

## **Institutional approaches**



## **The Finnish Virtual University of History**

Tapio Onnela  
University of Turku

### **Overview and organisational practices**

The Finnish Virtual University of History (FVUH) is a broadly-based organisation providing higher-education courses in the field of history using ICT. Its status is still that of a project. Its members are drawn from ten departments in eight Finnish universities, from Lapland on the Arctic Circle to Helsinki in the extreme south. The Finnish network for the History of Science and Technology is also involved, as well as the Finnish universities of technology. Another partner is Agricola – The Finnish History Network – which is a joint web-service started in 1996 for connecting various resources in museums, libraries and archives in order to give universities, schools and history associations access to a broad range of historical materials.

### **The main objectives**

The FVUH has been in operation since the year 2000. Its main objective is to produce web-based history courses and offer them at university level to its member institutions. It thereby makes diversified history teaching widely available to all history departments and gives them an opportunity to set in train an international exchange of courses with history departments abroad. It gives students flexibility, enabling them to choose where and when to study, and to decide the tempo of their studies. It helps tutors and other staff members to use e-learning technology, and teaches students how to use and exploit the Internet and other ICT-technologies and e-learning methods.

## **How it works: organizational challenges**

A common problem in larger collaborative projects is that the organization frequently becomes top-heavy and ineffective. If the organization is too large, too formal and too rigid, a great number of resources are wasted in travel and in meetings, instead of being used for productive work.

The FVUH is controlled by its working committee which is the decision-making body. It has representatives from all 11 participating institutions. The working committee meets twice a year but also continues its deliberations by e-mail. The committee vets new web-courses and gives approval for their introduction into the curriculum of the project. It also approves resources for course-builders. The FVUH has one full-time co-ordinator.

Organizations are made up of people, but people who have the power to decide things, within these organizations, often have so many other administrative functions that they rarely have enough time to participate in new projects unless they are directly related to their normal work. All the representatives of the institutions taking part in the project also teach “at the chalk-face”. The advantage of this kind of organization is that it is very flexible and is effective in its actual work. The drawback is that a gap can open up between the chalk-face teaching and the higher decision makers who allocate resources.

In developing co-operation between institutions, it very often happens that the organization grows too big and becomes difficult to manage. The FVUH chose to build up the organization in an organic way, by proceeding gradually, in small steps. Teaching started between two history departments, which were responsible for the teaching content, and two adult education organizations. More institutions came to participate in the project and finally, by 2003, all history departments had joined, accepting the written agreement between the participating institutions. After that they began to co-operate with other institutions which needed history teaching at university level.

This slow way of proceeding was adopted because, in 2000, e-learning and web-courses were almost unknown in history departments. This gradual approach gave tutors and course-planners time to develop their courses and to include a pilot phase in order to try out new methods. The step-by-step approach allowed those involved to see how their web-courses would look and check their teaching methods. In short, they could find out what can be done with new ICT-tools. The first courses were arranged in the spring of 2001. By 2005 as many as 35 different web-courses were being offered.

## **Financing**

The FVUH is financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education as a part of the Finnish Virtual University, which was set up within the larger “Knowledge Society” programme at the beginning of 2000.

It was allocated money in order to begin a virtual-teaching project in the field of history. Without this extra money, the history departments could not have started on their new activities. With this special funding from the Ministry, which was over and above normal departmental funding, the history project has been able to build up support services for the various departments, to manage the project and the courses and to develop new forms of collaborative teaching. History departments have been financing the actual teaching of the courses which means, in practice, that they pay the teachers. Departments have received no extra money for teaching although they have had money for creating the courses and for including virtual courses in their curriculum.

## **Course production:**

### **Courses in the curriculum and student recruitment**

The initiative for new courses has mainly come from tutors and researchers. No instructions have come down from the national working committee. The project began with strong guidance from the working committee, but this organizational model was found to be too cumbersome. It failed to produce good results because it was too difficult to create content to suit the curriculum of different departments. Instead, tutors began creating more specialized courses which took advantage of particular expertise in the different departments. People specializing for example in the history of the cold war gave their expert knowledge for use by other departments by means of virtual courses.

Course-production teams were also organized virtually so that people interested in medieval history from different departments built courses together. The virtual environment gives great flexibility, enabling people from different departments to create courses together. Although this option has not been as widely used as it could be, course-production teams have usually been organized in departments between people in close contact who already know each other.

Course production is usually arranged in teams with people specializing in different aspects of the subject. These teams vary from a minimum of two people to as many as eight. A course team can divide the workload by thematic tasks. One team member for example could handle the subject from the perspective of gender, another could do it from the point of view of economic history while yet other members could concentrate more on technical and teaching issues or on graphics. This is a novel concept in the field of history teaching where tutors have traditionally

prepared and run courses on their own. Never before have researchers and teachers collaborated so much with their colleagues.

The working committee, which is the decision-making body, accepts new web-courses into the curriculum of the project, then, at the beginning of each term, the various history departments select courses which they think will suit their curriculum. They announce the courses to their students through the normal channels, and students then enroll on the courses using the centralized database. The departments choose the students who will attend the courses. All this information, from the announcement of the courses to the enrolment procedure, is maintained in one data-base connected to the public Internet. It is also connected to the project intranet where access is only available to the representatives of the different departments.

## **Evaluation**

All new courses are evaluated in feedback seminars which are organized twice a year. Courses are discussed in the seminar from three different angles: The first is an evaluation of the content, when experts from the subject taught on the course discuss the detailed historical content. The second consists of students' comments on the course. The third is an assessment of the course from a pedagogical and technical viewpoint. These are then put together in a general discussion. Such evaluation seminars have proved a very fruitful way of discussing essential matters in researching and teaching history.

## **Platforms**

The platform used in the project has mostly been WebCT. Course-building teams were given a free hand in choosing the platform to use. The project had the option of using the University of Turku's WebCT-licence. This is the reason why most of the courses are running under WebCT. Some other platforms have also been used, such as Optima and Moodle. The question of platform is not a very important one. It is only significant when the cost of platforms is considered. WebCT has been available free of charge for the project because universities had already paid for their licence. Further investigation is needed to judge which would be the most cost-effective platform for history courses.

## **Results**

So far, the project has created 35 different e-learning history courses and in three different languages: Finnish, Swedish and English. The demand for web-based courses has increased steadily since 2000 when the FVUH began. By 2005, as many as 800 students were studying on virtual courses. The testing and pilot phases are

due to end in 2006 when e-learning history courses are expected to become part of mainstream teaching in Finnish history departments.

The project has generated much of value including administrative tools for managing student mobility at national level, evaluation and quality practices, tools for helping in course production and new methods of teaching and learning. The teaching staff in the various departments have been taught to use virtual courses in their teaching, and much administrative effort has been devoted to making the courses relevant for the curriculum of each partner. The FVUH has been involved in a number of co-operative pilot projects. One such project was with the Finnish National Broadcasting Company for testing the possibility of using their vast audio-visual resources for teaching. It has also been active in examining pedagogical problems, copyright issues, and co-operation with institutions for preserving primary source materials.

## Effects on the history departments involved

The main result from the project has been the increase in co-operation between institutions. Before the project started there was no shared teaching between history departments. By contract, departments can now choose from 35 different web-courses for inclusion in their curriculum. In this way they have the possibility to enrich their range and offer courses that they otherwise could not have any way of providing.

Another interesting result is that web-courses are usually prepared by a group of tutors or researchers. This is in stark contrast to normal face-to-face teaching,



where the lectures and seminars are prepared and handled by a single individual. New ICT tools have changed the way tutors do their teaching. It has also brought in a far more collaborative method of working. It has given departments a concrete and cost-effective tool for co-operating internationally in their teaching.

### **Pilot project or permanent organization: is there a future for the FVUH?**

The FVUH still has project status. It does not have sustainable funding and the organization is not permanent. This is going to be a problem if it is to achieve its objectives in the future. Changes in ICT-technology affecting e-learning are very rapid but organizational changes in institutions using technology follow all-too slowly. Six years have not been long enough to establish a totally new way of organizing teaching collaboration – especially when it comes to finance. The time has not been long enough for effective collaboration even between departments from different universities in a small country like Finland.

In principle, all departments agree that they have benefited from collaborating, and they would like to continue. The problem is that money is scarce for all history departments, as indeed for Finnish universities in general. As long as the departments got extra money from the Ministry for enlarging their curriculum and building up new courses it was also reasonably easy to get favourable decisions about e-learning and innovative methods of teaching history. It is understandable that departments want to secure their core work when incentives from outside dry up. Collaboration is not the normal state of mind between competing institutions. It has to be supported with extra funding, otherwise the cost of providing courses becomes too high for departments and they drop collaborative e-learning from their curriculum.



## **E-learning and traditional distance learning in History in Portugal: the Universidade Aberta (<http://www.univ-ab.pt>)**

Rita Ríos de la Llave and  
M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Cabañas González  
Universidad de Alcalá

### **Description**

Our research shows that the use of e-learning is not as developed in Portugal as in other parts of Europe. The Universidade Aberta however is an exception.

The Universidade Aberta was founded in 1988 as a distance-learning University, the first of its kind in Portugal. It was, from the outset, a public University, fully recognised by the Portuguese State. It offers 7 degree courses and 21 MA courses, as well as Postgraduate studies, 3 courses for Portuguese and some additional courses for professional and other subjects. The University employs around 180 tutors. Most of the students are located abroad. Some of them are looking for a degree whilst others wish to further their education and to enhance their career prospects.

Activities involving History and e-learning are mainly extensions to other courses. The number of credits that they represent varies considerably, although they do not correspond to ECTS credits. These courses relate mainly to the following subjects of study: Prehistory, Ancient History, Mediaeval History, Modern History, Contemporary History, The Teaching of History, The History of Portugal at different periods, Economic and Social History, The History of America, The History of England, Local and Regional History, and The History of Women's Rights.

There is a History course giving 10 credits in the Social Sciences degree programme. The European Studies degree programme includes 5 History courses giving 10 credits. The Portuguese and History degree courses include 9 History courses giving 5 or 10 credits. There are 16 History courses giving from 5 to 10 credits in the History degree, and 17 History courses giving from 5 to 10 credits in the Teaching of History degree. Finally the Teaching of Portuguese and the History degree include 8 History courses giving 10 credits – except one which gives 5. The 10-credit courses last a whole year, while the 5-credit courses last only one term. Some of the courses are common to several degrees.

E-learning in some History courses is included in MA studies. There is one course giving 15 credits in American Studies (12<sup>th</sup> edition); another giving 15 credits in English Studies (8<sup>th</sup> edition); two courses giving 6 and 7 credits in Cultural Heritage Studies (2<sup>nd</sup> edition); five seminars in Portuguese Studies (10<sup>th</sup> edition); three courses giving 2 or 3 credits in Women's Studies; and four courses giving 10 credits in Mediterranean Studies (1<sup>st</sup> edition). "Edition" means the number of times the course has been run.

## **Pedagogy**

Degrees offered by the Universidade Aberta are regarded as valid in the official Education System (*curso formais*), so each student can get a university degree fully recognised by the Portuguese State. There are three ways of gaining access to these courses of study:

- By passing a local test, which can be taken only by people who have finished secondary school and are at least 21 years old. If they are less than 21 they can still take the test provided they are working. They cannot be students elsewhere in higher education.
- By completing an annual course related to the same type of study in some other higher education institution, as long as they were not students at another university.
- By passing a special exam giving access to higher education.

To get a degree from the Universidade Aberta students have to gain a specific number of credits. The number varies according to the area of study: They need 240 credits for Social Sciences, European Studies, Portuguese and History, or History degrees; or 220 credits for the Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History degrees. In this there is no difference from the traditional universities, apart from the structure. Degrees are traditionally organised in two cycles, each of two years, with students needing to gain 60 credits each year. But at the Universidade Aberta degrees are not organised in cycles and there is no limit to the number

of courses per year, nor to the total duration of study. So the system is more flexible.

MA studies usually last 24 months, except for Women Studies where it is only 4 months. Students need to have a degree before they can study for an MA. It is sometimes necessary to show previous knowledge of the subject which is to be studied in the MA course. For example, students must show that they have completed some course in the subject. To get an MA, students must have gained 20 credits in Women's Studies or 57 credits in other subject areas.

Most of the students in the Universidade Aberta are working adults, so they do not have much time to follow traditional courses. Some students just want to get a university degree; while others are more interested in furthering their education and advancing their careers. It could be claimed that History courses are clearly oriented to life-long learning as advocated by the Bologna Process<sup>1</sup>. The courses are rather different from conventional courses in Portugal, where most of the students have just finished secondary school and see getting a job as their main aim in studying for a degree. The Universidade Aberta has students scattered across the world. This is where e-learning scores as it eliminates barriers of space and time. That is one of its main advantages<sup>2</sup>.

The Universidade Aberta has developed a learning system that links traditional methods of distance learning with the use of on-line tools. The aim is to give adult learners new material and new ways of studying, to provide learning to a scattered population, offering flexibility in space and time, and to promote self-learning and interactive communication. In a nutshell, they seek to provide critical knowledge by means of continuing education<sup>3</sup>.

From a pedagogical point of view there is a greater spread of work in the Universidade Aberta than in traditional universities. In other Portuguese universities the tutor in charge of the course is also responsible for teaching. But in the case of the Universidade Aberta there are different people responsible for these activities. The courses are structured in virtual class-rooms with a maximum 10 students with one tutor who is also in charge of the course and guides the group. Other people create the content and prepare the materials. There is also a co-ordinator for each course. At the Universidade Aberta more individual attention is paid to the student, and this benefits the learning process<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> G. Haug, Ch. Tauch, *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education (II): Follow-up Report prepared for the Salamanca and Prague Conferences of March / May 2001, April 2001*, p. 24 ([http://www.uah.es/universidad/espacio\\_europeo/documentos/Trends%20learning\\_Structures\\_Higher\\_Education\\_marzo-mayo\\_2001.pdf](http://www.uah.es/universidad/espacio_europeo/documentos/Trends%20learning_Structures_Higher_Education_marzo-mayo_2001.pdf)). J. González, R. Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, 2003, p. 126 ([http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc\\_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf](http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> K. Kruse, "Using the Web for Learning: Advantages and Disadvantages", *e-LearningGuru.com*, 2002, p. 1 ([http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art1\\_9.htm](http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art1_9.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.univ-ab.pt/acerca/distancia.html>.

<sup>4</sup> J. González, R. Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, 2003, p. 264 ([http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc\\_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf](http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf)).

The system of the Universidade Aberta combines face-to-face teaching with virtual tutoring which can be both synchronous (where students and tutor are on-line together) and asynchronous (where they are not). In this way the lack of human contact, which is one of the main disadvantages of e-learning, can be eliminated<sup>5</sup>. In any case not all students can attend face-to-face tutorials, since a lot of them live outside Portugal. Contact is also done by telephone and fax.

Students have to carry out a variety of assignments during the term and at the end they have a face-to-face meeting, which can be an exam or a discussion about a final assignment. When MA students have finished their studies they have to write a dissertation. At the Universidade Aberta the work of the students is much more important than that of the teacher, so as to encourage their aspirations and their creativity, develop their personality and enhance their independence of thought, in order to prepare them for today's world<sup>6</sup>. The activities are, however, still closely related to traditional ways of teaching History.

## Materials

The following History courses are offered by the Universidade Aberta:

1. Prehistory (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
2. Proto-history (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, and Teaching of History).
3. Roman Portugal (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
4. History of Mediaeval Portugal: Economy and Society (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
5. History of Mediaeval Portugal: Politics and Institutions (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
6. History of Modern Portugal: Economy and Society (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
7. History of Modern Portugal: Politics and Institutions (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).

<sup>5</sup> K. Kruse, "Using the Web for Learning: Advantages and Disadvantages", *e-LearningGuru.com*, 2002, p. 2 ([http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art1\\_9.htm](http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art1_9.htm)).

<sup>6</sup> S. Aguado Henche, A. García Pérez, R. Ríos de la Llave, "¿Es posible realizar una enseñanza universitaria en Inglés?", *Educación y Futuro digital*, 9 (2005), p. 1 (<http://www.cesdonbosco.com/revista>).

8. History of Contemporary Portugal: Economy and Society (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
9. History of Contemporary Portugal: Politics and Institutions (degrees in History, Portuguese and History, Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
10. History of the Discoveries and the Portuguese Enlargement (degrees in History, Teaching of History, and European Studies).
11. Pre-classical civilisation (degrees in History, and Teaching of History).
12. Classical civilisations 1: Greece (degrees in History, and Teaching of History).
13. Classical civilisations 2: Rome (degrees in History, and Teaching of History).
14. Middle Ages History (degrees in European Studies, History, and Teaching of History).
15. Modern History (degrees in European Studies, History, and Teaching of History).
16. Contemporary History (degrees in European Studies, History, and Teaching of History).
17. Teaching of History (degrees in Teaching of History, and Teaching of Portuguese and History).
18. Economic and social History (degrees in Social Sciences, and European Studies).
19. History of America (MA in American Studies).
20. History of England (MA in English Studies).
21. Local and regional History (MA in Cultural Heritage).
22. History of Art and Cultural Heritage (MA in Cultural Heritage).
23. Millennium and Empire (MA in Portuguese Studies).
24. Historical Discourses (MA in Portuguese Studies).
25. Portugal between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic (MA in Portuguese Studies).
26. Portuguese Jewish Migration (MA in Portuguese Studies).
27. Cities in the Portuguese Middle Ages (MA in Portuguese Studies).
28. History of Women's Rights (MA in Women's Studies).
29. Methods of research 2: History (MA in Women's Studies).
30. Political and Social Contemporary History (MA in Women's Studies).
31. The Portuguese Extremadura from the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC until the arrival of the Phoenicians (MA in Mediterranean Studies).
32. The circulation of goods, people and cultures in the Ancient Mediterranean (MA in Mediterranean Studies).



33. Scatological ideas in the construction of Europe (MA in Mediterranean Studies).
34. The Discourse of the History: the pull of the sea, from the Mediterranean to the oceans (MA in Mediterranean Studies).

All the materials used in the courses have been specially written. They have been prepared by specialists paid by the Universidade Aberta.

Most of the courses present the materials in a traditional way as well as electronically. They consist mainly of text-books, videos, and sound and image files on CD-ROM or on web-sites. As such, the courses are really attractive to the students. The Portuguese primary sources and bibliography, which have been digitised through funding by its Library, also play a very important role<sup>7</sup>.

Copyright in the materials created by the various authors is kept for a certain period of time by the Universidade Aberta. In this way it follows the practice in many countries: where an author is employed to create something, the copyright in the resulting work belongs to the employer rather than to the employee<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The *Universidade Aberta* has a special section, the *Biblioteca Antiga Digital*, where the students can consult different types of digital sources related to the History of Portugal (<http://www.univ-ab.pt/bad/index.html>).

<sup>8</sup> *Nociones básicas sobre derecho de autor y derechos conexos. Documento preparado por la Oficina Internacional de la OMPI*, 2005, p. 11.

## Administration

The organisation of courses is done at different levels.

Skilled staff are responsible for technical matters, mainly connected with managing the platform. Since most of the students are adults with little experience of computers or the Internet, any technical problems can have a serious impact

The University takes responsibility for marketing its courses, using the Internet for dissemination. Its web-site is included in [Universia.net](http://Universia.net), the main channel for spreading information about Spanish, Portuguese and Latin-American universities<sup>9</sup>. However it is not included in the web-site of the Ministry of Education (Ministério da Educação), which does not in fact include information about any Portuguese universities.

