



BSc (HONS) GEOGRAPHY

Online Classroom-Supported Learning and Teaching- Online+ Model

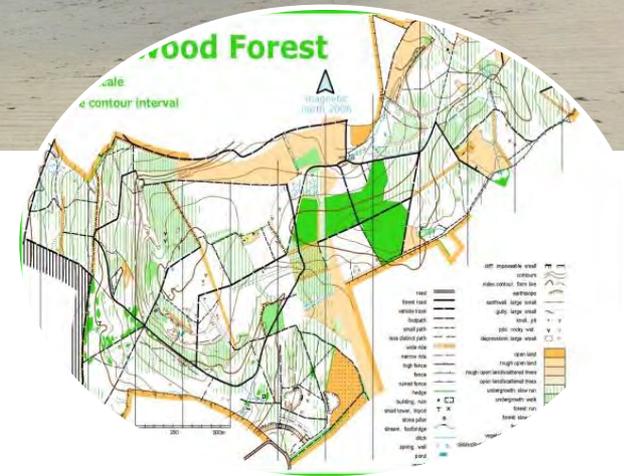
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The Merging of on-campus and off-campus pedagogies



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BSc(HONS) GEOGRAPHY, DELIVERED IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Online Classroom-Supported Learning and Teaching



What's special about this BSc (Hons)?

- Full-time degree delivered over three years
- Unique course content (*HTML5*) all online and fully compatible with tablet & mobile smartphone devices, games consoles and Smart TVs
- Face-to-face tutorials & presentations online Wikis, Blogs, Discussion boards
- Fieldtrips locally to the Cairngorm & NW Highland mountain ranges and a European destination (e.g. Swiss Alps)
- Group-based learning which has replaced exams to provide participants with varied and dynamic learning and teaching environment
- Social constructivism achieved through communities of practice established in each module to pursue problem-solving and the construction of knowledge which is then reflected on and the product and process assessed



Rationale for a new Online+ Model in Geography

- Geography one of “**Ten recession-proof degree subjects**” (*The Daily Telegraph* 2013)
- Geography graduates **least likely to be unemployed** (*The Guardian* 2013)
- Geography graduates had **second lowest level of unemployment** (5.8% - 6.4%) across all academic subjects (HESCU 2014). Graduates have high levels of employability skills.
- Emerging criticisms of online learning and related levels of **falling student retention and high levels of dropout**
- Emerging criticisms of **online student performance** in terms of grade achievement and depth of learning
- Emerging **criticism of the traditional lecture format** as a central teaching tool and its appropriateness for ‘millennials’
- Emerging recognition of **benefits of active and participatory learning** and the importance of **team working** as an emerging core element of graduate key skills.



Why we needed to re-think our conventional online teaching pedagogy...



Levels of online participation are often low for both asynchronous discussion-based events and synchronous chat events

Forcing participation through mark allocation and directed study on discussion boards is a forced form of didactic participation rather than natural communications and so argued to be at odds with the development of critical thinkers

The **changing role of the e-tutor** from being a broadcaster of information to a facilitator in the construction of knowledge requires experience, training and understanding

Digital literacy skills (or the lack of them) and **learning to communicate online effectively** are more significant barriers to online learning than first thought

Presentational and inter-personal skills are key graduate employability skills that are often not fully developed in online courses

If including dropouts as fails, then **online courses have much lower attainment rates** than on-campus equivalent courses, the latter attaining much higher average grades

Positive elements of conventional on-campus (and VC) teaching pedagogy...



Inter-personal and presentational skills can be developed through the teaching year

The balance of evidence suggests that on-campus f2f teaching is considered **more effective** by students and their **grade performance tends to be higher**

A **socialised learning environment** may be easier to establish with an on-campus group of learners, although the evidence is mixed

F2f tends to be a **less complex form of learning and teaching** and better understood by prospective students and parents and so expectations are more easily met

With a lesser form of forced didactic participation and communications, f2f if progressed collaboratively can be an **effective means to develop critical and reflective thinkers**

Key Statistics justifying the combining of online and f2f methods



An analysis of 6 MOOCs launched by the University of Edinburgh in 2013 found that the **completion rate was approx. 11%** (MOOCs @ Edinburgh 2013). In other analysis of Coursera in 2014 the **average completion rate was just 6%** (Jordan 2015).

