‘Help me - I’m going to be a student’: Using electronic media to support and enhance early engagement with new students.

Steph Cosgrove & Alex di Savoia

Abstract
University College Falmouth (UCF) has developed successful student retention activities that reflect the need for institutions to engage with students prior to arrival on campus. Our institutional retention research recognises that students’ early departure is related to false expectations of institutional and course environments, subject material and, potentially, a lack of commitment to the institution itself. Students’ tendency to persist within HE can be mediated by the provision of opportunities for social and academic integration into specific environments both at wider institutional and course level from the earliest possible moment.

This paper discusses this in the context of an integrated menu of pre-entry initiatives including a pre-entry forum and student focused website, online and print student handbooks and a peer-to-peer student ‘buddying’ system. The emphasis of these initiatives is on timely, realistic, student-centred information, from recruitment stage. More specifically, it assesses the impact of the web-based pre-entry chat-room/forum (www.falmouth.ac.uk/helpme) designed to bring students and staff together before the start of study. Evaluation of these initiatives reflects on the significantly lower incidence of UCF student early departure since the launch of the forum in 2002, both between acceptance of offer and subsequent registration and also during the 1st semester of the first year of study. Early contact helps new students feel connected to academic and social environments, and encourages realistic expectations of the host institution, whilst online platforms break down geographical, social and cultural boundaries.

This paper forms part of a wider study into the undergraduate student persistence process. For a full copy of this research to date please contact steph.cosgrove@falmouth.ac.uk
Introduction
The student persistence process is situated in individual sociological and psychological spheres and levels of the institutional environment. Whilst the nature of art and design education appears to give rise to withdrawal patterns that differ from more traditional subjects, i.e. students are less likely to cite 'wrong course' as a reason for departure, (Yorke, 2002) this has been given relatively little attention in the literature, an important gap to address in the current research field.

Two themes are apparent in existing research. First, a focus on student withdrawal; potentially inspiring blame and negativity for both institutions and individual students. A more positive focus on persistence has led this research towards an investigation of student experiences rather than merely the outcome of withdrawal, (e.g. Yorke, 2004). Student withdrawal is a symptom of wider issues within HE and (potentially) within the schools/colleges that students previously attend. In the context of lifelong learning it is more productive to concentrate on enhancing all students progression and achievement. Second, in the context of HE growth and diversification, existing research reflects a reciprocal interest in student retention; a deficit model which focuses on 'non-traditional' students; (in the UK; a Widening Participation context; in the USA; through status as minorities) and their differences from 'authentic' students (Bowl, 2003); typically coming from student groups who have not traditionally entered HE (e.g. mature, low socio-economic groups, ethnic minorities). The perception of admitting non-traditional students is of risk; they are commonly aggregated into a discourse of being 'at risk' (i.e. at risk of withdrawal) (Yorke & Longden, 2004; Thomas et al, 2003; McGiverney, 2003; Johnston, 1997, Select Committee on Education & Employment. 2001). However, these students do persist.

This paper forms part of a wider study into the persistence of all students, and aims to explore what forces; individually and institutionally; internally and externally, interact to influence students' decisions. Our research suggests the importance students place on 'people' (both students and staff) in encouraging persistence decisions throughout the first year of study, but particularly in the first few weeks when links to the institution are weakest. The use of electronic media provides a platform to build relationships with new students prior to their physical arrival on campus, and thus eases and extends the difficult transition process.

The reasons for student departure – a counter intuitive stance
A national UK survey by Yorke and Longden (2008, p.22) has suggested the common reasons for undergraduate student withdrawal (in order of frequency) involve:
- Poor quality learning experience
- Not coping with academic demand
- Wrong choice of field of study
- Unhappy with location and environment
- Dissatisfied with institutional resourcing
- Problems with finance and employment
- Problems with social integration

A similar report by the NAO (2008) mirrors this although it includes additional factors such as 'personal reasons' (e.g. homesickness, illness) and leaving to 'take up a more attractive opportunity' (e.g. career goals met without completion) (NAO, 2008, p.46). It would be an oversimplification to presume that persisting students had never encountered these issues (or opportunities). However, in the context of non-traditional students, Christie et al's (2004) comparative study of persistsers and non-persisters critiques the assumption that students who withdraw have a different experience than those who persist, particularly that all non-traditional students are disadvantaged 'victims'. This ignores the internal attributes and coping strategies all students use (Christie et al, 2004, p.620). How can institutions enhance or encourage these strategies?

