

teachingmatters

teaching and learning support and development

Rob's Reflections

Last summer was filled with transitions that affect L&T at Reading – in fact too many to mention them all here. However, I would like to welcome the five new Faculty Directors of Teaching and Learning, Martha-Marie Kleinmans (FoSS), Paddy Woodman (FAH), Ben Cosh (FoS), Peter Miskell (HBS) and Julian Park (FoLS). We couldn't have wished for a more engaged, energetic group of people to pick up the batons from their illustrious predecessors. Keith Swanson has been appointed Director of Academic Quality Support and David Stannard has taken up a post at the Henley Business School. Jennie Chetcuti has taken over from Chris Robson as Senior Quality Support Officer. In CSTD we said goodbye to Janet Pryse who, at Reading, developed one of the best staff training programmes in any university. We welcome Libby Graham as Acting Director and we wish her well in her secondment to the Centre. In particular, we welcome colleagues from Henley Management College, now part of the Henley Business School (HBS) Faculty. Our merger with Henley with its distinctive spread of programmes has broadened the T & L landscape at Reading in many positive ways. Of course we said 'arrivederci' to many happy graduates over the summer and more recently welcomed a new intake of students from all over the world. It was entirely appropriate then that in the early autumn joint T & L awayday we focussed on the transitions that home and international students would be making over this term. Local teachers told us about the sixth-form experience and how it could be quite varied in different types of schools. Meeting them left many of us with a better understanding of why some Freshers struggle with becoming more independent learners, and why they are often critical of assessment and feedback in university. Ros Richards, Director of CALS, highlighted the even greater gap for international students entering the UK HE system. Many students take advantage of all the support we provide but for those who struggle we aren't always clear what has gone wrong. So it is particularly pleasing that, over the summer, colleagues in CDoTL won a large grant from HEFCE and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for a 3-year project with colleagues at Oxford Brookes to study why students drop out and what we can do to improve retention.

Professor Rob Robson

Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning)

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Paddy Woodman – the new Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities



Paddy Woodman

My name is Paddy (Patricia) Woodman and as of the 1st August 08 I have stepped into Kris Spelman Miller's very large Faculty Director of Teaching & Learning shoes for the Arts and Humanities.

After completing my PhD in Archaeology I spent the following 10 years of my academic career in the School of Continuing Education, most significantly as programme director for the short courses and as School Director of Teaching & Learning. These roles have, I hope, been good preparation for the Faculty directorship in that as a result I have longstanding experience of leading and supporting a portfolio of diverse programmes. I consider myself to have been extremely fortunate in working in this challenging environment, one in which I could not help but develop an interest in teaching and learning.

I am starting this new role with the strong conviction that, in addition to contributing to the development of their discipline, arts and humanities graduates have important contributions to make to society (a point which so often seems lost on our present government) and because of this I am anxious that we should do all that we can to ensure that our arts and humanities graduates are demonstrably

equipped with the skills that will be useful to them in finding employment of their choice. But further than this, I agree with many colleagues that the Higher Education experience of students should be about much more than preparing for the world of work. I feel it should also be about promoting active citizenship whether in the local or global community, i.e. making conscious and positive contributions both within and beyond the arena of employment. One would hope that, in particular, graduates of the arts and humanities should play a pivotal role in the maintenance and development of many of the cultural elements of the world's civilisations, whether this is involvement in or patronage of art, literature, drama, film, heritage etc.

I realise that these are fine words and it remains to be seen whether it is possible to advance either of these objectives during my term as Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning. I look forward to working with the many staff who have positive contributions to make in teaching and learning both within Arts and Humanities and across the University.

Paddy Woodman
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Ben Cosh – the new Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Science

I started my career teaching in Further Education, working at all levels from Application of Number Level 1 for arts, sports and music courses through to Higher Level International Baccalaureate with students from Germany, Italy and Canada. In 2002 I went to lecture at Goldsmiths in London, continuing mathematics research in connectivity augmentation, and then in 2004 I came to Reading to run the Faculty-wide Science Foundation programme. It has been a dream job and I just love bumping into ex-foundation-year students all around campus and hearing their continuing stories.

I've always been fascinated by the different ways in which students learn and understand concepts and techniques. But also, to the bemusement of many

colleagues past and present, I'm intrigued by the systems and processes we use to manage and develop our teaching and learning. Keeping them effective, so that we're really making positive change and delivering the best programmes we can. Keeping them efficient, so that staff don't get bogged down with a succession of tinkering initiatives. Keeping them equitable, so that everyone is clear how and why decisions are made. I'm relishing the opportunity to explore these things with the talented, exciting people in the Faculty of Science and around the University.