The Universidade Aberta web-site provides a lot of information, such as details about the university, the government system, the structure of the departments, the various services, administrative matters for the students and the institution's publications. It does not give details of individual courses but provides an overview.

There is a co-ordinator for each course. They are responsible for all teaching matters. There is also a tutor for each course, one for every 10 students, while the tutors who created the materials are not involved in teaching. The co-ordinators and the tutors who created the materials all work under contract, either temporary or permanent.

## Platforms

Students and tutors on the History courses use a commercial platform called IntraLearn, designed by the IntraLearn Software Corporation. The Universidade Aberta has bought a licence from them. Students have their own username and password for logging-in to the Campus.

The platform offers a virtual class-room for groups of ten students who are registered for the course. Each virtual class-room includes a number of areas:

1. My courses (*Os meus cursos*).
2. Contents (*Conteúdos*).
3. List of students in the group (*Lista*).
4. Resources (*Recursos*), where the glossary, references, links and FAQs are given.
5. Communicate (*Comunicar*), which includes tools like calendar, chat, mail and forum.
6. Search (*Pesquisar*).
7. Profile (*Perfil*), giving the personal details of the student.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.universia.pt/conteudos/universidades/universidades\\_mapa\\_distrito.jsp?distrito\\_id=11](http://www.universia.pt/conteudos/universidades/universidades_mapa_distrito.jsp?distrito_id=11)



8. Record of marks (*Livro de classificação*), which shows the academic record of the student.
9. Short cuts (*Atalhos*).
10. Help (*Ajuda*), which includes instructions for handling the platform.

The platform also includes a work area, an area for exams, another for notes, where the students can put their comments, a system for recording pages that have been consulted, an area for the team and an index of the virtual class-room.

Course materials are usually provided on CD-ROM or video, or are printed. Video-conferencing is used as well as the traditional tools of distance learning like television and radio.

On the whole, the system is fairly traditional, being centred mainly on the tutors rather than the students, while the platform is used for simplifying communication.

### Language and Intercultural aspects

Portuguese is the language of all the History courses, although some of the material is also presented in other languages, mainly French and Italian. This assumes that History students know these other languages. This has both advantages and disadvantages.



The use of different languages could limit the number of students, given that most of them nowadays speak two languages, their mother tongue and one other, usually English. So not all students can understand materials in other languages. While the use of an e-learning system succeeds in breaking the barriers of space and time, the use of different languages makes access to the materials difficult for most of the students.

The use of different languages encourages intercultural exchange. Not only Portuguese students but also those from other parts of the world are involved in the History courses, so they are developing a multifaceted intercultural view of History through the use of materials written in different languages. The inclusion of English in some History courses could be a way of increasing the number of non-Portuguese students.

The Portuguese language, along with Portuguese culture and history, are the core of the History courses. The Portuguese historiographical tradition and teaching methods also play an important part, particularly in those degrees where students only learn about the History of Portugal – namely the degrees in Portuguese and History, Teaching of Portuguese and History, and the MA in Portuguese Studies.

### **Quality assessment – of the courses**

The Universidade Aberta carries out an internal and external validation of their History courses at the same time as the other Portuguese universities. This is done mainly through questionnaires. Students have to answer questions about teaching, research, content and the validation of degree and postgraduate students. But they do not have to comment as much as students do who follow conventional courses. The external assessment is always carried out by an independent committee not connected to the university.

### **Quality assessment – of the students**

The assessment of history students is based on two kinds of activity:

- a. Assignments during the term, mainly in writing
- b. A face-to-face test at the end of the term, in the form of either an exam or a discussion on a final assignment.

MA students usually have to write a dissertation once their studies are finished.

We have no information about the marks given for individual tasks, but it is evident that many activities are fairly traditional, like written exercises and face-to-face exams, instead of interactive and participatory involvement, which are the main activities associated with virtual platforms<sup>10</sup>. Holding face-to-face examinations re-

duces in practice the total number of students since those living abroad cannot take part.

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<sup>10</sup> C. Sigalés, “El potencial interactivo de los entornos virtuales de enseñanza y aprendizaje en la educación a distancia”, *X Encuentro Internacional de Educación a Distancia*, noviembre 2001. Guadalajara, México ([http://eadcna.cuao.edu.co/doc\\_cna/posters\\_Guerrero/3\\_02.pdf](http://eadcna.cuao.edu.co/doc_cna/posters_Guerrero/3_02.pdf)).

## The UK Open University

David Sephton, Oxford  
Primrose Publishing

### Description of activities

The Open University (OU) is an independent organization and is not linked to any of the existing UK universities. It has been providing courses for thirty years. The history courses are part of an extensive range of courses offered to anyone wishing to do further study, or to obtain a degree.

At present the OU has only one history course that is wholly on-line. It is a short 10-point course “Starting Writing Family History” It is part of a suite of courses on different subjects each with the title “Starting ...”. They are designed to encourage creative writing.

The OU History Department is preparing a re-make of their Master’s course. It is due to begin in 2009 and will be predominantly on-line.

The longer courses last 10 months, from February to October. They carry 60 points. The shorter courses last between 8 and 20 weeks and carry 10, 20 or 30 points. Students on the longer





courses are expected to attend a one-week summer school, held at one of the traditional universities.

There are six very important initial 60-point Level-1 courses lasting 32 weeks, such as the initial Humanities course. Each of them has 7000 to 8000 students. Most history courses have between 200 and 300 students.

Students have to pay for the course. Most fees range from £245 to £475, although a few courses cost as much as £1060. Fees can be paid in instalments.

Since there is at present only the one on-line course in history, information has been sought from the OU Faculty of Technology about their on-line courses since they offer quite a range.

## **Thematic viewpoints**

### **Pedagogy**

The OU stresses that their students are involved in “learning” rather than in “being taught”, and this of course is true of on-line courses generally.

In the past the OU has always used books, radio and television in delivering their courses. Later they added material on audio-tape, then on CDs, and finally on DVDs and on-line. What was formerly presented on radio and TV is now being done largely on DVD. The radio and television broadcasts are set to end in late-2006

Students tend to record the TV programmes, as they are broadcast at very unsocial hours. If they forget to record them they can write in and borrow a copy. Much of the material is now available to students on DVD.

Most courses still provide a printed course book. These books are now being paralleled by e-books on-line which students can download. The OU is the first UK university to introduce e-books, giving a choice of on-line or printed course material.

On-line video-lectures are used in a few OU courses for business and for technical subjects, but there are no plans to introduce them for history.

In the ICT Department each member of the team has a degree of freedom about what part they play. They can decide whether to help design the course, or to run the course or to do both. They can decide whether to work on-line or to plan the printed material. It is all very flexible. Each of them can exploit their own particular skills and interests.

## Materials

There are 14 undergraduate courses for history. These are:

- Exploring the Classical World
- Fifth-Century Athens: Democracy and the City State
- From Enlightenment to Romanticism c. 1780-1830
- Princes & Peoples: France and the British Isles 1620 - 1714
- State, Economy and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Europe
- Europe: Culture & Identities in a Contested Continent
- The Renaissance in Europe: a Cultural Enquiry
- Total War and Social Change: Europe 1914-1955
- Urban Britain: 1870-1914
- Evangelicals, Women & Community in Nineteenth-Century Britain
- Religion in History: Conflict, Conversion
- The Professions in Early Modern England: c.1450-1800
- Art, Society and Religion in Siena, Florence and Padua 1280-1400
- Understanding Comparative History: Britain & America from 1760

Course title	Credits	Next start	UK Fee
Exploring the Classical World (A213) NEW	60	Feb 2008	£495
Fifth-Century Athens: Democracy and City State (A236)	60	Jan 2008	£475
From Enlightenment to Romanticism c. 1780-1830 (A282)	60	Jan 2008	£475
Princes and Peoples: France and the British Isles 1620 - 1714 (A220)	30	Feb 2008	£245
State, Economy and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Europe (A201)	30	Jan 2008	£245
<b>Level 3</b>			
Level 3 courses build on study skills and subject knowledge acquired from studies at Levels 1 and 2.			
Course title	Credits	Next start	UK Fee
Art, Society and Religion in Siena, Florence and Padua 1280-1400 (A384)	30	Feb 2008	£245
Europe: Culture and Identities in a Contested Continent (AA300)	60	Jan 2008	£475

Three non-history courses have a significant history element.

In the OU history courses little use is made of graphics and illustrations, so no examples are included of visually-attractive web-pages.

## Administration

The history courses are under the control of the Head of the History Department. He takes overall responsibility and is active in writing and revising courses.

Students are organized regionally. There are 13 regional centres and 350 study centres that provide help and support. Each student has a personal tutor, known as an Associate Lecturer, and is encouraged to attend regular face-to-face tutorials. This applies especially for the initial courses. For later courses, where numbers



are smaller and students are widely scattered, it is often impractical to have tutorials face-to-face.

There is a clear split between the OU staff who are permanent employees, and the tutors in each region who organize the students' work and run their tutorials. The tutors are independent of the OU and work under short-term contracts.

The regional centres recruit the tutors and allocate students to the face-to-face tutorials. The tutor is contracted to do 16 hours face-to-face with students on a 60-point course. Tutors also contract to do so many hours on-line conferencing per annum. In the initial courses tutors expect to see their students every two weeks. In later courses they may see students only two or three times – or not at all for students who are abroad.

Tutors are required to deal with assignments and return them to students within 10 to 14 days. The system keeps a tight control of this

Students can send in their assignments in a variety of ways. Some courses specify which method is preferred. Students can use a variety of formats, relevant to the course, such as HTML, .DOC or PowerPoint. Many still send their assignments by post though most students send them as e-mail attachments or upload them to the OU web-site in HTML format using the OU's own Electronic Assignment Delivery System.

For each course there is a small team that designs it. The team then helps to run the course, the first time it is presented, along with a much bigger team.

## Platforms

The OU uses a platform for its courses called “Student Home”. It is believed to be their own platform. “Student Home” controls the courses. Students log-in to the OU web-site using their UserName and Password.

For on-line conferencing they use “First Class” which is a standard tool used in the UK. The OU has recently taken out a one-million user licence from OpenText in Canada who own the program.

However, many students prefer to use their own browser in preference to using First Class. In future the OU will try to design courses that can be accessed using standard browsers.

The OU also makes use of “Lyceum” which offers easy access to white-board and audio facilities. A special web-site has been introduced called “e-Desktop” which the OU created in-house. This is a templated web-site to enable course-designers to create courses using templates so that the format is uniform across the courses.

The OU only supports Windows. They do not support Mac or Linux.

In 2006 the OU hopes to launch “VLE” – Virtual Learning Environment. This will integrate all their on-line facilities: First Class, e-Desktop, Lyceum, etc. Students will be able to use it for checking their scores as well accessing everything else that they need. The first stage will come on stream in 2006 and the second stage in 2007, though it will probably not be finalized even then.

Blind students, and those who are partially sighted, use a program called Jaws for Windows which they can acquire on special terms. It has a speech-synthesizer which outputs text audibly and can produce documents in braille. All instructions can be accessed audibly.

Podcasting is now being actively considered. They are sure it will form an important tool in their range. The BBC already offers a great deal of podcast material. The OU history department has been experimenting with the podcasting software for some time.

The OU have a very robust system with six massive servers located at two independent sites, so it is very reliable. A complex system with a big data-base keeps track of everything that the student does.

“On-line conferencing” is the main way that students use the Internet. By this they mean active participation in a message board: studying information and questions put there by the tutor, and by other students, and uploading their answers and comments – and making any other contributions. The tutor controls the message board and makes sure that nothing offensive appears on it.

On-line conferencing is done by most students, whether their course is an on-line one or not. It is only done asynchronously, i.e. when students do it in their own time. Synchronous conferencing, when students need to be on-line together, is sometimes used for language courses, where it has an obvious advantage.

A minimum configuration is stipulated for the student's computer set-up. Very little use is made of video as tutors cannot be certain that all students have broadband. Clearly, video is not satisfactory using a 56k-modem connection. By the same token little use is made of audio. From 2007 all students will be required to have web-access.

Having been in existence for thirty years the OU has been able to develop and polish its platforms and iron out any problems.

## **Language**

All courses are given in English – apart from language courses where use of the foreign language is of course frequently necessary.

The OU management is somewhat concerned that they might be under a legal requirement to produce courses in Welsh – if asked to do so. This could also apply to Gaelic.

## **Quality assessment – of students**

Students on a 10-month, 60-point course have to do 6 essays: roughly one every five weeks. Essays have to be between 1500 and 2500 words and must be sent in by certain dates.

Students can send in their essays by post or upload them to the OU web-site. Essays are mostly word-processed – though this is optional. Tutors award marks and add comments.

At the end of the course students have a 3-hour exam. If the student's work has been consistently good, it is occasionally possible to dispense with the exam.

Students on a 60-point course have to attend a one-week summer school. These are run at a number of the established UK universities.

Students are assessed on their final exam and on their assignments. No account is taken of whether or not they attended face-to-face tutorials or took part in on-line tutorials or on-line conferencing.

Students on the T175 course in Information Technology have to do 4 tutor-monitored assignments. These are usually in the form of structured reports. They have to write about different aspects of their subject.

The final exam can include practical work, such as describing how to build a web-site.

The final exam is not done on computer so it has to be a written text. Students might create a web-site as a project during the course.

All students have to upload their assignments to the OU web-site in HTML using the ETMA system. Multiple files have to be zipped.



The OU goes to great lengths to get reactions from students at the end of their course. Many students say that they love working on-line, especially having contact with the other students in their group. They say it is much more intimate than face-to-face meetings. If an active student drops out of the course he or she is often sorely missed by the others. No-one is inhibited on-line because of age, personal appearance or disability. Lots of lasting friendships have been formed on their courses, and some have led to marriage.

Students are assessed in two ways: continual assessment gives 50% of the marks, the final assessment also gives 50%.

## **Tutorials**

Students have to take part in asynchronous conferences. There are usually 15-20 in a group. They can also participate in the *inter-group conference* whenever they like. This is open to about 2000 students and allows them to ask more general questions, discuss technical problems, etc.

If students have a particular problem they can ask their tutor for a one-to-one “live chat” on-line, by e-mail or phone. Synchronous “live chats” between students and their tutor also take place sometimes. An agreed time is announced.

Many tutors like to have a face-to-face tutorial at the start of the course so that they get to know their students, and students can feel that they belong to the group. The group usually has no more than 20, all living reasonably close. More attend the first tutorial. Any later face-to-face group meetings are attended by far fewer students.

The first face-to-face meeting is felt to be very useful. After that it varies a lot. Some students like them; others are not so keen.

Some tutors regard on-line tuition as a satisfactory alternative to face-to-face tutorials. Many students like it better. The skill lies with the tutor. The tutor needs different skills from a traditional lecturer. Some tutors are excellent on-line. They don't “lecture” as such. Tutors who like face-to-face lecturing, with feed-back from reactions and eye-contact, often have poor success on-line. Others who are brilliant on-line would blush with embarrassment if confronted with a group of students, and be unable to speak.

Some students who are working only on-line, miss the personal interaction with other students. This lack of peer-contact is seen by some as a significant disadvantage. Some students miss the face-to-face contact. Others find it more friendly and more intimate.

## **Quality assessment – of courses**

A huge amount of time and effort is devoted to assuring, then assessing, the quality of courses. It is quite complex. It starts at the design stage. An external assessor from an outside university, usually a professor, assesses the course right the way through. He, or she, also takes part as one of the examiners, writing an assessment report at the end of year one, year four and year eight. There is also a panel of tutor-assessors.

## **OU policy and future Plans**

The OU spend a great deal of time and effort discussing and exploring how best to help students, how to motivate them and how to make studying as easy and effective as possible. They are dedicated to motivating every student. They don't want to lose a single one of them.

The aim of the OU is to deliver their courses in whatever forms are best for their students. The paramount concerns are student-choice, student-needs, and student-wishes – along with ensuring the highest quality for everything that they offer,

Students are not obliged to attend tutorials but they are strongly encouraged to do so. Some simply don't go. Some are too busy, or the time and place are not convenient for them. Some have no time, or the tutorial clashes with work or with family commitments. Some have a long way to travel.

One of the OU's major aims is to ensure that all students get some personal tuition. The OU are agonizing over this right now. They are taking the problem very seriously. There is a big debate going on throughout the OU.

The majority of their students are out at work and therefore can study only in their spare time. For them, studying is often not easy. A high proportion are under 25, which they classify as "younger students". They are often under pressure and lead stressful lives because they are starting a job, getting married, looking for a flat or moving house.- all of which makes regular studying a problem.

## **On-line learning: advantages & disadvantages**

There has recently been great pressure from top management to move to on-line courses. They want all courses to have at least an on-line element. They would like to switch over to using electronic means of delivery as far as they can. This is assumed to be for financial reasons.

However this is causing a dilemma. For the OU, personal tuition has always been important – ideally face-to-face.

There is a feeling amongst many of the staff, – and the tutors – that, whilst delivering courses on-line is possible, it isn't necessarily, or always, desirable. Despite the insistence by the management that as much as possible be delivered on-line, most

humanities tutors believe that some face-to-face teaching is not only desirable but essential – especially for history.

They have found specific disadvantages in using on-line delivery. Some students don't like it and cannot get on with it. So they drop out. They want personal contact face to face with tutors. They also like interacting with other students.

The development teams are conscious all the time of the need to use, develop and refine “best practice” in order to make sure that their courses have the greatest possible success.

For the foreseeable future, it seems that only a few courses will be delivered exclusively on-line, and these will, in the main, be the shorter courses.

A few courses, for example in philosophy and in music, have been exclusively on-line for some time. The tutors involved, and their managers, say that they work well.

Post-graduate courses lend themselves to delivery on-line as the students are independent, are few in number and are widely dispersed geographically, making face-to-face tuition impractical.

The great advantage of using on-line delivery is that studying can be done in the student's own time. This is important for some students, particularly for those on active service or on ships. Some of their students are serving in Royal Navy submarines, in which case the OU usually appoints the submarine captain as the examination-invigilator – unless of course he happens to be one of the students!

Some courses are more suitable for work on-line than others. Only two of the courses involving history are on-line, or mainly on-line. This is because they appeal to, and are aimed at, people across the European Union.: One is “Governing Europe”. The other is “Europe: Culture & Identities in a Contested Continent” – a course which has an important history component.

A consensus is now emerging that blending the two methods together, face-to-face and on-line, may be the best solution.

The trick will be finding how best to blend it all together so that it works – for all types of student – taking into account their different circumstances, problems and motivations.

The result of these on-going debates is to offer a mix of delivery methods for tutorials: both face-to-face and on-line. They will try to do tutorials face-to-face at the start of a course even if they are later done on-line. They firmly believe that it is important for the student to get to know the tutor and for the tutor to get to know the student. It is also valuable for students to get to know each other so that they can interact better later on, when working on-line.

The OU have traditionally provided students with everything they need, but now they are encouraging students to go on-line, to libraries for example, and find for themselves some of the material that they need.

Material on CD/DVD will in future be used only when this medium is particularly relevant since they are expensive to produce. They will occasionally form part of the course, and then only when it offers a clear advantage over other methods, such as, for example, when looking round a museum.

## **Blended learning**

From surveys, and course reactions, it seems that students print out about one third of the on-line material. Many do this because they can only be on-line at odd times and like to use spare time on trains and at airports to keep up to date with their course.

As a result the tutors now favour making their 9-month courses in part blended, with a PDF file for all the on-line material.

