



## Blogging, reflective learning and peer support

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## Level 3 Information Delivery module

- ❖ Module content is focused on organisational information challenges
  - Information overload
  - “Islands of automation”
  - “Audience”
- ❖ Proxy for placement experiences
- ❖ Mixed cohort
  - High proportion of international students (46% non-native English speakers in 07/08)
  - Full range of Computing programmes represented, plus some students from Customised Programmes
  - Mainly third year undergraduates

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## Evolution of the learning environment

Cohort	Site for reflection	Research output
2003/4	Closed learning logs	
2004/5	Blog environment internal to module developed by one of the module tutors	Hall & Davison (2007): blogs for peer learning and support
2005/6		
2006/7	"Blog" environment internal to Napier University supported by WebCT Portfolio function	Hall & Widen-Wulff (2008): socially motivated online information sharing
2007/8		

Move into "public" space to widen opportunities for collective reflective learning through "speaking out" (blogging), "listening" (reading), and "discussing" (commenting)

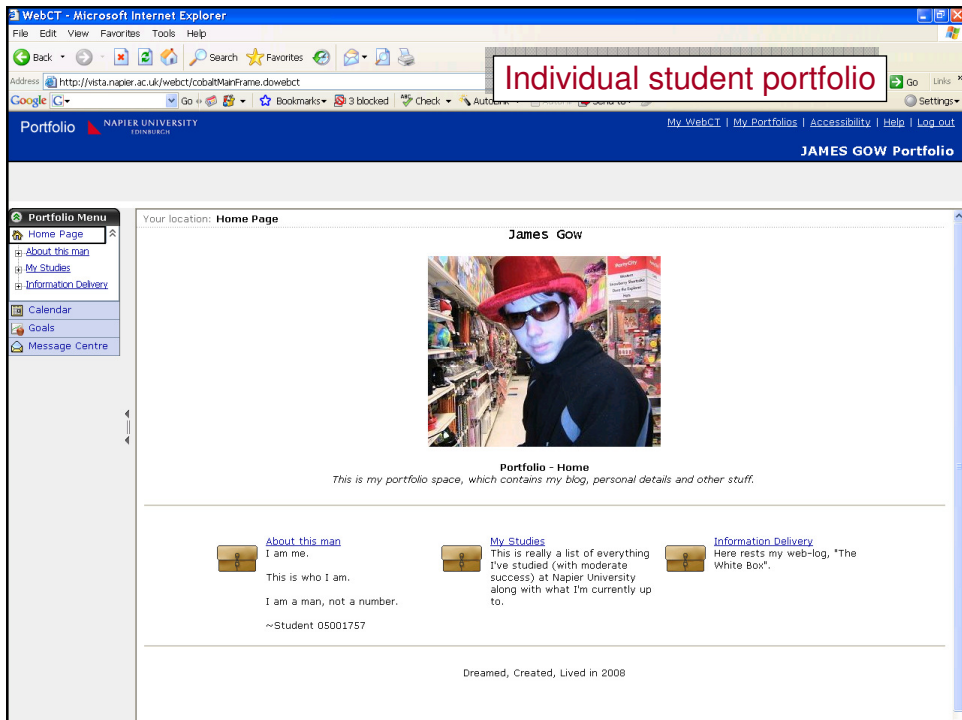
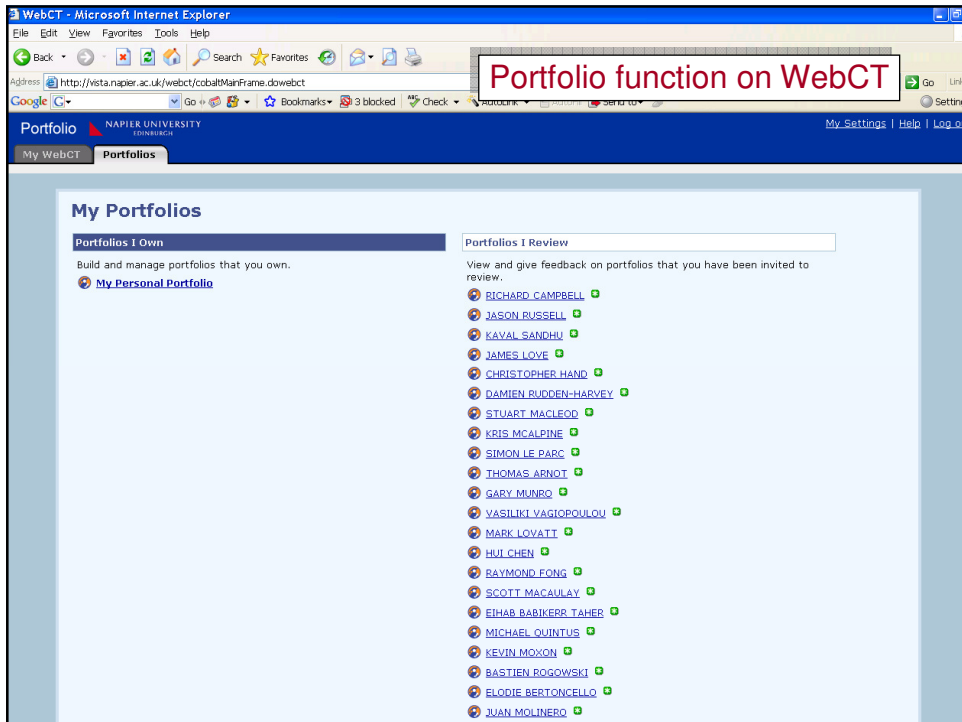
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## 70% course assessment mark allocated to blogs and comments

