

Student Views of Learning Technologies 2012/2013

Introduction

Over the academic year 2012/2013 the Faculty has been engaging with students around their view of learning technologies.

In this report we have pulled together a number of data sources including: a consultation and discussion with student representatives in the Staff Student Liaison Group; a survey of BA Econ students; two surveys focussing on online submission, marking and feedback (across the Faculty and within the History discipline); and nominations from the student-led 'Best on Blackboard' competition.

When asked an open question about what the top three priorities were, students said:

- Lecture capture
- Online coursework submission and marking
- Wi-Fi coverage

Humanities student views will be compared with the HE sector as a whole. Also we will be reflecting on a similar report produced by the Faculty in 2009/2010¹.

Who is this report for?

This report is meant for all staff and students in the Faculty. It will enable us to take stock of where we are and aid discussion about where we are going.

The general message from our current on-campus students is that technology is vital to their teaching and learning, but so are the face to face / traditional elements of their educational experience.

Overview

The report focuses on 5 areas:

- Use of Blackboard and Blended Learning
- Online submission, marking and feedback of coursework
- Lecture capture
- Other issues
- Equipment, systems and access



Use of Blackboard and Blended Learning

Blackboard is seen as a vital tool to learning and the place where students access all their course content. Students have seen improvements since 2011/2012 and a significant number have had experience of 'blended learning'.



Blackboard

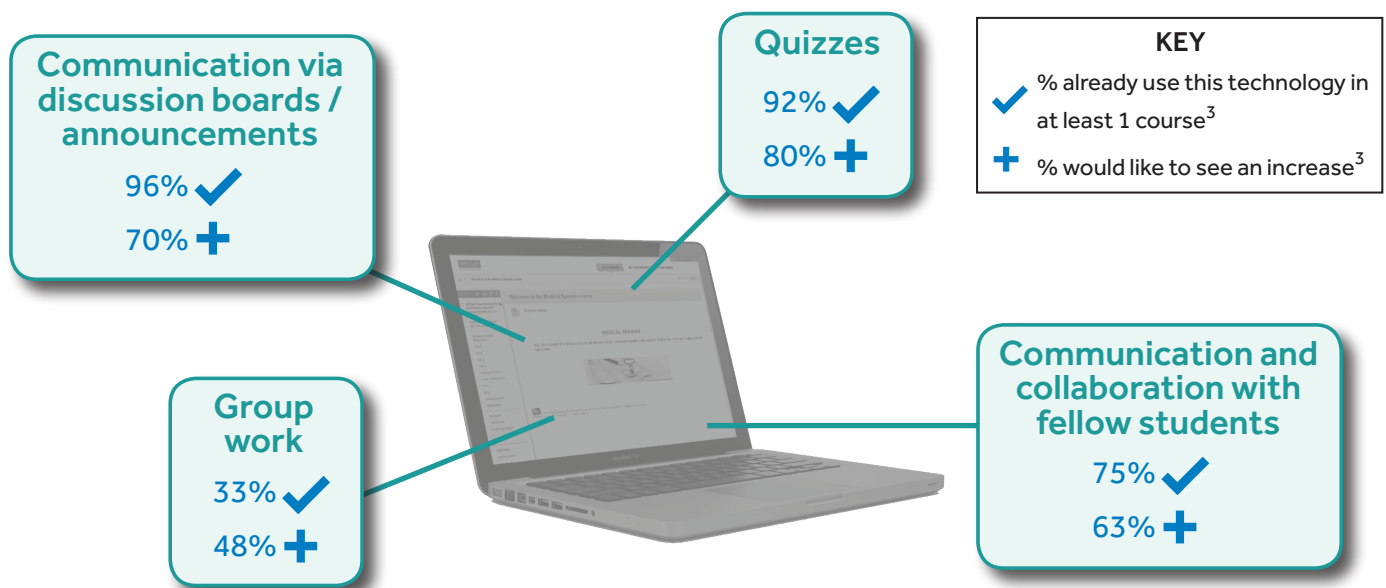
In the Higher Education sector Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) are widely used, with 78% students (NUS/HSBC 2011) having experience of a VLE. However despite this increase there was a decrease in students indicating that ICT had enhanced their learning.

¹See www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/documents/posters_leaflets/Hum_eLearning_studentFeedback_2009-10.pdf



Also in the sector a lack of staff engagement with the VLE is noted: "Many participants remarked that VLEs are only intermittently updated by academics and do not contain useful and effective content. This reflects a larger debate around attendance, with teachers fearing low attendance numbers if material is available online." (NUS, 2010). A similar situation was experienced by our own students back in 2009/2010: some were confused and disappointed by the lack of material found in courses; comments such as "It's got all the tabs up there but there is nothing in the sections" and "Only 50% of my lecturers use it" illustrate this.