Ben Cosh
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Martha-Marie Kleinhans – the new Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Social Sciences

I am a Senior Lecturer in the School of Law and began my tenure with the University in 2000. I have been greatly involved in teaching and learning since arriving at the University of Reading: from 'coalface to oversight.' Much of my work in T&L has been specifically tied to the dissemination of the national (HEFCE) agenda of e-learning: I led the School of Law and, in many instances, the University on the development, extension and embedding of best practice in learning technology. Additionally, I am a strong proponent of student-led learning and the enhancement of the student experience generally. I have worked to embed better practice with regard to the former in my own teaching and have been actively involved in both formal and informal groups to work toward the latter.

Another strand of focus of my work has been on the collaborative provision of University programmes and the specific International Student experience that some of these bring to the fore. I have

mostly worked as Programme Director of the School of Law's collaborative (twinning) programme with Taylor's University College (in Malaysia). Involved in the programme from its inception, I have been instrumental in setting up, maintaining and enhancing its teaching/learning quality.

I have just begun work, as the latest recipient of a funded University Teaching Fellowship, on a three-year project to explore student experiences of the assessment process using a qualitative approach to collecting data – collecting and instigating stories told by students of their experiences of assessment.

In October my work in teaching and learning was recognized by UKCLE (the HEA subject centre for Law) when I was shortlisted as one of five in the country for their Law Teacher of the Year 2009 award.

[Martha-Marie Kleinhans](#)
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Peter Miskell – the new Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Henley Business School



Peter Miskell

As a new FDTL I've been asked to 'introduce myself' to readers of *Teaching Matters*. For those who don't know me already, I can tell you that I'm a historian, and that since 2001 I've been working in the Department (now School) of Management. My primary research interest is in the evolution of multinational enterprise during the twentieth century – particularly with regard to the globalisation of entertainment.

I became SDTL for the School of Business in 2007, and then FDTL for the newly formed Henley Business School in August this year. How would I summarise my approach to learning and teaching in higher education? Here are a few thoughts:

As academics (whether lecturers or professors) we should not have separate identities as 'teachers' and 'researchers'.

Both are core to the concept of scholarship, and each should inform the other.

Promoting 'independent learning' means that we probably ought to spend more time thinking about our students, not less. It requires us (as researchers and teachers) to inspire in students a passion for our subjects. It's much harder to 'inspire' active engagement than simply to convey information. But...

Graduates who are confident in their ability to think critically and learn independently are also highly employable. The task of enhancing student employability is not only consistent with academic excellence on our part, it requires it.

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Julian Park – the new Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Life Sciences ... and a National Teaching Fellow



Julian Park

Useful websites

www.engageinresearch.ac.uk

www.ecifm.rdg.ac.uk

www.reading.ac.uk/cetl-aurs/

www.biohorizons.oxfordjournals.org

Bioscience Education Journal Issue 4

<http://bio.itsn.ac.uk/journal/index.htm>

The NTFS and beyond!

'The path is made by walking'
old African proverb

My teaching 'path' started at Norfolk College of Arts and Technology teaching Agriculture to Youth Training Scheme students. I have certainly trodden many paths since then but I still enjoy teaching, get a buzz out of encouraging and facilitating learning, tutoring and enthusing students, trying different techniques and tools and meeting and working with colleagues at Reading, across the UK and further afield.

These are the aspects on which I have built my lecturing career and it was demonstrating and evidencing these that formed the basis of my National Teaching Fellowship which was awarded in June 2008.

My recent teaching areas have been on the boundary between agriculture and environment science (including field courses), approaches to sustainable development, environmental management and simulation modelling. I have particular interests in the design and use of websites to support learning (i.e. *Engage in Research* and *Environmental Challenges in Farm Management*), considering ways in which we can improve the link between teaching and research (i.e. the Applied Undergraduate Research Skills CETL and the *Bioscience Horizons Journal*) and in the general

areas of assessment and feedback (i.e. Assessment diaries project). I am currently working on two feedback related projects with Dr Anne Crook from CDoTL. First, Engage in Feedback which aims to provide a web resource for staff, collating existing information and tips for how to provide quality feedback to students in a time effective manner. Second, ASSET which is a JISC funded project exploring how we can use video and web 2.0 technologies to provide feedback to students. I will be using the NTFS award to continue my research related to feedback.