Mackie (2001) identifies 4 categories of factors as 'enabling' or 'constraining' individual students, modelled on Tinto's (1993) theory of academic and social integration. However, she considers the complex nature of individual students' decision-making processes (Mackie, 2001, p.267-8):

- **Social** (e.g. meeting people, integrating and participating in university life)
- **ORGANISATIONAL** (e.g. coping with course content, supportive perceptions of the institution)
- **EXTERNAL** (e.g. finance, accommodation, family)
- **INDIVIDUAL** (e.g. motivation, commitment, home-sickness, goals)

The framework above also reflects Yorke and Longden’s (2008) suggestions as to why students withdraw; it acknowledges the importance of student fit; feeling part of the social landscape of the institution, and being able to cope academically. Early and interactive engagement with students using a web based platform can address and encourage students positive perceptions in the ‘social’ and ‘organisational’ spheres, thereby encouraging and ‘enabling’ persistence decisions.

**Using the Tinto model**

Tinto (1993) is regarded as seminal in the field of student retention, in that interactions between students and their peers and tutors are of crucial importance in the persistence process (Nagel, 2008). In 2002 University College Falmouth’s (UCF) launched a student HelpMe Forum to encourage students perceptions of connection and commitment to the institutional. New projects include an online International Student Handbook and an ephema-based HelpMe website. However, in relation to Tinto’s (1993) theory of dual commitments to the goal of graduation (instrumental motivation) and to the institution (integrative motivation): it may be that different factors encourage persistence in different ways at different times during the student lifecycle. Early socialisation can mitigate early withdrawal, but this may also influence later decisions through students’ perceptions of the costs and benefits of remaining in college, the ties made to the student peer group and commitment to the institution.

**Socialisation and managing early expectations through the web**

Our institutional findings suggest that students who depart early in the first semester tend to cite social problems and/or a mismatch between expectation and reality as ‘major’ factors in their decision, whilst those who leave later in the year tend to cite more academic reasons or dissatisfaction with elements of the course/institution itself.

‘I liked the course but just felt lost in the crowd’

‘I was sold on the idea and it didn’t live up to it. Where is the place I thought would be here?’

This implies that there are factors (e.g. transitional support, pre-entry information) that we can target and control. Our pre-entry web forum (www.falmouth.ac.uk/helpme) was set up in 2002 to engender a sense of connection and belonging to the institution and to explicitly encourage student socialisation and manage expectations prior to physical arrival on campus\(^1\). Student feedback is continually very positive.

It’s fantastic to know that so many others are in the same boat and I’m happy now I know people who are going to be doing the same course or just living nearby. I feel a lot less apprehensive since coming on this forum and much more excited’

‘I’m so happy this forum exists I’ve spent the last 2 days like stuck to it!!!!’

‘I’ve been chatting to my other friends who are off to uni and they all wish something similar had been set up at their unis. They’re well nervous about heading off without knowing or having spoken to anyone’

‘People on these forums have been very charitable and friendly toward one another’

Whilst we also recognise the proliferation of external social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace, the forum provides a safe and managed platform in which students can engage and interact with the institution in a more informal manner, providing a source of ‘hot’ knowledge that balances the

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\(^1\) The pre-entry forum is open access and can be viewed by applicants and external parties at www.falmouth.ac.uk/helpme
‘cold’ information usually provided by institutional promotional material (Archer 2001). However, interestingly, the majority of the posts on the forum do reflect social factors; students trying to make friends and engage with their future peers, rather than explicit questions about the academic nature of their courses. It also appears that this early socialisation has had a positive impact on retention figures, (Fig. 1, p.4) with significantly fewer students withdrawing in the early part of the first semester. Building this early connection with students has extended the induction period to acceptance of offer (around April prior to October enrolment) and appears to have heightened students’ early commitment and feeling of connection to the institution.

