Welcome to crucIBL

Welcome. In the fourth issue of crucIBL we’ve tried to broaden out a little bit – to look at how one of our initiatives is helping to develop inquiry-based learning in some other institutions.

And we’ve got stories from some departments that we’ve not covered before – Germanic Studies and Psychology – as well as some old favourites!

We thought it would be nice to focus upon what some members of the CILASS team have been up to. So, Chris Clow, our new IT/AV Advisor, tells us about what he’s been doing to open up CILASS learning spaces and technologies for staff and students.

And we’ve also got a couple of articles about the Student Ambassador Network. You can find about what they get up to and what they thought about the Third Staff-Student Conference on IBL, which they organised and hosted in March.

Professor Philippa Levy, Academic Director, CILASS

In this issue...

- Statistics, Statistics, Statistics
- Finishing the dissertation
- Theatre Studies and Oral History

uSpace: a new place to talk

Picture this. Just four weeks to run a group project, only two contact hours available, nearly thirty students at two universities nearly two hundred miles apart and a big topic: The Multicultural Society in the Netherlands. This was the challenge facing second year students of Dutch in the Germanic Studies department.

This project stands out because it was carried out entirely in an online environment. This was not just a gimmicky feature. Since it involved students from both Sheffield and University College London, they could not physically get together to discuss the work.

In the Netherlands, multiculturalism is a fiercely debated topic that has dominated Dutch politics, media and arts for nearly a decade. The aim of the project was to introduce the facts, the key players and the issues that dominate the debate in the Netherlands.

And the project wanted to help students to develop both research and communication skills, to introduce them to a new electronic collaboration tool and to experience a video conference. That is a lot to get through in four weeks, but then again, this was meant to be a bit special.

In comes uSpace, the University’s new collaborative environment which allows participants to write wikis, to start discussions and to write blogs. It is hyper flexible - you can post links, photos, videos - and it is open for business 24/7, which seems to suit students who work in the early hours of the morning and/or have a demanding social life.

By Dr Henriette Louwerse, Lecturer in Dutch

CILASS student ambassador for Germanic Studies Lottie Needham describes how the project worked:

We were split into six different groups made up of students from Sheffield and UCL. Each group was given a short film, a video, or an interview as a starting point. The brief was short, yet open-ended: mediate the content and the context of your video to a non-Dutch audience by writing a joint document, a wiki. Groups were free to take their research into any direction they felt was relevant as long as their wiki would give an outsider an objective insight into the Dutch multicultural debate.

“I found that this was technology employed at its best, complementing the research and fostering a real sense of team work and enterprise. uSpace proved a fantastic resource to facilitate online discussion and general collaboration.

I must admit that I have become somewhat addicted to the whole uSpace phenomenon. The idea that our wiki would actually be made available through Virtual Dutch gave an even greater sense of relevance and then there was the grand finale: a plenary debate on six statements using the video conferencing facilities in CILASS.

The students say:

Despite initially feeling a little sceptical about communicating entirely online and producing a wiki document, the project for me has been a complete success and I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it!

This project has really opened my eyes to the multicultural debate... I mean at the beginning I did not know how to even define multiculturalism!

Then weeks later to have participated in a discussion about it shows just how much you can achieve in a short space of time.
The deadline approaches...

As the end of the academic year loomed, thousands of students were busy finalising the most exciting and nerve-wracking challenge of their undergraduate years – the dissertation. As a sustained piece of research into an aspect of a discipline, it’s a chance to show off knowledge learned and skills gained. crucIBL has been following three final year students who’ve taken time out from their keyboards to give us a progress report.

JAMES GOULD
BIBLICAL STUDIES
10-12,000 words
Dissertation title
The influence/importance of the Bible on contemporary Christians

“It all seemed to be going well until mid-March when I had a meeting with my tutor. My initial ideas for writing were far too broad, and I needed to focus it! The final topic was a study of whether Jesus, in Luke's Gospel, would agree that the Bible should be the supreme authority. In essence, is Jesus an Evangelical? This has taken over my life more than I ever thought anything could. And it has been a journey, a very personal one. I took Biblical Studies because it allowed me to study a book that I love - and now my dissertation has allowed to me answer a question that I have literally not stopped thinking about for over 4 years! It has been amazing to get the guidance, resources and space to study in such depth and freedom.