They also feel that, on a 9-month course, there is too much material for a student to handle, if it is solely on-line. Some students feel overwhelmed by it.

Having the 10-point courses exclusively on-line is less of a problem. These only last 10-12 weeks so the material is more easily assimilated.

The impetus for change is coming partly from the students, via their end-of course comments and reactions, and partly from the tutors.

Many of the OU tutors and course designers have a Mac as well as a Windows PC. Consequently they are able to help students who have problems using the Mac.

## **Books**

Printed books are still used a great deal and will continue to form a vital part of the OU armoury – even if only as an alternative, or a supplement, to the electronic media.

The OU can also offer their books with comb-binding to help students that have reduced manual dexterity and who cannot easily handle traditionally-bound books.

Books are included in the course fee. In the longer courses the student gets the books sent in two or three spaced mailings.

The books are of very high quality. The content is entirely created by the OU. The books are published partly by the OU and partly in co-publishing ventures with big publishers like Blackwells in Oxford.

The OU type-sets and prints in-house. Being word-processed the texts can easily be produced in book form, or made available on-line, or on CD/DVD. In this way the OU can offer the same material in both printed and electronic form.

The OU have pioneered e-books. These consist of the book-content in PDF format which students can either consult on-line or download – and then print out if they wish.

Delivery in “electronic form only” is likely to remain the exception. Most books will be provided in both printed and electronic form. Electronic format will nearly always be offered as a supplement to the printed book.

### **Variety of materials used**

All OU students get a CD with the software programs that they will need. The T171 course in ITC was totally on-line but students had to buy 3 set books. The new T175 ITC course has no books as such but has a blend of printed and on-line material .It also uses one DVD which contains videos.

There is no interest in giving on-line lectures using audio or video , whether with or without text. The OU don’t give “lectures”. The aim is not to teach but to help students to learn. There are video files on the T175 DVD in MPEG format.

### **Background information**

Two million people have already completed Open University courses. 160,000 people are currently studying. Most of them make some use of on-line facilities. Twenty percent of the students do on-line courses. Others use it for admin, research and conferencing, and on-line chat-rooms. The OU have a large number of handi-capped students. On average, 10% of students are disabled, including many that are blind. Over 50,000 employers have sponsored staff on OU courses.

Students are mostly in the UK. Between 5 and 6 percent are located abroad, mainly in Europe, especially those following particular courses. Some are further afield, widely scattered. Some are in the armed forces on active service, others are on ships.

Many students drop out because they find the course is not what they expected. Drop-out rates tend to be higher when the entire course is on-line. This is especially true for the shorter courses. For 60-point courses the drop-out rate is lower.

The drop-out rate varies between 35% and 50 % for the short courses. For the longer ones it is nearer 20%. Students who drop out of the longer courses can get a partial refund. Refunds are not available for the shorter courses.

The percentage of students who go on to take a degree is hard to assess as students can take any mix of courses to make up the required 360 points to obtain a degree. To get a degree the student therefore needs to complete six 60-point courses or twelve 30-point courses – or a combination of both.

The Open University offers a broad spectrum of courses enabling people of all ages to do further study or obtain a degree. There is no formal academic background required.

Courses are designed for people who missed out on university when they were young. Open University degrees are frequently obtained by retired people, some of them over 80 years of age.

The courses are intense and can take many years to complete. Students can get a certificate in one year, a diploma in two years or go on to take a degree, either at bachelor level or at master level.

On a 60-point course, students are encouraged to attend regular 2-hour face-to-face tutorials along with other students at one of 13 regional centres throughout the UK. They are often on a Saturday, though occasionally on week-day evenings. Sometimes they organize a one-day event with students from other regions.

Courses are generally divided into Levels 1, 2 and 3. Level 3 builds on study skills and subject knowledge acquired at Levels 1 and 2.

Students can mix-and-match their courses so they can study two unrelated subjects such as music and economics. Or they could take a course in art history and then follow it with a course in computing. Students can and do spread their studies over many years. One student that was interviewed had taken economics and industrial archaeology to obtain an honours degree.

The OU has agreements with organizations in a number of countries. Some deliver OU courses. Others co-operate with the OU to develop courses.

## **Location of students**

It is difficult to say what proportion of students are located outside the UK. Many students in British Forces abroad can register as UK students. Students can be anywhere in the world. There are usually some from the USA, Canada, and Australia. A goodly number are in EU countries.

The Newcastle Regional Centre handles students in Continental Europe. The Birmingham Regional Centre handles students in British Forces abroad.

## **Numbers of students on Technology courses**

Technology Course T171 has just ended. It was totally on-line. It has had 60,000 students over the 9 times it has been given – during a period of five years. At one point they had 12-13,000. The latest one had 1500. On the first course 1000 students registered. On the second course 13,000 registered. They had to employ 700 tutors.

Technology Course T175 replaces T171. It has had 1600 registered for the first presentation of the course starting on 1st Oct 2005. 2000 have registered for the second presentation starting in February 2006. Like T171 it will be given twice a year. It costs £295.

Students normally start at Level 1 but those with experience can start at Level 2. Tutors, however, are not keen to encourage this as students may then find gaps in their knowledge.

### **Numbers and types of courses offered by the Faculty of Technology**

Level 1: Three are 30-point courses, five are 10-point.

Level 2: Three are 30-point courses, three are 10-point.

Level 3: Three are 30-point courses.

The 30-point courses usually last 9 months.

There are also a few post-graduate courses. ICT also forms a part of some Mathematics & Science courses

The ICT Department (Dept. of Information & Communications Technology) is in the Faculty of Technology. Our main contact and the source for information has been a “Lecturer in the ICT Dept”. He is part of the team covering two “level 1” courses.

### **References**

Bernard Waites, Head of History Department at the Open University

Derek Sheills, Course Manager, Faculty of Arts (History) at the Open University

John Woodthorpe, Lecturer in the ICT Department at the Open University

A student who studied at the OU for seven years to gain a degree

OU web-page: Main Course list

OU web-page: List of History courses

## The web application at the Department of History, Uppsala University

Peter Knutar  
Uppsala University

This web<sup>1</sup> is the result of collaboration between five University Departments: History and Art History, in the Faculty of Arts, Political Science and Pedagogy, in the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the Law Department, which in itself is the Faculty of Law.

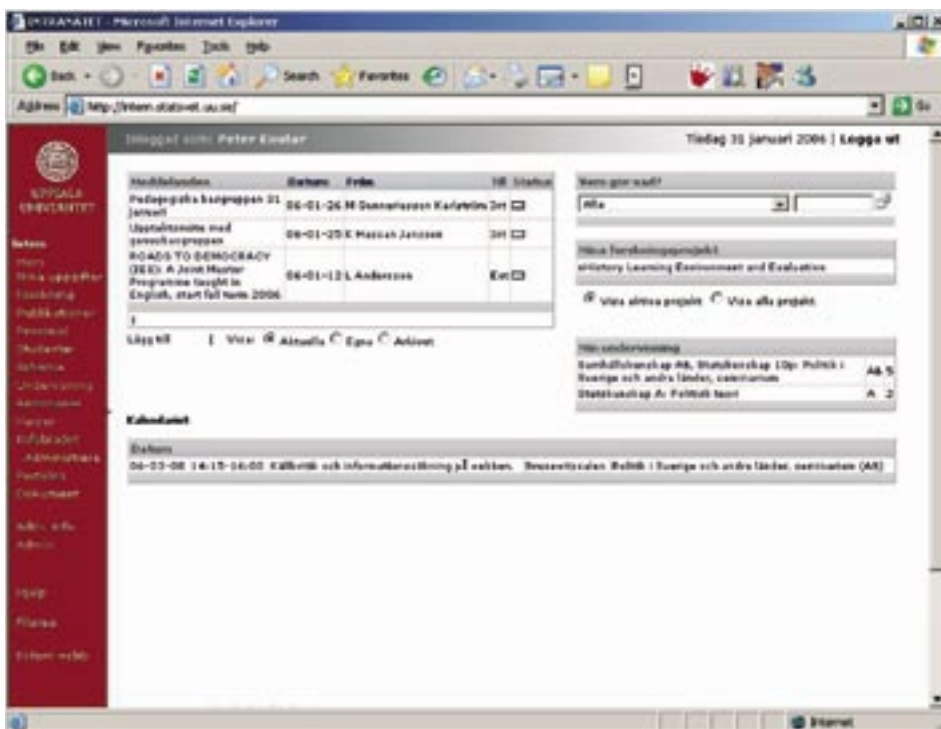
### Background

The application started as an initiative from the IT group in the Department of Political Science to simplify and decentralize the dissemination of information in the department. Initially it was used to present, internally and externally, information about research, publications, and seminars. The initiative was soon shared between four departments in the Social Science Faculty and the Faculty of Arts, including the History Department.

After seeing some examples of more mature database-driven portals, the Department of Political Science decided to start developing, in 2002, a fully-fledged portal, including a Student Web. The aim was to create a portal for administering all courses, along with basic tools to enable tutors to communicate with their students. After some initial development and tests the Departments of History, Pedagogy, and

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, the terms *portal* and *web*, as in *student web/student portal*, will be used as synonyms for the sum of all information that is published in the same web site – in this example this would be <http://student.hist.uu.se>.





*Personal start page, internal web*

Art History were invited to participate in a "consortium" that was formed in 2003 to finance and oversee the web development. The steering group of the consortium, consisting of at least two representatives from each department, decides on the directions and priorities of the development at half-yearly meetings. The application development is led, and the web server is run, by the Department of Political Science. In 2004, the Faculty of Law joined the group.

At first the initiative was to create an intranet, a web for the dissemination of information from the department to the public and to students. It was designed to be a tool for researchers to post information about their research profile, their on-going projects and their publications, and for administrators to display schedules, post notes, etc. to other members of staff and to students. Very soon it became obvious that the web should be extended to contain more administrative tasks for course administrators as well as some modules for tutors to communicate with their students. The University has been pushing quite hard to get tutors to use Ping Pong, a Swedish LMS, like WebCT, and Blackboard. This has been successful in some faculties and departments, but the use of Ping Pong is not very widespread in the Social Sciences and Arts faculties, although there are some very good examples.

## Relation to the Central Student Portal at Uppsala University

There is a central student portal at the University, that was conceptualized by the Information office (*informationsavdelningen*) and developed by the IT Support Centre. Since this web was not in being at the time the History Department's web was designed and developed, the Department doesn't use it – for obvious reasons.

There are big differences in approach, functionality and design between the History Department's student portal and the University-wide portal. The emphasis is not on administrators or departments in the central web, but rather on the students. While this has benefits, it also has a lot of short-comings. In 2005 the University began developing "version 2" of the central portal to overcome some of these problems. At the moment, however, it seems that the possibilities for data exchange between the systems will be limited. The University appears to have chosen a different data model for version 2 than that used in the local web.

### Platform: design and modules

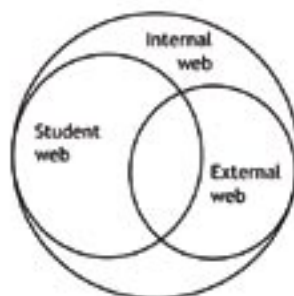
The web application is built as three distinct webs per department, all sharing the same database.<sup>2</sup>

The *internal web* is designed to take care of all information and communication tasks for administrators, researchers, and tutors. This is the main web for all personnel. It feeds data into the database, which then populates the other two webs.

The *student web* is the web for students. Here all the data for the courses are shown, together with general information, messages, etc. This web also has an internal part, where students can log-in to get quicker access to their current courses, interact, and find material intended for their particular courses.

The *external web* is for the general public. It is the official web for the Department. This is the [www.hist.uu.se](http://www.hist.uu.se) address. All general information can be found about the department, seminars, staff, research, publications and so on.

The *student web* is the web for students and potential students, where general and specific information is published concerning the department's teaching and its courses.



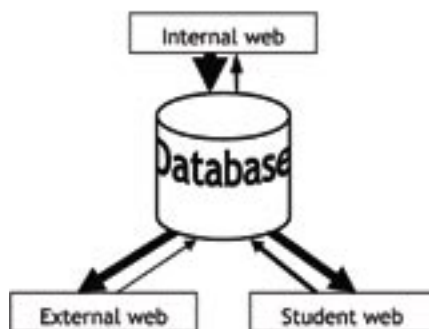
<sup>2</sup> The technical platform is Microsoft 2000 Server and IIS (Internet Information Server) version 5. The application is developed in Visual Basic .NET.

Unfortunately, today it is only possible to deliver information in English in the external web. This is not so much due to any technical constraint but to lack of resources for translating and programming.

### Internal web

The internal web is an information tool for all personnel. The general idea behind using a single address to manage all types of information has been *ease of use*. The goal is that all pieces of information that will benefit from being handled through the web will end up being managed here.

For instance, if a female staff member doing research receives funding and starts a research project, she can put details on the intranet, which immediately publishes it on her personal home page, both internally and externally. If she publishes an article, she adds it to her publications using a form on the internal web. And if she is assigned to a course, she can manage it from the “Teaching” link in the menu on the internal web.



### External web

The external web is the department’s official website. As a result of the portal design of the internal web, the external web has been reduced to an information web address for staff use, where they check how the information that was input in the internal web is published.

For staff, there is practically no information in the external web that isn’t accessible from the internal web.

### Student portal

The student web is the portal for all students enrolled in the departments that use the web application. It serves the dual purpose of both a general information web-site and an intranet for the students’ curricular activity.

#### *External*

85 percent or more of the information in the student portal is accessible without log-in. Here students find general messages for all students, specific messages for their particular course, tutor lists, syllabs details, schedules, and so on.

#### *Internal*

If tutors decide to upload material that they want the students to have access to only after they have logged-in, there is an area of the student portal where this can

be done. Nothing has to be hidden, though, unless the management of materials demands that the user needs to be authenticated, and so be identifiable – for instance when uploading a term paper or downloading a take-home exam.

### **A note on roles**

Rights are given to people according to a set of *work-based roles*, which are abstractions of people's actual places in the work flow. Courses, for instance, have five roles: *Course Administrator*, *Lecturer*, *Tutor*, *Examinor*, and *Head Tutor*. People can occupy one or more of these roles for a particular course. This gives them rights to manage different aspects of the course. For instance, a person given the Course Administrator role can edit the schedule for the entire course. A person given the Tutor role can only change the notes for his or her lectures.

There are roles for the administration of courses on the departmental level as well: The Course Administrator role at this level manages the entire course structure for the department, including the definition of new courses in the “course repository”, editing syllabus details, literature, etc.

The point of having roles for defining rights is that rights are set for the work session when the user logs-in. This makes it possible to display only the links, icons, menus, etc. that the sum of rights allows the user to see as a result of his or her role. The more-advanced users have much more to choose from in their web browser when they log-in, while a guest lecturer has only one link to click – Teaching.

Role-based administration is an excellent way of solving the dual problem of letting staff, with only basic computer skills, administrate things they know a lot about in real life in a complex IT environment. It has been proved many times that work tools modeled from the users' perspective can be less “user-friendly” if they reflect the perceptions of the users rather than the models created by systems developers.

### **The “portal in the portal”**

Another benefit of the portal model is that for visitors there is no difference, in the internal web, the student portal and the external web, between dynamically created content, such as course pages, staff home pages and research project presentations – and “static” information like minutes, contact addresses, FAQ's, etc. To manage static content, there is a content-manager module commonly called “the portal in the portal,” where administrators can create and publish web pages in a hierarchical structure. This structure seamlessly integrates with the database-driven pages.

In the figure to the left, links 7-10 and 12 are published dynamically from the database. Links 2, 4-6, and 11 are published from the portal in the portal. Link 3 redirects to the student portal, and the rest are links to external web-sites.



The administrators have full control over the order of the links and can insert new links anywhere in the menu field. This makes it unnecessary to have different web addresses and interfaces for different information, making the unified web site a powerful tool. Departments using the University's centrally developed student portal must have a second web to publish additional information such as old exams, information about computer labs, registration, and so on.

### Functions in the web

The following is a short description of the modules in the web, viewed mainly from the perspective of internal workflow and course management & teaching. Other aspects of the portal's use are only mentioned where they impinge on course and teaching aspects of the web application.

### Administrator use

Administrators, or to be correct, *users assigned administrative roles on an organizational level*, do all kinds of work in the web. Initially, an administrator defines the structure of courses and modules that is to be given in the forthcoming term, and assigns tutors to the courses. Further groundwork includes importing students from the central study-administration system, defining seminar groups for courses, and placing students in them.

All courses given each term are defined in the web, which means that all basic information about courses – syllabus, tutors & schedules – can be viewed in both the internal and student web-portals.

### Tutor use

When users log-in, they all have access to the Teaching link (*Undervisning*) in the menu. This is the starting point for all day-to-day course management and teaching activities.

If the user is assigned to one or more courses, the drop-down menu will list them, making it possible to select the course to work with. When a course is selected, all links will show data for this course only. Below is a list of the administrative and pedagogical tasks tutors can carry out in the courses.

#### *Messages – (Meddelanden)*

This posts a message on the message board, i.e. the course's start page, to all students in the course. Messages can also be sent by e-mail. Messages are given a start



portal. *Documents* is designed in the same way as *Web pages*, but here the tutor can upload complete documents in their original format.

It is possible to hide pages, documents and links while they are being edited or when they are out-dated. It is also possible to hide them from public view, i.e. students will have to log-in to the student portal to be able to see them.

#### *Forums – Forum*

Any staff member can ask the web administrators for one or more discussion forums for a course. The Forums link is where the tutors oversee the students' activities and participate in the discussions.

The forums are straightforward and easy to use, but they are non-threaded, i.e. the web page doesn't show which answer is a reply and which is the start of a new thread of the discussion. This has been a draw-back, especially for the distance courses, where participation in forum discussions is mandatory and replaces seminar activities in campus courses.

#### *Papers – Uppsatser*

If a course has a term paper associated with it, tutors can access the students' papers from this link.

The web application is quite sophisticated in the handling of essays. Most aspects of the process are handled on-line and automated, including scheduling, electronic distribution, and library classification. The university also subscribes to an anti-plagiarism service, to which the papers are automatically uploaded on delivery from the students.

#### *Exam registration – Tentaanmälan*

This is also a service for the administrative staff. Since seats in the central examination hall have to be paid for, departments must give ten days notice in order to cancel preliminary reservations. This is where the exam administrator can see how many students will actually take the exam. There is a link to a form for exam registration in the student portal where students register.

## **Student use**

The public start page of the student portal shows current messages posted by tutors and administrative staff to all students. Students do not have to log-in to perform basic tasks, such as checking the schedule, syllabus, or literature for their courses. In the navigation menu there are different groups of links that lead to important information.

### *Courses – Kurser*

This links to an intermediate page where students choose the type of course they want to look at. After selecting the course type, currently History, Distance courses, and Masters' courses, the courses for the category are listed, with a link to each course's home page.

All pages for the courses have the same basic menu options – *Messages, Syllabus, Schedule, Tutors, Course literature, Documents, Pages, Links, and Library resources*. The entire content in these pages is read from the database, except *Library resources*, which links to the University Library's resource page for the course.

### *General information – Allmän studieinformation*

This is where the pages from the Content Management System ("The Portal in The Portal") are displayed. In spring term 2006 the links were to course and registration dates, information about courses taught in English, information for visiting students, studies abroad and Master's courses.

