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December 2004

Online at <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/7080/>

MPRA Paper No. 7080, posted 9. February 2008 10:22 UTC

Management of Asynchronous Learning Networks: A case study of Graduate Students of Management using Unconventional Teaching Methods



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Now there are numerous free softwares available on the net (Manhattan Virtual Classroom), which can be used for teaching. There are also free services provided by web service providers such as Yahoo for such purposes. One such experience is using Yahoo for a course on Buyer Behaviour. It is a course for the Masters programme in Management. The web platforms such as Yahoo group provide all services in a single page. It also helps the teacher to address the heterogeneous students. This can either be used for total off campus course or for the on campus course. In case of on campus courses it actually substantiate the classroom teaching. In the present context it actually addresses the needs of students who attend the classes as well as the students who were not regular to the classes. It doubles the productivity of the teacher. For example, if a teacher is engaged in teaching for 30 hours the actual teaching happens for about 70 hours. The teaching in general is not just the lecture alone. The teaching includes lectures, tutorials, interactions, tests, assignments, exams, case studies and so on. In case of the use of web tools the all the above happens double the normal time. In addition it also allows the teachers and students to share the resources. Here in this paper author shares his experience of realizing the above, using various features of Yahoo. Each of the features is explained in detail with their applications.

Using web tools for teaching

There are various studies, which addresses various issues of using web tools for teaching. Shannon and Doube (2004) reported teaching staffs are valuing higher of and have future intention to use than their current use of the Internet to support teaching. The study further emphasized that in spite of improved learning and teaching outcomes and cost savings, many academics are reluctant to adopt web-supported teaching.

Madhavan (2004) article on Managing Storage on Learning

Web based tools are successfully used for various Technology and Management courses. It has lots of potential in social sciences, especially in behavioural sciences. The principle of teaching behavioural sciences is preparing the students to understand the social and behavioural aspects of individuals. It also equips them with some tools and techniques to understand the behaviour and also develop some interventions to alter the behaviour.

Management System reported, Waiting for the next advance in storage technology is not enough—storage management strategies that involve the use of reusable content objects can help.

Sun News (2004) reported, Educators say online offerings and use by students have jumped nationwide in recent years as many seek a convenient way to fit educational advancement into their busy schedules. This infers that web based tools are very much suitable for the part time and on the job students.

There are initiatives to offer MBA online in various parts of the world. Universitas 21 Global, a consortium of 16 universities, including the University of Glasgow, has partnered with Irish company PAI Publications Ltd (electricnews, July 2004).

Chris O'Hagan (1999), paper suggests that it is possible to embed ubiquitous use of educational technology because it offers variety and flexibility, and it can actually enhance student learning. **The Yahoo group as a teaching tool for students.**

According to the Yahoo site, Yahoo group is a communication tool, which facilitates groups of people to communicate on the Internet to discuss, sports, health, current events, and more. It also facilitates to share photos and files, plan events, send a newsletter and stay in touch with friends and family. The present endeavour is using such a free ware for the students of Masters in a Management programme. Actually it is an additional tool for teaching.

The each feature is ideally fitting in teaching the Management subjects. I would like to give some illustrations of the some of the features for teaching the Management Subjects.

Features

Messages

This is the feature, which as a

message thread. This is used as a forum to discuss on the subject among the students and faculty. It was also used as a tool for communication. The announcements on the assignments, the queries arise in the class room teaching, project notifications, class details, and so on are communicated through this. It was proved to be an excellent tool for communication among students. Only the members of the groups who are registered will get an access to the site. It also has an additional feature, which enables the moderator to send the message as email. It helps the teacher and the students always are in touch. This was used for maximum advantage. This was helpful for the students who find difficult to convey the questions. It was also helpful for other students to understand the heterogeneity of the

is actually used for uploading the notes of the classes. It is also used for uploading the reference materials. In case the course instructor is having the PPT slides it is uploaded in the group. Also the reference materials, case studies and other teaching materials are uploaded. This is referred in the classes while teaching for future reference. For example a Psychological test is taught, the students are informed about a test in the Message board. This includes the test and the reference of the specific Psychological Test uploaded in the web space. Then the students prepare before attending the class. Faculty teaches the class referring the material uploaded. It was proved to be successful for maximum number of cases.

The students also used this facility for uploading the assignments. The faculty announces the assignment to be submitted on a topic either through message board or in the classroom. Then students prepare the assignment and submit in the files area. It also has an advantage of retaining the time stamp for deadlines. The punctuality of the students increases. Further, the students are conscious about the other students

who have access to their material. So, the materials are prepared with extra caution and care. This is used as a reference material by the future batches.

