

Natural Hazard Website Assignment

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Level 2

Group size 40

Technology requirements

Microsoft FrontPage, access to electronic information resources (e.g. Science Direct).

Skills required

Standard IT skills, good literature searching strategy, the ability to précis information, good design applications.

Rationale

Students on degree courses including Environmental Science, Environmental Management, and Geography study the module 'Natural Hazards' as a part of their studies. Learning outcomes are defined (amongst others) in terms of:

1. *Module specific outcomes*

- critical evaluation of physical and politico-social systems
- illustration of various concepts of risk assessment
- plan, design, execute and report a piece of enquiry

2. *Personal transferable skills*

- communicate effectively, organize + collate information and use IT effectively

3. *Generic academic outcomes*

- think critically and synthesize ideas

Although specific degree award criteria may differ, the purpose was to allow students the opportunity to learn a new framework for showcasing both their academic and technical IT skills. A website assignment was thus set up so that students on different awards could interact with their chosen subject matter in a way that was relevant to their individual award criteria.

Teaching method

Students are trained firstly in the use and operation of Microsoft FrontPage2000, which is widely available in the University. They are initially presented with a hard copy workbook, which contains a worked example of a simple "volcanoes website". An interactive three-hour workshop is also set up for problem solving any technical issues, but students generally learn how to use the software and create websites at their own pace. The assignment brief asks students to concentrate on one particular hazard (rather than hazards in general) or develop an idea or theme that arises out of the study of hazards (e.g. vulnerability of populations, economic features of disasters, the impact on social structures following a disaster). Students are asked not to use more than 6 web pages and to write in a form that is both useful and accessible to an informed professional. Each submitted website is an individual piece of work and reflects the ability of the student to engage with the module themes.

Benefits

As students are required to include all of their information sources and to obtain permission to use any images, they have to interact with the literature to a high level of engagement. Effective information searches, real understanding and carefully managed self-study are thus essential to fulfill the learning outcomes and to pass the assignment. New IT skills supplement their employability prospects.

Pitfalls

There is a danger of a “cut and paste” mentality from other web sites. Plagiarism and collusion are thus risks and it may be time consuming to check on authenticity. Students who have poor IT skills need high levels of support.

Evidence of effectiveness

Student feedback has been very positive in the past. Pass rates have also been high in the past. Material and concepts developed in websites are ‘learnt’ rather than ‘taught’. The exercise is thus perceived as being very efficient in terms of time management.

Advice to others

IT technical staff can address technical matters, releasing academic staff from contact with students.