So is Jesus an evangelical? Well, it would not be inquiry based learning if I told you would it!”

MICHAELLA LEAHY
GEOGRAPHY
30 pages including diagrams
Dissertation title
Luminescence dating of a coastal barrier in Vietnam

“Going out to Vietnam to collect my data was certainly a trip with a difference. After a hot, sweaty week of digging and sand collection I was full of excitement and anticipation as I unwrapped it all and began analysing the mountains of sand. Up to this point, the freedom that doing my dissertation had given me had been both exhilarating and terrifying. I certainly enjoyed all the new experiences - I just wish someone else could have written it all up for me!

The months of preparation, data collection, laboratory analysis, endless reading and mundane redrafting all seem to be a blur, but the final flurry of panic as the deadline loomed will forever be a painful memory. The hard labour, late nights and lack of sleep were all finally worthwhile when I dropped my dissertation proudly into the hand-in box with a thud. Now I can only hope that all the tears shed and hair lost were worthwhile.”

CHLOE MILLER SMITH
MUSIC
7,500 words
Dissertation title
To what extent does the physical proximity of a performer and the audience affect audience enjoyment and perception of performance quality

“The original plan for my dissertation was to look specifically at the effect of audience proximity to the performer on their enjoyment. But the results of the first round of empirical research made me reconsider the breadth of my study. I decided to look more at the English Venue in Arts Administration, a topic which has actually made me more excited about the work!

My dissertation has been a real learning curve. Yes, I’ve written things like this before but never with such freedom. I’ve relished this but have often found myself longing for someone to tell me just what to do! I hope I’ve been able to introduce readers to new ideas and make them think differently about the music venues they venture to. It’s been a great journey, and although it has not always received the focus I wanted it too I hope I’ve done it justice. If not, let’s just hope my solo recital goes well!!”

CILASS goes national!

For the first time, CILASS has been offering funding for IBL projects in other universities as a way of taking Sheffield’s best practice out into the wider world – and learn something from what is going on at other places. Now, 19 projects at 17 institutions are underway, taking dissemination to a new and different level.

The scheme has been organised through Higher Education Academy Subject Centres covering Business, Management, Accountancy and Finance (BMAF), the Centre for Education in the Built Environment, the Economics Network, English, Information and Computer Science and the Psychology Network.

The institutions are:
- Aberystwyth University
- Anglia Ruskin University
- Brunel University
- Coventry University
- King’s College London
- Liverpool Hope University
- Queen’s University
- Salford Business School
- Thames Valley University
- University of Brighton
- University of Central Lancashire
- University of Chichester
- University of London
- University of Nottingham
- University of Portsmouth
- University of Teesside
- York St John University
Statistics, for the majority is scary, a subject only ‘got’ by a tiny minority. You can imagine the disappointment when fresh and eager first years were told they had to do a compulsory module, ‘Statistical Methods in Geography.’ Silent groans in the lecture theatre. The last time some of us had seen numbers were during GCSEs. Little hope then.

Not so. Statistics was brought to life this year through a successful combination of lectures, weekly practicals and a group assignment. Using statistics, geographers had to investigate whether there is a North-South divide in Britain or with a subject close to home (the weather!) had to investigate if climate and climate change vary across the UK.

The staff knew this ever-daunting module needed a rethink. The process was helped along by Natalie Whelan, CILASS student ambassador for 2007-2008 and Michaella Leahy, this year’s ambassador. Natalie suggested ways of improving it and was the ‘voice of the student’, in identifying problems. Michaella stepped in to help with the evaluation process, which began soon after the module started last autumn.