**Figure 1: Student departure by month of study**

![Student departure by month of study](image)

**The potential impact of early socialisation**

Universities have the power to act as ‘intermediary agents’ to allow individuals to gain capital resources in the context of wider social equality and class mobility (Bourdieu in Berger, 2000, p.101). However, the widespread acceptance of Tinto’s Student Integration Model of Departure (1993) and students’ social and academic integration, may tacitly promote a philosophy that universities do not have a responsibility to change. The student is expected to integrate and adapt into pre-existing structures (e.g. Kuh and Love, 2000). Tinto’s (1993) model is dependent on students’ separation from the home community in order to be integrated into static, pre-existing, institutional social and academic spheres.

Thomas et al (2004) propose a lack of capital reserves makes it harder for non-traditional students to assimilate and integrate into these spheres. Similarly, Berger (2000) proposes from the wide sociological perspective that ‘students who do successfully integrate from a social reproduction perspective do not do so at the expense of their home backgrounds (e.g. Tinto, 1993) but because of them’, that the university environment is itself part of some students existing culture (Berger, 2000, p.109). Pre-entry and interactive contact through the web forum can provide the capital that some students may need, and encourage the development of relationships with staff. Indeed, research by Parmar (2004) suggests that students who persist are more likely to look to the institution for help in overcoming problems, surely more likely if the student has already developed a trusting relationship.
with staff and has a positive (and realistic) perception of the support the institution can offer. Single institutional research at a London university by McCaffery (at Hands et al, 2008) suggests that contact with one or more trusted individuals within the institution is important to students’ feelings of connection.

Also, early contact with faculty can encourage enhanced academic motivation, in terms of tutor/student relationship increasing students (albeit extrinsic) affiliative drive (Dörnyei, 1994 p.278-279). Individual students are situated within a single cohort and are subject to similar experiences, whilst Elton (1996) proposes the role of collective motivation amongst peers is relatively ignored in the literature. Dörnyei (1994) proposes student peers form a community who possess group-specific motivational components; shared goals, norm and reward systems (Dörnyei, 1994, p.278). We frame ‘peer’ alongside ‘tutor’ as part of a course specific community, a modification of Tinto’s (1993) ‘social’ and ‘academic’ dichotomy, suggesting a single cohort as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2001). For some, this peer community may promote persistence; Sommer and Baumeister (2002) found that perceived rejection increased motivation to succeed amongst students with high self-esteem, whilst those with low self-esteem tended towards learned helplessness. This suggests that for some (with high self-esteem), integration into the course community may be less important in the persistence process, but that for others (with low self esteem and no feeling of inclusion) it may be a mediating factor. Lave and Wenger (2001) discuss the idea that self-identity and motivation are generated as newcomers move towards full participation (Lave & Wenger, 2001, p.111), again suggesting a temporal student experience, and the use of the forum as a pre-entry ‘community’ in its own right, extends this period significantly.

**Peer-Group Interactions**

One-to-one personal attention is a critical factor in retaining ‘at risk’ (i.e. non-traditional) students, however, in terms of both psychological and sociological models, it is important also to engender a sense of belonging and connection in all incoming students, faced with the ‘sheer anonymity’ of the new institution (Moxley et al, 2001). Is there a role for technology in creating Institutional Commitment? UCF pioneered an approach that blends a one-to-one model with the same technology which has made Web 2.0 developments, specifically web forum technology and blogging, possible and widely accessible. The blended approach launched by UCF addresses both pre and post retention issues and provides the opportunity to identify ‘at risk’ students before they arrive on campus.

