



Teaching fellowships: Using wikis, blogs and social networking tools to enhance collaboration and participation

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The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) Ireland, Teaching Fellowship awards have been established in support of strategic innovation and enhancement of learning. These awards are funded under Irish Higher Education Strategic Initiative Funding (SIF), namely the Enhancement of Learning Strand. Teaching Fellowships were awarded by DIT Faculty Heads of Learning Development and presented to an individual or a team in support of their work developing and evaluating a specific project that will support the enhancement of learning and/or curriculum development at programme, school or faculty level. Twelve Fellowship projects, aimed at supporting the Enhancement of Learning strand of SIF in Higher Education, were officially launched on 25 Sept 2009.

Project themes

Key areas addressed by the Teaching Fellowships in the projects are issues of: Student Engagement and Retention, Curriculum Development, Assessment, Elearning, First Year Curriculum, Modularisation and Diversity.

The Enhancement of Learning strand of SIF project funding requires the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) agree to collaborate in the sharing of practice and research in pursuit of enrichment of learning and teaching. To help sustain collaboration and dissemination of information regarding the projects between the HEI's, various types of information communication technologies were introduced.



Using technology to support projects

Web 2.0 tools provide an uncomplicated means of publishing and sharing information on the internet (Van Harmelen, 2007). Thus each Teaching Fellowship project established a Blog to report on project progress and to reflect on project milestones. Secondly, a wiki was set up within the institutional virtual learning environment to support and share core project documentation. Thirdly, to support communication with students, certain projects created a presence on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Project evaluation

An aim of the Teaching Fellowship projects is to evaluate the use of Web 2.0 tools to support and enhance the projects. All Teaching Fellowship projects update a Blog and these have been publicised to other Irish HE Institutions in Ireland. Already the Blogs show indication of project planning, projects development and critical reflection on practice and project progression.

Two Teaching Fellowship projects in particular, DIT Get Smart (Mary O’Rawe) which aims to develop academic skills in the first year; and Peer Assisted Learning (Maria-Jose Gonzalez, Odette Gabaudan), a student mentoring programme have introduced social networking tools to enhance support and communication with students. Both projects have established Facebook groups and through this



disseminate information relating to workshops to students. The Facebook wall offers a space for students to pose questions and the Facebook group area also offers useful guides for the students on the subject of the projects.

A Twitter stream for the Get Smart project was also established. Initial evidence indicates the use of the Facebook group being more successful, as the Twitter stream with students has been less popular.

Sustainability for the future

All Teaching Fellowship projects wish to research, learn and improve from this initial first phase of the Teaching Fellowship project. The projects will be evaluated and along with the support provided by the Blogs, Wikis and Social Networking tools. The findings will help shape the Teaching Fellowship projects in the future and inform the DIT and wider HE community in Ireland of the suitability of Web 2.0 tools for enhancement of collaboration and participation.



References

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Image references

All images available from DIT Teaching Fellowship projects (with one exception of Web 2.0 image). Web 2.0 image (licensed by Wikimedia Commons) from
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