

Case Study G: Using Standard Blackboard Features to Assess Students' Usage of the VLE

NUI Galway

Module discipline: Film Studies
Approximate module size: 25 Students
Level of module: 3rd year Undergraduate

Reasons for using analytics in the module

I decided to use data analytics in this module to assess how students themselves were using the platform, in particular whether they were accessing the readings provided there.

Data sources/modelling approach

I access statistics on Blackboard regarding the use students make of the resources available there, in particular the readings provided week to week. To do this I click on the Action Link (arrow pointing downward) next to a Content item (e.g. that week's reading), Select View Statistics Report, Click on the Action Link next to Content Usage Statistics and click Run. On the Run Reports page, I select the desired Format (I usually use the default format PDF), the Users, Start Date, and End Date. The report produced will indicate what students have downloaded the readings. If there are students not doing so (particularly over a long period) I will engage directly with them to enquire as to why.

Impact of using data

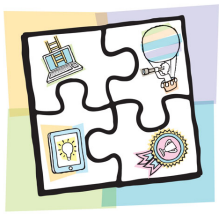
I found this process very helpful, particularly as it enabled me to identify students that were not engaging with the readings provided. I then followed up with the students to enquire why they had not accessed the readings. Sometimes there were technical reasons given and this gave me an opportunity to address these directly with the students. On other occasions, I found students were dealing with personal or extenuating circumstances and I was able to advice on supports available to help the student through so they could refocus on the module.

Gathering further data

I now integrate blogs through Blackboard into my module and ask all students to blog on the weekly reading before the relevant class. I have found this very helpful to encourage students to engage with the material but also to facilitate debate and discussion of relevant issues between students before class and after. It also gave another means of identifying students not engaging (by not blogging) and allowed me to intervene earlier than I might have to address issues that they may be having.

Advice for colleagues interested in using a data-enhanced approach

I would recommend exploring the features included in Blackboard – in particular those that allow you to track student use of the materials. To begin monitoring student engagement is as simple as ticking



the relevant box when uploading materials but it can make a big difference ultimately in understanding how students are engaging with your module. The blog feature is also very useful and worth exploring.