it has had a major impact on their knowledge of the University and its facilities.

PDP FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BANGOR

Keywords

portfolio, reflection, small group work

Aim

Year 1 student representatives from four different degrees – Sports Science (Outdoor Activities), Sport, Health and Physical Education (SHAPE), Sports Science (SS) and Sport Science and Physical Education SS(PE).

Description/approach

Participate in University PDP pilot to reflect on current skill set and goals during Semester 1 and 2 with reflection and review after each semester. More information on this initiative can be found on the wiki.

Anticipated outcomes

- to see if skills have improved over the course of the academic year
- compare this University PDP pilot to existing SSHES PDP module.

Evidence of actual outcomes

To be determined at end of academic year.

Reflection/impact

To be determined at end of academic year.

PERSONAL TUTORING – CERTIFICATE IN SUPPORTING STUDENTS ABERYSTWYTH

Keywords

supporting students

Description/approach

An accredited training programme for non-academic staff members (but open to all staff), in developing good practice in supporting students. Training and development in this area has traditionally been targeted at academic personal tutors or Student Support professionals, however these interventions may not be immediately available to a student facing difficulties.

The 'Supporting Students' programme builds on existing best practice and encourages staff to reflect and develop their approaches to supporting the needs of a diverse student population and can be tailored to individual role requirements.

The programme is designed for staff members involved in "student facing" activities. It aims to provide a broad overview of supporting student issues within Aberystwyth University and the higher education sector.

This programme is aligned to the University mission and corporate plan, as well as learning and teaching strategy, and has been informed by sector wide issues such as student support, transition, recruitment and retention.

The programme has been benchmarked against the National Professional Standards Framework and the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) values and has been developed in collaboration with Aberystwyth University's Student Support Services. The programme is also accredited by Aberystwyth University through the Lifelong Learning Framework. We believe this to be the first formal programme of its kind in the United Kingdom to be aimed at non-academic staff.

Anticipated outcomes

The intention is that on successful completion of the programme, staff will be in a position to understand the wide range of issues that may arise whilst supporting students and be able to refer students to the appropriate intervention service.

Staff will be more aware of students and the issues that may affect their experience at university and recognise the need, where appropriate to support students by

simply listening or by signposting them to an appropriate intervention service.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The programme has only recently begun so actual outcomes cannot yet be confirmed. However, within two days of advertising availability the course had been filled. Within a further few days numbers interested had risen such that we have a waiting list to fill two further courses. This demonstrates the interest from staff in developing and enhancing skills in this area.

STUDENT AND STAFF EXPECTATIONS PROJECT

UWIC

Aim

The aim of this pilot survey was to gather the views of students and staff in relation to student expectations on entry to higher education. To assist UWIC in finding ways to manage expectations and improve the student experience of first year students, which will ultimately impact on levels of student satisfaction.

Description/approach

In November 2008, LTDU conducted a pilot, online, web-based Student Expectations Survey to gain a better understanding of student expectations on arrival in higher education. A parallel survey about the staff perspectives of first year students was also conducted. Questions were identified following desk research into similar surveys conducted elsewhere. Generally, the sets of questions to students and staff focused on the same issues.

The issues focused on:

- pre-entry information
- students' preparedness and motivation for study
- induction and the first week
- learning and teaching activities during the first eight weeks
- student representation
- identifying factors for a successful first year student experience.

Anticipated outcomes

To generate comparative data relating to students and staff perspectives of learning and teaching issues for first year students.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The student survey gathered a large number of open comments. The qualitative data which has been generated from the survey is to be collated into detailed reports to Schools and Units for further action

Reflection/impact

The qualitative and quantitative data which has been generated from the surveys will be collated into detailed reports to Schools and Units to help with:

- promoting and facilitating professional developments events on inductions for first year students
- student engagement and influence in action planning. UWIC Students Union and Student Representatives will be involved in discussing the results of the surveys and producing an advice leaflet/web page for new students
- influencing and supporting the work of key institutional working groups (e.g. UWIC's Week One Welcome Group which schedules a programme of introductory events for first years)
- assisting with accurate marketing of programmes
- influencing awareness of Students Rights, Services and learning support.

UWIC DIARY ROOM

UWIC

Keywords

student voice, student expectations, innovative research method, video clips, staff development

Aim

The diary room concept was introduced in order to combat survey fatigue, to try and encourage more open and detailed responses from students who wouldn't respond to a traditional survey method. To get students to engage with the evaluation process by using methods that would be familiar to them from areas of modern/pop culture. It was hoped it would produce a high impact method of presenting the results to allow the key findings to stand out. This in turn would allow more specific action plans to be created and the complete buy in by all staff to the issues at hand.

Description/approach

Many forms of communication were used between the University and the students to inform them of the project including the student newspaper 'Retro', the use of student ambassadors to hand out flyers on the day of the diary room and to encourage students to enter. The diary room was run on all four campuses (2 days each) and the questions were presented to the students via a laptop interface designed by the Learning Development Officer (Media Specialist). The students were asked 8 questions on areas of current strategic concern e.g. personal tutoring, PDP, assessment and feedback. All students were asked if they would sign a consent form allowing the clips to be used for future Learning and Teaching purposes and whether they wished to enter into a prize draw for £50.