- ❖ Main entries should
  - Be relevant to the week's module content
  - Make links between theory and practice
  - Demonstrate understanding or highlight areas of difficulty
  - Justify points made, e.g. through reasoned argument, by referring to reading material, personal experience, etc.
- ❖ Comments should
  - Extend the line of argument of the original blog postings
  - Offer alternative views

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WebCT - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: http://vista.napier.ac.uk/webct/cobalMainFrame.dowebct

Portfolio NAPIER UNIVERSITY EDINBURGH My WebCT | My Portfolios | Accessibility | Help | Log out

**JAMES GOW Portfolio**

**Blog entry**

Portfolio Menu: Home Page, About this man, My Studies, Information Delivery, Calendar, Goals, Message Centre

Subject: It's Reading Week. Author: JAMES GOW Date: 15 April 2008 8:21 PM

**Today**

The title never lies, particularly in this case as it is indeed our fabled reading week, although don't be fooled, there's definitely been more blank stares at Visual Basic rather than reading going on. As there have been no lectures this week, my 'today' sector is teetering on the precipice of being a little on the barren side. There hasn't been an information delivery lecture to write about, nor has there been a practical exercise to summarise. What then, goes here?

Well, there's a seagull outside.

**Articles**

I have to admit, I expected to be graced with a titanic paper to wade through this week. The main clues that led me to this train of thought were 'It's called reading week!' coupled with being told that students are to spend more time than usual on their logs. So upon completing the text (Efimova & Grudin (2007)) I was pleasantly surprised (if not highly suspicious) that it could be tamed in less than an hour. That appears to have been a re-occurring theme all throughout the module, the information delivery reader itself is stupidly thick & yet here we are, almost right at the end. Anyway! The reflection can be spared for next week, onward!

This week's piece is called: "Crossing Boundaries: A Case Study of Employee Blogging" by authors Efimova & Grudin and at a basic level (like the title suggests), is all about the impact of web logs in the workplace. The article talks about multiple benefits harvested from workplace blogging and genuinely appears to put it over positively (although it is not devoid of negatives either, these aren't as abundant within the text). Right off the bat, with more & more companies investing in creating logs, that means more jobs! The logs require authors & subsequently, the article mentions that one vice president of product development employed an already established blogger, stating that the company had:

*"much to gain from being seen as open and transparent."*

It touches on transparency too, elaborating that more personalised blogs aid in adding a human side to an otherwise cold, robotic & sheltered company. It helps to gain the consumer's trust when they're privy to what's going on. In fact, this links back to what Colin said in Week 6's lecture about Redfin, how they were rocketed to victory by showing the public everything that transpired behind the curtain:

*"Redfin, a U.S. Estate Agent firm who made available a log conveying internal disputes & debates within the company for the public to see and offer solutions about. They would also write about what their competitors were doing, what they did & did not like (this would be an example of a corporate blog)."*

In summary, it's a useful portal that permits potential customers free reign to see just what's what (from the employee perspective, it allowed one such individual in the article a vessel with which to state that all employees of a particular company were not 'evil'). Another positive the text raised was that:

*"Employee weblogs enabled the company to very rapidly counter misinformation in press coverage."*

**Comments on blog entries**

Comments - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Create Comment

1 Author: JAMES GOW Date: 13 April 2008 8:43 PM

I'm rather surprised by our team wiki percentage too, when Colin was going through the "You should've done this" list during the lecture, I couldn't help but think "Yeah..we should've." the whole time. Still, 68% that's not to shabby. That's 10.2% of our overall grade, assuming my mathematics skills haven't completely broken down post-school.

