Welcome to crucIBL

Welcome to the second edition of the CILASS newsletter. A large number of our inquiry projects emphasise the relationship between academic study and the outside world – ultimately to the jobs students will be doing and the skills they will be using after they have left the University of Sheffield.

So in this issue we decided to focus on a range of projects that relate the real world to the classroom, involving students in doing fieldwork, in going on work placements, and in showing their work to members of the public.

We hope that the articles reflect the interesting things that our students are doing in the community, the valuable contributions that they are making and the life skills that they are developing in the process.

We received some really positive feedback about the first edition and would like to encourage you to continue to let us know what you think about crucIBL.

Philippa Levy, Academic Director, CILASS

In this issue...

- Fieldwork: from the graveyard to the moors via Barnsley
- Opera and Theatre productions – something old, something new
- Local election special
- Students teach the teachers – technology and inquiry

In a C(I)LASS of their own!

The first CILASS IBL Awards for excellence in inquiry-based learning were awarded to winners by Professor Paul White, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching, at the CILASS Staff-Student Symposium in early May. Each of the winners can select their own combination of prizes to the value of the award which they can use for learning and teaching related activity/work.

For more photos of the symposium: www.flickr.com/photos/cilass/tags/sss08/

Building Barnsley’s big conversation

Over the past semester, first year Architecture students have been involved in researching, designing and building structures out of materials such as concrete, timber and brick as part of the ‘Matter-Reality’ project. After much experimentation and a competition, nine final installations were chosen to be built and displayed around Barnsley town centre.

The students called their projects ‘A Place for Conversation’. Not only were they trying to create a piece of public art that people could talk about, they were creating spaces for people to get together and talk to each other.

The student IBL work was closely linked to a scheme to regenerate the centre of Barnsley, being run by Will Alsop Architects in conjunction with Yorkshire Forward. On the project, students were not only learning their trade and getting to grips with the need to explain their work to the public, but in a small way were contributing to the regeneration of Barnsley. One student said: “This project is about reinventing a material, reviving its unique qualities, similar to how Barnsley is being revived by way of a regeneration project.”

The project in full – pages 4-5

First year Architecture students gave the people of Barnsley something to talk about on a market day in March with a set of striking installations they created as part of the town’s regeneration scheme.
Grave material for archaeology

Laura Howard, the Student Ambassador for Economics, found herself a special guest at an inquiry-based learning project run by Archaeology. And she wasn’t put off by its somewhat unusual location.

I’m sure that most people wouldn’t think of a cemetery as the most obvious place for an inquiry-based learning activity, however this is the setting for the second year Archaeology module ‘Research Skills in Archaeology’.

The General Cemetery off Ecclesall Road was opened in 1836 during the industrial revolution. Now, it is a historical treasure and a potentially valuable source of research data.

The students began their module by dividing into small groups and collaborating to agree on suitable and challenging research questions to investigate when they got to the cemetery. After a pilot study and, in some cases, some serious rethinking, students hit the graveyard to collect their data.

All the groups focussed on different research questions, such as the dates and styles of the gravestones, and the condition of the material out of which the gravestones were constructed.

One student said: “Working in a group has been enjoyable but challenging. At first, devising the research questions was a daunting task but after a successful fieldwork session things started falling into place. I’m sure it will help me in later studies and general life.

The module leader, Professor Glynis Jones, said: “The purpose of this module is to allow students to develop their independent research skills. Any job requires you to think for yourself and this module is the perfect opportunity to do this.”

Inquiry-based learning was an essential part of the opera’s preparation and rehearsal process. The musical director, Andrew Lawrence-King, realised a new edition of the opera for our production. Andrew worked from surviving manuscripts of the opera as well a modern edition to produce the Sheffield version.

“When I was cast as Pocris I knew I was about to embark on a huge challenge. It was my first principal role in an opera, and I was petrified by the fact that I had to learn to sing in 17th century Spanish! I didn’t study Spanish at school so even the basics of pronunciation were new to me.

“Developing the ability to adapt to changes quickly was certainly useful and has prepared me well for other music projects and is an important transferable skill to use when working with contemporary composers on their new works.