For 6 years I have been a part time academic advisor with the Centre for Bioscience. Working with the Centre staff, attending and speaking at events and meeting with colleagues from across the wider Bioscience community has provided a wealth of new ideas and experiences which has informed my own teaching. I have recently started to walk a new path, as the Life Sciences Faculty Director of Teaching and Learning which means, perhaps ironically, that I will be teaching less but hopefully have the opportunity to engage widely with teaching and learning issues within the University. It's a path I am looking forward to walking!

Julian Park

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HEFCE / Paul Hamlyn Foundation student retention grant programme

In July 2008 CDoTL and Oxford Brookes University submitted a proposal to the joint HEFCE/Paul Hamlyn Foundation student retention grant programme requesting funding to carry out a three year collaborative project on the impact of student support and personal development on student retention. In total 63 applications were submitted from a wide range of institutions of which only seven were funded, with Reading/Oxford Brookes being one of them receiving just over £183k.

Following existing evidence that students drop out of university for a variety of reasons and often have multiple needs that require a wide range of support, this project sets out to evaluate the

approaches available in both institutions in providing support through study advice and personal development and their impact on student retention.

The life of the project commenced in September 2008 and in the next two and a half years (until August 2011) Reading and Oxford Brookes will be working closely together to identify, evaluate and share institutional good practice in student retention. If you would like more information about the project, please contact Dr Elena Bedisti e.bedisti@reading.ac.uk, x 8409

Elena Bedisti

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LearnHigher year planners help Reading students manage their time



The LearnHigher planner

You may have noticed students carrying what look like pale blue Ordnance Survey maps around campus. Contrary to appearances, it's not because they're lost! Rather they are making use of a unique new tool to help them manage their time: folding student year planners, developed collaboratively by LearnHigher project teams at Reading and Brighton.

Research into student time management by the Study Advisers at Reading revealed that, while students like the portability of diaries, wall planners were more helpful in giving a visual overview of academic work. The folding year planner accomplishes both functions in one. In addition, there is space for notes and targeted time management tips.

After a successful pilot last year, Student Services funding has made it possible to

provide a free planner for every Reading undergraduate. Feedback from students has been positive, with typical comments including, 'I don't know how I survived without one last year. It is much easier to see how to manage my time visually' (3rd year Psychology student).

The successful development of this resource has led to its adoption at a number of other universities including, Plymouth, Liverpool Hope, Nottingham Trent, and Manchester Metropolitan.

For more information on the year planner project, or other LearnHigher resources that could help your students with time management, please contact Dr Michelle Reid.

Michelle Reid

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Should lecturers and students be Facebook friends? Advice for staff



A number of university staff are on *Facebook*. There are various reasons they have signed up: family and friends post news and photos; conferences, events and books are sometimes promoted via *Facebook*; it is a good way to keep in touch with people you know, either well or vaguely. There are other staff who wouldn't touch *Facebook* with a barge pole, citing *Facebook* policies or just the scariness/sadness of social networking.

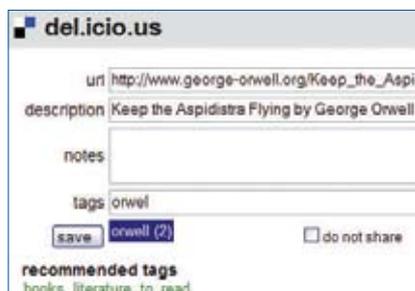
Staff on *Facebook* are likely to get requests from students to be their 'friend', in social networking the term 'friend' is used to describe all acquaintances. Most staff I have talked to were surprised by the first request and they have taken different approaches to dealing with them, ranging from 'I don't accept anyone from the university - *Facebook* is for my private life' to 'I accept all requests'. Sensible solutions seem to be somewhere in between.

One colleague politely refuses all requests from undergraduates, sending them a note explaining that she will be happy to be their *Facebook* friend when they graduate. Another accepts all her student requests, ensuring that her *Facebook* presence is completely professional. I have settled on a compromise of accepting requests from students and putting them in a group. I can then limit what this group can see. I'm still cautious about what I put on Facebook, and with any friendship request I check who the person is, I also know I can un-friend people, and they aren't notified that I have broken the relationship.