Anticipated outcomes

Fresh way of hearing the student voice, production of visual clips that could be used in a number of different ways for both staff and students, cross campus response.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Over 100 students entered the diary room from a number of different programmes, this produced over 10 hours of recordings to analyse. There have been a number of requests by staff to use the video clips for numerous activities including during induction week as a demonstration of what students can expect. The qualitative comments were commented upon as very useful by programme directors when analysing and redesigning their programmes. The clips have been used as part of staff development discussion sessions.

Reflection/impact

Initially run as a pilot the diary room has run once more and at a different time of year with a different focus to the questions. It has attracted students that we didn't expect to attract – e.g. international students and has provided a wealth of qualitative data. Promotion and timing were essential to the success of the project as was the clarity of the questions. Throughout the whole process the inclusion of the student bodies and students themselves was key to the success and it is important to remember to close the feedback loop and let those who took part know the outcomes of their efforts. It will continue to run bi-annually alongside other initiatives as long as the students keep entering the diary room. It has also been trialled for staff.

LEARNER SUPPORT FORUMS

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords

advice, guidance, getting started, organising yourself ready for study

The following discussion forums were offered as pilots designed to find the best model of forums for the future. For example, the getting started and course choice weren't offered to all students but to students studying particular subject areas.

Getting started forums:

- start studying Social Science or Business
- start studying Science or Technology
- start studying Languages

Forums for students with disabilities:

- organising yourself for study

Keeping up with study forums

- study tips for Arts students

Course choice forums:

- choosing your History course
- choosing your Sociology or Social Policy course

Aim

Forums are available to all registered students, but the 'Getting Started' forums are particularly aimed at students on Level 1 courses.

Description/approach

Student Services provide a range of advice forums throughout the year. Most forums run for a month. After this they remain available as read-only forums for approximately a year. Students can post a message only while the forums are open. All forums are moderated by experienced advisers and tutors and students are invited to:

- talk to fellow students
- ask for advice from experienced OU tutors
- find out about the OU community of students and alumni
- learn more about OU online services such as the OU Library.

These are supplemented by a Getting Started website: www.open.ac.uk/learning/induction/undergraduate/index-home.php

Anticipated outcomes

It is hoped that involvement with these forums will encourage students to engage in the process of distance learning from an early stage in their studies. Not only can students benefit from specialist information, advice and guidance from experienced staff acting as moderators, but they can also gain peer support from fellow students.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Over 10,000 students took part in Learner Support forums in 2008. Those who participated valued the help from advisory staff and the support from other students. A sample of students who took part in the forums are being tracked to see if there appears to be any link between participation and course progress.

Reflection/impact

The forums create an environment which empowers the student to ask questions and creates a sense of community and mutual support as students exchange experience and offer practical support to each other.

CAREERS FORUMS AND WIKIS

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords

forum, career-planning, advice and guidance

Aim

Forums and Wikis are available to all registered students and aim to:

- make careers information, advice and guidance accessible 24/7 to students who are managing their studies alongside busy lives. OU students often work full time and/or manage families and an online forum allows them to ask questions and access the answers at a time that is convenient for them
- encourage students to think about their career options early on in their studies – many students tell us that they wish they had begun their planning earlier
- raise the profile of the Careers Advisory Service.

Description/approach

An online forum is offered for students to contribute to for one month. It then becomes read-only for a year afterwards. They are always moderated by a qualified Careers Adviser to ensure students are getting the most

accurate advice and guidance. Forums are offered in different ways:

- On specific career areas, e.g. entering Teaching or Law
- Using Employers to answer student queries has enabled us to replicate as closely as possible the opportunity to meet employers face to face offered by campus universities and this has proved to be very effective
- Subject based forums have also been offered helping students to see what career options are open to them in a particular subject area. Funding for these has come from the OU PILS CETL (Personalised Integrated Learning Support Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning)
- Wikis on CV Writing and Volunteering have also proved popular and provide the opportunity to link from our website to these resources, making the website more dynamic.

Anticipated outcomes

- Student quick queries are answered more efficiently than they would be if they were to make an appointment. Where appropriate for more complex queries students are referred to the careers adviser in their region or nation centre for a full guidance interview
- Many students tell us that by accessing the forums, they have found answers to both questions they already had and also those they didn't know they needed to ask
- Content generated can become a resource for future careers publications and web materials.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- Students interacting with Careers Advisers
- Students interacting with other students
- Case studies of students coming back with their 'success' stories
- 10,000 students visited forums in 2008
- Over 4400 students visited a forum on Entering Teaching in November 2008
- Runner Up in the ICT award category in 2007 by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
- Students tend to be very positive in their feedback.

Reflection/impact

Participation in the Forums and Wikis has impacted on the OU community in many ways. For example it:

- enabled and empowered students to do their own research and to consider careers early on in their OU study career

- provided good staff development for moderators
- was useful to demonstrate to academic staff the volume and type of careers question their students are asking
- provided an impetus for making employer contacts. Also helps to educate those employers who take part in the forums about our student population
- made Careers Advisory Service more accessible to a diverse student population
- allowed us to provide an ongoing resource for students to access after the forum was closed to further queries
- helped to raise the profile of the service
- paved the way for other areas of Student Services to offer forums to students based on the successes on the careers forums.