Second year student Hannah Tankard was in one of the first groups to go through the new module. She said: “As one of the many number-phobes, I had little belief that I would be any good at statistics. However, I was proven wrong. Lectures provided general background knowledge, accessible to all maths abilities. Bi-weekly lectures were supported by practicals, reinforced further by inquiry based learning in groups. The group work built up the confidence of those, like me, who are less confident about statistics.”

Lecturer Edward Hanna said: “I feel reinvigorated by the discernibly greater student engagement.” And module convenor, Harvey Armstrong believes that the module appears to have been a significant success. “The vast majority of students appear to have benefited from the subject, despite the strenuous extra effort they had to put in, and marks have improved on previous years.” he said.

Looks like IBL has been given the thumbs up by statistics.

by Hannah Tankard and Michaella Leahy, Student Ambassadors for Geography

There are 19 projects underway. Here are just two of them...

Alan Rice, University of Central Lancashire, Dramatising Slavery & Emancipating Students: Learning Beyond the Classroom

The students on this live project will learn about the Transatlantic Slave Trade and its aftermath through researching historical characters who had a wide variety of roles in all aspects of the trade, including perpetrators and victims. A series of guided activities, field trips and talks from experts will help students think about the history of slavery and how the multiple stories of individuals are portrayed. Students will be encouraged to find characters they are interested in and would like to develop narratives around. They will then create a dynamic 90 minute dramatic tableau based around 20 characters. The characters will interact together on an improvised triangular stage to mirror the trade and their movements and interactions will be developed by the students based on their research. A range of reusable resources will be created in the process of researching the characters.

Ann Hockley, Anglia Ruskin University and Nigel Walford, Kingston University, Bottom-up Planning with Geographical Information Systems

This project aims to use an inquiry-based approach to planning to focus students’ attention on the problems faced by planners in professional practice and the role Geographical Information Systems (GIS) might play in helping to solve them. Second and third year modules at the two universities will be modified to allow both planning and geography students to explore the potential of GIS for addressing realistic planning scenarios, to gain increased insight into the complexities of resolving spatial planning problems, and ultimately to enhance the teaching of GIS, a subject which students often find hard to engage with.

by Jamie Wood
Postcards from the SAN

The CILASS Student Ambassador Network is made up of 28 Ambassadors, one from each Faculty of Social Sciences and has been heavily involved in lots of our projects over the last year. What do they do? Su Arnall, the Ambassador for Sociology, has put together a picture of some of the things they’ve been up to lately...

Working in the Student Ambassador Network

We attend monthly Network meetings at CILASS where all of us have the chance to get together and discuss projects that are happening in our departments, support each other in our work, decide who will represent CILASS at any events that may be occurring and generally strengthen the CILASS community.

Conferences and visits

Four of the Ambassadors contributed to the keynote speech and ran two sessions at the “Students as Researchers” conference at York St. John University.

"Conferences are one of the most exciting opportunities we get as Student Ambassadors. We meet others involved in inquiry based learning, share ideas, see things from fresh perspectives, share our own experiences and get motivated to continue the good work!"

Ali Bestwick, Student Ambassador for Archaeology

Engage, Challenge and Change” – that aimed to get staff and students talking about their experiences of IBL around the University.

Students from the Technology group ran a ‘Sandpit Session’ with Chris Clow where they unveiled some works-in-progress - video clips explaining ‘how to’ and ‘why to’ use technology for various aspects of learning. JANINE BRADBURY, one of the participants said: “I had always figured myself at least moderately savvy when it came to technology, but being in this session made me realise how much I could change the scope and meaning of my research by branching out and using some pretty snazzy gadgets.”

SU ARNALL, from Sociological Studies told us about an initiative in her department – "Small Changes, Big Difference". Su started this project in January this year because she believed that a number of small changes in the department could make a big difference to the student learning experience. She drew on ideas from fellow student ambassadors and her peers in the department, then presented her proposals at a number of meetings in the department. Now staff are looking into starting a blog for incoming students, there’s more support for existing ideas about introducing dissertation presentations and there is a lot of interest in starting up reading groups in some modules next year.