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What is social bookmarking?



images imperialism indie inrainbows internet interview
interviews keiman komar language lessing levy life linguistics
literature luddite magazine mailer manners mason&dixon
mcsweeney's meat melamid memory military monophony
morrison motivation mp3 MUSIC mybloodyvalentine myers
myspace nabakov news NewYorker newyorkobserver novel
opera orwell peer-to-peer philosophy phonetics pinsky piracy
politics popularity post-rock posters postmodernism
procrastination productivity proms propaganda psychedelics

Social bookmarking tools

Recently my laptop stopped working and now it's gone off for repair. Apart from being generally disruptive, it's meant that for the time being I can't access anything saved on my hard drive. Mostly it's music I'm missing, a whole library of which I'd ripped to my computer. This breakdown would have meant having a small one of my own but the original CDs are at home and, thanks to the N:/ drive, most of the documents I use for work are safe too. And if I hadn't got into 'social bookmarking', I wouldn't have access to a long but convenient list of websites, both useful and trivial, that I've been building up over recent and fast-moving years.

Over said-years, I've been in the habit of reading news, reviews and articles online and, if there's anything I intend to go back to, I note the website. Previously this involved using the 'Add to Favourites' option that appears in every browser, inevitably generating a long list of webpages that there's never time to revisit, let alone organise.

Organisation, where it does occur, consists of cumbersome folders with carefully vague titles. 'Music' would be one, 'Literature' or, more careful still, 'Books' another (that's another debate altogether) and then perhaps 'News' for a hypothetical third.

Even at that level of generality, there's cross-over – where would I put a news story on an upcoming book about post-punk, for example? Assuming here of course that I don't want to bookmark the page three times just so I can put one in each folder. And, in this situation, the more specific folder headings get, the more crossover potential like this exists between folders.

This arrangement, probably familiar to many, also meant that whenever I was away from my computer at the screen of another, I would be without that list. Not much good if you're visiting your local library and you suddenly think it would be useful to look up that website you saved last week.

But I discovered 'social bookmarking'; an important component of the buzzword revolution that is 'Web 2.0'. Specifically, it was a site called *del.icio.us* that got my attention, which you can get to by entering the name into the address bar – easy enough so long as you remember where the dots are. Once there, the process of getting an account is both simple and free.

What *del.icio.us* enables you to do is bookmark webpages that you can then access from any computer. This is of immediate benefit to anyone who moves between different computers a lot, like those with broken laptops or those without one to begin with. However, there are more advantages beyond this initial convenience because – and here comes the 'social' – this is a website on which many millions of people also have accounts containing their own lists of webpages. That means it's possible both to share yours and to find out what other people are looking at. Not that you have to; a simple tick in the 'Do Not Share' box will ensure that anything that's only personal can stay that way and will not display for others.

Social bookmarking also does away with folders altogether and uses something called 'tagging' instead. You can tag a bookmark with as many words as you like – so that aforementioned news story

could be tagged 'music', 'books' and 'news' as well as 'post-punk', '1980s' and anything else that might be relevant.

As you tag, you build up what's called a 'cloud' of tags which can be displayed in various ways. Clicking on the tag 'music' in your cloud will bring up any bookmarks that you've tagged with this word. Whereas the folder model aimed to imitate reality, as if you were putting actual pages into physical folders, social bookmarking recognises that information can be manipulated in many different dimensions and directions. This is what some like to describe as a move from taxonomic organisation to 'folksonomic' organisation because tags can be any word at all, appealing much more perhaps to subjective and synaesthetic sensibilities than to the drive to separate and categorise.

The *del.icio.us* site is just one example of social bookmarking, something you, your students or your colleagues may already be using. There is also a tool called 'Scholar' which we acquired fairly recently for *Blackboard*, that does all the things that *del.icio.us* can do but can also sit inside your *Blackboard* course. This way, you can assign bookmarks course- and discipline-related tags, enabling both you and your students to collectively build up a pool of useful resources together. These bookmarks can also be shared across institutions, an exchange which should prove less problematic than with content, since these are by definition resources already available on the Web.

If you're interested in using Scholar, I'm dashing between computers now to put together a quick guide which should hopefully be ready by the time of publication. You can contact me on g.i.s.purse@reading.ac.uk to get a copy, or to ask any questions that you might have about social bookmarking or Web 2.0 generally.

Guy Pursey
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Blackboard and the Library

1: Putting scanned readings into the Blackboard

The Library is currently conducting two interesting pilot projects, with input from ITS and CDoTL. Core readings for taught courses are being scanned; the *Blackboard* E-Reserves Content area is then used to manage the administration of the files and, importantly, comply with copyright terms. The two pilots are linked, but are slightly different in focus:

1.1: CLA Licence – currently we are scanning high-demand material under this licence for selected modules in Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, and Film, Theatre and Television. The CLA licence covers UK material only, within tightly defined perimeters. Regular data returns to the CLA are required and compliance / quality control inspections by the CLA can happen at any time, so we are investigating how best to anticipate these. Initial findings also highlight the significant staff time it takes to produce files in-house and the financial cost of outsourcing file production. There are, therefore, a number of questions still to be resolved before we are in a position to roll out the pilots to other Schools.