The forum is integrated with the use of student mentors (second year students from each course) who act as a direct point of contact for students on a course-specific basis. Students can contact each other, Mentors, Academics, Non-Administrative Staff and UCF Service departments. Students’ use of the HelpMe Forum continues long after they have commenced their programmes of study. It is a convenient method for them to keep in touch with fellow course mates, discuss projects and/or problems, enable peer to peer learning and communicate with students from other courses for collaborate projects and to plan social activities. The forum also enables a feeling of ‘belonging’ and a ‘connection’ with UCF campuses before incoming students arrive on campus.

The Forum offers a safe, secure, fun, educational, and interactive environment in which prospective students and current students can learn more about their peers, share interests, build relationships, form study groups, communicate with mentors and develop for further uses. It assists in allowing students to develop their identities and find their “fit” within the college community. The Forum draws people together, opening the door to deeper engagement within the college’s community, and improves student retention. This has served to support a ‘recruit to retain’ environment as well as facilitating communication across a wide variety of backgrounds. Developing the forum into a full social networking platform involving alumni will serve to deepen a member’s experience.

Our research investigated the role of ‘people’ in the persistence process, finding the students attached greater importance to the friends they had made during the first year of study. This reflects a national UK survey by Yorke and Longden (2007) in that ‘new friends’ was the most frequently cited ‘best aspect’ of the 1st year experience, followed by teaching (i.e. course) related experiences. These mirror Tinto’s (1993) concepts of social and academic domains. A feeling of belonging within the student (institutional or course) peer group is important for persistence, but this also suggests that students
need to engage with tutors (as ‘people’) as a representation of the course environment. This may also refer to students' perceptions of ‘value for money’ as mediated by the level of staff engagement with them (Yorke & London, 2008a, p.50); an economic cost analysis decision (e.g. Leppel, 2001). A survey by the higher education strategy firm EducationDynamic conducted a student retention survey (June 2008). Findings suggested students perceived phone calls and personal engagement as most positive, followed by social networking and e-mail. Since the launch of the Helpme Forum UCF has retained a markedly higher number of students: (Fig. 1, p.4). Within the overall scope of the UCF retention model, the specific use of Web 2.0 technology and web developments has proven successful in the support of at risk students. This approach allows current students to be spokespeople for their course and for the college. One key result has been a perception of transparency between UCF and incoming students – as well as prospective students. This is an important element for any institution of higher education with a ‘recruit to retain’ policy.

Student mentors, ambassadors and teaching assistants, Educational Development Lecturers, the Web Content Manager, the Education Liaison Officer, the International Office Manager, the Schools Project Co-ordinator and the Learning & Teaching Department work in conjunction to ensure the Forum’s continued success and to ensure it remains a safe and vital environment in supporting students’ needs. However a wide spread of non-academic departments also has a heavy engagement level with the HelpMe Forum: The Diversity Office, the Chaplaincy, Bursaries, Student Services (Counselling, Accessibility, Academic Skills, Accommodation, etc). Each department regularly contribute posts and/or respond to applicable student posts. The non-academic departments have a pro-active approach; understanding that many students may be too shy or embarrassed to raise certain personal and/or academic issues of their own accord. This encourages student perceptions of the institution as being supportive and interested in their welfare, even before they arrive. This approach has been a contributing factor to the success of the Forum.

Can technology play a role in enhancing institutional commitment?

What’s the right forum format?

Any online platform that addresses persistence needs to comply with WC3 Web Accessibility guidelines, details which can be found at: http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG20/glance/. There are a handful of solutions that are WC3 complaint (phpBB (www.phpbb.com) for Open Source websites). Other forum solutions will have to be made WC3 complaint using internal staff.

Web accessibility means that people with differing physical abilities can use the Web. More specifically, web accessibility means that people with differing physical abilities can perceive, understand, navigate and interact with the Web. They can also contribute to the Web. Web accessibility also benefits others, including older people with changing abilities due to aging.