Sandpits, strangers and small changes

Staff and students got together in March for the third annual CILASS Staff-Student Conference on inquiry based learning in the Information Commons. The day was designed around four themes – *Inquire, Engage, Challenge and Change* – that aimed to get staff and students talking about their experiences of IBL around the University.

Students from the Technology group ran a ‘Sandpit Session’ with Chris Clow where they unveiled some works-in-progress - video clips explaining ‘how to’ and ‘why to’ use technology for various aspects of inquiry-based learning. JANINE BRADBURY, one of the participants said: “I had always figured myself at least moderately savvy when it came to technology, but being in this session made me realise how much I could change the scope and meaning of my research by branching out and using some pretty snazzy gadgets.”

SU ARNALL, from Sociological Studies told us about an initiative in her department – "Small Changes, Big Difference". Su started this project in January this year because she believed that a number of small changes in the department could make a big difference to the student learning experience. She drew on ideas from fellow student ambassadors and her peers in the department, then presented her proposals at a number of meetings in the department. Now staff are looking into starting a blog for incoming students, there’s more support for existing ideas about introducing dissertation presentations and there is a lot of interest in starting up reading groups in some modules next year.
EVE STIRLING, from Education, blogged about one of the 'Challenge' discussions on technology and inquiry-based learning: “A great full round table...with both students and staff present,” she wrote. “Ryan, Georgie and Chloe led a discussion starting with the network learning study they are involved in. Discussions followed around the use of MOLE in communicating with students. The assumption that all undergraduate students want or like to use technology was challenged. Not all students have the skills to use technology effectively to carry out their studies. Some lecturers do take the time to facilitate this learning in their taught sessions - but this needs to happen more. Staff also don't always have the skills to use technology.”

CATRIONA STEPHENSON, BECKY O'GARA and SIAN EVANS, students from the English Department, gave a presentation on ‘How to talk to Strangers’. Their extra-curricular oral history project involves travelling around the country and talking to people who were involved in theatre as actors, directors, theatre workers and audience members in the post-war era.

by Emma Low
Student Ambassador for Architecture

To learn more
about the conference, go to: www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/ssconference.html
To see the CILASS student blog, go to: www.cilass-student-blog.group.shef.ac.uk/
The Sound(house) of Music

Staff and students of the Music Department have spent this academic year settling into their new home on Gell Street. The iconic, black-clad Soundhouse and the nearby Jessop West are buildings that offer some of the most state of the art equipment available.

Dr. Adrian Moore, lecturer and composer in the Department is thrilled: “I am extremely pleased with the Soundhouse,” he said. “We have rooms that are acoustically perfect enabling us to listen clearly to the music we are making. Our work, our attitude towards work, and our pride in our work has taken a huge professional leap forwards.”

The studios are equipped with huge mixing desks, double monitors and surround-sound. All the recording suites, linked to the studios by 4 panes of sound proof glass, are equipped with acoustic enhancing wall coverings and sound altering drapes and electric pianos. The studios have opened up an exciting new world to the musicians of the department.

Some of the people making the most use of the sound studios are those taking the ‘Sound Recording’ module, in which students learn about recording all types of music - and recording it well.

Tom Coltman, a third year student at the music department has spent hours there. He said: “It’s really fantastic to have proper recording facilities at our fingertips and the knowledge of the staff to take advantage of. The recordings we did came out great!”

His fellow third year Flis Kirk agreed. “It’s great to work in such a fantastic space and brilliant to have access to such high quality equipment. We’re really lucky,” she said.

by Chloe Miller Smith, Student Ambassador for Music

The new kid on the blog

Over the last few months my main focus has been finding ways to unlock technology for inquiry-based learning. I’ve concentrated on three main areas: developing the website for the CILASS teaching spaces, producing new training support materials and leading regular training sessions for staff and students.