### *Exam registration / Exam schedule – Tentaanmälan / Tentaschema*

If there is a written exam in the course, students must register for it, since the department has to pay for seats in the examination hall. The web lets students register for their exams here. It also displays the schedule of forthcoming exams for the entire department.

### *Log in – (Logga in)*

This lets the student log-in for a personalized view of the web, and to view materials accessed through log-in.

## **Advantages**

The main advantage of the approach described in this case-study is that it takes its starting point at the departmental level – even though there are five departments using the web. This makes it possible to develop, in a relatively short time, the exact functionality that the users ask for. It also potentially increases the acceptance of the web among staff, which is an important factor for its success. In a survey of on-line education, nearly 60 percent of senior university administrative officials said that obtaining management and faculty support was the greatest challenge in co-ordinating and conducting distance learning in their institutions.<sup>4</sup> Since students are encouraged to use the web for information, it is important for the departments to get their tutors to use the web for more than just a calendar of events.

<sup>4</sup> Survey conducted by Acadient, a developer and distributor of online education. More than 400 senior university administrators and members of the University Continuing Education Association (UCEA) were surveyed. <http://wreg.com/Global/story.asp?S=1777055>



The task was to create a web that could serve as a platform for *all* basic work, from course definition by administrative staff to uploading of course materials by tutors. To use a historiographical term, the web is supposed to take care of *minimum demands*, not *optimum norms*. Tutors who are used to an LMS have no problem in “extending” their courses into Ping Pong, but the basic idea is to deliver enough functionality and ease of use so that tutors can do basic course management by themselves in the local application.

Since all information, regardless of its destination, is input via the intranet, there are almost no obstacles for tutors to begin to use the “LMS part” of the web. All types of information are handled via the same web interface and the same Internet address where most of the department’s internal messages, seminars, etc. are displayed.<sup>5</sup>

One effect of the “minimum demand” approach is that there is a very tight integration between the administrative, pedagogical and information parts of the web. In an LMS there would not have been any departmental information, and in a purely administrative web there would have been neither downloadable files nor discussion forums. Here, all information is exposed in the same web-site, so there is only one place you have to visit to get all information from the department.

## Issues and problems

The biggest problem is the hesitance among teaching staff to use the web. There is more than one explanation to this, but at least two factors are worth considering. In Sweden, as in many other countries, most of the staff who are enrolled as tutors are also researchers and do not consider themselves to be tutors. They consider themselves as “researchers who teach.” This creates a reluctance to spend too much time learning new teaching tools. There is also the question of changing habits – “if it isn’t broken, why fix it?” Both students and tutors are used to deliver and receive information on paper, and there is an infrastructure for this that functions.

E-mail has made its way into the student-tutor relationship, and many tutors embrace this means of communication wholeheartedly. There are some signs that the incorporation of the web “as a tool” is on its way, but perhaps not in the History Department. If you look at the figures (shown below) for Political Science and the Law Department, it is clear that web use is higher there.<sup>6</sup> This is partly a generational issue in that younger staff members are more willing to reconsider what tools to use than their older colleagues, but also partly a matter of how management has worked to spread web use in the organization.

<sup>5</sup> The start page for all users’ web browser is set to the internal web, and this cannot be changed.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers should be weighted since Political Science has ca. 760 enrolled students and Law ca. 1500, but there is nevertheless a significant difference.

## **Administrators**

There are two problems that the administrators often discuss in the twice-yearly meetings of the “steering group.” One is the lack of quality data from the central databases of the University, which causes difficulties because a great deal of “handiwork” is needed to place all students in the right courses. There are no standardized methods of data access, either for importing students into the courses or for obtaining current addresses for them. The other problem is the lack of certain modules and certain functionality for which there is no funding at the moment.

## **Tutors**

The main advantage is also the source of the biggest problem. Since the functionality for e-learning is quite limited, tutors who wish to expand their on-line activities hesitate to do so because this would mean that they have to use another platform – in Uppsala’s case: Ping Pong.

There is also the problem of the web becoming a hindrance – when functionality is limited, you are content and do not demand better tools. With a large degree of streamlining and uniformity that limit what tutors can do, there is little freedom to explore individual solutions.

There have been very few complaints from the tutors. This is probably a result of low use rather than a lack of problems.<sup>7</sup> Neither research nor surveys have been done on the use of the web among tutors, but low usage is revealed by four indicators. These are that a) students in a recent survey (see below) complain that there are large differences between courses – and even between parts of courses – in the use of the web; b) some tutors when asked claim that they “do not have the time” to use the web; c) the number of created web pages, links, and documents is not very high; and d) the number of messages posted (either to all students or to individual courses) is quite low.

## **Students**

In February 2006 we sent out around 1100 e-mails to all students who, during the fall-term 2005, attended one or more courses in the History Department or the Department of Government, inviting them to participate in a survey about the use of the student portal. We received 265 responses, of which 66 were from history students and 190 from political-science students. This relation in the response frequency was expected, since it reflects the difference in both the size of the two departments and their use of the web.

<sup>7</sup> Several attempts have been made to inform and educate tutors on the use of the web, but generally attendance has been low. There is a group of tutors in each department who use the web, but usage is not universal.

Department	Fall 2003			Spring 2004			Fall 2004			Spring 2005			Fall 2005		
	L	P	D	L	P	D	L	P	D	L	P	D	L	P	D
History	1		3						1		7				2
Political Science	91	12	149	35	3	68	48	5	142	40		300	42		278
Art History															
Pedagogy	1		4	1	1	26	1	2	21	1		12	5		15
Law	2	8	47	11	4	154	10		225	1		159	10	1	330
<i>Total</i>	<b>95</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>625</b>

Table 1. Links (L), web pages (P), and uploaded documents (D) created by staff in the student portal, fall 2003-fall 2005

Table 2. Messages posted to courses and course moments, fall term 2005.

Department	To all students	To Courses	
		Courses	Messages
History	3	9	9
Political Science	27	30	145

Note: Numbers in the column *Courses* reflect different courses to which messages were posted. ["Course moments" are parts of the course where students earn points]

Most of the questions in the survey concerned usage, opinions about functionality, and how students valued the departments' use of the web for disseminating information.

It is apparent from the results that the student portal is established as the place to find information from the departments. One question was "How often do you visit the student web?" More than 50 % of the history students' answers and 85 % of the political science students' answers were in the first three values (where 1 was "several times a week" and 6 was "never").

There are differences, though, when you compare results concerning how the web is being used to distribute information. Both departments normally use the web for schedules and exam registration, but there is a high level of correspondence between the lack of messages from the history department and the low frequency of students who say that they have used the web to read messages. Since the answer reflects opinions as well as facts, it is apparent that the history students do not expect to "find" messages on the web.

78 students from both departments answered the question *Which functionality do you miss in the web?* The answers are interesting in several respects. First, students

are not always aware of the de-centralisation of the University. The distinctions are blurred between central services such as the study-documentation system, information services like the University Library, and the departments who actually run the courses. As a result, several of the students' suggestions concerned posting grades, setting up links to the library or subject resources and the like. Secondly, there weren't many suggestions for further functionality. Rather, the students criticized the tutors for not being active enough in the web, in posting lecture notes and presentations ("you would expect tutors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be able to use Power-Point, or at least PDFs").

## Pedagogy

E-learning facilities are quite limited in this portal, in comparison with brand-name Learning Management Systems. On the other hand, it provides certain interesting advantages that an LMS cannot provide. First and foremost is the fact that since *all* courses – campus, distance, and web-based – are managed here, absolutely all students have to visit the web, making it an excellent place for disseminating information. And since departments have ceased to hand out schedules and literature lists on paper, in many courses, all students have to acquire basic skills in navigating the web in order to participate in the courses. If and when tutors add materials, the students have no problems accessing them.

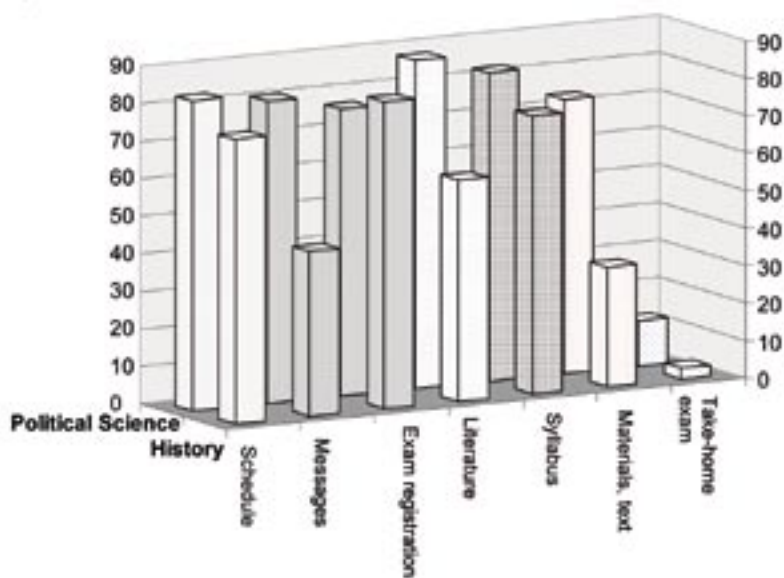


Figure 1. Percentage of students who said they have visited web pages to access different types of information in the web

## Materials

The law regulating digital rights makes it difficult to deliver the full text of materials on the net. Since it is illegal to distribute digitized materials on the web if you do not hold copyright to them, both the History Department and the Department of Political Science do not distribute much course material digitally. This is not a shortcoming of the web, but rather is a result of the legal situation. By contrast it is quite legal to sell course materials on paper at cost.

Where it is possible to do so, i.e. when copyright is not a problem, tutors can upload course material, or the department can include digital versions of books, articles, etc. in the literature list. Reading instructions, comments, and presentations are examples of materials that are often uploaded to the course pages. Tutors who lecture on their own research can, of course, also distribute their own papers via the course pages.

## Conclusions

The main aim of the web application in this case study is to provide basic resources, primarily for administrative purposes, but also for the distribution of materials and for disseminating information.

As was pointed out earlier, the approach has been to meet minimum demands, not optimum norms. All the departments' courses are defined, and their basic data is always accessible, via the web.

Although they are not forced to, tutors can use the web to distribute materials and communicate with students, thereby making it possible for them to move at their own pace towards more fully-fledged web-based learning.

Available statistics, both from staff usage and students' answers to the on-line survey, reflect this. The students' acceptance of the portal as an information tool is far more widespread than tutor use would suggest. In most cases either administrative staff or the head tutor upload schedules, but after that not very much happens. This is especially true for the History Department. It is not one single factor, but rather a complex of several factors that together provide an indication of the problems that need to be addressed in *best practice* in the administrative field. These include:

- Information has not reached the tutors about functions available in the web
- Management has not fully appreciated the complexity of the web application
- Tutors do not want to abandon their traditional way of disseminating information. To be polite, one could say that tutors have embraced e-mail as their main technology.

- Tutors have not taken the mental step from being *consumers* of web-based information to being *producers* of web-based information.<sup>8</sup>
- The staff *in general* are still relatively computer illiterate, and they are thus not ready to accept the change.
- Management has not pushed the use of the web as compulsory.
- Web developers have been too distant from tutors – and have worked too closely with the administrative staff.

It can nevertheless be noted that:

- The close co-operation between web developers and administrative staff has led to good workflow in the web, following, to a great extent, the workflow in the “real world”. Concentrating on the web as *the* information tool has provided administrative staff with more time to attend to administrative tasks – many fewer students queue for help at the information desk.<sup>9</sup>
- Concentrating on administrative functions and defining *all* courses in the portal has made students ready for an expansion of its use. They are familiar with the interface and the design, and are prepared for a wider use of the web in e-learning.

<sup>8</sup> A very obvious example of this is the opinion voiced by a number of researchers that the personal and research information at their own department’s web is inferior to other departments, even though the researchers can now update all such information by themselves.

<sup>9</sup> This is especially true for the Department of Government and the Law Department, where the portal is used more systematically,

## Edinburgh University and the 12 history tutorials

David Sephton, Oxford  
Primrose Publishing

### Description of activities

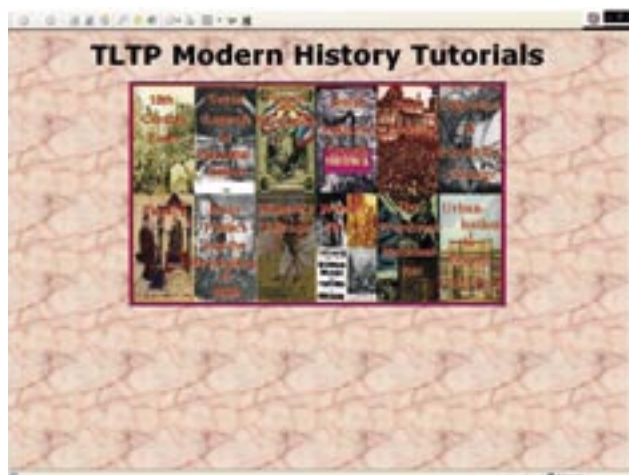
Edinburgh University does not offer any on-line history courses. However they do make extensive use of on-line materials, in particular a series of 12 tutorials. Much of this case-study is about these tutorials and the use that the History Department makes of them.

### Thematic viewpoints: Pedagogy

The tutorials, as well as most of the on-line resources used in the department, are regarded as useful supplementary reading and illustrative material.

Staff are conscious of the drawbacks of both the 12 tutorials and much of the on-line material, in that it does not get revised and updated in the light of experience and is not reworked with advances in technology. Lack of finance is a major cause of this.

Tutors tend to stress the fact, often missed by their funders, that the use of



on-line material does not save academic labour. What it does is to intensify the learning experience. In fact it often requires much more work for the academic staff.

The way the department uses the 12 tutorials is this: for the course on “Social History Two” the tutor will send an e-mail to his/her students, at a certain point in the course, saying: “Before my seminar next week, study tutorial number 12 “Urbanisation in Britain 1780-1914”.

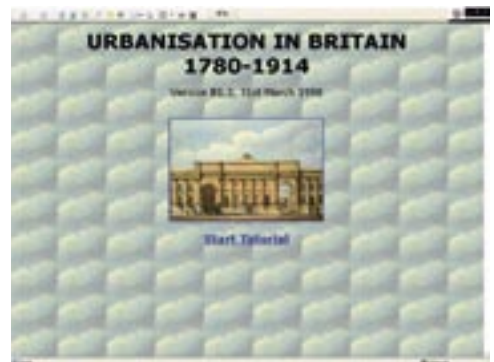
The students then access the tutorial and read whichever items within it are relevant.

## Materials

The tutorials were developed by a consortium of 15 UK universities and completed in 2001. They are on 12 CDs. A full set of CDs entitled “Core Resources for Historians” was then distributed free of charge to all UK Universities and Institutions of Higher Education. One of the History Department staff has contributed to these tutorials.

Edinburgh University have put all 12 tutorials on their web-site together with a colourful title screen – which may have been taken from the CDs. The history tutors make good use of some of the tutorials in their courses. The titles of the 12 tutorials are:

- An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Town
- Social Aspects of Industrialisation
- French Revolution: the people enter politics
- British Industrial Growth
- Great Powers & the Division of Europe 1944-1949
- Migration and Population Change: the early modern English town
- The Papacy, Religious Change and Church Reform 1049-1125
- Mass Politics and the Revolution of 1848
- Women’s suffrage: Enfranchising women: 1789-1945
- Women’s History: Major themes from the enlightenment to the second world war
- The Protestant Reformation, Religious Change & the people of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe
- Urbanisation in Britain 1780-1914





Each of the 12 subjects offers an extensive range of texts for the student to access. A list of contents of one of these is given at the end of this paper.

## TLTP

A full set of these history courseware CDs can be obtained from the History Courseware Consortium at Glasgow University. They are known as the “TLTP Modern History Tutorials”. TLTP has a web-site which provides much background information.

## Other resources

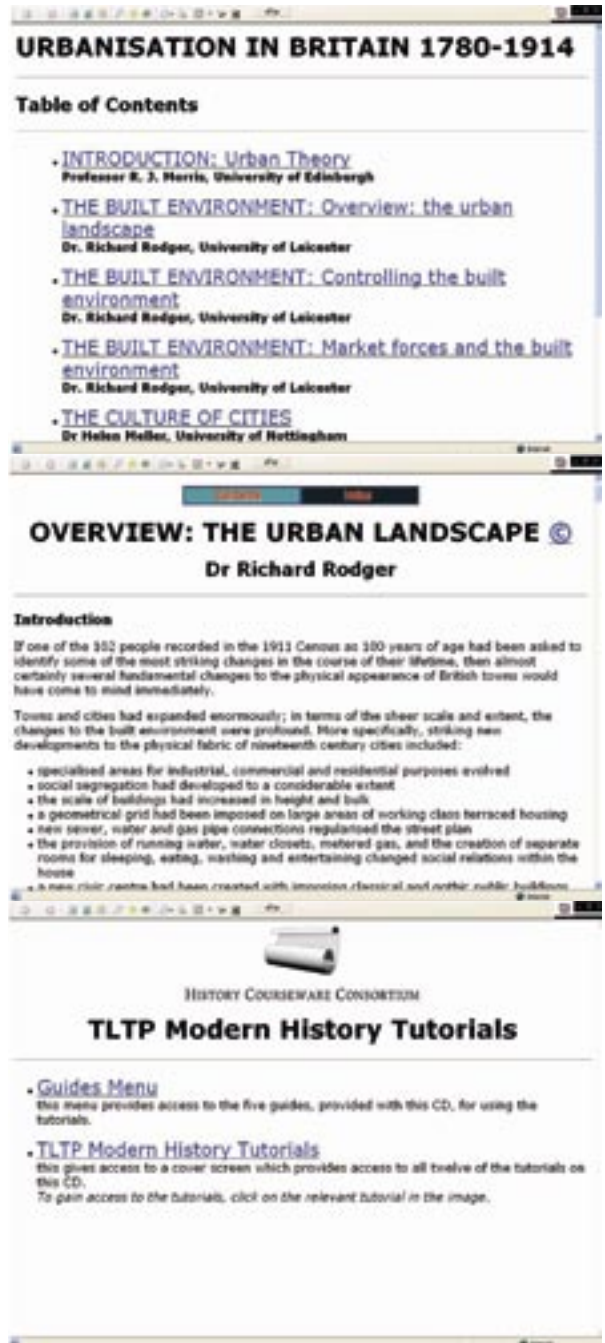
Tutors in the history department make use of a variety of on-line databases and resources, depending on the course involved. For the “ESH Dissertation and Project Preparation 3<sup>rd</sup> year Honours Course”, one tutor gets students to study the Proceedings of the Old Bailey in London and the Charles Booth Online Archive. They also access a variety of image databases and the Census Online.

Another tutor encourages students to access the newly-published “DNB Online” (Dictionary of National Biography) for studying British and Scottish history – and to some extent early American history too.

Use is also made of SCRAN (Scottish Cultural Resources Network) which is a museum and object-based resource, as well as the on-line edition of “The Statistical Accounts of Scotland”.

## Administration

The tutorials were simply installed on the University’s web-site from the 12 CDs. A colourful access-page has been inserted.



## **Platforms**

The tutorials are accessed by students simply by going into the web-site and typing their UserName and Password. The tutorials can be accessed using any browser.

## **Language**

The tutorials are in English.

## **Quality**

The tutors make regular use of the material and appear to be pleased with its quality. However they are disappointed that it does not get revised and updated.

