

**‘Blue, White and Green Nation: Britain and the Sea since 1600’: Online and Collaborative Learning Using a Wiki
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This project involves the development of a more critical pedagogy based around goals set by the student as well as the teacher, and drawing on a mix of new technology and guided reflection.

This is a final report on this project, which came to a close in May 2009. Aims given in the original bid for resources are given in bold; work conducted towards those aims are given beneath each original aim.

A pilot project along similar lines was conducted the last time this course ran, in 2006/2007. Several new elements have been introduced: the Brookes Wiki has become much easier to use in that time, and the idea of a permanent repository of student sources was introduced, to encourage the students further in their gathering of new and original research material.

Work completed

The provision of a course Wiki within which students can develop their own spaces and pages, uploading images, sound, text and video to talk amongst themselves about the themes of the course.

This was provided in tandem with colleagues in Computer Services and the Media Lab, and with the students themselves in both formal and informal learning settings, they uploaded original research sources on their group Wikis. They were been asked to conduct such work towards their final course grade on U67562, ‘Britain and the Sea since 1600’.

The applicant will put up, within WebCT [now Brookes Virtual], a collection of primary sources for each week of the ‘Britain and the Sea’ course

This has also been done, along with selected secondary readings that would be hard for the students otherwise to access. Feedback about this has been good. A long list of weblinks was also provided, for the students to conduct their own online, as well as offline, research.

Allow time to organise meetings of colleagues to disseminate knowledge over how to use online WIKIs for teaching

Informal meetings have been held with a number of colleagues to spread best practice as to the use of the online Brookes wiki for different modules.

Results of the study

To investigate how collaborative online teaching methods can be used for students, [use will be made of] the traditional feedback form that Oxford Brookes University uses for all Undergraduate courses.

In general, this was well received, and certainly helped learning. Students were asked to pick from a number of 'Wiki questions' in the course handbook:

1. Was British national identity forged by the sea?
2. Was it just Britain's long coastline that made it a 'maritime country'?
3. Pirates: heroes or villains?
4. 'No Royal Navy, no *pax Britannica*'. Discuss.
5. What was the effect of mass emigration back at 'home'?
6. 'No man who can get himself into a prison would get himself onto a ship' (Dr Johnson). How true was Johnson's observation?
7. How important was privateering in the British maritime expansion?
8. Why did the *image* of maritime women 'afloat' not keep up with the reality of women's participation in the maritime economy?
9. Did the British turn their backs on the sea after 1945?

Some students initially seemed confused with the wiki system, but in general appeared happy with this aspect of the course.

Their comments, collected at the end of the course, were usually positive, but sometimes questioning, e.g.:

'I liked some of the format of assessment – i.e. the wiki – [it was] something new to me and an interesting break from the norm in the third year'.

And:

'The module content is interesting... However, there should be either a full lecture or seminar on the description of the wiki and the deadline dates set. Also group members should be able to e-mail each other, because communicating on the wiki was difficult. Also there should be one text or article that students are asked to read for every week. Also, if presentations are a requirement then people should be grouped together instead of single presentations so that they are longer and actually beneficial [to other students]'.

Students therefore seemed rather divided as to their opinions. Some liked, and some disliked, the wiki; given their emphasis on assessment and the achievement of given marks, many thought that group work could hamper them if other students did not co-operate. Technical problems, especially the difficulty of putting up comments, images, text or speech and then waiting for others to (re)shape it, also stood out.

Still, both the University and Hefce are promoting group work, and it was here only 10 per cent of the mark. It should probably be kept, as (a) students not contributing at all to the wiki could be tracked tools within the system, and (b) a small element of group work – while retaining most assessment for individuals – does keep students in mind of the fact that knowledge is usually collaboratively sought and created.

A student forum, which the course leader will chair, asking students to talk with the applicant, and each other, about what they learnt from the new methods employed in ‘Britain and the Sea’

In general, those students who did want to talk over this method of assessment and learning were positive – though they may have been rather self-selecting. They welcomed, in particular, work that could go on day and night, and the ability to communicate with other students and the course tutor across the week rather than in just the ‘traditional’ context of the Monday night lecture and class.

Probably the most important testament to this innovation and experiment was the sheer range of original sources that the students used, and the innovation they showed in doing so. These included:

- Images of piracy in popular culture;
- Links to modern newspaper stories about piracy;
- Links to pages of text (and audio) on sea shanties;
- Statistical tables of Royal Navy strength;
- Web tables and charts showing the destruction of North Sea fish stocks;
- Links to shipwreck images in the National Maritime Museum.

In general, the students were encouraged to be ‘playful’ with this part of the course – to experiment. And in general, after some initial hesitation, they seized this opportunity. The relatively good feedback, and the quality of the work done, testifies to the fact that this seems to have been a very positive experiment indeed.