

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

“Critical evaluation is hard to get going face-to-face, but the blogs supported the discussion and encouraged students to share their experiences.”

Ros Brownlow
Course Leader
University of York



Campus Pack™ in Action:

Distance Learning and Social Software Help Students Get to the Heart of the Matter

How can a university address the increased demand for a popular course in a way that is cost efficient while enhancing learning outcomes? To face just such a challenge, the University of York integrated the social learning platform Campus Pack™ with its Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to develop a distance learning version of its classroom-based course on cardiac rehabilitation and coronary heart disease prevention. The online delivery was a success: learners were introduced to problem-based learning and used both private and open blogs to complete coursework, reflect on learning outcomes, and offer peer-to-peer feedback and assistance. An added bonus—the new class environment was able to include students throughout the U.K., as well as Brunei and Saudi Arabia.

High Tech, High Touch

Coronary Heart Disease Prevention Online was created as a unique educational experience to help nurses develop skills in providing essential preventative care to patients at risk of heart disease. Course leader Ros Brownlow viewed the development of a distance learning course as an opportunity to explore the possibilities of online delivery, while reviewing the content of the course. “With the distance learning approach, we had to look at the teaching and learning strategy and technology side-by-side,” she explains. “What are the challenges? How can technology help? We also wanted to get students really feeling that this is not just a new course, but it is about the new agenda, so they get a sense of dynamism.”

The result was a new type of course, supporting a problem-based learning approach, in which students engaged with patient case histories over the duration of the course. The details of each patient were revealed in the form of an episodic drama, to provide a sense of realism for each individual case history and to keep the information entertaining and fresh over the 14-week period.

Room for Discussion

The University’s VLE hosted the case studies and risk assessment activities and Campus Pack blogs were used to support interactive and reflective journaling activities. Students, as a part of engaging with each case history, reviewed specially

About Campus Pack™

Designed for education, Campus Pack makes wikis, blogs, podcasts, and more available to users throughout your institution for their academic and co-curricular activities.

Campus Pack is easy to use and integrates with any learning management system.

- ▶ Give collaborative tools to everyone at your institution
- ▶ Provide tools designed specifically for education
- ▶ Jump-start adoption with seamless LMS integration
- ▶ Promote active and reflective learning
- ▶ Increase student engagement and enhance learning outcomes



prepared online video sequences of patient and practitioner interactions. They then posted their observations about the exchange on a personal blog. These observations varied from activity to activity and covered areas such as where the practitioner's approach was flawed or effective, or what level of care they felt the patient may require. The posted observations had viewing access restricted to their tutor only and the tutor then used the blog commenting feature to feedback to the students. An open blog called the "Coffee Room" was also provided with contribution privileges given to the entire cohort. This was used for broad discussion in and around course themes as well as social non-course related themes and work oriented observations.

Brownlow found that the introduction of the VLE and Campus Pack helped to improve on the learning outcomes for the course. "The use of blogs is better than discussions in class, which are very rapid. The blogs slowed things down so the discussion was more insightful," she says. Because of Campus Pack's built-in features, students could also revisit specific posts and discussions as needed.

Beyond Expectations

The students agreed that the Campus Pack blogs served as reflective learning logs and represented a safe and private place where they could ask questions about course content and activities and receive personal feedback from their tutor. They also appreciated the opportunities that the blogs provided to support one another. The online design of the course led to unintended learning benefits for students, in terms of the study skills that they acquired. Brownlow notes, "At the outset I was worried about whether students would be able to cope with the technology. But it has been a liberating and enabling experience for them. They are more confident about IT now and have developed a range of skills which has helped them to become more independent learners."

The course has run multiple times since its inaugural term and was adopted by the British Heart Foundation as its definitive course on heart disease prevention.