PROACTIVE STUDENT SUPPORT

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords

pro-active student support (pass), welcome, motivation, encouragement, study skills, preparedness for study

Aim

Students across the UK identified as 'vulnerable' by a University statistical model are targeted for additional support prior to their course starting. Selection criteria include: students on their first OU course, students under 25, students with no previous education qualifications, students in receipt of a financial award. However, in Wales this has been extended to all new students, regardless of whether or not they are deemed 'vulnerable'.

Description/approach

Students who are new to the OU and considered to be 'vulnerable' to drop out are given a proactive telephone call to introduce them to Learner Support services and encourage them to think about effective ways to approach the course. Specialist Advisers contact students to give them the opportunity to discuss their motivation for study, any concerns they may have about starting the course and talk them through the VLE system. Questions include:

- Have you received your computer username and password?
- Have you logged on to StudentHome (the Open University's Virtual Learning Environment)?
- Have you received all your course materials?
- Do you have any specific questions about the IT

aspect of your course?

- Can I just check that all the contact details we have for you are correct?
- Is there anything else I can help you with?

This contact acts as an early warning system which allows us to identify any additional needs students may have and also ensures that students engage with the distance learning process from the outset.

At the OU in Wales, we have extended this contact to all new students, regardless of whether or not they are considered to be vulnerable in a bid to increase retention.

Anticipated outcomes

Encourages students to think about how they are going to approach their studies early on and prepare them better for studying with the OU. This kind of proactive contact also fosters a relationship with Learner Support which encourages students to get in touch with us if something goes wrong. All of this is designed to increase student retention and progression.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Since PaSS work was introduced in 2004, student retention has increased by 7% across the Open University as a whole.

At the OU in Wales, retention increased by 3% points between 2003/04 and 2005/06.

Reflection/impact

This kind of contact also helps students studying at a distance to feel part of the institution as studying part time at a distance can feel quite lonely.

The aim is to front-load student support to create autonomous learners who are happy to contact the institution as and when problems arise.

LIBRARY ONLINE TRAINING

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords

illuminate, library, online training

Aim

To provide an alternative to the face-to-face library induction and training that you would get if you were a student or member of staff at a 'traditional' campus-based university.

Description/approach

Library Services offers a programme of synchronous online training sessions to all OU staff and students using the web-conferencing tool Elluminate Live!

This programme started in November 2008 and currently consists of the following sessions:

- Student Introduction to Library Services
- Associate Lecturer Introduction to Library Services
- How to find an e-Journal
- How to set up eJournal alerts
- How to social bookmark
- How to find information in Languages
- How to find information in Business and Management.

More sessions are being developed and integrated into the programme.

Since November, 2008 18 sessions have been offered and 109 students and 8 staff have attended. Of the student attendees, 40% are on 1st level courses and over a quarter are new to studying with the Open University.

Anticipated outcomes

Students and staff will learn about the resources that we offer via the online library and they will feel more confident using the resources in their studies/course writing/research/teaching.

They will discover the broad range of services that we offer, particularly the SCONUL Access scheme which enables OU students to access other university libraries and borrow books for free. Students and staff also find out about the help and support available to them through the Library Helpdesk.

Evidence of actual outcomes

91% of student attendees answered 'Definitely' to the question 'Would you recommend this event to a colleague?'

Here are some examples of qualitative feedback from students:

These tutorials are such an excellent idea – really helpful.

I just wanted to thank you for conducting this online session. I really enjoyed it and I look forward to participating in future sessions. I now have a better appreciation of the differences between e-journals and databases and how the information is relayed.

Thank you for the OU library tutorial – I wished it had come sooner as it would have avoided so many frustrating hours spent.

A clear, concise and friendly delivery ensured that all objectives were achieved and the participants were well motivated to further investigate OU online library services.

Really important this. All OU students need to get using the Library resources, which are fabulous but I didn't really know how to access them before.

This has been very useful - quicker and more interesting than just reading through the guides.

This should be mandatory training for all new students

I found the session very useful and well worth the hour. Also useful was Steve's showing us how to apply for library access at local university libraries.

Comment in course forum: "I took a library course yesterday and it was really helpful. You can sign up at the library it is free and it is online I really recommend this it only takes 1 1/2 hours of your time"

We will also be sending out follow-up evaluation forms soon. These forms ask participants to rate the possible impact of the training session and indicate whether they have used any of the resources or services that were mentioned.

Reflection/impact

Our time-poor students may not be aware that they have access to an excellent online library because many are not required to engage with it in their courses. These training sessions, as well as raising awareness, also give students the confidence and skills to use online library resources for themselves.

SKILLS FOR OU STUDY WEBSITE

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY IN WALES

Keywords

study skills, distance learning, confidence-building, managing stress, preparing for exams, using academic english

Aim

The aim of this website is to act as a study skills resource for OU students and tutors. All students have access to this, but it is particularly useful for those studying at level 1.

