



Re-imagining our curriculum
Consolidating the First Year Experience

Prototype Project Updates:

January 2016

General Details	
Project Title	Virtual Learning Community & Environment.
Name of Main Applicant	Jennifer Byrne
Position Held	Lecturer, First Year Tutor. Furniture & Joinery Manufacture Strand Tutor 2 nd & 3 rd Year.
College	Dept. of Construction Skills, Dublin School of Architecture, DIT.
Tel. Number	Work 01 4022909
Email	Jennifer.byrne@dit.ie
Names of any co-applicants (& colleges they are based in):	None
Signed	Jennifer Byrne
Date	22/01/2016
TU4D Theme (Please tick)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Induction/early orientation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> First 5,6 or 7 weeks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Peer mentoring <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment and feedback <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Attributes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students as autonomous self-directed learners <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Learning spaces – virtual & physical <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative Curriculum models	
Summary of Prototype project (max 200 words)	To create a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), for first year entrants on the Timber Product Technology programme. Applied Geometry & Drawing (5Ects) is taught in a classroom environment. Jointing Techniques & Furniture 1 (10Ects) which deals with practical training of these students and is taught in a practical workshop. I created two websites to provide elearning backup for these two practical First Year modules. A purpose specific project like this can provide scaffolding for the students for future work while also trying to engage them in online learning, peer sharing and self directed learning. My aim was to involve the class more in their own learning by providing them with a VLE that was just for their class and directly related to their practical modules. The websites are designed for mobile technology so can be viewed on smart phones therefore students can access the websites during class times also. A number of different apps and tools were used to make the website more engaging. I found that the learning and sharing did continue outside the classroom walls. These first year students appeared to be more cohesive as a group and many embraced the use of new apps and mediums that they had previously not used.
Project dates	Semester 1 2015-2016 (14 th September- 7 th December)
Main proposed original project outputs for the TU4D (max 100 words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ To support the first year entrant's initial move into higher education. ◦ To introduce the students to a virtual classroom and elearning. ◦ To establish, build and reinforce a community within the programme. ◦ To introduce and familiarise the students with the technology utilised in VLE's. ◦ To integrate mobile learning into the teaching and learning

	<p>environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ To encourage and support the continuation of elearning outside the environs of the classroom. ◦ To set up peer sharing and peer learning.
<p>Project outputs including any evaluation data (max 300 words, data to be included in an appendix but can be summarised here)</p>	<p>1. Induction/orientation: Students were shown the website in their first class in week 1. They were shown how to navigate through the pages and some material on the website was shown to them such as past exam papers, material & reading lists and power point presentations. Students were invited to use Google hangouts and advised to forward student emails to their personal email account.</p> <p>2. First 5,6 or 7 weeks: Having been a first year tutor for many years I was familiar with typical queries asked so I used the home page of the website to provide information and links to DIT pages for timetables, exam details and students matters etc. I also provided a link to email their First Year rep. and I emailed weekly updates with general feedback on work etc. to encourage website interaction.</p> <p>4. Students as autonomous self-directed learners: Animated Power Point presentations were uploaded to the website at various stages along with images, videos, sample questions and solutions. Students were expected to practice these questions outside of class times. Coursework was also uploaded to the website.</p> <p>5. Peer mentors: Samples of previous students work was uploaded onto the websites so students were aware of quality and standards expected from them. I have found many benefits in the collaborative learning that takes place from students' peer sharing of their work. Sharing can continue outside the classroom walls.</p> <p>7. Learning Spaces: With the use of the website students were able to practice outside of the class times or view presentations during class at their own pace. As my website is designed for mobile use, material can be viewed on a large smart phone or tablet making mobile access very easy. Students often look up notes during practical classes. Learning was made more interesting by using mediums that many of these students may not be familiar with.</p>
<p>Lessons Learned (max 200 words)</p>	<p>I found that this cohort of students embraced the Virtual Learning Community and Environment very well. I set up "Google Hangouts" and contacted them on a couple of occasions in the earlier weeks of the semester, however they as a class set up "Whats App" in the 3rd week and kept this as a form of communication between them. I later switched to contacting the class rep who in turn sent my message through "Whats App".</p> <p>I was delighted to see this interaction between the students because on the DT169 programme these first years are separated into two groups for practical classes and they tend to make friends and stay within those two groups during first year and even into second year which puts a strain on the second year classes at the beginning of year 2.</p> <p>It was difficult maintaining two separate websites and I would</p>

	<p>prefer to have just the one First year website but as there is no guarantee that I would be teaching the same yearlong module for Sem 1 and Sem 2 I had to set up two accounts.</p> <p>Some of the first year students asked if they could join the Pinterest board that I use with the 2nd and 3rd years thus demonstrating that they want to be more involved with students from other years.</p>
<p>Next stage(max (max 200 words)</p>	<p>Evaluation was mostly done through observations in class as it was evident to see students using the websites during class while also asking about material that they had viewed in their own time.</p> <p>The website builder that I use is YOLA and YOLA have their own site traffic analytics so I could track on a regular basis how many students were using the sites and on what days.</p> <p>I found student feedback to be the most informative way of evaluating the prototype and have taken some comments on board to further improve this prototype. Example: The students commented that having examples of past project work was really beneficial as it gave them a good starting point on undertaking the written assignments.</p> <p>I will be showcasing some of my work to colleagues at the LTTC Showcase in May 2016.</p> <p>I will converse with other teaching staff on the programme to gauge the level of interest around VLE's and VLC's, with a view to further developing the idea of providing online support to these first year students as they move into higher education.</p> <p>I would hope to apply for funding on further developing this prototype, ideally I would like to have a website for the full three years but this would depend on timetabling and allocation of modules.</p>