## **List of topics**

The tutorial on the French Revolution includes papers on the following topics:

## **References**

Web-page: The Urbanization of Britain – Overview

Web-page: Title screen of 12 tutorials

The following members of the School of Classics & History, Edinburgh University

Professor Robert Anderson, Head of Department

Bob Morris, tutor

Alexander Murdoch, tutor

Shane Ewen, tutor

## Alllearn: consortium of Oxford, Yale & Stanford

David Sephton, Oxford  
Primrose Publishing

### Description of activities

This is a series of on-line history courses offered on a web-site called Alllearn developed by a consortium of the universities of Oxford, Yale and Stanford.

### Thematic viewpoints: Pedagogy

The courses are offered on-line to students anywhere in the world. They were created by history tutors at the three universities. Courses are also offered in 15 other subject areas.

### Materials

The courses vary in length from 3 to 10 weeks. There are one-week taster courses so that students can try them out before committing themselves to the full course.

The cost of the courses varies, from 100 euros for a 3-week course to 700 euros for a 10-week course. In addition, students have to pay between 20 and 60 euros for materials.

The courses often include the use of:



- multimedia
- discussion groups
- web-casts of lectures

Students have to commit themselves to spending between 5 and 9 hours per week:

- 3-4 hours per week on reading, and on watching, or listening to, lectures
- 2-3 hours per week in on-line discussion and chat sessions

At the end of the course students have to pass an examination or submit a paper of 6-8 pages.

### **The Alllearn courses offered for history**

#### The American West 10 weeks

The West has been at the center of dreams – and nightmares – since conquistadors landed on these shores. Learn about the West that doesn't make it into cowboy movies or landscape photos.

#### History of Nature 10 weeks

Understanding the social origin of our environmental situation and responding to it constructively.

#### The Intellectual Making of the Modern World 10 weeks

Explore the sources of the world-transforming intellectual movement that continues to shape our thoughts and lives today.

#### Lessons in Leadership 9 weeks

How do our modern beliefs about leadership fare when viewed through history's lens? By examining the lives of some of our greatest political leaders, this course considers the principles that define leadership in its many forms.

#### Pompeii 3 weeks

Rediscover the history, art and culture of an ancient civilization suspended in time with this interactive study of Pompeii.

#### The U.S. Constitution 8 weeks

What would the founding fathers have to say about today's burning political questions, including the question of same-sex marriage? Professor Jack Rakove, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, provides the answers.

#### World War II and the World it made 19 weeks

Not simply an historical event, consider how the War continues to affect us culturally, and economically.

#### Archaeology for Amateurs 8 weeks

What is archaeology, and what can we learn of our history through excavation? Learn about archaeology through a study of the golden age of Crete – and its abrupt and mysterious end.

## **Administration**

The courses are all listed on-line and students simply apply to follow the course of their choice. The courses are administered by individual history tutors from the three universities.

## **Platforms**

The courses are accessible to students simply by applying to take part.

### **Course Experience:**

All courses are developed by faculty from Oxford, Stanford, and Yale Universities. Day-to-day activities — discussions and chat sessions — are led by online instructors who are subject-matter experts and have been recommended by the professors.

Students participate in ongoing online discussions by posting thoughts about the materials covered in the course, receiving instructor feedback, and debating with classmates.

Live chats, hosted by the online instructor, are regularly scheduled, hour-long online sessions that bring the class together for real-time discussions.

### **Credit Requirements:**

AllLearn courses created by Stanford University may be taken for Stanford Continuing Studies credit. Students are required to actively participate in the course by taking part in discussions on the message boards and in live chats. They will also need to either submit a 6- to 8- page paper or complete a final exam at the end of the course. Each student's participation and written materials will be evaluated by the online instructor in order to determine credit.

**Time Commitment:**

TOTAL: 5 to 9 hours per week

- 3 to 4 hours completing the reading assignments and watching or listening to the lectures
- 2 to 3 hours participating in online discussion and live chat

Additional time may be devoted to viewing of popular films about World War II

**Online Instructor:**

Day-to-day and week-by-week course activities are facilitated by credentialed subject-matter experts and experienced teachers. They maintain discussion boards and coordinate the overall course experience.

**Language**

The courses are in English and students have to submit their work in English.

**References**

The Alllearn web-site: [www.alllearn.com](http://www.alllearn.com)

Alllearn web-page: Alllearn Course catalogue

## **“Geschichte Online”**

### **An Austrian pilot project in e-learning and history**

Raphaela Averkorn  
University of Siegen

#### **Description**

At institutions of higher education in Austria, e-learning is frequently used in many courses in the social sciences and the humanities. At the University of Vienna a special e-learning centre has been set up.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays e-learning figures prominently in academic discussion and will in the future be used more and more in higher education. Many universities have acquired learning platforms and will start training their staff as they are doing at the University of Vienna. Following the requirements of the Bologna Process, universities are now in the process of revising their curricula and restructuring their study programmes. This offers an opportunity to introduce new teaching and new learning methods and this in turn opens the door for e-learning. Most institutions are opting for blended learning. In this paper we will concentrate on one example of e-learning: in history and the cultural sciences. The pilot project Tuning Educational Structures in Europe<sup>2</sup> gives some prominence to e-learning in history.

Some years ago the Austrian government began to encourage the use of e-learning in the universities and the so-called universities of applied sciences and

<sup>1</sup> For further information concerning e-learning and related teaching and research activities at the University of Vienna see <http://elearningcenter.univie.ac.at>. For the importance of e-learning see Arich-Gerz, Bruno, Der Galatea-Effekt, in: *Forschung & Lehre*, 7, 2006, 378-380 and Kleimann, Bernd / Wannemacher, Klaus, Es geht nicht mehr ohne. E-Learning als Element der Hochschulentwicklung, in: *Forschung & Lehre* 7, 2006, 372-374. This discusses the current situation in Germany which can be compared with Austria where e-learning is also becoming more and more an essential teaching tool.

launched a special initiative by inviting tenders for two projects.<sup>3</sup> The one which will be presented here was approved as a result. It was funded for two years, from 2002 till November 2004, by the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur). This was done within the framework of the initiative “New Media in Teaching at Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences in Austria”.<sup>4</sup> A total of 25 different projects were approved for financing in a variety of subject areas.<sup>5</sup> The funding amounted in total to 280,000 euros. In contrast to many other pilot projects in e-learning, the future of this project is now guaranteed. Since 2005 it has been financially supported by the University of Vienna. The person currently in charge is Franz X. Eder, professor in the Institute of Economic and Social History.<sup>6</sup>

During the pilot phase the project was lead by a consortium of partners whose project heads were Alois Ecker and Franz X. Eder from the Institute of Economic and Social History and Wolfgang Schmale from the Institute of History, all three working at the University of Vienna. Partners from other Austrian universities took part in the project. There were also project members<sup>7</sup> from other German-speaking countries, namely the University of Basel in Switzerland and the University of Munich in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final report. Pilot Project – Phase 1, ed. by Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, University of Deusto – University of Groningen 2003, Bilbao 2003 (downloadable <http://unideusto.org/tuningeu/> [21.7.2006]); Tuning Educational Structures in Europe II. Universities’ Contribution to the Bologna Process, ed. by Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, University of Deusto – University of Groningen 2005, Bilbao 2005 (downloadable <http://unideusto.org/tuningeu/> [21.7.2006]). Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. The Subject Area History, ed. by Cllohnet, Pisa 2005.

<sup>3</sup> See the publication *Neue Medien in der Lehre an Universitäten und Fachhochschulen in Österreich*, ed. by Andrea Ecker, Felicitas Pflichter, Angela Weiglun, Vienna 1998 (downloadable [http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/universitaeten/pm/nml/nml\\_rahmenkonzept.xml](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/universitaeten/pm/nml/nml_rahmenkonzept.xml) [1.8.2006] and the download of the English version *New Media in teaching at universities and polytechnics in Austria* [http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/4421/new\\_media.pdf](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/4421/new_media.pdf) [1.8.2006]).

<sup>4</sup> Concerning this initiative sponsored by the ministry see <http://www.nml.at> and concerning the project description of “Geschichte Online” see <http://serverprojekt.fh-johannaecum.at/sp/index.php?n=zrgon> [1.8.2006]. Several authors and members of the project have discussed its issues, see Eder, Franz X. / Fuchs, Eduard, *Lernmodelle und Neue Medien. Historisches Lernen und Lehren am Beispiel „Geschichte Online“ (GO)*, in: *Geschichte und Informatik. Histoire et Informatique*, 15, 2004, ed. by Angelika Epple and Peter Haber, Bern 2004, 163-181; Hodel, Jan, *Historische Online-Kompetenz. Überlegungen zu einem hybriden Kompetenzmodell*, *Geschichte und Informatik. Histoire et Informatique*, 15, 2004, ed. by Angelika Epple and Peter Haber, Bern 2004, 139-161; Krameritsch, Jakob, *Geschichte(n) im Hypertext*. Von Prinzen, DJS und Dramaturgen, in: *Geschichte und Informatik. Histoire et Informatique*, 15, 2004, ed. by Angelika Epple and Peter Haber, Bern 2004, 33-55.

<sup>5</sup> Concerning this project see <http://www.geschichte-online.at> and also the final evaluaton of the entire project *Neue Medien in der Lehre – Erfahrungen der ersten Etappe*, ed. by BMBWK et. al., Vienna 2003 and especially concerning “Geschichte Online” see Fuchs, Eduard, *Fachliche/Thematische Netzwerke als Motor für Kompetenz und Innovation*, in: *Neue Medien in der Lehre – Erfahrungen der ersten Etappe*, ed. by BMBWK et. al., Vienna 2003, 29-31 (downlodable [www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/10780/neuemedien.pdf](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/10780/neuemedien.pdf) [1.8.2006]).

<sup>6</sup> For a general project description see also <http://www.e-teaching.org/referenzbeispiele/>.

<sup>7</sup> Concerning further members of the project and the different tasks see below chapter “Administration”.



The “Geschichte Online” project was created at the University of Vienna. Its aim is to introduce history students to the basics of scientific work and information search.<sup>8</sup> It is designed as an on-line self-study course not directly linked to any fixed course programme. It can be used flexibly by teachers wishing to link it to their own specific course.

The target groups are history students, at beginner and advanced level, and also graduates, at German-speaking universities in Austria, Switzerland and Germany. Students in vocational training and doctoral students would also find these courses valuable. The co-ordinators would like to have participants from national and international history networks as well as teachers and pupils from secondary schools. Access to the project courses is free and there are no password-protected areas, so it encourages the creation of a vast community of users.<sup>9</sup>



## Pedagogy

Since the 1980s the history departments at the Universities of Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, Linz and Salzburg had been using computers and new media in their teaching – though mainly for analysing source material. They were therefore really interested in submitting a proposal to create a pilot project and to set up a network.<sup>10</sup>

Being an innovative and interdisciplinary e-learning project, “Geschichte Online” was intended to meet the demands of the new curriculum in Austrian universities which require the integration and use of new media and technical skills. It was designed for courses in the fields of history and cultural studies.

<sup>8</sup> Hodel, Online Kompetenz, 158s.

<sup>9</sup> Eder/Fuchs, Lernmodelle, 171 and <http://www.geschichte-online.at> click „English Info”.

<sup>10</sup> Fuchs, Netzwerke, 29.

It seeks to standardize methods of working and to create basic tools suitable for teaching and research. Using the latest techniques, the project members created modules geared to research and research results in the fields of history and the cultural sciences. They built up a national network of specialists in teaching, and in those disciplines. They aimed at parallel use of the modules by different institutions based on the idea of “training the trainers”. It included an evaluation of the pilot phase.<sup>11</sup>

The project consists of four modules which are not linked and which can be studied independently. Neither the modules nor their related courses form a specific programme but can be used in class and in normal courses based on blended learning. Modules 1 to 3 can be used as self-study courses on their own.

The project is clearly structured. The introductory screen of the overall project sets out the main areas: 1. Introduction; 2. Modules (1, 2, 3, 4); 3. Glossary (concepts, symbols); 4. Search; 5. Partners; 6. Imprint; 7. Information in English.

“Modules” consists of four different sections, the first three having a similar internal structure. Each module contains several sections which are sub-divided into various learning activities. Module 4 combines 7 different courses. These permit demonstration of the different ways in which the hypertext creator can be used.

Module 1: “Introduction to scientific work in historical studies”

Module 2: “Literature and information research on the web about historical sciences and other specialist studies in history and culture”

Module 3: “History teaching”

Module 4: “Hypertext creator”.

### **Brief description of module 1: “Introduction to scientific work in historical studies”**

This module was created by Franz X. Eder and his team at the university of Vienna. It explains, in detail, different ways of doing scientific work. Students learn how to write a scientific essay, an abstract, a paper and a review, and how to give an oral presentation. The module consists of 8 units: I. Scientific work; II. Topics and questions; III. Writing scientific texts; IV. Reading and documentation, V. Annotating and quotation rules; VI. Written presentations; VII. Oral presentations; VIII. First steps in reading sources. Each unit is sub-divided into between 5 and 9 learning activities, contains exercises and provides a short hand-book which is downloadable as a PDF file. It also offers a feed-back questionnaire which can be used for evaluation. Students are asked to fill it in and send it back to the organisers.

<sup>11</sup> Concerning the project evaluation see chapter “Quality assessment of courses” below.

The student can work in two ways: either doing the exercises, or skipping them. An indication is given of how long each unit should take. This might vary from 30 minutes, without exercises, to an hour, with exercises. In some units, 5 to 10 hours if the exercises are attempted.



### Brief description of module 2: “Literature and information research”

Like module 1, this module was also developed by Franz X. Eder and his team at the University of Vienna. It aims to provide the basic skills needed for doing research successfully on the web in the fields of historical sciences and other historical-cultural studies. The module consists of two units: I. Searching literature, and II: Searching information. These are divided into a number of activities. Unit I contains eleven activities; unit II five.



### Brief description of module 3: “Teaching history”

This module was developed by Alois Ecker and his team at the University of Vienna and is designed for students doing teacher-training. It seeks to provide the basics in training possibilities in the teaching of history. The module consists of

four units: I. Introduction and theory; II. Planning of teaching units; III. Media and teaching; IV. Network of history teaching. Each unit is divided into between 3 and 7 separate activities.



#### Brief description of module 4: “Hypertext creator”

The co-ordinator of this module was Wolfgang Schmale who is also one of the directors of the whole project. Several other staff members were also involved in its creation. It is an easy-to-use tool for general use. Some examples have been developed in recent years.<sup>12</sup> So far several pilot courses have been created. Like the whole course material, it is available free of charge.

All the courses are in German although some source material is also available in French. In “Parliaments, Human-, Civil- and Women’s Rights in the French Revolution” certain material is available in both languages. The courses are not linked. They are in the form of prototypes which have been used at different times by a number departments in Austrian universities. They serve as examples and models for further courses which could be developed in the future. The courses demonstrate different ways in which the hypertext creator can be used. Basically they all follow the same pattern.

The home page of each course has a similar web-design using individual illustrations or images but offering the following sections: “Search”, “Home”, “Contexts” (texts and materials), “Attributes” (explanations and additions relating to the texts and materials), “About” (a short description of the project), “Imprint”, “Print”

<sup>12</sup> Concerning the technical aspects see chapter “Platforms” below.

and “Site-map”.<sup>13</sup> The course material can be found in “Contexts” and “Attributes”. “About” gives a short summary of the course content. “Site-map” is an extremely useful section for getting an overview of the available material.



#### Courses available in Module 4:

1. “Introductory course on using the hypertext creator”
2. “Parliament, Human-, Civil- and Women’s Rights in the French Revolution”
3. “Paper sucks, get connected. Hypertext: Theory and practice for students in Humanities and Cultural Studies”
4. “Europe – Iconography”
5. “Places full of memories” of National Socialism in Innsbruck and Seefeld”
6. “Auxiliary Sciences Networks”
7. “18<sup>th</sup> century – interdisciplinary research and teaching in Austria”.

The first course “Introductory course concerning the use of the hypertext creator” is intended mainly for course developers. It gives examples of existing courses (see courses 2 to 6) and illustrates how an e-learning course can be constructed. Model course-syllabuses are included.<sup>14</sup>

The second course is intended for students and was created by Tanja Buzek, one of the project members, with the help of her students, who added further texts during the pilot phase in a special course which took place in 2003. The purpose of the course is to support content-centred on-line teaching. It presents a hypertext network with more than 100 texts and other media material.<sup>15</sup>

The third course “Paper sucks, get connected. Hyper-text: Theory and practice for students in Humanities and Cultural Studies” was taught for the first time in the summer semester 2003 in the Department of History. This course is in the field of

<sup>13</sup> For further details see for example the screen-shots and webpage. The section “sitemap” is only available in some courses.

<sup>14</sup> See [http://hypertextcreator.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS\\_START](http://hypertextcreator.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS_START) [20.5.2006].

<sup>15</sup> See [http://revolution.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS\\_START](http://revolution.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS_START) [20.5.2006].



informatics and media. It was developed by Jakob Krameritsch (Vienna). The target group were students mainly in the second semester of their course. Students had to write an essay and draft definitions and biographies, and insert the texts into a database. A network of more than 150 texts is now available proving that even students at the beginning of their studies are capable of using such tools.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> See [http://papersucks.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS\\_START](http://papersucks.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS_START) [10.6.2006]. Cf. as well the contribution of Krameritsch, *Geschichte(n)*. This course was developed by specialist staff who are also working on another e-learning project called [www.pastperfect.at](http://www.pastperfect.at) which is directed by Wolfgang Schmale. It was created by him in collaboration with Jakob Krameritsch and other team members. The project “pastperfect.at” received a special distinction in 2004. In 2004 they received the Medida Prix in the section “encouragement and audience price”. The very innovative and extremely interesting project [pastperfect.at](http://www.pastperfect.at) aims at contextualising European history between 1492 and 1558. This project is directed by Wolfgang Schmale and includes about 700 contributions written by about 50 specialists. The Medida Prix which has been in existence since 2000 encourages innovations in the field of new media and education. Higher education institutions from all German-speaking countries (Germany, Switzerland and Austria) are allowed to participate. For further details and a list of the price winning projects see <http://medida.prix.de>.

The fourth course, “Europe – Iconography” was developed by Wolfgang Schmale in the Institute of History at the University of Vienna. It was run during the summer semester 2004 in a course called “Europe – Iconography in Vienna”. Students had the task of retrieving, from different places in Vienna, source material linked to the idea of Europe, and then to describe it. Information was collected about different neighbourhoods and places, and about works of art, and then described in a variety of ways.<sup>17</sup>



The fifth course “Places full of memories of National Socialism in Innsbruck and Seefeld” was developed in 2004 by Horst Schreiber, who specializes in the teaching of history at the University of Innsbruck. He worked in close collaboration with students in the fields of history, social sciences and political sciences enrolled in the teacher-training course. It was linked to another project, “National Socialism and the Holocaust. Memory and Presence” which was funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It was also directed by Horst Schreiber. Students wrote short texts and collected material about the “places full of memories” of National Socialism in the towns of Innsbruck and Seefeld. This material can also be used in secondary schools.<sup>18</sup>

The sixth course “Auxiliary Sciences. Networks” was developed by Georg Vogeler and Julian Holzapfl at the University of Munich. It was given in summer 2004 in the History Department at the University of Munich. It gives an internal view of the development of auxiliary sciences in history and related disciplines like palaeography, chronology, genealogy, heraldry, and numismatics. It also lists famous researchers and research centres<sup>19</sup> in different periods from the Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>17</sup> See [http://europa.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS\\_START](http://europa.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS_START) [20.5.2006].