Forum launch process

- Identify institutional needs for forum and source a forum option
- Identify staff forum team
- Assign roles and responsibilities for staff forum team and communication structure
- Building of forum commences: Identify necessary message boards within forum; then create them
- Recruit student forum team
- Train student forum team
- Test forum
- Forum goes online
- Get the word out amongst in-coming students (UCF uses a combined methodology including one to one phone calls, emails and SMS Text Messaging).
**Forum membership**

Similar to a social networking platform, Forum members create a profile. There is a login process to keep the information private, and the member can select what information to share and what information to be kept private. Based on how this data matches to the system, options are given for publishing and communicating with others. Members can add personal touches such as creating and uploading a personal avatar.

Upgrading the Forum to a social networking platform will allow members to publish photo/video/image galleries, along with a ‘status’ feature, keeping friends up-to-speed on what members are doing at that moment. Friends are invited to join a member’s network, and the system constantly aggregates their status and info. Personalisation settings will allow members’ information can be exchanged with all, only those on the system or only those in a member’s network. The goal of these networks it to keep other members informed, entertained and above all – connected. Each network will be moderated by members of staff and Mentors.

As students graduate, their status changes to Alumni, thus encouraging their involvement with the Forum. This allows a connection to the college to remain as well as provide networking capabilities amongst graduates as well as students and graduates. This ongoing relationship with graduates also further deepens the peer to peer learning process via ‘real world’ experience dissemination.

**Conclusion**

Social networking offers institutions a new means to engage with their students both prior to entry and throughout the student lifecycle. It offers a means by which the campus community is re-defined in a virtual space. Integration is enhanced, without the constraints of physical or geographical boundaries. Our research shows that students’ persistence is promoted by feelings of connection and belonging and using new technology provides the means to economically and quickly respond to a large and diverse population of students’ practical and psychological needs, particularly in terms of overcoming the challenges faced by our own rural context.
Appendix 1: TINTO’S MODEL: A CONCEPTUAL SCHEMA FOR DROPOUT FROM COLLEGE (Tinto, 1975)
Appendix 2: Peer Group Interactions: Key peer stakeholders within the HelpMe Forum

Student mentors
In relation to the duties involving the HelpMe Forum, Student Mentors:

- Ensure the forum is a safe, engaging, and supportive environment
- Develop a direct relationship with their mentees prior to their arrival at the university; actively fostering a sense that the mentor-Mentee relationship is well established before in-coming students arrive on campus
- Regularly ensure students post and communicate on the Forum.
- Direct students to the services they need for academic or personal needs
- Encourage the use of the forum for social purposes and to disseminate course information
- Monitor and moderate language and posting, intervening through the use of private Messaging if this is required

Course Ambassadors & Teaching/Course Assistants
Alongside Mentors, these two groups of students offer additional support by providing course information from a different perspective. These two groups also assist in the peer-to-peer element of the Forum.

Students in general
The Forum allows in-coming students to meet and chat with fellow course mates prior to arrival on campus. The Forum allows them to:

- Discuss the aspects of the course that appeals to them – and why they are passionate about that subject
- Share personal projects to-date
- Discuss ideas centred around their subject of study
- Plan social gatherings once on campus
- Find roommates for living accommodation
- Get to know each other prior to arrival and strike up friendships
- Discuss summer project assignments and support one another
- Discuss specific needs they might have and/or identify other course mates and students from non-traditional backgrounds. These discussions can be centred upon: faith, physical abilities, dyslexia, race, demographic, economic, age, orientation, etc. These connections provide psychological comfort - “I won’t be alone” – that is important in a rural and geographically isolated region such as Cornwall with a large homogenous population.
- Course Ambassadors also provide student blogs.