Description/approach

The website (www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy) houses a range of study skills material designed to help students develop study skills in the following areas:

- Assignments
- Revising, exams and assessment
- English for learning
- Developing effective study strategies
- Thinking, reading and taking notes
- Working with others
- Using maths and statistics in your studies.

Students can download copies of these 'toolkits' or request hard copies from Student Services. Exercises include 'writing in your own words', 'five steps to better reading' and English language activities. Students are made aware of the availability of these resources through the learner support team in the Cardiff office, from their online student record pages (known as Student Home) and especially via the induction/preparation sections of their course materials.

Anticipated outcomes

Students are encouraged to use these activities to supplement their learning. Students experiencing difficulties in specific areas are sign posted to these resources by their tutors and Student Services staff.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Students report that they find these resources extremely useful, but no qualitative/quantitative analysis is available.

Reflection/impact

Toolkits are designed as resources for private study. This encourages students to experiment with different study strategies to find out what works best for them and to create autonomous learners.

PEER MENTORING UWIC

Keywords

peer mentoring, student support, group cohesion

Aim

To develop a system that would provide an extra support for first year students who may have questions about their course

and student life in general and create greater cohesion and engagement amongst different years on the programme.

Description/approach

The BSc (Hons) Psychology lecturing team approached the Learning and Teaching Development Unit following a presentation made on the uses of peer mentoring and the issues it could assist with. They have a large first year intake with over a 120 students often attending lectures. They wanted to introduce a system that would allow more engagement amongst the students with others on the course both within the 1st year and also second and third years and provide an extra signpost to the support available to students within UWIC. The mentors were all second or third years and underwent an afternoon of training re – communication skills etc. They were all assigned a tutorial group to mentor and met with the students during their second day at University for a question and answer session about student life. The mentors were contactable by email and phone (if the student wished this information to be given out). They were also given a space on the Psychology Discussion Boards within Blackboard where students could ask questions as the term developed. They were also involved in arranging a social event at the start of the year.

Anticipated outcomes

Increased cohesion amongst the new student cohort and an extra port of call for a student if they are having any difficulties with either the academic or social side of university life.

Evidence of actual outcomes

A system has now been set up that can be run year on year that all students can engage with and deals with both social and academic issues. Students felt more able to speak to other members of their course and felt they could ask other students advice when they wouldn't necessarily speak to a member of staff.

Reflection/impact

It was important to get a balance between a very formal to informal scheme. The students enjoyed meeting the students at the start of the first week to be able to ask them questions lecturers may not be able to answer. The social event also helped the different years to mix. The use of the discussion board was introduced after the pilot stage as the students asked for an area where they could put up questions that could be answered by all students and developed whether it be about a piece of work or where to get help with a problem.

School or faculty-wide

STUDENT SUPPORT MECHANISMS

NEWPORT

Keywords

student expectation, common modules, professional practice and skills

Description/approach

The School of Health and Social Sciences runs core modules for all first year students that cover not only an early introduction to Research (thus introducing students to the wider "story" of Higher Education) but also Skills for Professional Environments – which help new students appreciate the skills that they will need to develop and become successful students and independent learners. Along with this approach, a comprehensive evaluation of the new student experience in week 3 of the first term aims to pick up early indications of difficulty and requirements for further support.

Anticipated outcomes

In an area that has an emphasis on professional practice, students are encouraged at an early stage to place their studies in the context of a wider picture with a view to helping them understand why their courses are structured in the way they are, and how this will help them to progress along their chosen career path.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Student evaluations of the common modules in question have been extremely positive though it is difficult to identify whether engagement levels have increased due to this alone as many positive initiatives are in play simultaneously within the School and University. However, it is fair to say that the third week review has highlighted several cases of additional support that may not have been picked up were the process not in place.

Reflection/impact

Building early confidence for students involved in professional practice related disciplines is very important to ensure satisfaction and progression throughout what are often very demanding programmes. This activity not only achieves this but enables students to become familiar with other students in similar discipline areas.

SCHOOL ETHOS FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS NEWPORT

Keywords

student expectation, creating community, student communication, student engagement

Description/approach

All new first year students to the Documentary Photography programme are invited to attend an off-campus two night residential orientation and community-building event during the first term.

Anticipated outcomes

The intended result is to generate a group spirit from an early stage as students participate in this prestigious academic programme of study.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Over the last two years of this practice being established, the majority of students on the course have been able to attend (at their own expense) with the result that a close bond has quickly been established between the students with each-other – and with the academic staff who run this often demanding and pressured programme of study.

Reflection/impact

The very nature of this activity has not only aided greatly in the students' engagement with their studies – but has in itself perpetuated the prestigious perception that accompanies this award winning course. While perhaps not possible with larger cohorts, this approach is seen by all as an excellent means of preparing students to work hard as a group towards a goal of personal and group success and perpetuate the internationally renowned reputation of the programme.