In 2009/2010 there did not appear to be a lot of experience of blended learning; students at the time were concerned about technology replacing face-to-face contact in 2012/2013. Anecdotally this does not appear to be a major preoccupation. The indication is that students value the use of technology for blended learning; blended learning makes Blackboard more interactive and encourages students to engage more²; and would like more use of discussion boards, quizzes and group work / collaboration.



The Humanities experience in 2013 appears to differ from the sector reports in that the usage of the VLE is more widespread and students see it as vital to their learning experience, indicating a higher level of staff engagement. They have a wide variety of experiences and would like to see increased use of the VLE.

Individually none of the above uses necessarily equates to blended learning, however student quotes illustrate how they are experiencing a more integrated approach to using technology in their learning and the benefits they are getting / would like to see.

"Our tutor would always reference how to access blackboard and where to find the material needed for the weeks lecture. She would post pre-lecture which contained what we were going to go over in the class then after the lecture (but it would have gaps in it to encourage you to go to the class)"

Best on Blackboard student nomination (for BMAN10621 Danielle Lyssimachou)

"There are quizzes consisting of multiple choice questions for every lecture topic. There is a discussion board, separated into the various topics, that allows for students to ask questions amongst each other with academic oversight to ensure the accuracy of reasoning and substance. There are seminar files compiling compulsory and further reading enabling me to prepare diligently."

Best on Blackboard student nomination (for LAWS20022 Marcus Senior)

²Discussion Group
³BA Econ



Figure 1: Top 40 themes from the highly commended shortlist of Best on Blackboard nominations

"Some lecturers use blackboard to greatly support our study; posting the lecture slides, online quizzes, links to relevant articles and input on the discussion board. Others do not, which is frustrating - especially when you come to revise."

BA Econ student

"Blackboard is mainly used for putting up lecture slides and tutorial worksheets. There is no interaction between students and lecturer."

BA Econ student

Academic colleagues do say that they find it difficult to get students to engage in online discussions so student feedback wanting more engagement and communication online is interesting. Our student feedback is corroborated by NUS/HSBC (2011) where discussion forums were highlighted as the most useful facilities that could be integrated into their studies which were not currently used.

More information from students about strategies to encourage engagement would be useful.

Online Submission, Marking and Feedback of Coursework

Our students' views are very similar to evaluations in the sector⁴ and include:

- Overall student satisfaction (easiness, convenience, cost)
- Preference for online submission and for feedback returned electronically
- Perceived pedagogical added value: clarity, feedback quality, collection rates



Between 50% and 80% of students prefer to receive feedback online.

(Humanities Survey and BA Econ)

⁴University of Glamorgan, Turn it in or Turn it off? A Pilot Project for Turnitin and Grademark Experience, 15 March 2010
University of Exeter, Online Coursework Management Evaluation, JISC Project 2012
University of Glamorgan, Assessment Diaries & Grademark, 2012
University of Huddersfield, Evaluating the Benefits of Electronic Assessment Management, JISC Project, July 2012.

These are in line with the NUS (2010) highlighting students being receptive to e-submissions, e-feedback and the recommendation relating to use of ICT to attain greater efficiency and convenience: "Institutions should consider ways of making university administration more accessible through technology including e-submission of assessment, registration and course choices."

"I think it would be beneficial to receive feedback online, it would then give you points which you could bring-up with your tutor/lecturer in an office hour."

BA Econ student

Students see online marking and feedback as vital to their teaching and learning with over half in the discussion group and 62% in the survey wanting to see more online submission and 80% wanting to receive feedback online.

Data collected indicated that students:

- found it easier to read, avoiding misunderstandings⁵
- felt it was more convenient⁶
- were more likely to collect feedback online⁷ and review it⁸
- felt the feedback was more detailed⁹ (discussion group) and helpful¹⁰
- liked the in-line summary comments¹¹
- were positive that it was confidential / private to individual student¹²



72% of students say the switch to online essay submission improved their experience.

Jones, M (2012) History Students

"Online feedback also gives them more flexibility over when and where they can access their feedback, they know the exact date on which it is available and it is easily downloadable for their own records. The students were highly supportive of the idea and their initial feedback since rolling it [online feedback] out has been 100% positive. It has made their lives easier."

James Evans, Director of UG Studies SED

Students did not feel that submitting coursework had any negative implications on their relationships with lecturers; however this has been identified in other student bodies (Hopkins 2010). One issue shared with Hopkins (2010) by a small number of students was a certain amount of apprehension about submitting online and uncertainty about whether their assignment had been received. There is evidence of some small scale technical problems with using our systems.



