

The



*Technology Enhanced Learning
in Research-led Institutions*

Project

CASE STUDY

Research-based problems and evaluation in local history

Evaluation from implementation in courses

The TELRI Project

Centre for Academic Practice
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL

Email: telri@warwick.ac.uk

Web site: www.telri.ac.uk



The TELRI Project is a three year project funded under phase 3 of the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP).



CASE STUDY

Researching local history

<p>Title Advanced Diploma in Local History</p>	
Department	Continuing Education/TALL Programme
Institution	Oxford University
<p>Description of the course</p> <p>An online, web-based course that aims to develop the student as a confident and proficient researcher of family and community history.</p> <p>Unit 0 is an introductory session in which all procedures are outlined, site navigation is explained, students are assigned an online tutor, and a discussion format is initiated. There are two modules, each comprising 10 units. The concepts and methods of historical research are introduced, and the nature of, sources for, and approaches to local historical research are emphasised.</p> <p>Module 1: Concepts and methods for local history, involves the student in the use of original sources and case studies to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The nature and purpose of local history * Approaches to evidence * Personal testimony: oral history, diaries, etc. * The evidence of buildings * Introduction to quantitative methods * Putting it all together: writing good history <p>Module 2: Databases for Historians, involves the student in the assembly, manipulation and analysis of large bodies of historical data, and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Historical databases: principles and examples * Creating databases * Introduction to data sets * Questioning, manipulating, and analysing the data. 	<p>Course details</p> <p>Local History is an optional course set at undergraduate level three and has a time lapse of one year, comprising two modules.</p> <p>During the first running of the course, 600 learning hours were accumulated. Each "learning object" is 10-15 h of study time. The course constitutes 60 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points at level three.</p> <p>33 began the course, 11 withdrew, and 2 intermitted. All students were British, with the exception of one student from Ireland. One student was resident in Turkey. 50-60 students are expected during the second running of the course. Several will be from the United States.</p> <p>Tutor groups are small to ensure a high level of interaction.</p> <p>Admission is by application only and 2 referees are required. Furthermore, a preliminary assignment is required which establishes the student's ability to navigate the course online. The course is not for the beginning historian.</p> <p>Fees of £730 are assessed for all EU students and £1500 for all non-EU students.</p> <p>QAA guidelines for distance learning quality assurance procedures and design approaches were followed throughout.</p>

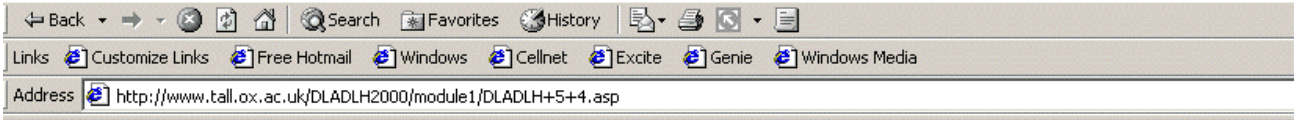
<p>Details of the TELRI intervention and how it aimed to enhance the learning and course activities?</p> <p>Course structure The web learning environment presents the students with the structure of the course through its hierarchy levels: course, modules, units and assignments, navigation design and use of "learning objects". The course is resource heavy and these are available to students at relevant point in their assignments (learning objects). A key design requirement was simplicity and ease of use. Navigation approaches were designed to assist students in contextualisation of individual learning objects into the bigger picture.</p> <p>Course design Learning outcomes are specified at each level of the course alongside the medium required to support study towards these (e.g. PDF documents, animation clips, discussion conferences etc.).</p> <p>Assignments Research-based problems and evaluation instructed tasks are presented as "learning objects" and supported by online tools, databases and primary resources.</p> <p>Students in later runs of the course will have access to examples of previous work.</p> <p>Student interaction Use of WebBoard conferencing software for discussion. Students can enter conferences on specific topics at every stage of their assignments, thus integrating tutor and peer guidance and feedback.</p>	<p>Other teaching methods used to support activity</p> <p>The entire course is run online. The course developers are investigated ways forward for providing staff development for online tutors.</p> <p>Other technologies used to support activity (e.g. CD-ROM, web resources, lecture notes, references, online tests)</p> <p>Students are given a booklet, CD and other multimedia resources during the course. Web research resources are also utilised.</p>
<p>How the course was previously run</p> <p>This is the first running of the course.</p>	<p>Problems with previous teaching methods</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Intended capabilities to be developed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to conduct historical research of a high quality ▪ Ability to analyse opportunities and identify methodologies required for studying complex data appropriately ▪ Scholarly rigour and precision ▪ Ability to design effective procedures and methodologies for historical research 	<p>Methods of assessment</p> <p>Assessment is through course assignments. Four assignments per unit are given, with student/tutor discussion as necessary. The assignments are written and then submitted for marking by tutors. The marking system is that used by the Open University. There is random moderation of tutor marking. All assignments are archived.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches taken. <p>The course units make use of specific case studies, but the lessons learned are generic.</p>	<p>There is no formal examination and no requirement to publish work to the web for open viewing.</p>
<p>Problems in setting up the course or technology</p> <p>The first run of the course required students to undertake a preliminary introductory computing course. Even so, the Help Service was heavily used.</p> <p>Learning resources were provided separately from course session assignments, limiting the coherence of the course for students.</p> <p>The use of commercial software within the course presents problems to students accessing files using different versions as well as costs in updating files for future runs.</p> <p>The implementation of particular features was constraining:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printing off materials was badly supported offline. 2. There was a need to integrate email with conference discussions without additional complex software. 3. Audio visual materials added configuration problems coupled with poor sound/picture quality. <p>Several students struggled with the technological aspects of the course, consequently taking up a disproportionate amount of staff time and further exacerbating delays in preparing and delivering course material.</p> <p>It proved difficult to recruit tutors. We require expertise in the early modern period of history and in database use, apparently a rare combination.</p>	<p>How these were solved</p> <p>In the new approach, students registering undertake "practice techniques" as an entry prerequisite, involving basic tasks such as email attachments.</p> <p>All resources were provided at course session level.</p> <p>Recombination solution: combine non-version dependent files with version-dependent options. Students are asked what "version" of software they are using and access specific versions of the materials.</p> <p>Production of a modular solution for the core functionality required:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use of PDF documents 2. Group-enabled activities through WebBoard 3. Move to use of Macromedia Flash and plug-in for students. <p>We have revamped our application procedures, to elicit more information from students. Applicants are also asked to carry out a test that allows us to assess their basic technological ability and their historical awareness.</p> <p>Persistence!</p>
<p>Extent of development of intended outcomes</p> <p>TELRI evaluation</p> <p>This is an 'enabling' course whose purpose is to help students improve their historical skills to the point that they become proficient and confident. Students learnt to think historically. They also learnt specific research skills, ranging from the identification and</p>	<p>Academic tutor evaluation</p> <p>We intend in future to spend more time on tutor training. In general, tutors have been more reactive than proactive, and that needs to be reversed. We shall be more specific in what we require tutors to do. We shall also try to persuade them to make greater use of</p>