At risk students
At risk students are actively encouraged by Mentors and the Educational development Lecturers (EDLs) to post to the forum if:

- They have course-related concerns and are shy, lack confidence or are not prepared to discuss these concerns face to face – initially soliciting feedback from fellow course mates to see if others are also experiencing difficulties, problems or issues
- They are experiencing feelings of isolation either within their course, in their halls of residence/lodgings. This allows them to connect with others who share the same interest but are otherwise on a different course (reducing the likelihood they would meet other than through initially chatting on the Forum).
- There are physical, emotional or psychological barriers to their sense of belonging.
Appendix 3: Faculty Interactions: Key staff stakeholder roles within the HelpMe Forum

Academic Staff
By answering queries and providing more information about courses, Course Leaders and lecturers allay in-coming students’ academic fears. Academic involvement within the Forum also fosters a sense of goodwill, concern about students’ welfare and expresses an interest in students’ success before in-coming students reach campus. On a sub conscience level, students feel an additional sense of inclusion and belonging to the university and the campus through this interaction. There is a sense of ‘my course leader and the lecturer’ will know who I am’.

Educational Development Lecturers (EDLs)
EDLs are senior moderators for the Forum. They provide academic support to students and management support for the Student mentors on the Helpme Forum. If mentors encounter questions, posts or content they are uncertain about within the Helpme Forum, the EDLs are amongst their first port of call for clarification, moderation or intervention.

The EDLs check the Forum on a regular basis to ensure that all in-coming student queries have been answered, that all posts are complaint with UCF Forum posting guidelines and disseminate information and/or announcements Forum wide. EDLs also train Mentors regarding their duties pertaining to the Forum and are part of the team which coordinates and oversees student blogs from Course Ambassadors and Mentors.

Web Content Manager (WCM)
The WCM oversees the back-end functioning of the Forum as well as developing the existing Forum into a fully-fledged social networking platform.

The WCM also provides additional management support for the Student mentors on the Helpme Forum alongside the EDLs. The WCM checks the Forum on a regular basis to ensure that all in-coming student queries have been answered, that all posts are complaint with UCF Forum posting guidelines and disseminate information and/or announcements Forum wide. EDLs also train Mentors regarding their duties pertaining to the Forum and is part of the team which coordinates and oversees student blogs from Course Ambassadors and Mentors.

Education Liaison Officer (ELO)
The ELO coordinates the activities of the Course Ambassadors with regards to the use of the Forum as part of their overall duties. The ELO also coordinates all student blogs.

International Office Manager (IOM)
The IOM encourages in-coming International students to engage with the Forum and coordinates student blogs from International students. The IOM regularly checks the Forum to ensure that all queries from international students are answered and/or correctly pointed to university services and staff who can answer queries which are raised within the forum.

Schools Project Co-ordinator (SPC)
As the scope of the Forum is broadened in the coming academic year, there will be a new forum category specifically created for secondary school students thinking about higher education. The SPC will raise the awareness of the Forum within this population during school visits.

As this new forum will involve the participation of minors, policies and procedures (e.g. CRB checks for all staff, Moderators and Course Ambassadors given access to this sub-Forum, special terms and conditions of use, etc) are being written to ensure the safety of this vulnerable group.

Additional Non-Academic Departments
A wide spread of non-academic departments also has a heavy engagement level with the HelpMe Forum: The Diversity Office, the Chaplaincy, Bursaries, Student Services (Counselling, Accessibility, Academic Skills, Accommodation, etc). Each department regularly contribute posts and/or respond to applicable student posts. The non-academic departments have a pro-active approach; understanding that many students may be too shy or embarrassed to raise certain personal and/or academic issues of their own accord. This approach has been a contributing factor to the success of the Forum.

**Learning & Teaching Department (L&T)**

L&T have a critical input into the peer-to-peer aspects of the Forum. L&T will be a key member of a steering group to integrate aspects of the Forum into the wider long distance learning strategy of the college.
**Appendix 4: Excerpts from the HelpMe Forum Mentor training guidance notes**