By Rosie Williamson
(Student Ambassador for Music)
Students involved in one of CILASS’s most innovative projects climbed aboard the London train earlier this year for a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum – all in aid of theatrical inspiration.

Theatre two point oh# is the first student-led project funded by the CILASS IBL grant scheme and as the name suggests, the ten-strong collective sees the exploitation of new technology in theatre as part of their mission. Project co-ordinator Laura Jenkins explained: “We want to utilise theatre as a tool for promoting inquiry and sharing ideas, practice and knowledge, and bring together a diverse range of students to create a theatre production from scratch.

“So half way through our project we couldn’t believe our luck when we heard that the V&A was staging a new theatre design exhibition, Collaborators, that highlighted the collective nature of theatre creation. We just had to go.”

The group used some of its grant to bring in experienced practitioners to lead workshops in Sheffield. Laura and fellow co-ordinator Tom Szekeres took eight participants to London to spend a full day at the exhibition, incorporating an afternoon workshop.

Neil Sheriff. “He asked us to re-enter the exhibition with fresh eyes and pick three different elements that appealed to us on a personal level,” said Laura.

“Many members of the collective took this as an opportunity to sketch and photograph their ideas, which helped to illustrate their arguments when we pitched the ideas back to the group. We were then asked to take one of the elements that we had chosen and either develop this into a character or element of the set.”

Tom added: “This trip couldn’t have come at a better time. It was a fantastic opportunity for us to nurture our collaborative inquiry culture and develop our personal relationships.”

By Laura Jenkins and Tom Szekeres

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MRSA in the Media

Twelve second year medical students have been taking a more than usual interest in Britain’s newspapers lately – they’ve been analysing how the papers have covered outbreaks of MRSA, the so-called hospital superbug.

They’re taking part in a special six week CILASS funded research project to assess whether newspaper coverage of MRSA and its link to hygiene in hospitals is accurate and appropriate.

They believe that as the amount of medical evidence for hygiene as a cause for MRSA is limited, the media is focussing on hospital cleanliness because the public perceive it to be symptomatic of a crumbling NHS.

For many of the students, research is a new process and this project is aimed at developing their inquiry skills. They kept a ‘learning diary’ in the form of a blog to identify learning needs and to reflect on progress.

As part of the research process the students each took at least one newspaper or journal to analyse for the period 1990 to 2006 and did a content analysis of all the articles which mentioned MRSA to determine if and how media reporting has changed over this period. In an attempt to further their insight into the world of the print press, they had seminars with Jonathan Foster from the Department of Journalism Studies. They interviewed journalists from their respective newspapers to understand the thinking behind their coverage of the MRSA story.

It’s given the students an opportunity to look at medicine from a different angle. “It has been well received by the students involved and has provided an opportunity to engage in areas not normally open to us,” said Emily.

By Tom Hinton, Emily Thomas and Heléna Cobb

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Factbox

**MRSA stands for Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus.** About one in three of us carry Staphylococcus Aureus (SA) on our skin or in our noses with no ill effects. But if the bacteria get into the body via a graze or cut it can cause infections like boils or abscesses. Most SA infections can be treated with antibiotics such as Methicillin, a type of penicillin. But SA is becoming resistant to a wide range of antibiotics, making it more difficult to treat.

*Source: NHS Direct*
Barnsley is a town in South Yorkshire, which lies on the River Dearne about twelve miles North of Sheffield. There have been markets in Barnsley since 1249, when the town was awarded its Royal Charter by Henry III. Local culture remains rooted in the town’s industrial past: the town was dependant on coal mining until the early 1900s and glass making has always been a prominent industry.

Now Barnsley’s getting a face-lift, to reintroduce a variety of shops and attractions to the town and to encourage more people to visit the town centre.

In 2002 Barnsley town council launched the ‘Rethinking Barnsley’ regeneration plan. Will Alsop Architects were invited by Regional Development Agency ‘Yorkshire Forward’ to help with the regeneration of Barnsley’s 1960s style town centre.