Dropout rates in online education between **25-40%** in comparison to 10-20% in on-campus courses (Levy 2007)

Dropout rate of 54% for online courses at US Midwestern University (Park & Choi 2009)

Rostaminezhad *et al.* (2013) identify and average international online course **dropout level of around 40%**

13% of OU students dropout before their first assignment and **38% fail to submit** their first assignment (Simpson 2004)



UHI Geography Retention Rates (to date)

As we near the completion of our first term of the third year of study, the first UHI Geography online cohort (with on-campus tutorial support) the anticipated impact on student retention is being realised. From our original cohort:

There is a retention rate of 89%

From our second cohort of students who have just completed their first year of study,

The retention rate is 100%



Key Strategies for Student Retention (to date)

- Early shared experience – induction field trip to establish early social bonds in group – e.g. hoards of killer midges in Cairngorms
- Explain the rationale - of the teaching model and the benefits of collaboration and active learning in education, at induction
- Clearly explain expectations - of learners on the programme and how they will learn as they progress the course and be assessed. They need to be stakeholders in their learning.
- Response time to student queries and communications - needs to be quick and relevant to increase student satisfaction.
- Digital literacy and Academic Referencing – go all out in first term in all instances to develop these key skills
- Collaborative working – engage students together in groups and help via tutorials to provide a socialised environment for knowledge construction and acquisition

UHI Geography Student Reflections



- The overall student feedback has been surprisingly mixed given the excellent results on retention and module completion. Extracts:
 - *"Face to face tutorials teaching was engaging and fun."* AND
 - *"Online materials were completely ignored and never referred to, instead face to face tutorials were conducted using questions and group presentations, which I did not find helpful."*
 - *"Support and guidance of the wiki development process was of great help"* AND
 - *"There was new technology introduced which was not fully explained and led to a large amount of stress over preparation and the deadline."*
 - *"This was an enjoyable module, which was well planned and delivered."* AND
 - *"**This module needed more** guidance on what was needed for the assignments."*
 - *"I never thought economics would be a subject that I would enjoy, but the structure of the module and how it linked to other modules made it very accessible, relevant and enjoyable!"*
AND
 - *"This module should have taught me so much but instead it just caused so much stress."*



The Geography Student Experience...

- Based from home, in their local area, students can continue with their existing social life and retain many existing friendships and part-time jobs
- Based in their home area, students will incur less costs than many of their peers and so retain a fuller social life whilst studying
- Studying in small local/regional groups of learners will ensure everyone gets to know each of their fellow-students well and so will develop new friendships with people in their home area
- On-site tutors will support small groups and so you will get **to know your teaching staff well, no more 'sage of the stage'** experiences. Instead learning will be more personalised, interactive and engaging.



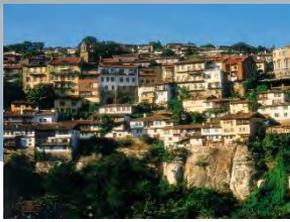
Merging Face to Face and Online Education to create a Socialised Learning Environment

- Students although studying a fully flexible online course in HTML5 which allows use on mobile devices, avoid the **commonly reported 'sense of isolation'** typical to online learners.
- For each module each week students attend a two-hour on-campus face-to-face tutorial to supplement their online learning activities. These are based around working in teams and to complement online activities, are delivered via collaborative learning activities which are interactive and participative.
- This is a highly active learning environment devised to develop social links through time between learners leading to a sense of camaraderie and a socialised learning environment.



Other notable features of the UHI Geography Model to **explore further...**

- Does the replacement of exams with group-based coursework to enhance the development of employability skills resonate well with students?
- Does the pull of an international field trip in the degree year help retain students?
- Does the replacing of lecture events with fully flexible online HTML5 course content greatly enhance the student experience?
- **Does the prospect of completing one's studies a year earlier in this accelerated programme (a largely unique market product) aid retention?**
- Does the higher entry tariff of four Highers at BBBC result in better student more able to cope with degree studies?



Summing Up: Achieving the best of both?

- The UHI Geography has been a unique opportunity for a scholar in pedagogic theory and methods to combine f2f and online study and develop a hybrid programme with a host of key features that would combine to provide students with their best opportunity to perform at the top of their abilities AND so complete their studies in a supportive and socialised learning environment.
- Indicators of success in future years will be increasing recruitment (there are currently 39 full-time live applications through UCAS for 2017-18), a retention rate of over 80% and final year grade scores skewed towards the top end of UHI performance.
- The major overhead for this project has been the writing and production of new subject content in a format ready for web designers to translate into high quality web content. Was it worth it? We live in an Information Society and for the digitally literate, accessing appropriate content is often only a minor challenge!



Conclusions – An Online+ Model?

- With such high retention rates achieved to date, indications are **that this new teaching model seeking to merge the 'best of both' has had initial success in proving its working hypothesis.**
- It appears a range of key features not previously combined in a single course have worked together to enhance student satisfaction and so student resilience. However, early feedback to this effect is mixed and contradictory.
- In instances where online courses are suffering high dropout rates there are now a series of measures that, early indications confirm, may be applied to have a real influence/effect on learner resilience.
- Active and participatory learning and teaching methods which are team-orientated and based around problem-solving, knowledge construction and reflection leading to a socialised learning environment (i.e. social constructivism) and learner camaraderie in the classroom and online lead to highly positive outcomes (for most students).



BSc (Hons) Geography



A 3 year accelerated-study honours degree programme (Scotland)





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