The CILASS website is now much more user friendly, with more images, videos and examples of how the spaces and the technologies are being used. There are training materials and user guides on there, and a lot of the information has been updated.

I have trained people in why and how to use various pieces of equipment, such as the digital audio recorders, digital video camcorders and CopyCams. I have also shown people what is available in the collaboratories, the additional equipment that CILASS has available to loan out, and how these technologies can be integrated into teaching to enhance the students’ learning experience. These are backed up with the support videos which I’ve produced with the Student Ambassador Network technology group.

And I’ve been running weekly drop-in ‘sandpit’ session which are open to any member of staff where they can play with the technology and ask me questions.

Chris can be contacted on cilasstech@sheffield.ac.uk. To see some of the resources Chris and the Student Ambassadors have been creating take a look at the CILASS teaching spaces webpage: www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/learning-spaces.

by Mark Morley and Chris Clow
TALKING TO STRANGERS

Eighteen second-year English students spent last semester travelling around the country uncovering stories about post-war theatre in Britain. They interviewed actors, dancers, stage managers, audience-members, and a puppeteer as part of the Theatre Archive Project (TAP), a collaboration between the British Library and the University of Sheffield. This semester, fifteen more students from across the university are conducting interviews.

They make contact with their prospective interviewees, travel to their homes, and spend an hour recording the interviewees’ memories. The students then transcribe the interviews, which are posted on TAP’s interview database.

Four student interviewers - Sian Evans, Becky O’Gara, Shandin Rickard, Catriona Stephenson - gave presentations about the project at an IBL Cafe, English Research Seminar, and at the 2009 CILASS Staff-Student Conference.

The students are gathering some extraordinary stories: Frances Cuka told Hannah Gumbrill about hanging upside-down from the brass rail of the gallery in Brighton’s Theatre Royal in order to get a better view of the set - a position that left her swaying over thirty feet above the stalls, while Tony Richards recalled attending variety shows in Sheffield unaccompanied as a nine-year-old, where he saw acts that ranged from artistic paper-cutting to topless posing.

Hermione Thomas interviewed Ruth Silvestre, an actor and singer who played a starring role in the UK production of the musical Man of La Mancha. Ruth told Hermione how on one occasion earlier in her career, when she was understudying for the lead in the musical Flower Drum Song, she was called on to take over under unusual circumstances:

“I did one of the previews in Flower Drum Song the lead had lost her voice, so I had to go on and they - the Management – didn’t want the Press to know about this, so they said to me, ‘Don’t tell anyone’ and they made me go out of the theatre by the side door. There I was running down Shaftesbury Avenue away from the Press and I suddenly thought, ‘am I mad or what?’ So I stopped and tied my shoelace or whatever and waited for them to catch up.”

by Alec Patton

You can visit the project’s home page at www.bl.uk/projects/theatrearchive/homepage

---

Researching student research

If you want to find out how, if at all, undergraduates experience research in the university, a good starting point might be to get the students themselves involved in the finding out part. That’s exactly what the university funded ‘Learning, Research and Teaching (LRT) Project’ is doing.

The project is backed by CILASS, LeTS, the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science. It aims to find ways of strengthening the relationship between learning, research and teaching, and to find examples of how these are currently integrated. The nine-strong project team want to spark new thinking about the ‘research-teaching nexus’ and to inform the university’s policies on involving undergraduates in research earlier in their degrees.

So the project team hired two student researchers to help with the surveys and focus groups, one from the Faculty of Social Sciences and one from the Faculty of Science. They bring a student perspective to the survey design and a ‘ground level’ approach to student contact. So what is it like being at the heart of such policy research?

We are conducting a survey and focus groups with students to try and prove, with examples, that this is the case elsewhere in the University. With the results, we are hoping to cause a shift in the way the University thinks of research: not something that staff do outside of their teaching, but something everybody at the institution contributes to. I feel very lucky to be able help towards this aim.

Richard Heinrich

Working as a research assistant to ‘The LRT Project’ has been a steep learning curve, but also an invaluable experience.