Myself & my colleague couldn't find much in the way of collaboration on the student portal either, all of the other aspects were present in at least some form...but no method by which to collaborate on things. One thing that did crop up when I was writing my log was that we only looked at it from the students' perspective even though we were supposed to view it from a purely *educational* stand-point which would include the lecturers pov, too. Even bearing this in mind however, I'm not sure we would've found much, I didn't see anything that allowed for the staff to work on stuff together either (although in retrospect, I wasn't really looking). Wouldn't be surprised if a student wiki pops up in the near future, though.

Also Queen of the South 4 Aberdeen 3, despite going nuts every time QoS scored, the fans seemed a bit shell-shocked at the results even as we left the stadium...it's as if it hadn't sunk in yet and they couldn't wrap their minds about the result. I suppose it makes sense, seeing as how they haven't been in a Scottish Cup semi-final for 58 years. o.O

2 Author: PETER GOUDIE Date: 14 April 2008 11:24 AM

i was a bit surprised about the blog results too, i was expecting something in the range of 40-50%. 68 is surprisingly fantastic :D

but I noticed that in our blogs, we have differing ideas of intergration - yours just means links

Done Local intranet

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## Student-to-student feedback

- ❖ Most obvious in the comments
- ❖ Some in the main blog entries, e.g. reflections on studying together in teams
- ❖ Tone
  - Largely positive: agreement with ideas presented, congratulations on one another's work, encouragement: *I enjoyed reading your blog... I think that you are underselling yourself. Your blog is better than [that of] most native English speakers... Good luck with the rest of it and don't be shy.*
  - Some negative, but rarely presented in a way that would offend: disagreement with ideas presented, peer tutoring: *[It] would have been nice to see some personal comments in there to add a final touch to the entry.*

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## Student-to-tutor feedback

- ❖ Not explicitly sought through the exercise, but some instances of feedback offered to tutors
- ❖ “Reading between the lines” feedback more common, e.g. a comment on speed of delivery of lecture material prompted a change of pace
- ❖ Students aware of value of feedback to tutors
  - *As students put down their thoughts and feelings in the blogs, Brian and Hazel can get useful material on how the module can be modified... before it is taught to the next set of students.*

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## Tutor-to-student feedback

- ❖ To date, tutors have not actively participated in the blog environment set up for the module as a means of providing feedback
- ❖ Intervention is only made when it is apparent that a student has misunderstanding about the module (content and/or administration) – and this is by e-mail, in person or by MSN
- ❖ Main means of providing feedback over the course of the semester is in person, in class
- ❖ All students receive individual and class written feedback on the whole portfolio of entries at the end of the semester

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## Feedback on week 1 submissions

### General standard

- ❖ Very good – well done!
  - Much higher than last year's students at this stage
  - Best work: longer entries; analytical writing, e.g. discussion of own practice/behaviour in the context of lecture and reading
  - Remember you are expected to spend 7 hours on private study for the module each week
- ❖ Some misunderstandings in the main entries
  - For example, misunderstanding of assessment weightings
  - Use the comments function to help out your colleagues

### Hints for improvement

- ❖ Look at the best work submitted to date
- ❖ Draft your entry off-line before posting
- ❖ Don't leave it until Thursday 16.30 to start typing!

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## Value and impact of blog exercise

- ❖ Direct impact on learning
  - [Other students'] blogs about the topic help me understand the concepts. Your blog is a prime example of this. Thanks.
  - After reading this blog I think that I will get some extra help from someone with experience of [the library portal] to avoid any problems that may arise.
- ❖ Sense of community
  - Blogging provides scaffold of social infrastructure amongst the participants
  - Social infrastructure supports further discussion and feedback, and thus learning, as students collectively challenge and reflect on the "realities" of the subjects studied

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## References

Hall, H. & Davison, B. (2007). Social software as support in hybrid learning environments: the value of the blog as a tool for reflective learning and peer support. *Library and Information Science Research*, 29(2), 163-187. (DOI 10.1016/j.lisr.2007.04.007.) [[Full-text available through ScienceDirect.](#)] PDF of draft manuscript available from [http://www.dcs.napier.ac.uk/~hazelh/esis/hall\\_davison\\_blogs\\_draft.pdf](http://www.dcs.napier.ac.uk/~hazelh/esis/hall_davison_blogs_draft.pdf)

Hall, H., & Widén-Wulff, G. (2008). Social exchange, social capital and information sharing in online environments: lessons from three case studies. Paper to be presented at [USE-2008: From information provision to knowledge production](#), Oulu, Finland, 23-25 June 2008. (Following presentation at the conference, the paper will be published in *Studia Humaniora Ouluensia*.) PDF available from: [http://www.dcs.napier.ac.uk/~hazelh/esis/hall\\_widen\\_wulff\\_2008.pdf](http://www.dcs.napier.ac.uk/~hazelh/esis/hall_widen_wulff_2008.pdf)

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