<p>analysis of sources (documentary and non-documentary) to the construction and analysis of historical databases.</p>	<p>the Webboard conferencing facility that allows tutors to talk to one another. Tutors, too, can feel isolated.</p> <p>Students evaluation</p> <p>The personal communication that derived from student/tutor discussion was invaluable.</p>
<p>Unintended benefits or costs</p> <p>TELRI evaluation (e.g. leading to changes in course design model or tool design)</p> <p>The need to design a specific web learning environment for TALL was a huge cost. However, this was necessary since commercial or HE managed learning environments (MLEs, e.g. WebCT, COSE, Learning Space) did not allow TALL to realise the philosophy in the way they wished. The sense of overview of course structure, content and logic/purpose is hidden in an MLE and does not allow the students to take as much responsibility for their own learning.</p> <p>There were problems with the way the database was presented. The team envisaged that the main time costs would already be incurred in the pilot course. The actual course became quite expensive for the small numbers recruited so far.</p>	<p>Academic tutor evaluation (e.g. leading to changes in teaching practice)</p> <p>This is a new course, and inadequate time was allowed for the preparation of course material. This had a serious knock-on effect in that material was often delivered late to the learning technologists, who in turn had insufficient time to develop it for Internet delivery. The problem should now largely resolve itself, since revision only, not new writing is required.</p> <p>Students evaluation (e.g. leading to changes in learning practice)</p> <p>Students requested integration of facilities for voice-based, synchronous conferencing, rather than purely text-based discussions.</p>
<p>Cost-effectiveness analysis (e.g. factors such as learning quality, staff time, ease of transfer to other courses)</p> <p>Total cost to set up and run course to date: £128,000, including TALL costs, fees for external consultants, technical infrastructure, but excluding academic course director's time and departmental overheads.</p> <p>Due to the nature of the subject area rather than the teaching and learning methods used, this course is currently not cost-effective. This may change as the number of runs of the course increases. The course is dependent on the additional student numbers subsidy provided by HEFCE. Across the TALL Programme of online courses, cost-benefits arise from a market-focused approach in the choice of subject topics, restricting future courses to subjects linked to employers' training (e.g. computing, subjects allied to medicine and business admin) and away from</p>	<p>To what extent can the course design approach support higher student numbers?</p> <p>The number of students will be limited by the availability of tutors and support staff. The design of the course is such that it could theoretically support many more students since tutor groups are quite low and additional tutors can be bought in.</p> <p>There are currently 1 in 10 applicants to enquiries due possibly to the high publicity and the difference between expectation and need associated with the high level of the course. A marketing solution might be to identify universities and colleges offered suitable preparatory courses and collaborate on recruitment. This may increase the number of students on the course.</p>

<p>HEFCE-subsidised subjects (e.g. liberal arts).</p> <p>In summary, quality online courses can be offered cost-effectively across the whole TALL Programme of courses, allowing a creative approach in how the costs and income are managed.</p>	<p>What further developments are planned for this or other courses?</p> <p>Rebuilding/revising this course from lessons learned.</p> <p>An effective course information management system is still desirable and will reduce administrative costs in student registration and problems with documents linking.</p>
---	---

Local History course web site



Advanced Diploma in Local History: Module 1

Unit 5: The evidence of buildings I



Session 4 A study of Mary Arden's House

(above) Module materials and activities are organised into a structure of courses, units and sessions.

(left) Online discussion in WebBoard showing conferences panel (left) and postings/replies (right)