

UHI GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDY

Using Mahara for assessment

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KEYWORDS

Formative assessment, blog, Mahara

SUMMARY

Mahara has been used by students on the BA Applied Music as a tool for reflective practice and assessment. Students use the journal tool for reflective writing, and can upload documents and files to share with staff and other students.

It was very easy to set up, and has been highly successful in that students have engaged with both the technology and the process of reflective writing. Giving feedback is easy by using the 'comment' function.

On the down side, Mahara is one of many technologies that students 'have to learn to use. The benefits of using it must be weighed against the costs of introducing it particularly for students in the first year of a degree programme.

CONTEXT

The BA in Applied Music is a networked degree course with students dispersed over nine UHI campuses, as well as studying from home. Course delivery is through a mixture of Video Conferencing (VC) and online methods, supplemented by a small number of residential sessions spread throughout the academic year.

WHAT, WHERE?

The programme team has been using Mahara as a tool for reflective practice, and formative and summative assessment across a number of the modules taught in the first year of the degree programme. Students were encouraged to blog after practical activities, and set reflective writing tasks after VC teaching sessions all of which were completed using the Mahara platform. Some modules also used Mahara for formative assessment where essays were presented as a portfolio.

WHY?

The programme team used Mahara primarily because of its facility to enable the easy sharing of content; students are able to upload text, audio and video files and share these with other users, who can leave comments. A particular benefit for music students was the ability to upload videos as music students often wish to share recordings of their performances. Staff liked the informal feel of the Mahara interface as it resembles other social media websites that students are accustomed to using.

HOW?

The journal tool in Mahara allowed students to create text diary or blog entries. Mahara also has the facility to enable the uploading of documents, images and videos so students used Mahara to gather different pieces of work in one place. All content remained private until students created 'pages' (in effect bespoke webpages) where elements of their work could be shared. Privacy settings allowed the student to select which other users could view the pages, and whether or not others were permitted to leave comments.

When the time came to prepare for formal assessments students were able to use Mahara as a kind of scrapbook and use elements of their writing as the basis for essays or other assessed work.

DID IT WORK?

The initiative is regarded as highly successful because students engaged well with the technology, completed the work, shared their work with each other and were able to receive valuable feedback. On the negative side, external examiners pointed out the potential for confusion in using both the Blackboard VLE and Mahara for summative assessments.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

It was very easy to set up as all students have access to Mahara using their UHI username and password. The students also found the interface easy to use. On the down side, Mahara is one of many technologies that Applied Music students have to learn in their first year (along with the other UHI core technologies such as Blackboard and email, Applied Music students also have software for music production to contend with) and it may be that using an additional piece of technology adds to the students' workload unnecessarily.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Access Mahara at: uhi-mahara.co.uk

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