The Copenhagen Field-class: 'one-stop' support through WebLearn

Introduction

Dr Thomas Jellis, winner of the 2013 OxTALENT award for "Use of WebLearn to support a course or programme of study", is a Research Fellow at the University of Oxford's School of Geography and college lecturer at St. John's and Hertford colleges. When preparing a new Copenhagen field trip for undergraduate geographers, he exploited WebLearn's capacity for effective course outlines. He and his team designed a very successful and highly specialised sub-site on WebLearn to host their material. Their aims were three-fold: to enable preparation prior to the trip; to promote reflection on the themes and activities; and to allow collaboration via group project wikis.

The Challenge

The trip required a 'one-stop' site, which Thomas produced from scratch himself, without contacting the WebLearn team. The site had to provide students with information before the trip, remain useful and updated for the duration, and serve as an information repository afterwards. Beyond the field trip itself, the site needed a coherent structure that could be easily reused for future trips.

The Innovation

The site can be accessed from any mobile device and scales seamlessly to any platform. Those using a laptop, tablet or smartphone are able to easily navigate the site and retrieve material. Moreover, by creating a wiki for each group project, the site expands the learning environment in a number of ways. It provides a forum to foster intercollegiate communication, encourages the development of research questions in advance of the trip, and allows the sharing of material, both during and after the trip.

Feedback

Thomas reports that student feedback was positive and the ability to share material was welcomed. Encouragingly, students felt prepared in advance of the trip and, as it came to a close, confident that they knew what was expected of them in terms of writing up their findings. In addition, colleagues at the department praised the site as setting the standard for field classes in the future.

Top Tips

- Attend the classes run by the IT Learning Programme and follow up afterwards on the WebLearn support pages.
- Experimenting and testing are crucial before you publish the site.

- Think about how the e-environment allows you to do things that would not be possible with printed documents. Include hyperlinks, embedded maps or figures, and a wiki in your site.
- When creating web links, always use the option to 'automatically resize'; this avoids the awkwardness of a double scroll bar and resizes the content for hand-held devices, essential on a field trip.

Further information

Explore the Copenhagen Fieldclass site

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