



Politics Tutoring

Blending tutorials with electronic support in WebLearn

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

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

“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.”

Dr Liz Frazer,
Fellow at New College, tutor and lecturer in Politics

weblearn@oucs.ox.ac.uk
www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/weblearn
OUCS, 13 Banbury Rd., OX2 6NN

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.”



New College, from New College website

Use of WebLearn Assignments tool



Assignment title	For	Status	Open	Due	In / New	Scale
Prelim Tut 1 What more is there to democ...	New College PPE FHS 12	Closed	08-Dec-2009 08:00	28-Jan-2010 17:00	4/0	0-100
Prelim Tut 2 What is represented in rep...	New College PPE FHS 12	Closed	08-Dec-2009 12:00	04-Feb-2010 12:00	7/1	0-100
Prelim Tut 3 Why do some political scie...	New College PPE FHS 12	Closed	08-Dec-2009 12:00	11-Feb-2010 12:00	8/0	0-100
Prelim Tut 4 Does *political free...	New College PPE FHS 12	Closed	08-Dec-2009 12:00	18-Feb-2010 12:00	6/0	0-100
Prelim Tut 5: What problem is Rousseau s...	New College PPE FHS 12	Closed	08-Dec-2009 12:00	25-Feb-2010 12:00	6/0	0-100

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.



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.)



John Opie, *Mary Wollstonecraft* (c.1797),
from Wikimedia Commons

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.

Recent Announcements

[Options](#)

[Philosophy and Politics classes: Hegel and Mill](#)

(Elizabeth Frazer - 12-Mar-2010 10:30)

Reading for the four classes on Hegel and Mill, for Philosophy and Politics students in TT10 is now ...

[Political Theory finalists: Rawls' revision worksheet](#)

(Elizabeth Frazer - 12-Mar-2010 08:55)

You might find this useful as you review Rawls.

[Political Theory HT10: Vac Work now under assignments and resources](#)

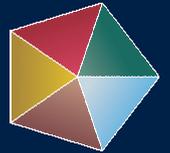
(Elizabeth Frazer - 12-Mar-2010 08:53)

Vac work has been added as an assignment; worksheet is here and in resources.

[New College prelims vacation revision: Social Contract worksheet](#)

(Elizabeth Frazer - 02-Mar-2010 15:19)

Everyone should complete this worksheet and submit it via Weblearn by the end of 0th week TT. Answ...



http://weblearn.ox.ac.uk