Basic information

Name of staff member  
Dr Linda Perriton

Module title  
Understanding Arguments in Management

Department  
The York Management School

Student level / numbers  
Undergraduate Year 1 / 197

Year that activity occurred  
2010/11 and 2011/12

Case study title
Developing core academic skills for large cohorts via continuous assessment and feedback

Aims and objectives
The module is a foundation module and aims to develop key academic writing skills (such as assessing information, incorporating academic sources and constructing arguments appropriately) for a very large first year cohort. This module differs notably from other modules within The York Management School in that the topics discussed cut across all of the different subject areas in Management (drawn from the world of accounting and finance, marketing, human resources, business history and sometimes more than one subject area at once).

Another critical aspect of this module was the requirement that students read to deadline and also submit their formative essays to deadline.

Outline / overview
In the Autumn Term students are required to submit three seminar papers on a continuous assessment basis with each seminar paper based on a different text. Writing tutors assigned to subsets of the student cohort return feedback indicating to students the level of achievement against five elements of essay writing within 10 days. All three papers had a final grade assigned to them before Week 1 of Spring Term. The Autumn Term papers contributed 30% of the overall module mark.

In Spring Term three further seminar papers are required, again on a continuous assessment basis with feedback provided within 10 days. All three papers had a final grade assigned to them by Week 1 of Summer Term. For this term the three seminar papers were based on the same text but covering a different aspect of the topic. The Spring Term papers contributed 50% to the overall module mark.

In Summer Term there was a closed exam. The closed exam contributed 20% to the overall mark.

Methodology
Having such a large cohort presented a number of logistical problems for this module. The VLE tools notably used to help facilitate student and staff activity (and the reason for using them) were as follows:

- **Groups.** The group tools were used to divide the cohort up into groups of between roughly 6 and 12 students. There were 22 groups in total, each assigned a different tutor.
The cohort were divided up and put into VLE groups. This was to make life easier for the tutors looking after the group and to enable the ability to selectively release tools/content to the students based on their group membership.

- **Standard Submission Points.** Each group had a submission point set up per assignment. The standard submission point creates a column in the Grade Center that allows tutors to harvest work electronically submitted by students. There’s no need for students to hand in their work in paper form.

Setting up one submission point per assignment, per group was designed to make it easier for tutors to access the submissions pertaining only to their students.

For the Autumn term a ‘late’ submission point was also inserted per assignment so tutors would easily know whether a submission had been made after the deadline. Both the initial and late submission points had an additional date/time adaptive release rule set for them to facilitate the initial point disappearing and the late one being made available as the deadline time was reached.

- **Grade Center.** The Grade Centre allowed tutors to harvest their students work and also to keep track of marks and marking process.

Use of the Grade Center’s Smart Views also allowed for the tutor view of the Grade Center to be much simplified than what it might have been. Smart Views allow Grade Center view customisation. For Arguments in Management this meant reducing the students visible in the Grade Center to only those the tutor was looking after and the number of assignment columns visible to only those relevant to the tutor’s group.

- **Adaptive Release.** Provided selective release of tools and content.

The main reason that each submission point inserted in to the module was released to a specific group was to prevent students having to search through a large number of submission points for the one they need to submit to and to prevent them accidentally submitting their work to a submission point targeted at another tutor. There were such a volume of submission points in the module that this would have been a major concern.

- **Journal.** The Journal provided a conduit for feedback.

Again, because of the sheer volume of submission points, the My Grades tool (which exposes feedback entered directly into the Grade Center) was felt likely to be very confusing for students. By the end of the Autumn term, for example, a student would need to look through at least 3x22 submission points in order to find their feedback for one assignment.

The Journal tool was picked as, from a tutor point of view, it provides a single point access to all their group’s students for uploading/entering feedback for all submitted assignments.

Similarly, from a student point of view it is a private conduit for communication with their tutor and a single point for them to receive all their feedback.

Before the module started both tutors and students went through orientation/induction training.

The students had the VLE site demonstrated to them in a large plenary session so that they would understand how to access it, what to expect from it and also what would be expected of them within its framework.

The tutors on the module attended a similar session where a member of the E-Learning Development Team took them through accessing/navigating the site, using the Grade Center and using the Journal tool.

As the module ran the E-Learning Development Team offered continued support to tutors and staff on the module.
Reflections

The module design does require a significant amount of set-up work before term (batch allocation of groups, adaptive release of submission points, journal outlets). However as the module has developed over the past two years staff have worked to simplify the site and the interface. The main issue for the module co-ordinators is whether or not to continue with the use of Grade Center or to switch to the anonymous assessment tool, with feedback returned to the whole group via students identifying their own exam number to read the relevant feedback. Varying levels of writing tutor competence with updating Grade Center means it is an unreliable indicator of progress with initial marking, feedback and interaction with students.

Transferable lessons learned

Large numbers of submission points require a systematic approach to set up but, once established, are an effective way of distributing marking amongst a large tutor group and allow for different groups to have differentiated hand in times/days. Journals are an effective way of communicating with individual named students, but where essays need to be anonymous at all stages of feedback and marking they are problematic and group email is more straightforward.

Keywords

Learning and teaching keywords

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Tools and technology keywords

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Projects keywords

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Other keywords (comma separated):

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