By 2012, the architects aim to have created art museum galleries, a community learning zone, a local history research centre and an exhibition space within Barnsley Town Hall. Alsop architects say: “Barnsley was once a compact, close knit and sustainable community and could be so again.”

www.yorkshire-forward.com
www.alsoparchitects.com

Livi Whitworth: Bricks
“Finding out a way of jointing the bricks was difficult, we looked at mortar but we ended up making the structure self-supporting.

Emma Hyett: Timber
“When everything fits together, I guess that’s exciting. We didn’t know if our joints would work, but luckily they do!”

Tom Bellfield: Concrete
“The most challenging thing was designing and making the mould work, and trying to hold the concrete sides in place.”

Katie Robinson: Stone
“It has been a really good project, working with a new material, and of course coming to cold Barnsley to build it!”
The School of Architecture devised the Matter-Reality inquiry project as a way of introducing Architecture students at the very start of their studies to the materials they will be working with for the rest of their careers and to develop the professional skills they will need once they enter the world of work.

Over five hectic weeks, first year students found out all they could about different types of material: concrete, stone, polymers, wood, glass, bio-materials, bricks, cardboard and metal. Each material was the focus for two separate groups of between four and six architects. Every group was allocated a particular building which used the material in a certain way.

Each group gave a presentation on their findings, and as part of their research. They also visited a factory which made their material.

Then came nine days of design. First, the two teams who’d been working on each material competed to design the best ‘Place for Conversation’ using their material. A winning design was chosen for each material and the two groups were merged for the next stage.

The first challenge was to get used to working in large groups of between ten and twelve people. Deciding on a coherent concept which developed the initial winning design was difficult, as one student said: “The frustration of group work... all our different points of view!”

Once they’d decided the design, the students quickly had to organise a production line. They had only five days to turn their plans into reality ready for installation on market day in Barnsley on the 5th March 2008.

The groups also had to know how a material responded to tension or compression and in many cases they had to learn special joining techniques. The cardboard group, which developed a sophisticated joint made only out of cardboard tubes and double corrugated cardboard sheets, managed to design a life size Meccano kit.

After five long and busy days, every group had an installation ready to set up in Barnsley.

The day was successful in generating both “interest and confusion!” about the installations that were scattered around the town centre.

People discussed the idea of refreshing their town centre, as they talked to the students. There was a parallel between the recycling of materials used in the installations, and the potential future of a revived Barnsley.

By Sarah Gold
(Student Ambassador for Architecture)
All 86 taught postgraduate students in the Department of Journalism Studies have just finished a major four day production project that centred on covering the local elections.

Between April 29 and May 2 students on five separate courses, specialising in print, magazines, broadcast, and web journalism and political communication pooled their resources to produce two newspapers, a live website, a 68 page magazine, hourly radio news bulletins, two daily television news bulletins and a one hour election results radio programme.

This is the fourth consecutive year that the department has run the project as a way of bringing real world experience into the curriculum and allowing students to flex their journalistic muscles.

MA Broadcast Journalism course leader Marie Kinsey said: "Each year, the project develops a stronger multi-media emphasis to reflect the changes in journalism working practices.

"By giving the students a broad framework for the output, they’ve a fantastic opportunity to come up with bags of ideas for stories and to cover an important political story. They did a brilliant job."

Sixteen of the students were down at the Friday morning count at Ponds Forge to hear Sheffield’s Liberal Democrat leader Paul Scriven react to the news that his party had won control of the city council by six seats. The students also bagged interviews with national Liberal Democrat leader and Sheffield Hallam MP Nick Clegg and former Home Secretary David Blunkett, the MP for Sheffield Brightside.

By Marie Kinsey

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The students talk tecchie

If you’ve ever wondered how the students are exploiting the use of new technology, a new video on the CILASS website will explain all.

Two of CILASS’s student ambassadors, Tom Szekeres and Joseph Tame, from the Technology Group feature in a new tech-talk video filmed by CILASS’s Mark Morley.

Mark said: "Tom started off by talking us through how to use Web 2.0 open source software to add translations, subtitling or commentators to copyright free video held on video hosting sites such as Youtube, Dailymotion and Google Video. Tom had suggested the use of the software to his department, French, where it is now being used by lecturers to improve the quality and content of their presentations."

