Divinity – Starting to Embed Graduate Attributes

This work builds on the case study Divinity – Online Academic Skills Course: ‘Making the most of your time at University’ module. This case study explains the background to this course in general and in particular focuses on one module contained within this course.

**School/Subject area:** Divinity

**Target Audience:** First year undergraduate students

**Staff Involved:** Course Organiser, Career Adviser for School of Divinity and Employability Consultant

**Date:** Development in 2011 for use from September 2011

Key features

* This work builds on the case study Divinity – Online Academic Skills Course: ‘Making the most of your time at University’ module. This case study explains the background to this course in general and in particular focuses on one module contained within this course.
* The Academic Skills course is an SCQF level 7, non-credit bearing, compulsory course for all School of Divinity Degree Programmes in order to graduate with Honours. Until September 2011 this course has concentrated primarily on basic skill development to ensure students have the foundational skills they require for their academic study. These skills include Library usage, IT and writing skills.
* Within the School it is widely appreciated that our students are picking up numerous highly employable skills throughout their academic life (and beyond) but the students themselves do not recognise this. Students of Divinity have numerous future career pathways available to them and need to be able to articulate the value they can bring to the workplace to a vast range of possible employers.
* University of Edinburgh’s Graduate Attribute Framework (<http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/GraduateAttributesFramework.htm>) provides an excellent leverage for students to start engaging with the skills, abilities and attributes they are developing. However, students need to be introduced to this early in their University life and encouraged to engage and reflect on their development as they continue with their studies and beyond.
* This case study focuses on the steps that are being taken to introduce graduate attributes to students early on in their academic life through a structured approach that will hopefully encourage the start of a process for further engagement.

Planning and development

* Much of this work has been done under the Course Manager’s secondment to the Institute for Academic Development within the University of Edinburgh. This has provided time to develop and discuss the proposed re-structure of the course to provide a graduate attribute focus.
* This has involved a number of brain-storming sessions with colleagues in the School of Divinity engaged with teaching first year students at a subject level and colleagues in the Career Service and Employability Consultancy.
* As this work was part of a secondment, some of the time taken has been to ensure that the model being developed is re-usable by other parts of the institution. It is planned that the model will be easily re-usable and customisable by other parts of the University of Edinburgh.

Project

* To date work has focussed primarily on determining the new proposed structure for the course. Until now the course has been provided solely online via the University’s VLE WebCT BlackBoard as a series of modules released at strategic points during the year to match student requirements.
* The proposed new structure takes the existing materials and embeds each within an appropriate graduate attribute heading. As well as including the existing materials, links are also being made to the wider experiences students may have that relate to each particular graduate attribute area.
* The e-portfolio PebblePad is also being added as the tool for students to start recording, reflecting and planning their graduate attribute attainment/growth. Within PebblePad a series of scaffolding components are being built that will aid students to start on this path – these include some self-assessment questions, encouragement to use the blog and action plan tools in particular. These are seen as starting blocks to enable students to start the process of engaging with PebblePad the tool but also PDP in general.
* The revised course structure will be rolled out to students in September 2011. An introductory lecture will also be given to provide some additional context for the course and approach.

Resources

* A substantial amount of time has gone into planning of this new approach but this was part of the secondment. Further roll-out would not require a large input.
* Development and delivery has focussed on the existing materials with only tools in the PebblePad resource needing new development. Even with PebblePad, most of the work has focussed on taking existing generic materials (My Edge) and giving them a customised view.

Evaluation

* Informal and formal feedback has consistently shown that the existing academic skills course is valued by the students.  This becomes even more evident over time as students are progressively exposed to different aspects of University study.
* No feedback data is available yet on the re-structured course – this will be available later in the 2011-12 academic year. It is planned to use questionnaires and focus groups to obtain student comments and revise as required.

Advice

* In the process of carrying out this exercise it has been possible to take a step back and consider the course structure and how the existing materials are packaged, without having to revise essential content. Embedding the graduate attributes within the course sits neatly within the academic aims and does not change the principal aims of the course, only the approach. Through this exercise we were able to re-evaluate the course and put in place a system that can easily integrate the basic skills requirement but within the wider context of the graduate attribute framework.
* Our main concern is student engagement – this is an early stage in their academic life and it is difficult for them to appreciate the value of taking this approach. In addition, even if they engage with the ideas of PDP and building on their graduate attributes for this course, will they continue when they are largely left on their own to do so?

Key contacts

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