<sup>18</sup> See [http://zeitgeschichte.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS\\_START](http://zeitgeschichte.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS_START) [20.5.2006].





The seventh course, “18<sup>th</sup> century – interdisciplinary research and teaching in Austria” was tested for the first time in the academic year 2004/05 by staff specializing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the universities of Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, Klagenfurt and Salzburg. The general topic was “Semiotics of changes in the country-side and towns in the 18<sup>th</sup> century”. It had both a European and a global perspective with examples from towns in China and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

The courses created for this pilot project are extremely useful. They also meet the requirements proposed by the Tuning Educational Structures Project. A comparison with the catalogue of competences elaborated by the Tuning Project, which was specifically designed for the subject History, shows that the competences mentioned for the first and second cycles can be acquired with these modules.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See [http://netzwerk.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS\\_START](http://netzwerk.univie.ac.at/ident.php?ident=SYS_START) [20.5.2006].

<sup>20</sup> This course obviously forms part of the project but was produced later and not added to the official web-site. It is available on the web-site of the Department. For the course and the material see [http://ferstel.univie.ac.at/ident.php?size=\\_small&lid=1&ident=SYS\\_START](http://ferstel.univie.ac.at/ident.php?size=_small&lid=1&ident=SYS_START) [10.8.2006].





## Materials

The project is web-based. No use is made of CD-Roms. The material was put straight onto the web. Several units contain exercises presented as an animation or in other ways. Basic information about many of the units can be downloaded in the form of little handbooks for teaching and learning purposes. They are in PDF-format. They include information research in libraries, digital data-bases, help in writing papers, making presentations in class, teaching tools, and short abstracts about the history of media – as well as much useful material for students. In the main, the material has to be consulted on-line (sources, texts, images, pictures, different media) and then be linked together. In module 4 the thematic pilot courses do not offer downloadable material. Sometimes course material is given both in German and in a foreign language, such as the course on the French Revolution. In general, each course offers 100 to 150 texts and other items.

## Administration

During the pilot phase the project was co-ordinated by Alois Ecker and Franz X. Eder in the Institute of Economic and Social History, and Wolfgang Schmale in the Institute of History, at the University of Vienna. Eduard Fuchs was the project manager; and Jakob Krameritsch was responsible for evaluation and training. Various people were in charge of web design and the technical realisation of the project. Other tutors, researchers and staff members were responsible for developing the content.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See especially The History Subject Area, 45 which gives a list of 30 subject specific skills and competences.

<sup>22</sup> For the administrative part of the project see [http://gonline.univie.ac.at/info\\_engl.php?id=4](http://gonline.univie.ac.at/info_engl.php?id=4) [25.07.2006].

Project partners are the Institute of Austrian Historical Research (University of Vienna), the Institute of Economic, Social and Entrepreneurial History (University of Graz), the Institute of History (University of Innsbruck), the Institute of History (University of Klagenfurt), Institute of History (University of Salzburg), the Institute of Art History and Cultural Studies / the Pedagogy of Arts / the History of Culture and Ideas (University of Applied Arts Vienna), the Austrian Society for 18<sup>th</sup> Century Research (Vienna), Historikum (University of Basel, Switzerland) and Historical Seminar (University of Munich, Germany).

The best way to get information about the project and its courses is the official web-site of the project (<http://www.geschichte-online.at>). It provides general and detailed information – though not about the course on the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At present this can be found on the web-site of the department in charge of the project.<sup>23</sup> Brief information is also available in English.

A special consortium of various members has been established to promote the new project and to establish links with other institutions in related fields of expertise like museums and archives.

## Platforms

The project co-ordinators chose a platform developed by VanGogh TV<sup>24</sup> (VGTV), an international association of curators, artists, technicians and programmers. It has been in operation since 1986. They are known world-wide, having been involved in projects in a number of countries. In 1997 they created the Virtual Museum System (VMS). This has been widely used, as in the Sprengel Museum in Hanover and in a project with the University of Applied Arts in Vienna<sup>25</sup> which is a partner in the “Geschichte Online” project.

“Geschichte Online” uses their Virtual Museum System 5 (VMS5), a database and editing system which VanGogh TV specially adapted for this project. It is easy to use and is very flexible in its editing and administrative routines.<sup>26</sup>

With this content-management system it was possible to develop a hypertext creator which is a special teaching and learning program. It enables tutors and students to create courses.<sup>27</sup> It is an open-source data-base and editing management system using MySQL. It includes a linked interface selector to generate web-pages.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For this course see <http://univie.ac.at/hist-e-kult/node/110>.

<sup>24</sup> Eder/Fuchs, *Lernmodelle*, 172.

<sup>25</sup> For further details see the web presentation of this association which was founded in 1986, as a project group of the Ponton European Media Art Lab: <http://www.vangoghtv.org/vgtv.php?sid=41&lid=1>.

<sup>26</sup> Another Austrian e-learning project named “pastperfect.at” and also directed by Wolfgang Schmale (University of Vienna) which aims at presenting the history and culture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is using a similar platform (see above note 16 for further details on the project). This project is using as a platform the content management system “Virtual Museum System” (VMS) developed by VanGogh TV because this system seemed to be the most suitable for the purpose. For further details see Krameritsch, *Geschichte(n)*, 48s.

Students doing these courses need normal computer equipment and software as well as internet access, a web-browser, software to read and download PDF files, a flash-and- shockwave player and media player.

## **Language and intercultural issues**

All modules in the project are in German. The target group for these courses are German-speaking students, mainly in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Many participating historians are specialists in the field of cultural studies. Courses in the fourth module “Prototypes” in particular deal with intercultural issues. The course on the French Revolution (“Parliament, Human-, Civil- and Women’s Rights in the French Revolution”) and the course on the 18<sup>th</sup> century (“18<sup>th</sup> century – interdisciplinary research and teaching in Austria”) analyse intercultural aspects and problems, including the situation in France in its relations with other European countries. It also discusses life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in different parts of the Austrian Empire and compares European towns with those in China.

## **Quality assessment of courses**

Evaluation and quality assurance is one of the fundamental concerns of “Geschichte Online”. The first use of each module, as well as each subsequent use, includes an evaluation based on “training-the-trainer”. From the beginning of the project, as well as in the pilot and construction phases, the modules were examined and evaluated by students and tutors in about 25 different history courses. This was done by the seven partners in Vienna, Innsbruck, Graz, Linz and Salzburg who used the modules in their regular classes. On-line evaluation questionnaires are included in the learning units of modules 1, 2 and 3 and students are asked to fill them in.

Based on the evaluation results the modules were modified and updated. Each partner had the task of evaluating the modules, and to test them in different classes. The partners were also responsible for training other tutors in how to use the modules and they undertook to use the modules in their institutions at the end of the pilot phase. They had to ensure the continuity of the project. To do this the partners organised workshops and information meetings to help colleagues to get acquainted with the programme.<sup>29</sup> An external evaluation was also done by three international specialists during the pilot phase.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Krameritsch, *Geschichte(n)*, 52-55 and, as an example, <http://hypertextcreator.univie.ac.at>.

<sup>28</sup> For further details see the official web-site of the well-known Swedish company MySQL AB and their products <http://www.mysql.com>.

<sup>29</sup> Eder/Fuchs, *Lernmodelle*, 172 briefly mentions the evaluation process. For further details see especially Fuchs, *Fachliche/Thematische Netzwerke*, 29ss.

<sup>30</sup> See <http://e-teaching.org/referenzbeispiele/> for further details.

## **Assessment of students**

The project offers four modules each containing a number of courses. They are not linked to form a coherent, integrated whole that can be used as the basis for a regular course. Each can be used independently by students to increase their understanding of a particular subject. Modules 1, 2 and 3 are particularly useful as they help to broaden the appreciation of historical and cultural sciences, give access to information and provide training in research techniques. No special assessment is intended in these courses. Students can follow the instructions, search for a suitable answer and then access themselves the correct results given at the end. There they can find an on-line self-assessment. If these courses are used as part of normal university teaching, it is up to the tutors how they assess individual students. If the course forming part of module 4 is used in class, the tutor decides how best to assess the students.

Because they do not form part of a regular course of study, no credits are given. It is intended that these courses, or parts of them, be integrated within regular courses in the way that seems most appropriate to the tutors for their particular students.

## **Conclusion**

As an innovative e-learning pilot project for history „Geschichte Online“ is clearly very useful as it can be used in an open environment in a wide variety of blended learning courses or for independent study. It covers many periods, and many different topics. The introductory course on the use of the hypertext creator enables anyone interested to start their own project.

As it is not related to any fixed study programme, the open environment allows multiple use in first-cycle and second-cycle degree courses and even as a refresher course at the beginning of the third cycle. Another advantage is that no payment is involved and the materials can be freely used. In contrast to many other e-learning projects which have to stop after the initial period through lack of funding, this project is secure because the University of Vienna has taken over responsibility to continue and enlarge it. It is hoped that, in the near future, more courses in history and cultural studies will use the materials or create new courses based on them which can be integrated into the local curriculum. It is certain that blended learning is going to play an ever more prominent part in class-room work in universities – and hopefully in schools as well.

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## The Ugla web at the University of Iceland

Peter Knutar, Uppsala University

This case covers the “learning web” at the University of Iceland in Reykjavík. It is aptly named *Ugla* (Owl). It is a centrally developed web portal that is available for all faculties, departments, and teachers at the university to use. Since the portal was not developed specifically for the History Department but for the university as a whole, this study has been done mainly with the help of the teaching Centre.



Figure 1. Ugla start page: the teacher's view

There are many similarities with the Uppsala case (see p. 56-70) : Uglá was developed in-house, it started off as an administrative system and all courses can use it. But since it is a central system, it is better integrated with other central IT systems such as the course administration system, personnel and student catalog . As a result, rather than a detailed description of Uglá as a web, this study will concentrate on the administrative aspects from the teacher's standpoint. Comparisons will be made with the Uppsala case.

## **Background**

The development of Uglá resulted from of a suggestion, by the software developers at *Reiknistofnun*, the central IT unit, that the university should develop an intranet. Some teachers had been using WebCT, and there had been other activities in the LMS area, but the idea was to collect as much functionality as possible in a common platform. After conducting inquiries it was decided that the IT department should develop the educational part of an intranet, but hang fire on the other parts.

The inquiry had identified as target groups for the web application: course administrators, faculty offices, students, and teachers – in that order. It was decided that since the teachers' experience with ICT tools was limited, it would be better to implement a solution that could serve as an information tool for administrators and students, assuming that teachers would start using it when their skills increased.

Uglá was introduced in 2005. Administrators began to use the system as soon as it was available, and students used it to obtain course information. A few teachers had experience with ICT tools and others had distributed information and materials via web pages but, in general, competence was low. Therefore it was somewhat surprising that acceptance and use within this group increased rapidly – within the first year most of the teachers had begun to log-in to the system.

At present (2005/06) the *project group* for Uglá consists of five representatives – one from course administration, one from faculty administration, two from teacher education, and one from the central software development group. There is no student representation. The *development group* consists of five people, including one project leader.

## **Design and modules**

The platform was built using Linux as the operating system, an Apache Web server, Informix database, and the PHP programming language. It is built in a modular form, consisting of about 150 different parts ranging from small “channels”, such as the local weather forecast, to fully-fledged management modules such as

surveys. There are too many modules to list here, but a few that are interesting and useful will be mentioned.

## Teacher use

The starting page for teachers was shown in Figure 1. The main page is designed to give an overview, to provide instant access to tools and to indicate if there has been activity on any of the courses that the teacher is assigned to. There are four “quick info” boxes, *My courses*, *My Group Projects*, *News and Announcements*, and *Recent documents, discussions and links*. All boxes contain dynamic content, read from the database, and are updated as soon as any activity has taken place.

The information on the first page is also accessible in different places on the Ugla web, but the reason for collecting all relevant information on just one web page is that users should not have to navigate a lot to get an overview of “what is going on” in the web.

## Course management

Administrators in the departments do not have to define courses in Ugla. The learning and teaching module – *My Courses* – is meant to contain links to information about all aspects of every course. Since the modules read data directly from the database, information is visible in the module and the course is ready to use in Ugla as soon as the respective entries are made in the administration module. This has been a key factor in minimizing initial obscurities for teachers new to the system.

When teachers log-in, they can click the link “My Courses” to access their courses. After selecting the course that they want to administer, they get access to all the

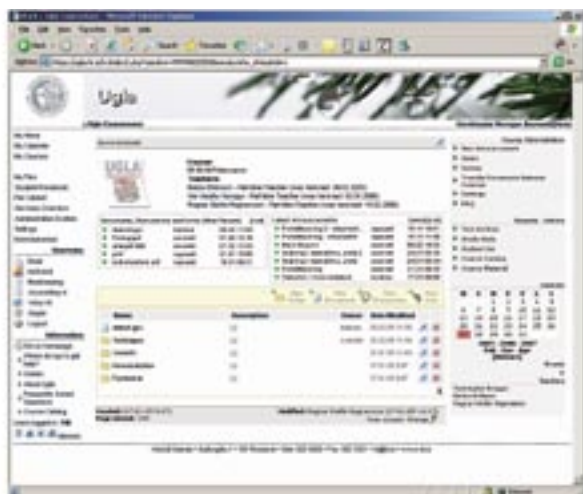


Figure 2. Course start page: the teacher's view



basic functions of the course. How the initial page displays depends on the role the user has.

The user layout is straightforward, with basic navigation on the left and specific navigation on the right. The main content is always in the centre of the web page.

There are some good examples of user-friendliness in Ugla's new "course homepage." In the right-hand column there is an easily-accessible collection of links to the commonly used modules, which gives an overview of what can be done in the course area.

When the course is running, the two centrally placed boxes ("Documents, Discussions, and Links" and "Latest Announcements" in Figure 3) display current activities. This makes it easy to get an overview of what has happened since they last logged-in. All content boxes have a set of standard icons for common actions, such as zoom and close-up.

The menu in the right-hand column lists the actions that can be taken when using the course. Depending on the user's role in the course – or the age of the course – actions on the links in the menus may be different. On some courses there is also a different layout for the web-page, but this is merely an interface issue, since the user still has the same level of control over the course.<sup>1</sup>

### **Post a new message**

Teachers can post messages to any of the groups, as shown below. They can also be sent by e-mail. Students see all messages posted to the course when they go to the course's start page. Unfortunately, there is no way to set the starting and finishing date and time for messages, nor any way to de-activate a message temporarily.

### **Create and manage groups**

Groups are an important basis for further work in Ugla. There are two basic groups for each course: *teachers* and *students*. In addition, teachers and administrators can create and manage groups, and populate them from the list of participants. This means that groups can be used for many purposes, from simple e-mail lists with only one student, or a few, to more elaborate uses for seminars and assignments.

### **Transfer documents between courses**

This module allows anyone with proper rights to copy uploaded materials from one course to another. The archive contains all courses that have been defined in Ugla, so this can be a very useful tool for teachers. One cannot select individual

<sup>1</sup> There has been a change of versions in Ugla, the one being version 2. Older courses still have the user interface from version 1, which is very different from that in version 2. This can be a bit confusing if you are assigned to both newer and older courses. This problem will of course eventually go away.

folders or files. Everything will be copied, and access rights will be reset to default values.

Since materials are copied between courses this also means that previous courses can be used as *course archives*. A badly designed solution for re-use of materials can sometimes cause problems, because teachers can modify old documents, thereby replacing the originals. Students who want to go back to see materials will then see the modified version and not the version that was used in their course.

## Settings

The portal is normally based on user log-in, but it is possible to set public access for individual courses, so that the course is accessible without authentication.

## FAQ

The FAQ link leads to a help system which opens in a new window. Unfortunately, as at April 2006, there are not many topics. The idea, however, is very promising as every topic has its own unique ID, which means that it will be quite easy to link to a specific node in a potentially large FAQ system.

## Surveys

There is a module for creating surveys, including everything from building-block level creation of surveys to computation of statistics from students' responses. The tool is accessed from another part of the web and relies on e-mail for its distribution, not on course registration: The participants who are registered for the survey receive an e-mail with a link to it. They participate that way, rather than via log-in in the portal.

## Course activities

**Test archive:** If the course has previously had tests, they will be visible here. This is often asked for by students, since tests give an indication of what is taught on the course, and what teachers think is important in the course material.

**Grade Statistics:** This module shows the statistics for the students' grades in the course, directly from the central course system.

**Student list:** This lists all students on the course. Teachers cannot do anything in this module; they can just read it.

**Course catalogue:** This provides a link to the central syllabus database. It displays Basic information about the course, such as which department is responsible

for it, the number of lectures and seminars, how many points it gives and ECTS points.

**Course material:** If the teacher or an administrator has defined the course material in the database, which is done using the Course Catalogue, this is where it can be found.

**Calendar:** The Calendar module is somewhat outside the teaching/learning modules, but is very practical. It displays events from different sources. Since Ugla uses the same database for all activities, it is quite easy to distribute not only a personal but also a *personalised* calendar. Users can add their own events to the calendars, which means that they can get a complete view of their agenda, and not just the events that the portal initially displays.

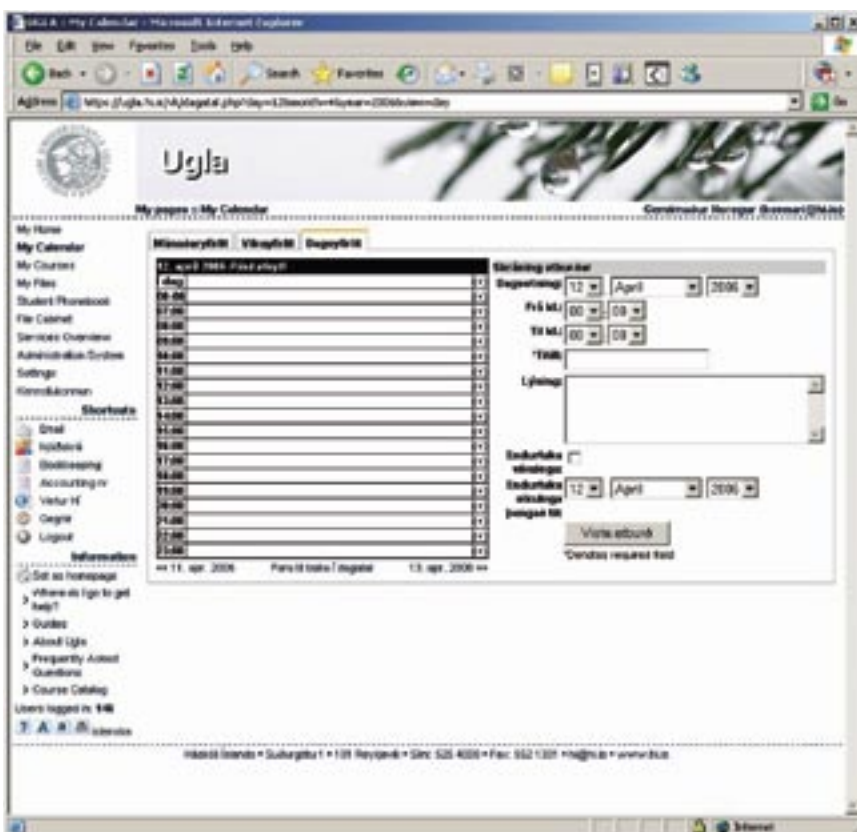


Figure 3. Calendar module

**Collaboration:** In the “content area” of each course’s start page there is an area where the course activities are displayed. The lowermost, unnamed, box contains all *documents, discussions* and *links* that have been posted in the course. Users can group

all three types of items in *folders*, so that the area will not become cluttered and impossible to work in.