1.2: HERON service – copyright clearance and scanning production is arranged through HERON, a copyright broker for material not covered by the CLA licence (esp. US material). This project is funded by a mixture of TLDF money and contributions from Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, the school involved in this pilot. The cost of clearance is based on student numbers taking a course and so it is very expensive to clear copyright permissions for large cohorts (typically £80+ per article, per annum, for a large Part 2 group). Any decision to roll out this pilot would first require agreement on sustainable funding models.

Student feedback has been gathered in connection with both pilots. Responses have been very positive. From a learning

and teaching perspective, the pilot has raised some issues, especially in FT&T, surrounding students' motivation to read and prepare for seminars, though it remains to be determined to what extent factors outside the pilot play a part.

To roll out both pilots will require considerable investment in terms of staff administration time (both within the Library and Schools), infrastructure, and copyright training as well as additional ongoing costs to pay for licences and external services associated with this activity. At this stage, we're keen to promote the pilots and potential outcomes, but also to stress very heavily that 1) the University does not yet have a central scanning service in place and 2) that the terms of the licences we have signed do not permit lecturers to make scans of copyright material themselves for use in teaching. For further information, visit:

www.reading.ac.uk/library/finding-info/copyright/lib-copyright-scanning.asp

The terms of the trial licence are currently being renegotiated at a national level and so we also wait to see what the revised terms will be and what impact that will have here at Reading.

2: Good practice to involve your Liaison Librarian in Blackboard

2.1: In the recent successful *History Department Periodic Review*, one commendation of good practice was the inclusion of the Liaison Librarian in access to *Blackboard* courses. It was noted how this can particularly improve the communication between Schools/ Departments and the Library. To give a few examples of how the Library is currently contributing to the teaching work of Schools as a result of access to *Blackboard*, we can more easily access reading lists and other course documents to ensure materials are available when needed; we can be alerted to situations relating to reading and preparing for classes through email alerts to students;

we can use *Blackboard* to promote our information skills training sessions and also deposit useful training materials for students to refer to.

2.2: The new School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy staff portal includes a Library module which is administered by the Liaison Librarian for Chemistry. It is being used to alert staff to changes in research tools such as databases, supply up to date information on periodicals reviews and Library services. The Liaison Librarian also has access to other information on the portal such as module descriptions. Her inclusion on the student portal also allows access to Reading lists and Course Handbooks.

Rick Hobson School LTC says 'I believe this provides a much better service to staff than the use of email for the dissemination of certain kinds of information. Whereas email is ideal for urgent announcements such information tends to be rather transient, messages are deleted and attachments easily lost.

Announcements or documents posted on the portal can be left there for as long as they are applicable so that staff can check the latest information from the Library or download the most recent files at a time convenient to them. Giving our liaison librarian access to our student portal makes a lot of sense administratively and is of benefit to both the Department and the librarian.'

It is expected that the new template for staff *Blackboard* portals will include a Library module for the appropriate Liaison Librarian to administer.

If you have not yet enrolled your liaison librarian for your *Blackboard* course or want to discuss contents of your staff portal, you can contact him or her at: www.reading.ac.uk/library/contact/staff/lib-liaison.asp

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CETL-AURS in the Department of Archaeology



Top The Teaching Resource Room in Archaeology
Middle Part of the reproduction lithic collection
Bottom Iron Age coins teaching session, with associated support materials

The work of the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning – Applied Undergraduate Research Skills (CETL-AURS) has been achieving significant changes in teaching and learning in the Department of Archaeology at the University. The objective of the CETL is to encourage more undergraduate students to undertake artefact-based dissertations and to facilitate their independent research. To this end, a new teaching space, the Teaching Resource Room, has been created which conforms to all the latest specifications. Housed in this room are the department's reference collections which have been enhanced and expanded with the help of the CETL. These include:

- A set of reproduction stone tools from the Palaeolithic to the Bronze Age made by John Lord, the UK's leading flint knapper. As well as providing this comprehensive collection, he also retained all the debitage (waste flakes from the production process), which are a very useful research resource.
- Reproduction Roman glass, coinage of all periods, ceramics and other artefacts.
- The collection of animal skeletons has been greatly expanded.