**Example: Message Boards on the UCF HelpMe Forum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Last Post</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcements</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>06 Jun 2000 at 9:26am by User 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Chat Chat (2 Viewing)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>Today at 10:32am by User 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>StudentsUnion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Yesterday at 11:00pm by User 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help &amp; Support</strong></td>
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<td>Academic Support</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>09 Jul 2000 at 5:30pm by User 4</td>
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<td>Accommodation Services</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Yesterday at 11:47pm by User 5</td>
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<td>International Office</td>
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<td>Yesterday at 11:57pm by User 6</td>
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<td>Library Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 Jun 2000 at 9:01am by User 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25 Jul 2000 at 7:08pm by User 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Matters</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25 Jul 2000 at 1:22pm by User 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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## Message Boards on the UCF HelpMe Forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility Issues</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20 Jul 2009 at 4:26pm by xxHarryxx</td>
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<td><strong>Diversity</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15 Jul 2009 at 11:28pm by Samuel</td>
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<td><strong>The Chaplaincy Service</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foundation</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28 Jul 2009 at 2:13pm by jynnejasen</td>
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<th>Posts</th>
<th>Last Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24 Jul 2009 at 6:17pm by Seaside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illustration BA(Hons)</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>25 Jul 2009 at 9:29pm by annymaxi</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marine &amp; Natural History Photography BA(Hons)</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29 Jul 2009 at 2:30pm by canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photography BA(Hons)</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>Today at 11:06am by rabbit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Press Photography BA(Hons)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>25 Jul 2009 at 8:46pm by amritjoneri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>20th Century Art &amp; Design: Histories &amp; Theories PaDip/MA</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 Jul 2009 at 2:39pm by Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contemporary Visual Arts MA</strong></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>10 Jul 2009 at 2:39pm by Samuel</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Curatorial Practice MA</strong></td>
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<td>10 Jul 2009 at 2:39pm by Samuel</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Illustration: Authorial Practice MA</strong></td>
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<td>10 Jul 2009 at 2:39pm by Samuel</td>
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<td><strong>Photography MA</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Professional Photography MA</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Assigning member levels

### Forum Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preference</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Show my Email Address</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hide your email address if you want it to be kept private from other users.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notify me of replies to posts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sends an email when someone replies to a topic you have posted in. This can be changed whenever you make a post.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notify me by email when I receive a Private Message</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable the WYSIWYG post editor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only browsers that are detected as being Rich Text Enabled will have this feature available when posting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatically log me in when I return to the Forum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time offset from forum time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present server date and time: 28 Jul 2006 at 11:14 am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Format</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Admin and Moderator Functions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>User is active</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suspend User</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group**

- Newbie - Ladder Group - Min. Posts 0
- Administrator - Non-Ladder Group
- Guest Group - Non-Ladder Group
- Student Mentor - Non-Ladder Group

**Member Title**

- Administrator - Non-Ladder Group
- Guest Group - Non-Ladder Group
- Student Mentor - Non-Ladder Group

**Number of posts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Admin/Moderator Notes</th>
<th>Group(s) Ladder Group - Min. Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These are notes left by Admin and Moderators, about this member, such as any warnings the member has been given (max. 250 characters).</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groupecs - Ladder Group - Min. Posts 50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Member - Ladder Group - Min. Posts 100</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Member - Non-Ladder Group</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Member - Ladder Group - Min. Posts 500</td>
<td>000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' Union - Non-Ladder Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Student Mentor - Non-Ladder Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Assistant - Non-Ladder Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Delete this member?**

- Check this box to delete this member, this cannot be undone.
The following pages show screen grabs which form part of our Mentor's HelpMe Forum training programme

how to create your user account

Help Me - University College Falmouth

2 June 2008 - As forewarned, the forum has now undergone its annual clean in preparation for the summer and the index of new students. All topics and posts have been backed-up and deleted from the site.

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Click ‘Register’
It’s usual best to use your real name as your Username (e.g., not funhobbit)

Use the personal settings that you’re comfortable with. Remember, this is a public forum, accessible from outside UCF, so you may not want the whole world to know what your email address is.

Note: The ‘Notify’ options should be set to ‘Yes’—this will let you know immediately when someone has responded to one of your posts or has sent you a Private Message.
how to create your first post

Help Me - University College Falmouth

2 June 2008 - As forewarned, the forum has now undergone its annual clean in preparation for new students. All topics and posts have been backed-up and deleted from the site.

Find your course’s forum from the list of forums on the HelpMe home page.