Other utility of the files is, it helps the teachers to ask the students submit the project reports. First the faculty asks the students to submit mini projects on the subject. The students submit a proposal for approval. Once the faculty approves it, students col-

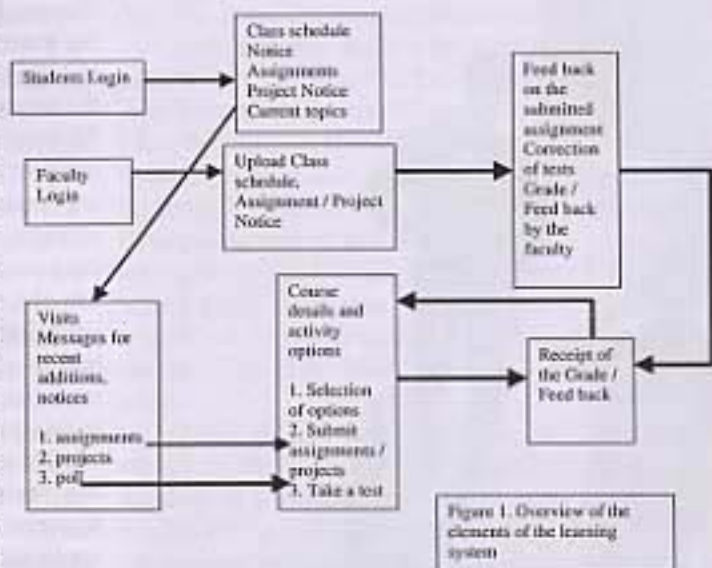


Figure 1. Overview of the elements of the learning system

students.

Chat

This facility was used for providing a synchronous feel of the course. This was done through Yahoo Messenger. There are features parts of the IM environment such as file transfer and so on are used to maximum advantage.

Files

This is another important feature fully used for the teaching. This enables one to upload and store files. It

lect data and prepare the draft reports for correction. Once the faculty gives the inputs the final report is submitted for presentation. This is used as a future reference material for the successive batch of students.

As mentioned above project reports on the subjects were useful. First students are requested to submit the proposals. Then corrections to the proposals are made. Once the proposals are accepted they are asked to design the tools. Once the tools are accepted they are asked to conduct the tests for the study. Then the reports submitted for iterations. Then the final report is archived. This "File" feature is very helpful for the projects. This process also helps the others to know what is the progress of the projects in the class. It also helps others to get idea and they ensure there are no redundancies. This actually promotes the transparency among the teachers and students and students and students.

The other advantage of this is if the course is offered for second time these materials are used as study materials for the new students. It becomes a library and resource center for itself.

Photos

This feature was used for uploading the images for the Psychological tests. Further, the feature is used for uploading any photographs of field-work the students conducted. A study on various aspects of the rural market was one such experience of uploading.

Links

Another important feature of the group, which is very relevant, is the links. This helps the teachers and students to upload links, which are very useful for the course. This also helps the users to abide by the copyright issues. The links helps the faculty to create a complete reference page with the resources. The links of the

free web resources on the relevant topics, the genuine management practices by corporate houses, and study reports of the research agencies are some of the examples. Further, the faculty creates a static web page for the course on another domain on the policies of grading and teaching are linked.

Database

This is used for the archiving the details of the members. The scope of this feature is very high and has a lot potential to use it a maximum. A table can be designed on the members, which can be used effectively.

Polls

This is another important feature, which is used for the conduction of quizzes. The online quizzes using the polls with objective questions were very popular. This is an authenticated result, which are very useful. The time for such quizzes can be limited and pupils can be assessed. This also used for conducting polls on the methodology of teaching for the teacher's feedback, for the topics of discussion and so on. There is also potential to use it for conducting research among the subjects. This feature was used among the students for regular short tests on the topics covered.

Members

The directory of the members is another feature. This is the feature, which lists the identity of each of the members. In case a course is offered only online then this is very useful feature.

Calendar

This feature is used as a planner. This helps the teachers to announce the classes and topics. It is also used for announcing the deadlines, examinations, and so on. This helps the students who are absent for some classes to go through and find where the class is progressing and one can accordingly prepare on the next topic.

The Course Details and Course

Objective

This is the feature, which is the main page of the group. This page gives the course details with Curriculum and states the Learning objectives. For an example, for a course on E-Commerce, full detailed syllabus for 30 lectures and the course objectives such as, "Preparing students for work in the E-Commerce environments", is stated in the main page.

Search Facilities

This is an inbuilt facility of Yahoo. If one wants to find the subject area namely, Consumer Behaviour, he or she has to search in the category of Marketing and Advertising. This helps the students to search the course page if they do not remember the URL.

Number of students and Language of Instruction

Based on the experience of the author all the students of the regular classes registered for the group. This increased the effectiveness of teaching. The language of instruction used for the group and classroom was English.

Group Information and Group Settings

The group is only for restricted members. As mentioned above the language used for the group is English. The group was listed in directory. As it is the group which is restricted for members it moderated by the faculty. The message boards are unmoderated. It encourages all members to post. It archives all the messages and sends them as Email attachments. The link for the Yahoo group is <http://in.groups.yahoo.com/>

Acknowledgments

Author acknowledges the "Yahoo! Inc" for the templates. It is only the application of the template for a specific course and author have no right over the templates.

(Contd. in... P.147)

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