

Using Google Sites to provide an authentic learning experience

Delivering the goods on student engagement, authentic learning and employability

The aim

Students were struggling to market their HR capability to employers during their level five placement seeking year. The module team wanted to find a creative form of assessment that provided level four students with an authentic learning experience that would develop easily marketable employability skills and enhance student's chances of gaining an appropriate placement.

Benefits

- Students are developing authentic employability and distinctive IT skills
- Supports actions to acquire a placement opportunity
- Provides a creative method of assessment for students

The approach

The module required students to work in groups to develop an intranet site that would provide 'Line Managers' with appropriate subject matter expertise and guidance. The groups had to 'create' a company and develop the Intranet platform using Google Sites. As a group the students had to develop an overall brand for the site and an agreed approach to staff management. Each student specialised in a different aspect of HR and consequently created their own content areas. The students were marked individually on their production and on how they had complied with overall agreed brand and strategic approach.

The module team, along with the faculty e-learning adviser agreed and developed a basic template for the site. The e-learning adviser also created screencasts for the students, with instruction for how to upload new pages, add information etc. These, along with other resources were provided on the module blackboard site.

The module was delivered over one academic year. In the first semester the students were given two practical lab sessions to become comfortable with the technology and develop a sound relationship with the e-learning adviser. Remote support via email was offered as and when required.

Students were encouraged to use video, apps, presentations etc. on their site. All content inclusion and development / design decisions were captured in a 1,000 word build rationale submitted by each student. This was to ensure that there was an academic focus to the work but that it did not distract from good website design. Two formative feedback sessions on the developing website (1) and content (2) took place at appropriate points in the academic calendar.

The outcome

The assessment was received positively by most students, but some couldn't understand why they had to develop an online IT resource when their subject of study was HR and Business. The tutor delivered a rationale for the method by providing live examples of HR vacancies and outlining the skills expected of applicants.

“Coming on to this course [module] with no prior knowledge and then being able to achieve 70%... is something I am so proud of being able to do!”

The outcome (continued)

The students were able to work independently and quickly build their sites. As they developed their knowledge in their subject area they then had the opportunity to use this knowledge to progress their assessment task. Student perception of group work is often that they do not get the individual recognition for the work that they have put in. Unlike typical group work, this form of assessment allowed students to be marked for their individual effort on delivering the overall group philosophy. This led to wide ranging assessment scores, with 87% the highest, the majority 2:1 and a limited number performing less well.

Most students reflected on their formative feedback and implemented/improved their sites as a result.

Student feedback on the whole was positive; one student contacted the tutor to say “I got myself a HR placement... She [the manager]... asked me to show her [the website] on my first day!”

The module team enjoyed marking a different style of assessment and said they got a real “buzz” when they saw the level of creativity and knowledge displayed by students who were new to university study, the subject area and the technology.

Profile

Tutor name:

Michelle Blackburn and Lynne Booth

Faculty:

Sheffield Business School

Size of cohort:

Medium (30-70 students)

Technologies used:

Blackboard, Google Sites

If you would like your e-learning practice captured and shared in a similar case study, please contact Brian Irwin within Quality Enhancement and Student Success.

Future development

Future summative feedback for the module is going to be delivered via a screencast which will allow the tutor to explore the developed site while providing audio and visual feedback for the student.

For a future run of the module, the module guide will provide real examples of job advertisements to provide students with evidence of how the creation of the site will allow them to develop their employability skills.

Recommendations

The tutors advise anyone interested in this approach to:

- Develop a good working relationship with the faculty e-learning adviser for the initial set up of Google Sites
- Set aside time to understand the technology from a student’s perspective and ensure support material is accurate
- Provide working examples of other sites developed by students to show what can be achieved
- Ensure students are clear about assessment criteria and the marks awarded for the different elements, e.g. content versus style