

**Midlands Regional Network for Learning and Teaching in History**  
**Wednesday 5 July 2006, Newman College of Higher Education, Birmingham**

**REPORT**

**Welcome & Introduction** - Noelle Plack (Newman College) welcomed the 16 participants from around the Midlands to Newman College of HE in Bartley Green, Birmingham. She then reported on the History in Higher Education Conference held at Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford in April 2006. Discussion focussed on the new National Postgraduate and Postdoctoral History Network and its aims. Elaine Fulton (University of Birmingham ) updated us on the progress of the network thus far and indicated that the creation of the website was the current focus of the network. Noelle encouraged all participants to attend next year's event and Elaine promised to publicize the bursaries for postgraduates.

**Preparing Future Faculty: Starting to Publish** – Hera Cook (University of Birmingham) led a stimulating session on how to begin academic publishing. She began with the question 'Why Publish?' and then went on to discuss the skills learned from publishing and also pointed out that publishers need academics' work to stay in business! Next, Hera took us on a journey through her own publishing career. She explained that giving conference papers was the first step. Her advice was to start small with book reviews and reference book entries. Seeing your name in print for the first time will build confidence. There was then discussion of publishing journal articles and finally book proposals and a first book. This was a lively session with participants constantly engaging with the speaker and each other, asking questions and sharing experiences. It was agreed that more advice could be given on how to prepare academic CVs. Hera described how to make things 'look good' and 'fit' on a CV, but a further session could be devoted to this issue in the future.

**E-Learning** – Howard Fuller (University of Maryland University College, Europe) presented a fascinating and enlightening session on the University of Maryland's online distance learning programme. We were all struck by the scale of this scheme. Howard explained that UMUC had 600 distinct courses online and 99 BA and MA programmes. In total there were 144,000 students enrolled in online courses in 2005. The 'Europe' branch of the UMUC programme caters to US military personal stationed overseas. Currently UMUC Europe is delivering higher education courses to 47,000 active duty military personal. After this initial overview of the programme, Howard demonstrated, via the Internet, the Webtyco portal through which the online programme is delivered. He talked us through his own course on the US Civil War and explained how students take the class virtually. Of particular interest was the interaction between students via 'blogs' about specific course content and the marking of essays. Howard described how he marks hard copies of essays, digitizes them with his comments and sends them back to the students as a pdf file. Much interest was generated by this session as everyone was keen to know how much time was involved teaching a course like this and the challenges of distance learning.

**Plans for Next Meeting** – Richard Hawkins (University of Wolverhampton) suggested his institution as the venue for the next meeting. It was agreed that it would take place

in late November 2006 and that possible topics might include how to write grant proposals and the pros and cons of digitisation for historians.

**Noelle Plack**

**6 July 2006**