How vital are the following technologies to students learning (on a scale from 1-10)

- Blackboard 9.6
- Lecture Capture 8.7
- Online submission and marking 8.6

Students were frustrated by dual submission, i.e. where they were being asked to submit both in paper and online. They were not sure why they were being asked to do this. Some students did feel that they would benefit from seeing the Turnitin originality report, however most said the quality of the feedback was more important than viewing originality reports.

These negative issues can be summed up by the following quote from a BA Econ student: "It saves a trip to ALB, but it never really works properly as everyone tries to upload at once, and it causes some apprehension about whether it's actually been submitted properly. Also in one unit which required the submission of Excel files in this way I later learned that the interface did not allow for comments to be read in Excel, which had I not discovered this would have led to a portion of my work being unmarked."

⁵Discussion Group and Humanities Survey

⁶Discussion Group

⁷Discussion Group and Humanities Survey

⁸Humanities Survey, Max Jones (2012)

⁹Discussion Group

¹⁰Max Jones (2012)

¹¹Discussion Group

¹²Discussion Group

Lecture Capture



Students are overwhelmingly positive about lecture capture, as they are about lectures as a teaching method. Prior to the roll out of the University wide service for Lecture Capture due 2013/2014, students in Humanities were already experiencing different types of audio and video capture to support their lectures; for example 82% had experience of audio or video capture on at least one course and 17% on at least half of all courses (BA Econ). Over half the students in the Discussion Group had some experience of lecture capture.

Students used lecture capture primarily for review and revision purposes, but what did students say about it impacting their attendance at lectures?

This is a mixed picture. Students understand lecturers' concerns about impacting attendance, and that some students would opt to not attend lectures if it was available online. Students confirmed this, however an equal number indicated it would not impact their attendance. The jury is out on this aspect and will soon be tested by the University's roll out of the 'Podcast' service in 2013/2014.



97% of student respondents would like to see an increase use of lecture capture

BA Econ

"I don't think it impacts much on attendance. Because if one really cares about lectures, he/she will go to the lecture independent of whether it is being podcasted. It's simply not possible to go through every podcast minute by minute, it would be pointless to do that. It is to be used as a reference, not as a lecture. As in BMAN21020, the room is still packed although it is being podcasted. But it could also be very useful for one has occasionally missed a lecture."

BA Econ student

"Podcasts are hugely helpful as they enable us to access all of the lecture content, as many lecturers speak quickly and it helps to be able to pause to write. Recordings do influence my attendance but having access to all information is the point."

BA Econ student

Students ideally would like audio and video but think that audio only is sufficient. They would like the lectures straight away but understand lecturers concerned about attendance and would want them at least for revision They felt a compromise of half way through the course would be appropriate.

Students understand lecturers' concerns in terms of student attendance or impact on their individual teaching style however they did ask lecturers to bear in mind just how useful online lectures are to students.

"Capturing lectures is the most beneficial tool to improve learning in lectures by far. In many lectures if you are confused after 5 minutes the remaining 45 are pointless as you cannot follow. With podcasts you can pause the lecture after 5 minutes and find other ways of understanding the concept before continuing. My attendance would decrease but my learning and exam results would increase"

BA Econ student

Other issues

Social Media

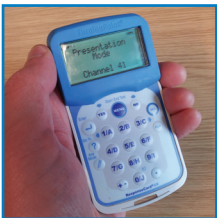
Students saw social media, e.g. Facebook as a very important tool for their teaching and learning for student-to-student communication, collaboration and support around academic courses. They did not want it to be used by their lecturers as a key component of their teaching and learning. They indicated that they saw Blackboard as part of their 'formal' learning led by a tutor and Facebook as informal, student-led and organic. This view is supported by Hopkins (2011).



Facebook is also used to share content that was not sanctioned by the lecturer, e.g. previous exam scripts.

Twitter is used by some students not for specific credit-bearing courses but to be part of a wider discipline based community. This was seen as useful to develop greater links, networks and understanding of their discipline and to aid employability / find jobs etc...

Classroom Clickers



Students felt in the discussion group *"there is a lot of potential but teachers would really have to think about how they would best work..."*, and articulate clearly the educational benefits. Clickers weren't seen as vital to the student teaching and learning experience and students felt they were more useful in checking knowledge of fact-based subjects.

Equipment Systems and Access

During discussions a number of issues related to what facilities and the type of technical infrastructure students had access too. Below Rosie Jones from the Alan Gilbert Learning Commons (AGLC) and Guy Percival, the IS Manager respond to student feedback.