PORTFOLIO OF ACADEMIC SKILLS

BANGOR

Keywords

generic higher education skills

Description/approach

- Small group learning (25) and designed to enhance basic academic skills which are transferable and will support learning skills in other modules
- Linked with JXH1018 module Issues in Sport, Exercise

- & Outdoor Activities for workshops on Academic Reading & Writing. Essay topics are available on the wiki
- Linked with the Personal Tutor/Mentor System
- Module outline is available on the wiki.

Anticipated outcomes

- On completion of the module students will have gained an understanding of the academic skills required for a BSc degree
- Identify “at risk” or “high achievers” and refer to appropriate study skills or master classes.

Evidence of actual outcomes

- Students enjoyed linking Issues module as was related to their degree and not generic so they identified easier with essay topics;
- Some “at risk” students found lectures difficult whereas high achievers felt some classes were too easy so sometimes difficult to find a balance.

Reflection/impact

- Sometimes difficult for module tutor to present with variable levels of ability especially if the topic was for only one lecture.

PDP USING WEB 2.0

UWIC

Keywords

pdp, vle, student portal, reflection, personal tutor, feedback, e-portfolio

Aim

To engage all first year students at the Cardiff School of Sport in a PDP process.

Description/approach

All first year students were given instructions on how to create their own PDP Year 1 folder within their student portal site. The students then enabled their personal tutor to have access to this folder. A blog link was then created from Blackboard to their student portal folder which only the personal tutor and student have access to.

Since setting up this folder, all students have been submitting work directly to the student portal folder, including reflections on their University experience.

Personal tutors access the individual folders for viewing and also for submitting feedback to each student.

Anticipated outcomes

This is the first year that all first year students have created an e-portfolio. The outcome for this portfolio is that all students' work is directly accessible to their personal tutor and is also an area for personal tutors to provide feedback directly to individual students.

It is also the first initiative to use technology to enhance this process, up until now all portfolios were recorded in paper format.

Evidence of actual outcomes

This pilot was received well by both students and staff. The overall aim is to expand this model to include all second, third and postgraduate students from the Cardiff School of Sport. The use of a blog connecting with the student portal is a new and successful initiative.

Reflection/impact

The student portal enables complete privacy for each individual student. Each student gives permission to their personal tutor to engage in their specific folder. This gives the student full confidence that their information is confidential. This model also provides students with a tool that can be followed throughout their coming years at the University. Upon completion of their course, students will be able to have access to their student account for a further month enabling extra time for saving to another form of storage, the students' full University experience.

LIBRARY INDUCTION VODCAST

UWIC

Keywords

library, induction, youtube

Aim

Due to staffing shortages at the time we were aware that our traditional “walk and talk” induction round the library would not be feasible. Also, numbers of attendees had been dropping over the last few years, and less requests were being made by teaching staff for this kind of event. Furthermore we know that at the start of the academic year, Freshers are bombarded with all sorts of information that they quickly become desensitised to.

We decided to keep the “walk and talk”, but condense it and put it online via a link from the Library Homepage to YouTube. We wanted to keep it to 5 minutes maximum as we felt that would be about as long as a student would be prepared to sit in front of a library induction for! And we wanted to cover not only the basic geography of our library, but also all the basic user information; what you need to borrow a book, how to search for one, where to go once you have found it, how many items you can borrow, where to find staff with enquiries, fines(!), etc. By using the basics, prominently it meant the video could also be of some use to students at other sites: the geography would be different, but all the other elements discussed would be exactly the same.

Description/approach

We wanted to use one of our Fixed Term Information Assistants to play the role of the “student” as they are typically students themselves that work part time in the library shelving etc. during the evening and weekend opening hours.

This would also allow the student watching to see themselves carrying out the same tasks.

The skeleton of the script was that used previously to carry out the old inductions; marking all the more important and relevant points in order to allow the student to get started in the library. Again we took the decision early on not to include too much in-depth detail about other resources, e-journals, databases etc. This information typically comes at a later date in conjunction with the tutors when the students are beginning to plan for their first assignments – again this was due to keeping to a limited time but also not throwing too much information at the new students too early!

Once we had a draft that covered everything we wanted from a library perspective, we worked with the Learning and Teaching Development Unit's Ade Clark to turn it into something that would make sense on film. Several more drafts followed, but it was all pretty straightforward. The filming took only one day, with a second day needed for editing, adding music and a few extra shots, and that was it. Uploading the completed film to YouTube was also just as simple. Once you have opened a free account, you can place any films you make there, add your own metadata and descriptions and you are done.

Anticipated outcomes

Our initial hope was that more students would see it than would have trooped through our door had we stuck to the

old tried and tested physical tour of the library. Anything above that would be a bonus.

Evidence of actual outcomes

YouTube records all visits and allows visitors to make comments on what they have seen. The video was uploaded in time for the start of the academic year, and by that Christmas, one term, over 1,000 people had visited and watched the video! That was definitely more than would have come through the door to our old inductions. This video was uploaded in September 2007, and we have now received over 4,000 viewings and have been given four stars!

Reflection/impact

As with all things it is already a little out of date, and is only available in English. Fortunately the student featured is still working with us and is a Welsh speaker, so some of these hurdles can be overcome. There have also been changes to opening hours (they have now increased) and security (we have new locking systems and cards).

