

Learning & Teaching Conference 2010

Abstract 4C

Molecules of Life: Supporting student learning in the transition to a second year Biochemistry course

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As part of the 'A Journey to Innovation' event in June 2009, we developed support material on Moodle to enhance the learning experience of approx 330 students in a Level-2 course (Molecules of Life). These students had moved from a highly structured first year with intensive staff support, to a more academically challenging year where the students have to develop a more independent approach to study. We decided to use a blended learning approach in that we wanted to involve online teaching combined with face to face teaching in order to offer individual attention to a large group of students. This is a second year Biochemistry course forming the basis of a number of Honours courses. The lectures, labs and tutorials were essentially unchanged from previous years of this course, but the online support was completely revised.

How the use of technology can enhance students' experience of transitions

The appearance and layout of this Moodle course was changed to give the course a strong visual identity, and to improve navigation. All students were assigned to tutorial groups and were provided with forums for each group to allow the students to communicate and participate in group work.

Enquiry-based Learning (EBL). The tutorial material was not covered in lectures in advance but was issued online. Students were encouraged to work with their peers through EBL. Each group of students also uses the group forum to collate source material and design a poster. This is uploaded electronically then presented to their peers.

Feedback and assessment. The traditional postlab lecture was replaced by a lesson that students can access at any time after the lab, to test their understanding of the material. This can also be used by students who miss the lab.

The student perception of the look and feel of the Moodle course and the support offered in this course was assessed by anonymous questionnaire and by focus groups. Staff were also asked for feedback on student participation and performance.