- Specialist medical models of bones and muscle groups have been acquired. These are useful in helping to explain the pathology of the human skeletal reference material (all rather gruesome).
- The creation of a set of micro-morphological thin sections from departmental research excavations. This now acts as a reference collection for use in teaching.
- The acquisition of sets of teaching microscopes which have greatly enhanced the microscopy teaching facilities for archaeological science modules.

In addition to helping to expand the Department of Archaeology's reference and teaching collections, CETL-AURS has also been directly involved in the running of practical teaching sessions and the production of relevant support materials. Archaeology students are now offered a much wider range of practical options which is increasing their knowledge and hands-on experience of archaeological material, as well as being great fun!

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ASSET: moving forward through feedback

Dr Anne Crook (CDoTL) and Dr Julian Park (Faculty Director for Teaching and Learning – Life Sciences) have recently been awarded £220k in JISC funding to lead the development of an interactive resource, 'ASSET', to support staff in providing timely, quality feedback to students. This is an 18-month project which will also involve working with colleagues from the University of the West of England, Leeds and Staffordshire Universities.

ASSET will utilize the principles of Web 2.0 social software to support staff in providing feed-forward and rapid, effective feedback to students, e.g. using video and audio casts. It is hoped that the use of Web 2.0 will also support and enhance students' active engagement with feedback and enable

communities of students to 'interact' with one another on the basis of feedback they receive. The aim is for ASSET to be launched within the next eight months; the second half of the project will involve the project team working closely with individual academic staff, Schools and students to pilot, develop and embed the resource.

We are currently looking for colleagues and/or Schools who may be interested in piloting ASSET. For further information and/or to register your interest in piloting ASSET please contact Dr Anne Crook a.c.crook@reading.ac.uk, x7948.

Anne Crook
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Highlights from teaching and learning elsewhere

University teaching: a laughing matter?

Kevin McCarron is a funny man, but, more importantly, he is a man who knows how to manage an audience. As a lecturer in American Literature at Roehampton, he has found that his part-time work as a stand-up comedian has greatly informed his approach to teaching and he has been sharing what he has learned from this combination of careers through a series of national workshops.

The *Teaching: An Improviser's Art* session, was potentially controversial and deliberately provocative, for one of Kevin's main points was that lecturers should spend much less time (perhaps even no time) preparing for discursive seminar sessions. His rationale is interesting. At the start of his stand-up career his audience was less than enthralled: 'Even though I never told them I was an academic,' he says, 'they knew there was something wrong with me'. What was 'wrong' was not the material that he had scripted, but his reliance upon the words of his script, and this is an insight that has informed his approach to seminar preparation. His thesis is that lecturers too often focus their attention so strongly on appearing to be an expert to the class, sticking to the exact material and discussion format that they have so carefully crafted, that

they squeeze out room for spontaneity and creativity. He suggests that lecturers think of themselves as teachers rather than scholars as they enter the seminar room, discarding their intricate lesson plans in favour of improvising and using instead a range of techniques to encourage discussion among the students. Spontaneity and improvisation, he argues, run counter to our academic training, but many of his suggested techniques are accessible to new and established lecturers alike. For example, when faced by an audience that seems loath to share its views, one technique that he suggests is 'voicing the audience's thoughts': begin with the words, 'I know what you're thinking...' and assert for them a viewpoint that they would be embarrassed to accept. They must either accept that this is indeed their perspective or else counter it. His insights extend also to large group teaching (how do we deal effectively with heckling?) and marking (what does the 'audience' need to hear?).

The session has been filmed and will be made available on the website of the English Subject Centre shortly:
www.english.heacademy.ac.uk

You may agree with some, all or none of his ideas, but they will certainly get you thinking ...

Creating a bank of plant-based research project templates (a CETL-AURS funded project)

Final year research projects allow undergraduates to develop a wide range of skills, from experimental design and problem solving to time management and effective communication. Dissertations often form a significant part of a finalist's degree result, and a positive experience can turn graduates into effective ambassadors for our university. Nonetheless, the provision of project concepts can be a challenge, especially in some areas of the life sciences such as molecular biology. Unsuitable or poorly thought through research can waste significant resources in both expensive consumables and technician support time.

A CETL-AURS initiative is aiming to resolve these problems by developing a bank of plant-based project templates for students within the School of Biological Sciences. Plant-based projects have the potential to be far more widely utilised than just within the plant sciences: animal and human nutrition, pharmacy, and physiology are all potential areas which can involve the analysis of plant materials. Our plant collections both living and dead (in the Harris Garden, and the 250,000 dried specimens in the herbarium) provide excellent potential resources for final year projects, and this is something we want to promote.