Rosie Jones the Learning Commons Manager responds

"The Learning Commons is great, but it is so busy!" The AGLC is pleased they are so busy and have extend the main Library opening times, but there are still areas in the AGLC and Library not being used so they are looking into making sure all the space is used.

"We want more desks to use our own equipment on." Rosie says they get conflicting demands here from students some want more computers some want less. Don't forget though students can find computers / desks in other locations e.g. the Simon building, the George Kenyon and the Main Library.

"We want to charge our devices in the Library." Rosie says this is being addressed in the Main Library (as it's an old building it is more difficult to install power points so they have introduced the charging lockers to try and help in the meantime).



Guy Percival the Faculty IS Manager replied, saying,

"The Wi-Fi coverage is patchy across campus and you are logged off automatically." Guy says that there is work on improving the Wi-Fi coverage across campus. He recommends students use 'Eduroam' as the preferred Wi-Fi connection (see the online support via the Knowledge Base for help with this).

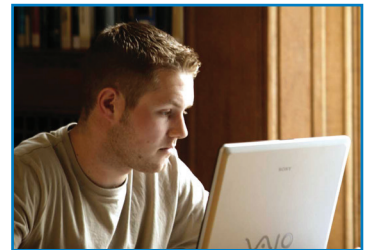
"Why do I have to sign onto clusters and then sign on individually to different services, e.g. Blackboard?" Systems security is very important and logging onto University systems separately helps create a secure learning environment.

Mobile technologies were not covered directly in surveys or discussions, interestingly however, it was not raised specifically by students, notwithstanding discussions around Wi-Fi access.



What students would like lecturers to do

- Post up lecture notes on Blackboard immediately after the lecture / in a timely fashion
- Have more consistency across Blackboard course units (particularly in use of terminology e.g. seminar, tutorial)
- Become more skilled in the use of Blackboard so they can support students more
- Use more blended learning
- Reduce the need to submit coursework both online and in paper or at least explain why
- Adopt lecture capture



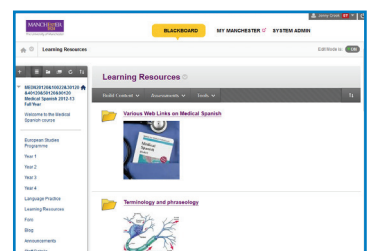
What students say about the systems they are asked to use

- Blackboard has a clunky interface for discussions, group work and collaboration
- Blackboard is difficult to navigate and needs an improved interface
- Notifications of when content has been updated in Blackboard is important
- It is not clear on Turnitin whether course work is submitted, and there are some technical issues



What the University / eLearning support has done to respond to student feedback

- Redesigned the Blackboard interface
- Publicised how to get push notifications of Blackboard updates on mobile devices (see the [Knowledge Base](#))
- Monitored Turnitin and reviewed of student guidance for online submission to ensure guidance is clear (see the [Knowledge Base](#))



References

Hopkins L (2010) **Student perspective on learning technologies**, University of Loughborough. Accessed from <https://blog.lboro.ac.uk/elearning/?p=621> on 16 July 2013

NUS (2010) **Student perspectives on technology – demand, perceptions and training needs**. HEFCE. Accessed from www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2010/studpersptech/ on 16 July 2013

NUS/HSBC (2011) **NUS/HSBC Student Experience Full Report 2010/11**.

Accessed from www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/NUS-HSBC-Experience-report-web.pdf on 16 July 2013

Data Sources

BA (Econ) (2013) students providing their views on Learning Technologies (n=71)

Best on Blackboard nominations (2013). The Best on Blackboard competition is designed to highlight resources that stand out as examples of good practice which have positively engaged students and to reflect the wide range of innovative learning design that exists across the Faculty, www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/bestonblackboard/

Discussion Group (2013). Discussion group with 12 student representatives on the Humanities Staff Student Liaison Group. Students were asked to consult with their peers. All Schools were represented except Law, most students were second years and all bar one student had consulted with their peers and felt quite or very confident representing their peers' views. Undertaken Semester 2 2013.

Humanities Survey (2013). Humanities wide UG and PG survey with a specific focus on online submission and marking (n= 204) completed in 2013.

Max Jones (2012). Survey of History UG students with a specific focus on online submission and marking (n=91)

Other Information

The University Knowledge Base from www.manchester.ac.uk/servicedesk



Humanities eLearning Team website:

www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/



Follow us on Twitter:

@humelearning



Find us on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/humelearningteam

For comments or feedback, contact eLearning Manager Cath Dyson: cath.dyson@manchester.ac.uk