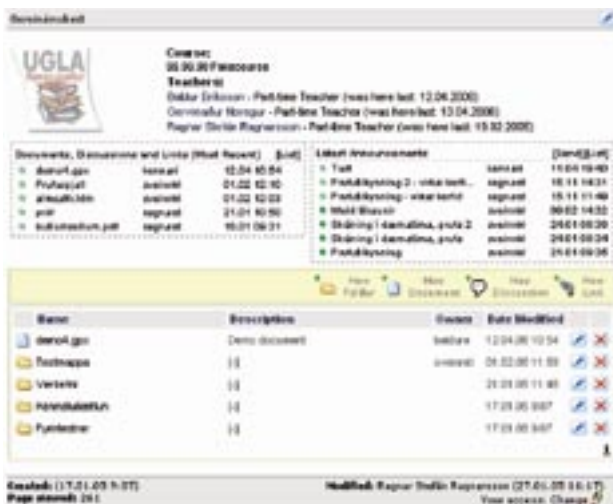


Figure 4. Collaboration area

Administrators have full access to folders and their contents, and can set permissions on items per student group, namely “Forbidden”, “View”, or “Change”.

Items can easily be moved between folders, and folders can be put within folders. The only drawback could be that the ease to add new folders creates obfuscation, because there tend to be users who create too many folders, thus over-organising the area.

An obvious use of folders is to create one folder per student group and to use it for the distribution and redistribution of materials in the group, together with discussions and links. The students can then create new folders for internal use. Another use is to create a folder for the distribution of course materials in digital form.

*Documents* can be any type of file that users want to share with others. They can enter a description at upload time, but can also go back and change attributes later.

*Discussions* are posted as threads, and anyone with proper rights can reply to them. The forum has basic functionality. The subject, message, date, and sender are displayed, plus the number of replies. Users with *Change* rights can delete messages – even messages posted by others.. There is no way to search messages or sort threads.

*Links* are URLs that users want to share with others. They can link to anything on the Internet, and can be used to point to addresses that students should visit. Students can use them to point to their reports, or to share important addresses with the rest of their group.

## Student use

There is no student access to Ugla without logging-in; students must always authenticate to see any information.

As soon as students log-in they get a page similar to that of the teachers. They see general messages, some RSS newsfeeds (which can be customized by clicking on *Settings* in the left-hand menu), and recent activities in the courses that they are enrolled in. The students then have to choose which course they want to work with – or click on one of the links in the *Recent documents, discussions and links* to go direct to the course. They then see a start page that shows current activities and messages posted by teachers and administrative staff to all students.



Figure 5. Ugla start page, student view

In the navigation menu there are different groups of links that lead to the necessary information. *My Home* reloads the start page. *My Calendar* displays the personalized calendar and allows the student to enter new items. *My Courses* leads to the courses the student is registered for. *My Files* opens the personal file area on the central file server at the university. *Student Phonebook* allows the student to search for other students in the courses they are registered for. *File Cabinet* contains common

information files for the entire university. *Services Overview* contains a list of IT services that the university offers their students. It is mainly static information. *Settings* allows users to look up their central account and deposit money for printing, change password, etc. *Course Evaluation* (Kennslukönnun) links to the course evaluation module. All courses *can* be evaluated on the web, but not all of them *are* evaluated – it’s up to administrators and/or teachers to decide.

## Advantages

The main advantage with this web is that it serves as an information tool for students – whether the teachers use it or not. Since all courses are defined on the web, students can find such things as their syllabus, course literature and messages from the course administration. They can also see a list of all students assigned to the course, as well as other information.

Another big advantage is that the “Collaboration Area” can be used by students even if teachers are not using Ugla. As long as someone can create the groups, create folders for each group, and set access rights to them, students can use the portal in order to co-operate.

## Issues and problems

The problems in Reykjavík are the same as in Uppsala: teachers’ computer literacy is too varied to reach a high and uniform level of usage. The person interviewed at the Teaching Centre observed that students were becoming more vocal in their demand that teachers use Ugla instead of other, non-standard, and personal communication methods.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless Ugla is used mostly for distributing course materials and messages, with the more advanced parts still not being used to any significant degree.<sup>3</sup> There are teachers who continue to rely on photocopies and e-mail.

## Language

Language is not *one* problem, but two. Firstly – menus, navigation, and help on the web- pages themselves is clearly a problem if you can’t speak Icelandic. There is no complete translation of the system into English, so you often end up, in many areas of the portal, with all the alternatives in Icelandic. The developers are aware of this and are working on English translations of the modules. There is still much work to be done before it is possible to use a complete English version of the sys-

<sup>2</sup> This is also in line with the results from the Uppsala survey (see p. 56-70); students felt confused because there was a difference in the use of the portal even within courses.

<sup>3</sup> E-mail from Harpa Pálmadóttir at the *Kennslumiðstöð* (Teaching center), Jan. 15. 2006.

tem. However, taking the course with content in a language other than English or "Scandinavian" would remain difficult. Since Icelandic students' skills in English are often good, holding a course in English would not be a problem. Since Ugla is not only a learning tool but also an administrative tool, it would clearly be unfair to be too critical about the lack of support for languages than Icelandic.

## **Pedagogy**

Ugla's web has the same benefits as Uppsala's and more. This web has several tools that Uppsala's lacks, such as surveys. And both teachers and students can use the "Collaboration Area." E-learning facilities are still quite limited in this portal in comparison with dedicated LMSs. On the other hand, it provides certain interesting advantages that an LMS cannot offer. Since *all* courses – campus, distance, and web-based – are defined here, all students will visit Ugla, thus making it an excellent place for the dissemination of information.

## **Conclusions**

It is obvious that the approach in the Icelandic case has been very similar to that in Uppsala's (see p. 56-70). The ambition was to create a web that could serve as a platform for basic work: from course definition by administrative personnel to uploading of course materials by teachers. The university has not coerced teachers into using the web, relying instead on word of mouth among students and staff to spread its use. The development of a collaborative tool where students can work together has apparently been a driving force in the adoption of the portal throughout the university. It is believed that this has led to better results in Iceland.

## **Learning History at a Virtual University in Spain: The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (<http://www.uoc.edu>)**

Rita Ríos de la Llave and  
M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Cabañas González  
Universidad de Alcalá

### **Description**

The situation with e-learning in Spain is changing fast, with lots of universities now using a variety of platforms for offering virtual courses or providing support to traditional courses. From research for this project it is obvious that the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (the UOC) is one of the best, since most of the people interviewed quoted it as an example.

The UOC was founded in 1995 as an entirely virtual university, the first in Spain offering such services, though not the first university offering distance learning<sup>1</sup>. Since its inception, the UOC has been a private university, but within the Spanish University System. Their degrees are fully recognised by the Spanish State.

The UOC offers two Bachelor degrees (each lasting 3 years), five Engineering degrees, twelve degrees lasting 5 years, almost 50 courses covering MA and Postgraduate studies, and a programme of Summer Courses and Winter Courses. It has 1600 tutors, 220 IT staff and 60 administrative staff. The total number of students exceeds 30,000, most of them located in Spain and Latin-America. Since it began, more than 5000 students have graduated.

<sup>1</sup> The first Spanish University offering distance learning was the *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia* (UNED), founded in 1972 (<http://www.uned.es>).



As far as “history and on-line learning” is concerned, the UOC’s activities are mainly a development of courses to do with Art History, Mediaeval History, Modern History and Contemporary History, whether as core courses or as optional courses. The number of credit-points represented by the courses varies between 4 and 6. These credit-points do not correspond to the ECTS system. The price of the courses depends on the number of credit-points selected. Students usually pay an average of €63 per credit-point.

The various history courses fall within the Humanities degree programme, which has been running since 1997. All are six-month courses representing one semester. Currently there are around 1500 students registered for them. There are also some history courses within the: “*East Asia Studies*” MA programme, which has been running since 2004. Currently there are 250 students doing it. Other history courses form part of the Summer Courses Programme or the Winter Courses Programme offered each year. There is also a specialisation course on Archaeological Heritage Management which has been running since 2004.

## **Pedagogy**

The Humanities degree programme taught at the UOC is part of the Official Education System, so students can get a university degree which is fully recognised by the Spanish State. In order to gain access to this kind of study students must have passed the National University Entrance Exam. Students over 25 can take an alternative exam. These requirements are compulsory for studying at all Spanish universities.

Spanish degrees take 5 years to complete and are usually organised in two cycles. At the UOC the Humanities degree courses are grouped in eight blocks so as to allow students to gain their degree in eight semesters, four for the first cycle and four for the second cycle, instead of the usual 5 years: three for the first cycle and two for the second. The UOC is flexible and students can decide the number of courses they want to follow. But students can only get the Humanities degree once they have gained 300 credits, just as at other Spanish universities.

Students coming from other areas of study can gain access to the second part of the Humanities degree on condition that they obtain 44 credits in Preparation courses. Students who complete the first cycle of the Humanities degree can access the second cycle of other UOC degrees, such as Documentation, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Audio-visual Communication, History and Science of Music, Linguistics, Journalism, Publicity and Public Relations or Translating and Interpreting. The history courses therefore provide an opening to many different fields of study.

The MA courses on East Asia Studies are spread over four semesters. Students can organize their studies according to their own preferences and personal ability.

However, in order to get their MA degree, they must have gained 120 credits. In order to gain access to this study programme they must have completed at least the first cycle (lasting 3 years), so this MA programme is a kind of second cycle covering the final two years.

The summer and winter courses and the specialisation course on Archaeological Heritage Management are offered as a complement to students' general education, so there are no special requirements in order to follow them. What the summer courses offer varies every year, but all of them have certain things in common: each course covers 30 hours of lessons, is worth 2 credits and takes place during the month of July. The specialisation course covers 90 hours of lessons, is worth 6 credits and takes place during one semester..

Most students doing the history courses are about 35 years old, are in employment and have a family. They are not looking for a degree, but simply want to further their education and enhance their career. Students following the Summer Courses have a similar background. By contrast, students doing the MA programme in East Asia Studies and those doing the specialisation course on Archaeological Heritage Management are keen to advance their professional career in different fields of activity.

It can be argued that history courses are oriented to life-long learning as advocated by the Bologna Process<sup>2</sup>. This is in marked contrast to lessons taught in the class-room, in the case of studies in Humanities and History, where most students are under 25 and have only finished secondary education.

The UOC has adopted a co-operative approach to on-line learning. The main aim is to prepare students for management positions in “cultural organizations” and for promoting knowledge in the academic or social fields. The subjects have been developed in such a way as to give students a competitive edge, with suitable technical and all-round abilities. The UOC trains students in the intensive use of information and communication technology, giving them a vital skill in the world of work. So students doing history courses will be able to adapt to any management activity, without forgetting the specialisation that they have studied, thus allowing them to work in cultural organizations, official bodies in cultural management, in public or private institutions, in teaching, the mass-media, publishing and so on<sup>3</sup>. This emphasis on business skills is in contrast to that in humanities studies taught at Spanish universities, where education is more theoretical.

<sup>2</sup> G. Haug, Ch. Tauch, *Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education (II): Follow-up Report prepared for the Salamanca and Prague Conferences of March / May 2001*, April 2001, p. 24 ([http://www.uah.es/universidad/espacio\\_europeo/documentos/Trends%20learning\\_Structures\\_Higher\\_Education\\_marzo-mayo\\_2001.pdf](http://www.uah.es/universidad/espacio_europeo/documentos/Trends%20learning_Structures_Higher_Education_marzo-mayo_2001.pdf)). J. González, R. Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, 2003, p. 126 ([http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc\\_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf](http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.uoc.edu/web/esp/estudios/estudios\\_uoc/humanidades/humanidades\\_plan.html](http://www.uoc.edu/web/esp/estudios/estudios_uoc/humanidades/humanidades_plan.html)

At the UOC there is a greater separation of duties than in traditional courses, in both teaching and administration. At other Spanish universities the teaching is done by tutors who can determine the programme, the teaching methods, the bibliography, the sources and even the system used for marking lessons. Administrative work is centralised in an office, run by a Students Secretary, which the tutors have hardly any contact with. However, at the UOC there are several people who advise students every step of the way: the initial tutor who helps introduce them to the university and its administrative procedures; the tutor who directs the students in the final stages of their studies and advises them on the world of work; the authors who write the contents of the course; the advisers, who are the ones who teach the course (and sometimes write the contents); and, finally, the assistant professor for the course who co-ordinates everything. In this way more individual attention is paid to the student at the UOC, and this has a beneficial effect on the learning process<sup>4</sup>.

In all UOC courses there is a meeting at the beginning of the semester and another at the end. The first is to present the programme and the last is to evaluate the course and give final advice before the exam. During the rest of the semester there are no more meetings as all teaching is done on-line. Students are expected to carry out the various activities during the semester. These cover both theoretical and practical work. They include debates about the books studied, comparing the views of different authors, criticising different points of view and differing approaches, or suggesting new hypotheses. Sometimes they are in the form of individual papers; sometimes they are done as group work. Students do problem solving and they have to write an essay, which is essential before being allowed to sit the exam at the end of the semester.

Under this system the work of the student is more important than that of the teacher, which is in contrast to the traditional teaching system in Spanish universities, where the teacher explains the subject in class, the student take notes and then reads set books and sits an exam at the end of the semester or at the end of the course. E-learning assignments for history students are more varied than those in traditional teaching. Some students like the debates, which are fundamental to the training of a historian, and are more appropriate for working on-line because they can lead to further development, which is physically impossible in a conventional course. The UOC system facilitates continuous learning by the students as they interact with the teacher, with the class-material, with the tasks and with their class-colleagues, even though they do not meet face-to-face. Student-centred ideas enhance their aspirations, their creativity and their independent opinions, thus preparing them for today's world<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> J. González, R. Wagenaar, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, 2003, p. 264 ([http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc\\_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf](http://www.relint.deusto.es/TUNINGProject/spanish/doc_fase1/Tuning%20Educational.pdf)).

## Materials

The following history courses are offered within the Humanities degree at the UOC:

1. Mediaeval History.
2. Modern History.
3. History of Catalonia 1.
4. History of Catalonia 2.
5. Art History 1.
6. Art History 2.
7. Contemporary History 1.
8. Contemporary History 2.
9. History Aesthetic Ideas.
10. The Islamic World.
11. History of Music 1.
12. History of the Cinema and Television.

There are also some history courses in the Preparation Course that students coming from other disciplines are obliged to take. These are:

1. Contemporary History of Spain.
2. World Art History

In the MA programme on East Asia Studies there are several history courses or courses where history is the main element:

1. East Asia History 1: the Empires of East Asia.
2. East Asia History 2: 19th and 20th century.
3. International Politics in East Asia.
4. Art in East Asia.
5. Knowledge and Religion in East Asia.
6. Society and Culture in East Asia.
7. Gender and Family in the societies of East Asia.
8. History of Economic Thinking.

The following history courses are included in the Summer and Winter Courses programmes:

<sup>5</sup> S. Aguado Henche, A. García Pérez, R. Ríos de la Llave, "¿Es posible realizar una enseñanza universitaria en Inglés?", *Educación y Futuro digital*, 9 (2005), p. 1 (<http://www.cesdonbosco.com/revista>).

1. Introduction to Archaeology.
2. The world of death in Ancient Egypt: Beliefs and practices.

There is also the specialisation course on Archaeological Heritage Management.

Materials used in the various history courses are prepared in-house. Students have a certain amount of set material for every course, prepared by a tutor or by a team. Sometimes the material is prepared by advisers who also teach. Students also have a list of supplementary material which is provided by the advisers or is easily accessible through the UOC's Virtual Library.

The advisers therefore have some freedom of action when they are not the authors of the material.

Most of the courses use both on-line and printed materials. Subjects included in History of Art usually have material on CD-ROM as well in order to provide easy access to the images. They use text-books, articles, images and primary sources. However the courses could be improved by adding sound files, videos or films.

Copyright in the set material is held by EDIUOC, the University publisher, who also publish it. The UOC Library handles copyright in the supplementary material. In both cases ownership of the copyright belongs to the university and not to the authors of the material. In this they follow the practice in many countries: where an author is employed to create something, the copyright in the work belongs to the employer rather than to the employee<sup>6</sup>. As the authors of the material used in UOC are employed by UOC, it is UOC that owns the copyright.

## Administration

At the UOC there is a clear separation of functions in the administration of courses.

Technical matters and marketing are the responsibility of the UOC, which basically uses the Internet as its means of dissemination. The web-site of the university is registered with Universia.net, the main information source for Spanish, Portuguese and Latin-American Universities. The UOC is also featured on the web-site of the Ministry of Education and Science<sup>7</sup>.

The UOC web-site gives information about organisation, activities, teaching staff, courses of interest to companies, a link to the Library and access to UOC's on-line publishing, and to different on-line magazines and on-line sources. Information about course content is on the web-site and follows the traditional structure: from the most general (degrees and cycles) to the particular (courses), as the latter

<sup>6</sup> *Nociones básicas sobre derecho de autor y derechos conexos. Documento preparado por la Oficina Internacional de la OMPI*, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Universia.net: <http://universidades.universia.es/unis-espanyolas/ventana-abierta/index.htm>. Ministry of Education and Science: <http://www.mec.es/educa/ccuniv/html/interna/enlaces.html>.

are part of the official education system. The Summer Courses and the specialisation courses are presented more directly because they are oriented towards long-life learning. However the information is confusing because it does not detail the study plan for the first-cycle but only for the second-cycle.

Teaching is under the control of the co-ordinators. In the case of history courses it is done by the History and Art co-ordinator who has a working group of 30 people.

The job of teaching is shared between the same people. Each student has a tutor during the first three months. This tutor helps the student get acquainted with the university, the on-line campus, and the administrative procedures, and helps with learning strategies. From the 4<sup>th</sup> semester every student has the support of another tutor who advises on the final project and on the world of work. The advisers are the people who teach the courses and who select and send out supplementary material. Full professors co-ordinate the tutors and the advisers. They all work under temporary or permanent contract with the UOC. The authors of the set material, who are employed for that purpose, are specialists at different Universities. Sometimes the authors of the material also work as advisers.

## Platforms

For running the courses the UOC has its own platform developed in-house. It is managed by the university, using a system based on Java and CORBA, with an ORACLE database. To connect to it the minimum requirement is a Pentium 90 PC, a 28,800. modem, Windows 95/98, Microsoft Office Pro and Internet Explorer or Netscape. It is not an open-source platform. Students have their own username and password for logging-in.

There is an on-line classroom for each course, with a menu giving the following options:

- 1) Planning (*Planificación*): with a schedule and a Study Guide that provides information about objectives, content, sources, methodology, evaluation and the calendar of the course.
- 2) Communication (*Comunicación*): with a number of tools, such as the list of students, notice-board, forum, discussion area and e-mail.
- 3) Sources (*Recursos*): with access to the on-line material, bibliography, glossary and a link to the on-line library of the UOC.
- 4) Evaluation (*Evaluación*): listing the activities that students must complete, their grades and the student's academic record.

Some tutors have their own web-site, providing free access for students, where some of the materials are also available, particularly the supplementary material<sup>8</sup>. Such web-sites are a useful way of promoting and publishing the tutor's work.