Mark points out that this could be used for other things:

- drawing on news articles for language translations
- making a foreign language resource available in a non-language degree
- annotating a video that students could refer to outside class time
- responding to accessibility requirements
- inducting international students.

Joseph explained about the use of technology for IBL in the School of East Asian Studies. "He described how a ‘virtual language lab’ has been developed," said Mark. "It contains multimedia resources from interviews recorded in Japan and students can access it via the internet. This means students can develop their language skills when away from Japan."

In another case, students are given a particular inquiry topic which is supported by a bank of multimedia resources, for example on how tobacco is marketed and its consumption viewed differently between Britain and Japan. They then prepare for a debate about the pros and cons of the issue under consideration. Because the technology is integrated fully into the classroom, the students can participate in a passionate, interactive debate, pulling additional material from the internet in real time to bolster their position.

by Mark Morley
Dealing with Debt in Derbyshire

Students from the Department of Sociological Studies have been doing real world research for community-based organisations from the Gambia to Derbyshire. Social Research Practice is a third year group-based module in the Department of Sociological Studies. Each group has to produce a high quality report for an organisation outside the University. It is an unusual module on four counts:

- The relationship between staff and students is more like one between senior and junior colleagues than between lecturer and student.
- Student group members have to agree a binding contract with each other over the contribution they make and are held accountable by the contract.
- There is a substantial element of peer appraisal in the module, where each student assesses the contribution made by every other student in their group.
- There is an expectation – made explicit from the beginning and often repeated – that the quality of the final report should be of a publishable standard.

by David Philips

In the deep end

Social Research Practice immediately appealed to me because of its ‘hands-on’ nature. The module tutor began with a warning that the module would be tough and would most probably take over our lives for 12 weeks. We were provided with a ‘survival guide’ written by previous students on the module. Whilst this should have been enough to put anybody off, I’m thankful that it did not; the module proved to be the most rewarding and enjoyable learning experience of my three years at Sheffield.

‘All that my group knew before we started was that our research would be for the North-East Derbyshire Citizens Advice Bureau (NEDCAB) debt advice service. We were responsible for defining the research direction, goals, methods and everything else involved in the research process, although one thing was made perfectly clear – the deadline for a professionally written final report.

‘We exposed the workings of the CAB in terms of the service it delivers and provided some constructive criticism in order for it to improve. It was difficult being invited in to a service and then criticising it in such a way but it has meant that our project has had real beneficial outcomes for debt clients using the service. The project was a pilot and has succeeded in getting funding for a large scale research project.

‘We had to adopt a proactive approach throughout the module. The reality was one of haphazard trial and error as we encountered, tackled and overcame problems; both research-related and in group working.

‘Overall the module enabled me to acquire a whole new perspective on, and understanding of, social research in a group-based context that would have been impossible in a traditional essay/exam based module.

by Sarah Shorley
(Student Ambassador for Sociological Studies)

Factbox

North East Derbyshire Citizens Advice Bureau

NEDCAB gives free, confidential, impartial and independent advice and information on a wide range of subjects, including debt, housing, employment, consumer and tax issues, legal matters, immigration, family and personal issues. Last year the bureau had over 4,000 requests for help which brought about over 11,000 enquiries with the debt teams renegotiating over £3 million of debt.

To find out more, go to: www.ned-cab.org.uk/index.asp

The needle
in the haystack

By Natalie Jane Whelan
(Student Ambassador for Geography)

Every year second year physical geographers visit the Blencathra Field Centre in the Lake District to develop their skills in fieldwork research and design. After a few days of teaching, students are given just two days to arrange themselves into a group, design and implement their own fieldwork and analyse the results, before finally presenting their study for assessment to other students and staff.

Natalie Whelan was part of this year’s group and kept a diary. She found that IBL is sometimes difficult before it is rewarding!

Tuesday 11.15am: Last night we decided to study scree slope formation which gave us more time this morning to review literature and formulate a plan. We just found a journal paper with a scree sorting theory we want to test, and already have our site chosen, so now we are off out to collect our preliminary data!