To start a new post, select the ‘New Topic’ button

Spot these? These are additional ways to surf to other forums within HelpMe
Help Me - University College Falmouth

2 June 2008 - As forewarned, the forum has now undergone its annual clean in preparation for the summer and students. All topics and posts have been backed-up and deleted from the site.

‘Normal Topic’ is the default setting. 9 times out of 10, this is all you will need.

Sticky Topic is only used for an important topic – like announcing a policy.

Announcements should be used sparingly, if at all. These are course-related announcements (e.g. announcing a change in Assessment dates or cancellation of a tutorial)

These are ticked by default, should ALWAYS be ticked.
Message icons are available – and are pretty much down to personal choice.
Post New Topic

Type your Subject & Message as normal.

You can either preview your post to proof check it (a great thing to do!) by selecting the 'Preview Post' button on the bottom of the screen or you can just publish it straight away with the 'Post New Topic' button.

If you change your mind about posting – or made a complete hash of things – you can always use the ‘Clear Forum’ button. This will wipe the current post you’re working on.
how to respond to students’ posts: a snap shot

Historically, students understand HelpMe and how to use it responsibly. There will be occasional instances, however, where you will need to either comment on a post, edit a post or delete a post (remember, Steph and Alex are on hand to offer guidance before you do anything). Below are Best Practice guidelines.

1. Comment on, edit and delete posts with sensitivity.

2. Send a PM to the user to let them know why you have edited or deleted their posts.

3. Be aware of the language you use. You know what you have in mind but read it from the user’s point of view. Could what you write be conveyed as aggressive or sarcastic or condescending?

4. Humour is always a great added element but can be tricky. People’s sense of humour can be vastly different.

5. Try to resist the temptation to get drawn into a fight.

6. For the most part, posts will usually only have to be edited. Some posts, however, will need to be deleted. The Forum Administrators are on hand to give you guidance about the best action to take.
how to deal with negative posts

1. Know they are out there and keep tracking

   Part of being able to respond to negative posts is obviously knowing about them in the first place so keep track on all the posts and comments in your course forum.

2. Respond directly by using Comment

   All posts have the comment feature enabled so you get a chance to 'make your case'. Do not use this section to insult the user or simply say they are talking rubbish and/or are stupid because that will only make you look worse and might mean more negative posts are on their way. Instead try and help the person in any way (if they are having a problem with a course / lecturer or tutor / support service) or at least try to deal with their issue the way you would if it was sent directly to you.

   Doing this in an open manner shows you care about what it is you are doing and are willing to stand behind what it is you are doing / offering. If a mistake has been made, the Educational Development Officers / Course Leader / Support Service will admit it and make clear the steps being taken to rectify the situation. As a Mentor, you will only need to cite that a message will be imminent from the EDLs / Course Leader / Support Service. Please ask Steph Cosgrove or Alex di Savoia if you have any questions about this.

3. Notify the forum administrators immediately if you’re unsure

   UCF is a large institution that offers a wide range of student support services. So you may well see a lot of people using posts to talk about their issues. If an issue is something you haven’t seen before, and bring it to the attention of the Forum Administrators straight away. And let the student know that Forum Administrators have been notified and will be in touch soon.

   This is generally a good practice anyway, whether it’s someone who has posted negatively or contacted you directly about an issue they have. It will save future issues and might prevent future negative posts being created.
how to deal with negative posts, continued

4. Thank the student poster

Before you think we’re crazy and skip this page, keep reading. The main positive about being professional and open (yes, even when someone has insulted “yo momma”) is that there’s always the chance they can go on to write something positive just as easily as it was for them to write something negative.

Jumping into legal threats or anything of that nature can just help make things a million times worse. Being professional about the situation, getting in touch with the student poster to let them know you are working on what they are talking about, solutions for what they are talking about or even just thanking them for having an opinion can really come back to your benefit.

Doing all of this shows that you — and the College — are listening
References

- McGIVNEY, V. (2003) Staying or Leaving the Course, Leicester, NIACE