UOC

Historia contemporánea I

Edición del Plan Docente

Edición del Calendario

Apartados del Plan Docente

Calendario

Calendario Académico

UOC

Historia contemporánea I

Comunicación

Seguimiento

Búsquedas del Aula

Enviar un mensaje al profesor

Enviar mensaje al profesor responsable de la asignatura

Estudiantes de la asignatura

UOC

Historia contemporánea I

Evaluación

Actividades de evaluación

Aplicaciones de evaluación

Historia contemporánea I

Historia contemporánea I (1901-1932)

## Language and Intercultural issues

In Catalonia there is specific legislation governing language used in education, including at university level. This stipulates that teachers and students can use the language they prefer, though it is highly recommended that institutions use Catalan for teaching, administration and research<sup>9</sup>. History courses at the UOC are therefore taught in Catalan. However some materials are in Catalan and some in Spanish. This means that students must at least be able to read Catalan. Students can complete their tasks in either Catalan or Spanish.

This clearly imposes a restriction, as one of the characteristics of on-line courses is ease of access. It is strange to erect a language barrier when working on-line removes the barriers of space and time, because students and teachers do not need to be in the same location nor work at the same time<sup>10</sup>. It is obvious that if the courses were taught in Spanish the number of students would increase, not only from the rest of Spain, given the number of Spanish speakers in the world. If a course were taught in another language, especially English, the number of applicants would be even greater, and this would be an advantage considering the small number of students who enrol in humanities and history studies in Spain nowadays.

The use of two languages, Catalan and Spanish, in the history courses at the UOC, offers some real benefits. Students coming from different language and cultural traditions can meet on-line and exchange ideas. However, the traditions and methods used for teaching and learning history are almost the same in the Catalan region as in the rest of Spain, in spite of the language barrier.

## Quality assessment – of the courses

Every course taught at the UOC is linked to a process which enables the content to be updated and access given to on-line sources. It is handled by the course co-ordinator. In the case of History and Art, the quality of the courses is assessed by the PanFilHum project. They studies the strategies adopted by the on-line students in order to check how they use the material, interpret its content and extend their knowledge. The contribution to on-line teaching provided by the on-line materials is also analysed. Advisers and tutors discuss teaching strategies when using the Internet, its adaptation to the different Humanities courses and the teaching guidelines.

<sup>8</sup> The website of Prof. Joan Campàs Montaner is recommended. ([http://cv.uoc.edu/~04\\_999\\_01\\_u07/cur-sart.html](http://cv.uoc.edu/~04_999_01_u07/cur-sart.html)) It includes articles by the author and a list of sources about various themes (introduction to history, introduction to art, aesthetics, historical materialism, the information society), as well as a visual dictionary.

<sup>9</sup> Act Number 1, of 7th January 1998, on linguistic policy in Catalunya, chapter 3, article 22 ([http://www6.gencat.net/llegcat/legis/angles\\_llei.htm](http://www6.gencat.net/llegcat/legis/angles_llei.htm)).

<sup>10</sup> K. Kruse, "Using the Web for Learning: Advantages and Disadvantages", *e-LearningGuru.com*, 2002, p. 1 ([http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art1\\_9.htm](http://www.e-learningguru.com/articles/art1_9.htm)).



The people involved in this Project present the results of their research in seminars about e-learning. For instance, they give their opinions on such matters as the value of debating on-line, the interaction between teachers and students in the forum and by e-mail, the different kinds of assessment activities, the systematic use of the internet as a tool for learning and research, experimenting with on-line labs, co-operative work and so on. All this effort is intended to improve the system, paying special attention to detecting and solving problems in both independent and guided self-study lessons.

Students also participate in evaluating the courses by filling-in on-line surveys at the end of the semester. They are asked about their level of satisfaction with the different elements of the teaching system, with the resources for supporting their studies, with communication, learning sources, evaluation and on-line learning. They are also asked about the adaptation and application of their study plan. The average result is about 4 out 5. However, there is no specific data about history students.

External assessment is done by a team composed of members of the *Club Gestión de Calidad* (Quality Management Club), and co-ordinated by external consultants from the *Bureau Veritas Quality International*. They take account of the criteria of the *Foundation for Quality Management* (EFQM). In 2004 this organisation awarded the UOC the Golden Seal of European Excellence. This follows other awards: *Gangemann Challenge* the prize for the best European distance-learning initiative in 1997, ICDE the prize (*International Council for Open and Distance Education*) in 2001 for the best on-line and distance university in the world, the WITSA prize (*World Information Technology and Services Alliance*) for the world's best digital initiative in 2000 and the OEA prize (*Organización de Estados Americanos* (the Organization of American States) in 2004 for educational quality.

### **Quality assessment – of the students**

The assessment of history students is based on completing several activities:

- Participation in the debate proposed in every course.
- Completing 3 or 4 activities per semester.
- Sometimes the writing of a final research project at the end of the semester.
- A written class exam.

There are no details of the percentages allotted to each of these four elements, but they must play a bigger part than in traditional teaching, where the final exam and the written papers mostly determine the grade. When working on-line the interactive and participating activities are the main contribution<sup>11</sup>. The fact that there are also class-room exams makes it difficult, in practice, for students living outside Catalonia – or indeed outside Spain.

An interesting point is that students at the UOC can access their personal academic records through the platform, which ensures confidentiality. This system differs from that in traditional courses where records are published, though only slowly, and with no guarantee of privacy.

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<sup>11</sup> C. Sigalés, “El potencial interactivo de los entornos virtuales de enseñanza y aprendizaje en la educación a distancia”, *X Encuentro Internacional de Educación a Distancia, noviembre 2001. Guadalajara, México* ([http://eadcna.cuao.edu.co/doc\\_cna/posters\\_Guerrero/3\\_02.pdf](http://eadcna.cuao.edu.co/doc_cna/posters_Guerrero/3_02.pdf)).

## **BBC History on-line**

David Sephton, Oxford  
Primrose Publishing

### **Description of activities**

This is part of a huge amount of on-line material covering many subjects. It is one of the BBC's main educational activities since its charter requires it to provide educational programmes. Its remit is to inform, educate and entertain.

### **Pedagogy**

All the materials are of high quality. They are used as additional resources by history departments in universities and schools. One of our CLIOH partners from Cork says that he finds the BBC history material excellent. He has helped create some of the material himself.

The articles are divided into a series of conveniently-sized chunks of text, each on a separate web-page so that the reader can decide whether to go on to the next page or to make a break.

### **Materials**

The history topics include:

#### **Ancient History:**

Prehistory, Anglo-Saxons, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Vikings

#### **Archaeology**

including Marine Archaeology

### Church & State:

British Empire, Church & Reformation, Monarchs & leaders, Nations

### Science and Discovery:

Medicine, Revolutions in Science, Exploration

### Society & Culture:

Industrialisation, Women's History, Protest & Reform etc

### Wars & Conflict:

Norman Conquest, 1916 the Easter Rising, Genocide, WW1 and WW2

### Family History

A more detailed list of some of the material available is given at the end of this paper.

The material is attractively presented and easy to read, with sensible use of colour and plenty of images. The various subject areas are easy to navigate and have extensive links to related items.

In addition to serious academic papers on many historical topics, the site includes message boards and newsletters as well as many interactive items that are novel and highly-motivating for the user. These include:

- If Alexander the Great had gone West
- Make your own riddles & runes in an interactive guide to Anglo-Saxon life.
- Viking Quest – Build a ship, loot a monastery & claim your prize
- Explore a reconstruction of a real Viking farmhouse
- You've found the pieces – now build your Iron Age chariot
- Sharpen up your skills and build an Iron Age home
- Pyramid challenge: as an Egyptian vizier, undertake the project to build the king's tomb



- Chart the evolution of the pyramids
- Prepare the body of Ramose, officer to the king, for burial
- Tell the world how you think sport has changed since the Games of ancient Greece – using the History message board
- Animated maps trace borders through time.
- Skara Brae – Take a closer look at this Neolithic Scottish settlement
- Death in Rome – A blood-spattered Roman trader lies dead. You have until dawn to gather the evidence and identify the culprit.
- Hadrian’s Wall – Take a 3D virtual tour around a reconstruction of Housesteads Fort, part of Hadrian’s Wall
- Explore the Viking world with Thorkel and visit the Viking house to spot the items that don’t belong
- Viking Dig Reports – From the remains of Viking ships to the excavation of an ancient rubbish dump, uncover the finds that have revealed an enormous amount about Viking life.

The BBC were said to be investing heavily in “streaming” which would allow audio and video files to start playing immediately, without any waiting time, and it would prevent illegal copying of the files. The emphasis now is on podcasting with a huge amount of material being made available in this form.

A list is included at the end of this paper on the topics offered on Ancient Greek History.

## Administration

The material is updated and new material added from time to time.



## Platforms

Anyone can use the material as it is freely available to all. An extensive message board encourages people to exchange ideas and put forward their suggestions.

## Language

The material is all in English

## Quality

Comments from history tutors that use the material rate it as excellent.

## Some of the BBC materials offered on Ancient Greek history

The material and links are divided into two types: Articles and Interactive Content. These include:

- History Message Board
- The Battle of Thermopylae
- Alexander the Great: Hunting for a new Past
- Echoes of Plato's Atlantis
- The Democratic Experiment. Critics and Critiques of Ancient Athenian Democracy
- Religion: Greek Gods
- Lord Elgin – Saviour or Vandal?
- The Ages of Treasure
- The Ancient Greek Olympics
- Ancient Olympics Gallery
- Sport: Olympics 2004
- World Service: Ancient Olympics
- Schools: Ancient Greece
- Year of the Games

The articles are by well-known academics. Whilst the content is serious the style is very readable.

## References

BBC web-page: History Title page: On-line topics

BBC web-page The Egyptians

BBC web-page The Greeks

Tutor from the Department of History, National University of Ireland, Cork

## **Oscail – National Distance Education Centre**

David Sephton, Oxford  
Primrose Publishing

### **Description of activities**

Oscail is the National Distance Education Centre of Ireland. It was set up in 1982 on the campus of Dublin City University where it has faculty status. Its purpose is to provide adults in the Irish Republic with access to third-level education regardless of location, employment, domestic or personal circumstances, or prior qualifications.

They offer courses which lead to degrees issued by a number of Irish universities. More than 3,500 adults, located throughout Ireland, are currently pursuing Irish University qualifications with Oscail.

Oscail has pioneered a co-operative approach based on continuing co-operation with universities and other higher-education institutions throughout Ireland.

The challenge that they faced was to achieve their aim in a way which would be pedagogically effective, cost efficient and of a quality transparently equivalent to that of more conventional methods of higher education. An innovative model of distance education was devised to meet their objectives involving the participation of most Irish universities and institutes of technology.

From the outset, Oscail has been responsible for developing a national distance education programme. This embraces all activities involved in designing, developing and delivering programmes for undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing professional education to several thousand students throughout Ireland.



Oscail was established in response to a situation in Ireland in which higher education was restricted to relatively few people. It produced a quite low proportion of adults with degrees or other third-level qualifications, and an under-developed provision of access to degree-level qualifications through part-time or adult education.

The unique strategy that Oscail adopted enabled them to draw on the support of other universities and third-level colleges in developing and presenting their programmes.

Ireland, with a population of only 3.7 million, has seen student numbers increase four-fold during the past three decades. This has been accompanied by significant structural change, leading to an extensive and diversified system of higher education. The participation rate in higher education now compares favorably with that of other EU countries.

The government's investment in education is substantial. Oscail has a dedicated budget provided by the Higher Education Authority. It exploits its co-operative approach to course development and teaching within a single integrated national programme.

Two research studentships are offered each year for conducting doctoral research into the teaching of specific disciplines by Distance Learning.

## Pedagogy

Oscail currently offers the following programmes:



- Diploma in Arts & Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) (Humanities)
- Diploma in Information Technology, & Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Information Technology
- Bachelor of Nursing Studies
- Graduate Diploma & M.Sc. in Information Technology for Accountants
- Graduate Diploma & M.Sc. in Internet Systems
- Graduate Diploma & M.Sc. in Management of Operations

All the programmes are accredited by Dublin City University. In addition, the Diploma in Arts and the Bachelor of Arts (Humanities) are accredited by NUI Galway, NUI Maynooth, University College Cork, University of Dublin Trinity College and University of Limerick.

Courses are offered in:

- History
- Literature
- Philosophy
- Psychology
- Sociology

	History	Literature	Philosophy	Psychology	Sociology
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 1	Mod 1	Part 1	Part 1	Mod 1
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 2	Mod 2	Part 2	Part 2	Mod 2
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 3	Mod 3	Part 3	Part 3	Mod 3
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 4	Mod 4	Part 4	Part 4	Mod 4
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 5	Mod 5	Part 5	Part 5	Mod 5
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 6	Mod 6	Part 6	Part 6	Mod 6
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 7	Mod 7	Part 7	Part 7	Mod 7
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 8	Mod 8	Part 8	Part 8	Mod 8
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 9	Mod 9	Part 9	Part 9	Mod 9
Intermediate Certificate	Mod 10	Mod 10	Part 10	Part 10	Mod 10

Oscail offers six separate history courses:

- History Foundation Module
- Europe & a Wider World
- Land, Politics & Society in Ireland 1840-1922
- Politics, Culture & Society in Independent Ireland
- Women in Irish & European Society 1780-1915
- Researching Local History: People, Place & Time

All courses are designed, developed and delivered under the direction and guidance of multi- disciplinary course teams, including academics drawn from Irish universities and higher education institutions, and specialists in curriculum and instructional design and in distance teaching. For the technical and commercial qualifications they have relevant professionals drawn from business and industry

A senior academic is appointed to give academic direction to each academic stream of a programme. These appointments are made in close consultation with peers and the academic’s home institution.

## Materials

The course materials are written by academics in Irish universities and higher-education institutions. Some are prepared by leading practitioners in industry and the public sector.

For each module on which they enrol, students receive specially written course materials. Each student is allocated to a small tutorial group of around fifteen students for each module studied. A specialist tutor is assigned to each group.

Oscail's course materials are produced in specially designed binders. These allow materials to be easily revised and updated in response to changes in the subject matter or to student feedback on the instructional effectiveness of the course.

Students submit assignments to their tutor for assessment and they receive tuition at tutorial meetings in a national network of 12 study centres. They also interact with their tutor by telephone and correspondence, and increasingly by email. Students have access to libraries in the universities where they are registered and in the other co-operating institutions providing facilities for Oscail programmes

Past examination papers can be consulted via links on the Oscail site. They are available for each year going back to 1999.



## Administration

All courses are listed on the Oscail web-site and students apply to follow the course of their choice. The courses are administered by individual history tutors from the participating universities and institutions.

## Platforms

The courses use WebCT. The Oscail web-site provides a detailed student guide for using it.

## Language

The courses are in English and students have to submit their work in English.

## Quality

Oscail has developed a comprehensive quality-assessment process involving continuous evaluation and monitoring of all aspects of its programmes. Quality assurance is helped by the participative, transparent and co-operative approach to course development and delivery which greatly facilitates the provision of quality programmes.

Among the more important aspects of quality assurance are:

The involvement of the course team and specialist subject groups in the process of course design and development ensures that the content of course materials and the pedagogical approach to course delivery are uniquely open to peer appraisal.

Having the direct involvement of senior academics from a range of universities and third-level institutions in directing the programmes and in writing the course materials facilitates a wider awareness of the quality of the courses and the ready acceptance of graduates on postgraduate research programmes.

Re-monitoring, usually by the course writers, of twenty percent of all student assignments ensures uniformity of student assessment and effective teaching.

Regular visits are paid by course leaders to the regional student centres to meet students and local tutors in open debate on all aspects of the programmes.

A mid-term review is carried out on all courses. This focuses in the main on the quality of tutor support. It ensures that, should any problems be identified, remedial action can be taken while the course is still in progress.

When each academic year draws to a close, all students, on all courses, are asked to complete a detailed questionnaire which covers all aspects of the courses that they have studied. The subsequent analysis is presented to the course team with recommendations for overcoming any problems and defining future directions.

In addition, a number of methods are used to ensure that the staff at Oscail are kept up-to-date on all aspects of course presentation. These include random phone surveys and regular tutor feedback.

## Oscail's approach

Oscail recognises that adults are experiencing more and more demands on their time, both at home and at work.

Oscail characterize their mission as offering to students the flexibility to study for an Irish university qualification while at the same time meeting their personal commitments – both at work and in the home. This approach gives students the opportunity to tailor their chosen course in such a way that they can study in their own time, at their own pace and wherever is most convenient for them.

The courses demand a high level of commitment, although there are no formal lectures and few attendance requirements. They stress that the increased use of e-learning makes their courses more flexible for students.

Aware that many of their students have not studied for some time, and realising that studying outside a traditional university environment can be challenging for some, Oscail has established a Student Support System. This includes:

- Special introductory modules
- Dedicated tutors
- Tutorials & student networking
- Student information & advisory service
- Regional study centres
- Personalised student internet portal pages

The web-site provides a phone number and a named staff member, as well as the usual email address, so that students and prospective students can make contact in person to obtain information and help.

### **The advantages of studying at Oscail**

Without changing their current lifestyle students are given the chance to achieve an Irish university qualification. For students over 23 years of age, no previous qualifications are required for the undergraduate programmes. They study in their own time, at their own pace and wherever is most convenient, using Oscail's specially written self-instructional course texts. Students do not have to attend any formal lectures. They build their own study timetable to fit in with their individual lifestyle.

Oscail provides a flexible system of educational delivery and support specifically tailored to help students to achieve their qualification. If a student has been away from study for a while the special introductory module helps them to fine-tune the necessary skills and to get to know their chosen subject. Oscail's Student Support System includes:

Tutorial Support – All the tutors are experts in their field and are trained in issues relating to distance learning. Each student is assigned a specialist tutor who provides guidance and support. This is done by tutorial, telephone and e-mail throughout the period of study. Tutorials take place once a month. At these tutorials students have an opportunity to meet their fellow students. Tutorial support is provided, in some programmes, by computer conferencing. This increases the flexibility of study.

Student Advisory Service A team of Student Advisors is available throughout the academic year to provide information and guidance. They offer support in person,

by telephone, by e-mail and on-line. They offer advice on matters such as managing study time, library access, and module selection.

Study Centres – Oscail has a network of twelve study centres around Ireland. Students generally attend the study centre closest to where they live. They can also avail themselves of the campus facilities there, including their libraries.

Oscail representatives visit these Centres regularly to ensure a high quality of service to students.

Universities and Professional Bodies affiliated to Oscail

National University of Ireland – NUI Maynooth

National University of Ireland – NUI Galway

University College Cork

University of Dublin, Trinity College

University of Limerick

An Bord Altranais

#### Educational Bodies:

Higher Education Authority

The Higher Education Authority is the planning and development body for higher education in Ireland. It was set up on an-ad hoc basis in 1968, and was given statutory powers in the Higher Education Authority Act 1971.

Aontas

Aontas is the Irish National Association of Adult Education, a voluntary membership organisation. It promotes the development of a learning society through a comprehensive system of adult learning and adult education that is open to, and inclusive of, all.

Higher Education Equality Unit /Aonad Comhionannas Deise um Ard-Oideachas (HEEU) is a national body, established in 1992 and funded by the Higher Education Authority. Its role is to promote equality of access and opportunity in Irish higher Education institutions, for both staff and students.

Maynooth Adult and Community Education, specialising in post-graduate diplomas, degrees (Higher Diplomas, MA, Ph.D.) in Adult Education; an extensive Continuing Education programme; and research and consultancy in the areas of adult and community education.

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Oscail web-site

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