

Pre-registration opportunities for Social Work degree students



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Changing Identities

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Introduction

- Opportunity for potential students, with an offer of a place, to access a site on Blackboard PRIOR to induction week.
- Aims to ease the transition process.
- Site offers preparatory content for academic, social and practical challenges of Higher Education.
- Site includes discussion board for contact with staff and existing students for queries, support and reassurance.

Background

- 2005 – social work staff identified need for pre-induction preparation materials to ease the transition into H.E.
- Area set up the Virtual Campus; VC administrators had the 'power' to manipulate the system!
- Students logged in to access information about their course and a join in a discussion forum.
- Typical issues; reading lists, public transport, car parking, time tables, child care, nerves and reassurance.

Students said...

- "I feel more prepared, as I now know essential information such as the timetable for the year. Also it has been reassuring to know that I am not the only one who is feeling nervous about starting university."
- "hi, the discussion group is excellent i have just got back from hols feeling really nervous but after reading through the discussions realise everyone is feeling the same and i cannot wait to get there thanks"

Rationale

- Proactive management of transition is key to student retention and success (Yorke and Longden 2008).
- Project puts in place scaffolding integral to independent learning, to being self-directed and motivated (Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap, 2003)
- Online collaboration encourages self-regulation (McLoughlin, 2002)
- Students become familiar with VLE and 'virtual conversational frameworks' whereby learning develops from dialogue (Laurillard 2002)

Students said...

- "I was feeling very nervous about starting the course. By chatting to other mature students I felt fine on Monday morning."
- "It has given me reassurance and answered my queries"
- "It helped me sort childcare out early so I don't need to worry about my daughter getting a place in nursery"
- "Trying to get a feel of university. To seek anything that may help me. The fact that I am a mature student, I hoped to find others."
- "It was the opportunity of chatting to fellow students as well as finding out some extra information about the course"

The way forward

- Virtual Campus replaced by Blackboard.
- 2009/2010 worked on systems integration to automate the process.
- Student volunteers invited to answer queries from own experience.
- Renamed 'Getting Started'

Getting Started...

Preparation for academic practice



Students said...

- "Being able to access information before attendance (ie work load) was very beneficial. IT is not my strong area. I therefore found the Virtual Campus a learning exercise also."
- "I feel that communicating online through this project has been a brilliant idea."
- "The exercise helped to put me in the right frame of mind. Although I have found this week daunting [*induction*] I found by accessing the site over the last few weeks I felt I had a better understanding of what might be ahead although today I must feel my head is swamped!!"

Conclusion

- Proven opportunity to help allay stress and fears about higher education.
- Takes pressure off induction week
- Introduces students to their VLE
- Powerful tool for preparation for higher education at an early stage in the student experience
- "Reassurance that you are not the only one worried about going to university."

References

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