But the basic information is all correct. This was a spur of the moment idea, that not only came to fruition quite easily, but has also proved to be a huge success. All we need to do now is find some time where Ade can come back for a day for us to update and launch “Colchester Ave Library Induction 2.0”.

Programme, Scheme or Award level

EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GLAMORGAN

Keywords

skills, employability, personal/professional development

Context for the initiative

The initiative is delivered as a module on year one of the Higher National Diploma (HND) and Higher National Certificate (HNC) programmes in the areas of management and business. Its target audiences are thus first year HND/HNC students as new entrants to the HE environment.

Aim

The general aim of the module is to develop key skills underpinning academic study and employability, through further personal and professional development.

Description/approach

The module is very much about students taking control of their own academic development early on, and deciding for themselves which aspects of the study skills that underpin their other subject-specific modules they would wish to develop further, over the course of the year. To support this, the module assesses their entry-level key skills early, through self-diagnostic activities and a 1-2-1 interview, and asks students to identify areas for improvement over the year ahead. The module handbook contains exercises and activities which support and reinforce each week's skills-based workshop session incrementally as well as providing elements for their developing portfolio, itself assessed as part of assignments 2 and 3. At the end of the module, having completed activities from basic numeracy and communications through to advanced problem-solving, research and creative thinking, students submit a reflective essay considering their development over the year and their future 'skills plans' – the emphasis being on continuous professional development. They also attend a final 1-2-1 interview to assess their exit-level skills and motivate them for their second and subsequent years of study, and beyond.

The guiding framework for the module is Kolb's learning cycle which is directly referred to at the beginning of the workshop programme and underpins the assessment strategy and much

of the workshop activity. Learning outcomes are thus about students evidencing their skill development in a number of ways: engaging in individual and group based activities and experiences; the ability to reflect on those experiences; the ability to conclude realistically from reflections; and the ability to plan ahead and practice new skills and behaviours.

Anticipated outcomes

The module is designed to improve the way in which students engage with their own academic and skills development, in this and their other modules, and take ownership of this process. It is anticipated that by the end of the year-long programme, students will have developed a 'learning mindset' appropriate to their own context, skills and needs; planning further skills development, for the second year of the programme and beyond, is the major focus of the final assignment.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The nature of this module and its assessment means that evidence of the anticipated outcomes is always a challenge to obtain; the skills being developed throughout the module are both personal and contextual so only the students themselves are fully able to evaluate how effective it has been in achieving its goals, for them as individuals. The indirect impact is likely to be felt in other modules and classes incrementally throughout the year as the students apply in their subject-specific classes the skills they have started to hone during workshop sessions. Quantifying this correlation, in terms of the 'feed-through' effect on student grades, remains almost impossible, however it may be possible to infer outcomes from wider programme data.

In the 2007/08 academic year, for the group based at the University of Glamorgan's Treforest campus, 64 students submitted the first assignment in November and 60 the final assignment in April. The grades for the final assignment in 2007/08 followed a normal distribution, peaking in the 60–69% (merit) range. Of the 60 who submitted their final assignment 54 students (90%) are studying the programme's second year in 2008/09. Whilst it would clearly be inappropriate to suggest that the students' ability to progress through their first-year studies was solely the impact of this module, the module team takes great pride in the contribution made to students' engagement with the academic challenges they will face in their future studies and to their ability to rearrange their own skills priorities accordingly.

Reflection/impact

With each review the module seems well received by the students, at Glamorgan and across the University's network of Partner FE Colleges where this programme is also taught.

The team-teaching format adopted for large student numbers at Glamorgan, combined with the developing teaching-team approach throughout the Partner College network, makes this an interesting and well-supported module, for all involved. Comments from colleagues about recent changes of assessment weighting to refocus attention on the final reflective discussion and portfolio, in particular, have been very positive.

Final note: The module leaders wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of colleagues currently delivering and developing this module within the Partner College network, and to those involved in the creation and development of this course in its earlier incarnations; we would not have been able to develop such a successful initiative without your support.

VOLUNTARY BUDDY SYSTEM GLAMORGAN

Keywords

student support, integration, experience

Aim

The voluntary buddy system is targeted at year one chiropractic students and chiropractic foundation (year 0) students.

Description/approach

In order to integrate new students within the established chiropractic student body, the Division of Chiropractic has a voluntary system whereby students in year 2 are linked with incoming year 1 students. This system has been very successful and it has been extended to include the year 0 entry the year this course commenced. The Division of Chiropractic provides the administrative support for the scheme, however the year 2 students and the Chiropractic Student Society organise and manage the social events associated with the programme. Feedback from students indicates that this is extremely well received and has been acknowledged as a model of best practice within the University.

Anticipated outcomes

The programme was developed to create an additional support mechanism for new chiropractic students (year 0 and year 1) managed by year 2 students and overseen by the Chiropractic Student Society. The anticipated outcomes were to enhance year 0 and 1 students initial integration and communication within a new programme of study in a new environment.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The Division has received good feedback from both new students and programme organisers directly and via the chiropractic student council which meets once per term.