Discussions with academic and technical staff across Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Food Biosciences, Pharmacy and Agriculture, has led to the development of a bank of over 50 'project templates'. Each of these detail a research question, the methodology to be used, the resources required, potential supervisor, and also other key personnel around

with an interest in the topic. It is intended that these project templates can be used year after year with slight modifications, for example by selecting different plant species. This will maximise the time staff and students can focus on the detail of the project, and may allow staff to accumulate enough data to support a publication. By using the full range of the available plant resources, the aim is to spread the responsibility of supervision more evenly among staff and relieve some of the pressure from the busiest research laboratories.

Many of the research designs involve collaborations between plant scientists and researchers from other disciplines. For example, one project aims to test the antimicrobial effectiveness of plant material in the search for novel compounds to control antibiotic-resistant pathogenic bacteria. Another investigates the effect of plant-derived oestrogenic compounds (phytoestrogens) on breast cancer cells, while another researches the link between the traits of flowering plants and the behaviour of their pollinators.

With student numbers within the life sciences increasing, it is anticipated that this CETL-AURS initiative can help sustain and develop the quality of the research experience enjoyed by our undergraduates.

Jo Smith

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www.reading.ac.uk/cetl-aurs/CETL-AURSProjects/CETL-AURS_Projects.asp

University Teaching Fellowship Scheme – project reports

Emergent Technologies and how they can be used within our University

Abstract

The project aims to look at active communities around technologies; pilot projects; create training material; make bids for external funding; share best practice; promote the work; embed the plan.

Progress to date

A study of current practice within the University and beyond was undertaken, mainly by Richard Hussey. The evaluation plan and its embedding into the project plan are ongoing. The watching brief of technologies and practice and sharing via blog are ongoing. Shirley Williams is using her *RedGloo* blog and the tag UTFS to monitor the brief, alongside the microblog *Twitter* and *del.icio.us* (UTFS tag). Shirley submitted an article to *Teaching Matters* entitled 'Should lecturers and students be Facebook friends? Advice for Staff'.

Ahead of schedule: establishment of a *Blackboard* organisation for funding opportunities in L & T areas. A bid for a JISC call on Curriculum Delivery was unsuccessful but Shirley was offered a consultancy role for a number of the projects and some in curriculum design. Support was given to Dr Anne Crook's (CDoTL) JISC bid 'ASSET: moving forward through feedback'. Successful Eduserv bid for a digital identity project 'This is ME', with CDoTL and CCMS. Working on proof of concept project with CCMS.

Other dissemination activities

- Meetings held with the two other UTFs
- Senior tutors talk (May 2008).

2008 / 2009 aims

- Ongoing watching brief of technologies and practice and sharing via blog.
- Community building.
- Identifying and coordinating bids.
- Review dissemination strategy.
- Review activities for Year 2 (starting May 2009).

Shirley Williams
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Engage in Feedback

Abstract

The project aims to improve the provision of feedback to students by providing staff with ideas and tips for giving quality feedback in a timely manner. This will take the form of a review of good practice in the provision of feedback to students and the collation of resources and tips for staff on the 'Engage in Feedback' website. A feedback audit tool will also be developed to allow module convenors and programme directors to reflect on their current feedback practice and to consider how they can make time effective improvements. The audit tool will be piloted with ten members of staff. The project will also work with CSTD on supplementing their existing workshops on feedback.

Progress to date

A project researcher (Jo Walsh) has been employed and Dr Anne Crook (CDoTL) has been closely involved with the development of the project. The website framework has been developed and information is being collected, reviewed and catalogued before being included with the web framework.

2008 / 2009 aims

- Continue to develop and populate the dissemination website, with the intention that the finished pages be hosted within the new CDoTL website when the latter is complete. Complete the outline website and make it available to staff.
- Complete the audit tool and pilot it with ten members of staff.
- Prepare and deliver, in collaboration with CDoTL, 'Feedback in Time' workshops to staff.

Julian Park
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Online academic writing support project

Abstract

The project aims to improve academic writing support for students by providing subject / Department-specific resources. Applied Linguistics specialists in teaching academic writing will facilitate a case study for the design and implementation of an academic writing support website to enhance the work of Departmental study skills sessions. The website will in turn constitute an adaptable framework for other Departments.

