Dr Melanie Giles

Project: Reconstructing the Past

School: Arts, Histories and Cultures
Course: ARGY 10121 and 10072 Introduction to European Archaeology
No. of students: 70 **Level:** UG
Themes: Assessment, Feedback and Marking, Student Engagement in Class

TESS 2012
Teaching Enhancement and Student Success

TESS is a University-wide initiative, funded by the Faculty of Humanities. Working with the Faculty elearning Teams, academics set up projects aimed at developing course content specific to their needs, through elearning tools and skills development.

What was the problem?

"Archaeology (and the cognate subjects with which we work: Ancient History, Anthropology and Art History) are visual disciplines: from analysing aerial photographs to illustrating new artefacts, we work every day with images. Yet our undergraduate students often underestimate the importance of illustrating the past and the vital role images play in disseminating research to public audiences. We also wanted to diversify our assessment methods, and improve the way in which students use and reference images in their work. A further aim was to improve student awareness of the rich skills set they acquire during their degree, to enable them to articulate these to potential employers after graduation."

What did the students think?

"Feedback gathered through in-class 'clicker' handsets, as well as email responses, suggest that students greatly appreciated the addition of a formative assessment to their module, though participation rates may be enhanced if a grade was attached. They appreciated the supportive tutorial and research materials, which made them think more critically about the use of images in archaeology, and felt more confident about including illustrations in their future work."

How was the problem solved?

"We developed a Blackboard based, formative assessment, supported by a tutorial featuring two visualisations: one prehistoric case study (an Iron Age chariot burial) and one historic case study (a seventeenth century Hall). The images were enriched by primary data and research articles, accessed online through journals or PDFs for which we obtained copyright permission. The actual images could be 'exploded' as larger files, to allow close scrutiny of details. There were also audio interviews with the visualisation artists, explaining how the images were created. Students submitted a response paragraph – critiquing the images via email – and received formative feedback from the tutor: simple methods which encouraged participation. However, the potential exists in the future to use online assessment facilities such Turnitin and GradeMark."

How successful was the solution?

"There were issues with the timing of the assessment, and accessibility of the data: some students encountered difficulties in downloading the images or listening to the audio interviews, due to restricted access to high quality IT equipment off-campus. These are inevitable problems with online learning initiatives, which reminds us of the continuing divide that IT-based learning entails. However, on-campus facilities are provided for our students, to ensure equitable access – it just takes a little more planning on the students' behalf. Liaison with our excellent eLearning team was vital in resolving these problems.

In conclusion, the initiative has embedded visualisation skills in Level 1 assessment which will be vital for independent research projects at Level 2 (the Long Essay) and Level 3 (the Dissertation). More broadly, these are skills for life, which we can now deliver through innovative assessment methods, building student confidence for both future study as well as employment."

The Humanities eLearning Team are on-hand to provide advice, guidance and demonstrations to academic staff on the opportunities for using technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

Humanities eLearning team
elearning@manchester.ac.uk
www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl