

Fieldwork and the production of web sites for assessment.

Dr Chris Ribchester and Prof Derek France, Department of Geography and Development Studies, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ. email: c.ribchester@chester.ac.uk, d.france@chester.ac.uk

Level 1

Group size ~20

Technology requirements

VLE, web site editing software (e.g. Microsoft FrontPage), basic image-editing software, Netskills institutional licence, digital cameras and A4 scanner.

Skills required

Staff: understanding of web site design and working knowledge of an editing software package.

Rationale

The core module 'Introductory Field Skills in Geography' aims to develop student skills in field data collection, data analysis and project design. The web site assignment was introduced to 'add value' to these core aims by facilitating the development of key C & IT skills as well as helping to diversify the assessment strategy within the entire BSc Single Honours Geography programme.

Teaching method

Students attend a residential field course at the start of this module (at Slapton Ley FSC Centre, Devon) during which they complete an independent project that includes primary data collection. On returning to Chester, students receive guidance on writing up field-based research. They then write up their projects as a standard fieldwork report and receive formative feedback on this submission. At roughly the same time, guidance on website design and creation is provided, primarily through practical sessions using Netskills resources (www.netskills.ac.uk). Students are then required to adapt and convert their fieldwork report into a functioning web site, including the use of images and hyperlinks to relevant external sites. This is submitted as a summative assignment at the end of the module and placed on the University's VLE, which also stores a significant range of digital resources, including images of the study area. In the later stages of the module, support and guidance for the website assignment is provided through 'hands-on' practical sessions.

Benefits

The main benefits for students are:

- the development of web design and creation skills specifically;
- greater confidence with C & IT more generally;
- heightened awareness of report structure and the value of planning written work;
- the opportunity to develop concise writing skills;
- the opportunity to express some 'individuality' and 'character', particularly in terms of presentation.

Pitfalls

This system is labour intensive at the outset, but less so as module has matured. Ensuring student access to computing facilities and necessary software can be problematic. There is also the danger of academic writing style being abandoned in favour of personalised, chatty 'web speak'. Occasional

emphasis on presentation above content in student submissions.

Evidence of effectiveness

Detailed evaluation of this assignment exercise was completed between 2002 and 2004, using pre- and post-module student surveys and some focus group discussions. This served to highlight the benefits listed above. Evaluation is on-going, primarily now through end-of-module questionnaire.

Advice to others

- Clarity of assessment criteria is important, including weighting of marks for content and presentation;
- Stipulating the use of a single editing tool for all students allows support to be concentrated more effectively and can help to avoid time-consuming complications when uploading to the VLE;
- Providing students with a short period of 'grace' at the point of submission to solve small technical problems (e.g. a failed hyperlink) is appreciated by students and can avoid tutor frustration when marking.

References

France, D. & Ribchester, C. (2004). Producing websites for assessment: a case study from a level 1 fieldwork module. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 49-62.