Reflection/impact

This programme represents an attempt to welcome and integrate new students in a professional university based education into the existing student body and provide another level of support as part of their overall experience. This programme personifies and encourages inter-year communication and friendship as the students in the chiropractic programme interact throughout the four year education in many ways associated with learning and assessment. They also develop strong professional bonds that will have benefits in the future after graduation as they embark on their professional career. This programme was also designed to instil confidence early in the educational process.

STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS ON ASSESSMENT CARDIFF

Keywords

assessment, focus groups, engagement

Description/approach

In order to find out how assessment is used in the BA degree within the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (JOMEC) and in particular how assessment is viewed by students in the first year, eight focus groups were carried out in May 2007.

It was found that students enjoyed the process of continuous assessment as it motivated them to work throughout the semester, and that they wanted to be more challenged. Students were found to have a fear of 'failure' and could potentially struggle with tasks that require independence as learners.

The essay system of assessment was not seen as being a useful learning tool. There was a desire for more portfolio work and mini-tests. There was also a feeling that the first year needs to carry some weight towards the final degree mark so that students can feel that their work during that time is of importance.

There was a lack of a sense of School identity, with students feeling that they come in, do their work and leave.

There was a desire for earlier feedback so that this could be made use of as a learning tool. Seminar participation was noted as a good practice, as long as it is linked with a good seminar structure. Formative assessment and reading responses were also mentioned by students as ways of engaging with a task, and with each other.

Anticipated outcomes

- Changes to First Year curriculum, which did happen. A new module called Media Scholarship was established in September 2008
- A greater understanding at a senior level of the importance of initiatives which created a sense of community within the Schools
- Changes to the induction process. Students now spend more time with their personal tutors in the first week.

Evidence of actual outcomes

These findings have prompted several changes for first year students within the School. There is an improved induction programme to foster a better sense of belonging to a learning community. More challenging first year modules have been introduced as well as a skills-based Media Scholarship Module, involving a group presentation, reflexive 'blog' and a literature review with annotated bibliography and research trail. Further, the introduction of continuing professional development has helped a sense of engagement with the School to develop.

ENHANCING PASTORAL SUPPORT

BANGOR

Keywords

student retention, supportive environment, personal tutor/ student communication

Aim

The aim of the revisions to our pastoral care scheme was to provide outstanding pastoral care to all of our students (particularly those in year one), to aid retention, and to provide a supportive environment for students throughout their studies.

Description/approach

All of our year one students are allocated to a personal tutor who is a dedicated member of the School's Teaching Team and who is based in the Wheldon Building (the centre for Psychology students). We require all students to meet with their tutors at set times of the year:

Year one students – in Welcome Week; at the start of semester two in order to receive their semester one results, and at the end of the year.

Year two and three students – in week one of semester one, at the start of semester two in order to receive their semester one results, and at the end of the year.

Students who are in years two and three of their degree are then allocated to a "research active" member of staff as their tutor for the remainder of their studies.

In addition to this, all tutors have access to an online, web-based system, which allows personal tutors to update any mitigating circumstances for their students. These notes are accessible only to the student's personal tutor, the Senior Tutor and the School's Student Administrator.

Anticipated outcomes

As stated previously, we hoped to help increase student retention and ability.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Since we introduced the new system our student retention across all three years of undergraduate study has dramatically increased. In addition, student satisfaction of the pastoral care scheme has also increased.

LIFE THROUGH A LENS – INDUCTION PHOTO PROJECT

UWIC

Keywords

photo journal, fresher experience

Two programmes were involved – BSc (Hons) Psychology and BA (Hons) Community Education, based on different campuses – Llandaff and Cyncoed.

Aim

The main aim of the project was to gain the views of the first year students as to what was important to them throughout the first 3 weeks of term. What they had liked, disliked and so by understanding more clearly what they considered a negative or positive experience be able to improve that first experience both academically and socially. The aim was to carry this out in a different medium other than survey etc.

Description/approach

The students were all handed a notebook pen and disposable camera and a sheet explaining the project. They were given three weeks to hand back in the completed camera and books. Each time they took a photo they were asked to note down why they had taken the photo and what it meant to them. They were given examples of what they could possibly take photos of in two lists – something that makes you smile and something that annoys or delays you. It was then explained to them what would happen to the pictures and their commentary. Once collected in the photos were processed and paired with the students comments. These were then split into themes and a photo journal produced with these themes as the different chapters showing the pictures and comments of the students.

Anticipated outcomes

Collection of the thoughts and views of students in a different medium, to be able to be presented to future students and to be used with pre-entry students for discussion. A collection of themes that are rated as important by the student not just by staff – both academically and socially.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Production of over 400 photos in a library to choose from regarding first experiences of UWIC. Commentary on what was thought to be positive and negative alongside the pictures. Production of photo journal and posters describing what to expect from the students point of view and what they found important over the first few weeks to be handed out at Freshers Fayre.

Reflection/impact

Most of the students were happy to engage with the project although it did need close monitoring by the Programme Leader for collection of the diary and cameras. The students felt that they could take pictures without worrying what and why they had taken them and provided plenty of commentary to the pictures. They thought it was a nice way of documenting the first three weeks and asked for copies of the photos to be returned to them. There was a balance between academic and social issues and a lot of the students commented on coping with the day to day living experience.