What immediately drew me to apply for the position was the promise of being involved, so to speak, at the very heart of the project, undertaking actual research and having actual responsibility.

---

Rose Bavage

As a Biochemist, social sciences research is completely new to me, but I found it immediately fascinating. The discussions centre on people, not microorganisms.

As the project centres on student opinion, it was very rewarding having our contributions taken seriously and appreciated by those more experienced. I had expected to be instructed towards certain actions, but instead we had a major role in shaping the outcome of the results. This change in perspective massively affected how I approached the role, and it’s changed the way I work in my course too, in organisation and pro-activeness. In that sense, the project truly models its target outcomes, in showing that students’ doing their own research can be incredibly beneficial towards many different aspects of their learning.
Psychologists check it out

Each year, up to 300 first year Psychology students learn about how their subject is presented in the media as part of the core module ‘Discovering Psychology: Mind, Body and Interaction’. Student groups have to research the origins of stories about Psychology and present their findings back to their tutors and fellow students.

Lecturer Myles Jones started working with CILASS to give an IBL twist to the module back in May 2006 and we’ve been working together to refine the approach ever since. Myles said: “PSY 101 tutorials were just an opportunity to discuss problems with multiple choice questions and weren’t really an appropriate forum for discussion between tutors and students. “The inclusion of the new task was intended to stimulate discussion in tutorials, improve student information literacy skills, create more independent learning and encourage the students to work collaboratively.”

The activity is part of a bigger module in which students are introduced to the basics of the subject.

At the start of the semester each student group works with a postgraduate tutor to choose a story from a newspaper, a magazine or a website that claims to be based upon an original piece of Psychology research. The student groups then have to try to find the original research that the news article is supposed to be based on using a journal database. Towards the end of the module they work together to create a PowerPoint presentation that outlines their research process and findings.

Through this approach students learn a lot of skills and knowledge. It develops their information literacy capabilities. They also benefit from working in groups and improve their presentation skills. Importantly, it raises their awareness of the research process in Psychology and the different ways that knowledge is presented to the public. All of this helps to prepare them for independent and collaborative study and research at higher levels.

by Jamie Wood

The students say:

This was an enjoyable area of the module as it was different to the usual set up of lectures, and gave space for individual questions and in-depth talk. This helped us to understand things that were difficult in lectures and gave us the opportunity to do tasks and give feedback, as opposed to just listening in lectures.

Overall I enjoyed this project especially meeting others and working with each other cooperatively to get the group task finished.

I really liked working with other people rather than just your friends all the time. A good way to mingle with other people on the course!

It was fun to bring in the articles and discuss them and having to search for them.

Fact box

CILASS has funded a number of projects in Psychology, you can find out some more about them via this link: www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/cases/psychtags.html

Stop Press...Stop Press

The second annual CILASS IBL Awards for excellence in inquiry-based learning have just been announced. There are two prizes in the staff nominated category.

Leo Care, Howard Evans and Dan Jary, the First Year Studio Team from Architecture won for the approaches they developed around the ‘Matter-Reality’ project. Dr Daniel Scroop from History was given his award for a range of work throughout the department, including embedding IBL in undergraduate teaching and promoting good practice across the department.

Dr Claire McGourlay, from the School of Law, won in the student nominated category, having been put forward by Law School students Danielle Manson and Craig Purshouse for her work on the Understanding Law 2 module and The Innocence Project.

CILASS contact details

Editor: Jamie Wood
jamie.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Editorial Adviser: Marie Kinsey
m.kinsey@sheffield.ac.uk

CILASS Academic Director: Philippa Levy
p.levy@sheffield.ac.uk

CILASS Programme Manager: Nicola Reilly
n.reilly@sheffield.ac.uk

Centre for Inquiry-based Learning in the Arts and Social Sciences (CILASS)
Information Commons
44 Leavygreave Road
Sheffield S3 7RD
Phone: 0114 222 5270
Fax: 0114 222 5279
www.shef.ac.uk/cilass/home.html