Using e–Learning to Develop a Multimedia Mindset

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The MA Broadcast Journalism course at University College Falmouth is using e–learning to enhance well–established elements of face–to–face course delivery. This blended learning approach aims to equip students with the transferable skills to deal with rapid technological change in the media and meet the needs of future employers.

As learners, journalism students need to have access to learning materials, resources and activities at any time and from any location. As members of the Web 2.0 generation they expect to have instant online communication with academic staff as well as their peers. They like to submit their assignments electronically and receive their marks and feedback the same way.

As trainee journalists, they have to adopt an interactive, non–linear approach to multimedia news gathering and output. They need to learn advanced online research techniques that will help them critically analyse and assess information quality in the “Google age”. They must acquire digital storytelling skills that incorporate text, images, audio, video and user–generated content.

Initially the Broadcast Journalism course used standard Moodle software features to introduce e–learning resources such as online timetables, reading lists, PowerPoint presentations, handouts and lecture notes to the university’s virtual learning environment. Links to external Web sources encouraged independent digital research, investigation and analysis.

Early e–learning activities included an online notice board, backed by e–mail alerts, which revolutionised course–wide communication. An online tutorial appointment system, assignment upload and feedback were quickly added.
Regular course surveys have monitored student attitudes to e-learning. They reveal that the most popular e-learning activities are the short interactive quizzes that allow the students to make multiple attempts at assessing basic factual knowledge. Some students have struggled with the “clunky” interface of the VLE, so a simple house style has been introduced to the Broadcast Journalism site and navigation revised more than once.

Additional popular e-learning activities have enhanced existing practical newsroom simulation exercises. An online contacts database and an online futures file help simulate the 24-hour digital media operation. Online forums are used to organise production teams and roles. Group-run blogs encourage critical reflection and “networked” journalism in a user-driven environment.

We intend to continue developing these e-learning resources and activities to help our students acquire digital skills and achieve a multimedia mindset. It is vital to monitor the rapid technological developments in the media so our learning and teaching practice continues to reflect the dynamic nature of news organisations and meets the industry’s recruitment needs.