

CONDUCTING LARGE GROUP TUTORIALS USING BLACKBOARD COLLABORATE

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KEYWORDS

Online learning, Blackboard Collaborate, tutorials, large group teaching

SUMMARY

Teaching delivery on this module has evolved over the last few years to make the best use of the two hours per week timetabled slot, and to increase student engagement.

Recorded lectures and Blackboard Collaborate tutorial sessions have replaced videoconferencing to deliver teaching to a large student cohort based at different sites.

This new delivery mechanism is well suited to teaching computing due to functionality such as screen sharing and instant messaging, and has also led to an increase in student engagement during tutorial sessions.

CONTEXT

The third year of the BSc Computing degree is a fully networked programme involving students from six different academic partners. The cohort is large (50-60 students) and all students have articulated in to the degree via the HNC and HND in Computing. Advanced Databases is a core level 9 module within the degree programme. Assessment is by closed book exam (100% of available marks).

WHAT, WHERE?

Teaching delivery on this module has evolved over the last few years to make the best use of the two hours per week timetabled slot, and to increase student engagement.

Initially (in 2011/12) weekly teaching was by a two hour video conference (VC) session which incorporated a one hour lecture followed by a one hour tutorial session. Students were given tutorial exercises prior to the sessions which the lecturer would talk through in the tutorial.

In 2012/13, the lecturer recorded the lectures (with accompanying PowerPoint) and published them on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Students would be expected to have watched these, and worked through tutorial exercises prior to attending the one hour VC tutorial.

In 2013/14, the recorded lectures remained, but the tutorial sessions were taught using Blackboard Collaborate (something that the lecturer encountered when studying online for her Masters). This is a medium in which screen sharing, voice narrative and chatroom functionality is combined. Students can: see the lecturer's laptop screen; hear the lecturer's voice; comment/ask questions via an instant messaging 'chat pane'; comment /ask questions verbally. Questions and issues that were brought up in these sessions were posted on to the VLE discussion board afterwards for staff and students to follow up.

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WHY?

Prior to the changes, videoconferencing tutorials were not very successful: attendance was poor and there was not a lot of interaction between students. This was perhaps because of the large cohort but may also have been due to the introverted nature of many computing students who may have been too shy to speak up on VC. VC was also not an ideal way to teach the module content. For example, the lecturer wanted to demonstrate software which sometimes wasn't loaded on to local computers; or show their computer screen which did not display that well on the VC screen, particularly when scrolling up and down.

DID IT WORK?

Since the change to using Blackboard Collaborate, attendance and engagement in tutorials has greatly improved. There has been no accompanying increase in grades for the modules but students are happier!

WAS IT WORTH IT?

Delivery using Blackboard Collaborate involved no extra preparation; probably less, in fact, as you do not need to produce slides or notes and can just talk students through what is happening on the screen, and respond to questions as they come in from students. There is a bit of a time investment in writing, recording and editing lectures (these were done all at once, before the beginning of term). However, once these are done they only need to be reviewed and updated periodically.

If you wish to submit your own case study, or have any questions about this resource please contact:

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