Progress to date

Clare Furneaux and Nicola Taylor have worked towards Outcome 1: 'A set of research tools to explore student writing needs'. Clare and Nicola have met the University study advisers; explored the UK HE literature of academic writing support; surveyed students about their academic writing needs; conducted student and academic staff focus groups; collected examples of good and weak student writing and accompanying staff feedback, to analyse strengths / weaknesses and to aid production of materials.

Dissemination

- Project description in *Teaching Matters* (February 2008).
- Senior tutors talk (May 2008).
- Full paper presentation at the University Learning & Teaching Conference (July 2008). Presented as 'Academic writing needs among undergraduate students'.

2008 / 2009 aims

- Outcome 2: 'A framework for a website for developing student for student support in academic writing'.
- Outcome 3: 'Activities / materials that support academic writing within that framework related to one programme'.
- The project will also: collect more data about student needs in Applied Linguistics and across the University; create a specification for academic writing needs; draft and pilot support materials; develop an online support resource.

Clare Furneaux
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New Vice-President for Education (RUSU)



Vicky Clarke

I have recently taken over as the new Vice-President Education at Reading University Students' Union. Many of you may already have seen me out and about on campus, or more likely attending various committee meetings, but I just wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself and outline some of my aims for this year.

There are three main areas that I am focussing on; the Library, improving feedback on assessment, and running a 'RUSU Says Relax' campaign. The Library has historically been an issue for students, with problems ranging from opening hours to course textbooks and everything in between. While we appreciate the additional resource the University has provided, we will be campaigning to bring about the changes students still want to happen. I have

already begun working with members of the University on improving feedback provision to students, and I hope to address the issue of student engagement with feedback to feed into the projects that are already being undertaken. Finally, I will be running a campaign which addresses the stresses that students face. Many students will face pressure or anxiety at some point during their university career, due to either academic or personal problems, so this campaign is to raise awareness about the facilities available to students to help them cope with these issues.

I am very much looking forward to working with many of you on these issues over the coming year.

Vicky Clarke
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The new Career Management Skills Blackboard site

The Career Management Skills (CMS) is a compulsory module that introduces to students to the principles of career planning and encourages them to take action to help them prepare for their future.

Working with the new Centre for Career Management Skills CMS the Careers Advisory Service has been working to make significant improvements over the last two years. One of these has been the development of a new *Blackboard* site to be used to enhance the teaching of CMS. The work is as a result of a fellowship grant and has enabled us to build on the work of that has been done through pilot projects with subjects including Archaeology, English, Agriculture and Food Science.

The project is also using expertise from Cdot1 to ensure good practice is maintained throughout the new site and an additional outcome of the project will include a good practice guide to developing *Blackboard* sites.

The benefits of the new *Blackboard* site include:

- Using a blended learning approach which includes taught sessions, online activities and assignments.
- Linking teaching activities to the new *Destinations* website (a career learning website that has been specifically developed for undergraduate students in Higher Education).
- Using interactive tools such as discussion boards to engage students in the learning process.
- A clear introduction to CMS and its benefits.
- Individual sites can be tailored to the needs of the students both in terms of content and learning styles.

The new site was launched in June in the Carrington Building.

Sandhya Tanna
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Student Awards 2007/8

Students were invited to nominate a member of staff they felt had made the biggest contribution to their learning. The scheme was widely advertised across the University via posters, postcards and a range of promotional activities.

462 nominations were received, and the Teaching Awards Panel, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Teaching & Learning) decided on the winners.

Congratulations to the following members of staff who were nominated by students to be the winners of the 2008 Faculty Awards for Outstanding Contributions to Teaching & Learning Support.

Grace Ioppolo
English & American Literature

Tony MacFadyen
Institute of Education

Narina Grossberg
Maths Support Centre



Ben Cosh
Mathematics, Meteorology & Physics



Philip Strange
Chemistry, Food Biosciences & Pharmacy

R Students Bovered?

In preparation for the Quality Assurance Agency's Institutional Audit of the University, the Students' Union was invited to prepare a Student Written Submission. The insert in this term's edition of Teaching Matters outlines how the Submission was prepared. It was written by Pete Jeffreys, former Vice President Education at the Students' Union.

Call for articles

Articles for the next edition of *Teaching Matters* should be emailed to cdotl@reading.ac.uk by Friday 30 January

Teaching and learning seminar

The efficacy of feedback to first year bioscience students

Dr Jon Scott, University of Leicester

20 January 2009, 4.15–5.30pm,
Nike Theatre. All welcome.

Any enquiries to Dr Anne Crook at CDoTL
a.c.crook@reading.ac.uk