Introduction
Dr Elizabeth Frazer is a fellow and tutor in Politics at New College and lecturer in Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations. Teaching in college is mainly undergraduate tutorials and classes; in the department she runs lectures, seminars and classes for undergraduates and graduate students. Liz says: “When it comes to tuition and lecturing, I am a traditionally minded undergraduate and graduate teacher. I have begun to use Weblearn mainly for administrative efficiency, but also for enhanced communication with students about some aspects of their teaching and learning.”

Use of WebLearn Assignments tool
Liz uses Weblearn for setting tutorial topics and deadlines for students to submit their essays and for her to be able to mark and return them. This is in conjunction with very traditional tutorials in which one student reads out their essay (either from their laptop or from paper), the tutor and other students comment, and then all discuss it. She is in the habit of grading essays after the tutorial, and now assigns a numerical grade which is recorded in the WebLearn MarkBook. Liz says that she used to grade essays on paper, with rather illegible marginal comments and more detailed evaluation at the end. Students are notoriously mean with paper, and will not supply adequate margins! So her written comments tended to the illegible. Her electronic comments are legible, coherent, and more extensive.

“The to my surprise I found that grading on screen in the Assignments tool has improved my marking standard - in terms of legibility, and also the coherence and extent of my comments and summaries provided to the students.”

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The new Weblearn service at Oxford offers improved support for teaching and learning, in particular for communication and online submission of essays.

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http://weblearn.ox.ac.uk/info/showcase/liz

Theorising the Democratic State
Elizabeth Frazer:
http://users.ox.ac.uk/~efrazer/default.htm

Lecture 4
Who Rules? I

TROOPS OUT OF IR
Markbook
Liz has incorporated the Markbook in her WebLearn site and awards a percentage mark for essays. The Markbook has two advantages:
• all marks earned by students in relevant assessment tools such as Assignments and Tests are automatically collated and stored in the Markbook (like a site-specific spreadsheet);
• each student can then view their own mark sheet.
Liz has found this very helpful at the report writing stage, as she can get an overview of all the students and their marks. (Students can see only their own marks.)

Forums (Online Discussions)
For graduate students, Liz answers questions about their coursework or assignments only via Weblearn. She has found it difficult to get students to use the Forum facility actively — they prefer to email their questions to her. Liz then pastes their email question into a Forum thread and answers it. She responds to the individual student by email to tell them what she has done. This makes their questions and her answers visible to the whole student group, who can all potentially benefit from the information. Moreover, Liz does not have to answer the same questions over and over again.

Signup tool
Liz has used the Signup facility for students to organise themselves into tutorial groups and sign up for available time slots; and also for students to sign up to special college seminars.

Announcements
Liz uses the Announcements tool regularly to inform students of useful readings, to advise about vacation work with attached worksheets, and to let students know about new forums topics that she creates for tutorial members.

Evaluations (Surveys)
Liz proposes to try using the survey tool during Trinity Term, in order to see whether this can improve student feedback in both college and department. Currently it is very difficult and time consuming the prepare and distribute course evaluation questionnaires, and students very often don’t complete them. All surveys are completely anonymous, but the system identifies which site participants have not yet completed the survey and can send them automatic email reminders, at time intervals specified by the tutor.

Use of Groups
Liz has chosen to have one WebLearn site to collate all her teaching and learning materials, and to reach all her various groups of students — quite a complex site design exercise! She made use of the Add Participant Group feature in Site Info, which allowed her to import official course groups from the central database of students registered for particular courses. These groups lists are dynamically updated when students leave or join the course, and they are maintained as separate internal groups within the single Weblearn site. By using the internal groups and auto groups features, Liz can direct Assignments, Announcements and Forum messages to particular groups, where relevant.

Educational benefits of using WebLearn
• Students benefit from improved coherence, legibility and extent of qualitative and quantitative written feedback on their work. Students have ready access to their record via the Markbook facility.
• The group functionality in WebLearn means that students who log on to the site see only the material that is relevant for them — via WebLearn tools which are ‘group aware’.
• Instead of answering students' queries individually by email, Liz’s particular use of the Forum facility means that questions and responses are viewable to all the students in the relevant group.
• Students have 24/7 access to a rich collection of resources, assessment and communication facilities, all integrated into one WebLearn area.

Liz Frazer and Jill Fresen, April 2010