Module or subject level

COMPUTERISED PEER-ASSESSMENT GLAMORGAN

Keywords

peer-support, peer-assessment, summative, formative

Description/approach

There are often concerns in lecturing first year undergraduate students with regard to their ability to develop an understanding of the subject area and also to develop their presentational skills to the standard expected in higher education. It has been proposed that numerous formative assessments will provide a significant developmental process for them. However, there are two major obstacles that may well have an effect upon the success of this process:

- a) students will often not put any effort into formative tasks i.e. no reward;
- b) for tutors to provide appropriate developmental feedback is not feasible due to time constraints.

The study described in this initiative made use of student peer assessment/support in an attempt to counter the concerns expressed previously. In a module studying Computer Architecture a possible standard assessment would be: develop an essay that will provide guidelines for a user to purchase an appropriate computer for personal use and permitting Internet access. In order to accomplish this assignment the student may be expected to cover areas such as computer hardware, software and Internet access.

This study made use of such an assignment but broke it down into the three components mentioned previously i.e. essay on hardware, essay on software and also an essay on internet access. This being quite a large class the actual marking and provision of separate feedback by the tutor would have been a significantly onerous task.

It was therefore decided to make use of the CAP (Computerized Peer-Assessment system) as a means of supporting the assessment of each of these three tasks. In this way students with prior experience in the subject area could support those of a limited computing

background. Also these less experienced students would be able to view examples of both good and poor practice of their peers. Having progressed through this process the students were expected as in the past to produce a 'standard' essay that covered all areas of the study that would be marked by the tutor. Thus the tutor's load did not increase, yet the stages of feedback associate with the three tasks could be amalgamated together as a guide for the final submission (it should be noted that any student not presenting an essay for peer-marking would not be permitted to view their peers' work.

The marks awarded for this assignment constituted 50% of the module's overall grade. The split of this mark was developed in the ratio of:

- 5% for task one (peer average)
- 5% for task two (peer average)
- 5% for task three (peer average)
- 30% for the essay (tutor generated)
- 5% for performing all three stages of peer-marking/feedback

Anticipated outcomes

It was anticipated that the students would develop throughout the progress of the module by acting upon the feedback of their peers. By breaking down the task into three distinct elements then this would allow students of varying strengths to develop a final essay that met the required standards of the module's assessment.

Evidence of actual outcomes

The results from this assignment were very positive with over 90% of the students submitting and peer-marking all three of the preliminary tasks. The students who initially had quite low peer grades for the early task improved throughout the assessment process. The feedback provided by the students was excellent with considerable constructive quality shown. The study ensured that anonymity was present throughout and the students were only allowed to view the feedback not the marks allocated by their peers.

Reflection/impact

The students who participated in this study were very supportive of its methods. It developed a 'group' togetherness and supported the weaker students at an early stage of their studies both in the subject area and also in their presentational skills. The balance of personal development and summative assessment proposed by this study did not increase the tutor work-load with regard to marking, but permitted the tutor to

view the feedback from students to their peers. This in its own way permitted a monitoring of progress of the student as they needed to show subject knowledge themselves in order to evaluate their peers. The feedback provided by the students was significantly more detailed than a tutor would have provided (due to time constraints) and it was pleasing to note how the students increased the quantity of their feedback as the study progressed.

PEER ASSISTED STUDY SUPPORT (PASS) SWANSEA

Keywords

collaborative learning; personalised learning; social learning communities; study skills; communication and leadership skills; employability; achieving potential; retention; student experience; partnership

Aim

- Support the first year student experience through collaborative exploratory discussion
- Enhance the learning experience and Personal Development of PASS Leaders
- Improve academic performance and achievement and increase retention
- Provide an additional mechanism for communication and feedback between teaching staff and students.

Description/approach

- Learning enhancement through student to student support scheme
- Trained student PASS Leaders facilitate study sessions for groups of lower year students
- PASS is voluntary and intended to offer a safe, friendly place to help students;
- Enhance their awareness of course direction and expectations
- Content is based on course materials and PASS leaders are engaged in sharing their experiences and facilitating discussion rather than re-teaching the subject.

Anticipated outcomes

Institutional and faculty level

- Improving the student experience and academic performance
- Reducing student drop out rates

School and discipline level

- Providing staff with regular and ongoing feedback
- Highlighted as good practice by QAA
- Improves student study skills
- Fostering a spirit of community.

Student level

- Provides support and guidance
- Non-threatening and non-remedial
- Social benefits
- Increased academic confidence
- Improved communication, teamwork, collaborative problem solving & interpersonal skills.

PASS Leaders

- Personal development opportunity;
- Skills development – leadership, communication, teamwork etc
- Opportunity to reflect, review and re-evaluate
- Increased academic performance
- Recognition and Reward.

Evidence of actual outcomes

Pilot commences in October 2009 and will be monitored in 09/10 culminating in an evaluation at the end of the academic year.

Reflection/impact

Too early to reflect.

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