Tuesday 9.05pm: Got back from the field site earlier and it wasn’t pretty. After climbing up the mammoth steep slope with the aim to drop different sized rocks and see how far they would go, we came across several problems:

- Rocks were hard to find again once dropped.
- It was hard work getting the rock back to the top and took too long.
- The fine scree site where rocks were dropped became damaged over the day.

Whilst on site, we chose a fresh untouched slope and our test rocks for tomorrow and after a heated group discussion, agreed to reduce the different sized rocks from five to three and throw each rock thirty times instead of the original fifty. We also needed a way to identify them and agreed that wax crayons would be the best way to do this for both the environment and us. Just finished writing up our proposal for tomorrow which was possibly the most stressful part of the day as each of us had independently researched too much leading us to go over the page limit. We went about the task in the wrong way. Luckily our work managed to pass.

Wednesday 8.45pm: The new methods worked well today and we managed to collect our data with minimum problems. After data analysis and writing up, we have come to realise that our rocks were not chosen in the best possible way. We measured the length but didn’t take into account weight or angularity which would have affected how they roll down the slope and how far they travel, therefore affecting our hypothesis.

Looking back on the module, I realise how rewarding it was. As stressful as Tuesday was, I, like everyone else in the group, learnt how to work as a team and reaped the benefits on Wednesday. By the end of the day we all realised that debating over data collection methods wasted time, which would have been valuable for report writing later on.
When the Department of Town and Regional Planning launched a new masters course in International Development and Planning they created a real life project with a difference – instead of taking the students to the project, they brought the project ‘virtually’ to the students.

Using its links with the Planning Department at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in South Africa, the department pinpointed a new development in Johannesburg at the centre of a new high speed rail link – the Gautrain. The Gautrain is being used to encourage economic development in the area.

TRP lecturer Dr Steve Connelly received some training in using a video camera and went to Johannesburg, where he recorded interviews with planners and developers, collected mounds of paper documents, made site visits, took dozens of photographs and recorded video footage of the site and life in the communities around it.

“This project would give students the opportunity to explore an actual planning issue as realistically as possible, but from the relative comfort of Sheffield,” he said.

Back in Sheffield, the team started building all of this material and more into a set of resources on the MOLE virtual learning environment that students could access. They uploaded photographs, edited video clips and commentary along with interview sound files and transcripts.

And the project got bigger – the team drew on the specialist urban design and financial appraisal skills of other departmental staff, and called on a Wits planning academic, Garth Klein, who is studying for his PhD in Sheffield.

To give the students some structure the teaching team conceived the course within an overall IBL framework, asking them to come up with a plan for just, sustainable and financially viable development of the so-called ‘node’ around one of the new train stations. Each week there was a specific topic of inquiry to be addressed.

This was as challenging for the students as it was for the staff. What resources would the students need? How much should the staff ‘teach’? How could the staff give them enough information to make sense of an unfamiliar setting, without overwhelming them?

Four-hour sessions with plenty of time for discussion helped, Garth’s input was invaluable, and we ‘sensitised’ (or traumatised?) the group at the outset with the full-length film Tsotsi, which graphically portrays the inequity, contrasts and violence that characterise Johannesburg in a way that no lecture or exploration of virtual resources ever could.

“It’s exciting and challenging for us as tutors, taking us into subjects and ways of teaching that we have never dealt with before on this scale. There’s never enough time, and every session gives the sense of ‘winging it’ as we respond to the students’ progress and questions,” said TRP lecturer Dr Paula Meth.

It seems to be working for the students too – feedback has included: ‘the opportunity to use ICT in our module has been a great learning experience’ and ‘the course has built successfully from the theory-based work I have done last term into something that can be seen from a practical perspective and how what I have learned can be applied in the real world’.

By Stephen Connelly and Paula Meth

The university experience is always about asking interesting questions and trying to find the answers. Students from the School of Architecture have given this idea a novel twist at www.bemakeshift.com We’ll publish one question in each issue of CrucIBL. No marks, no prizes – just food for thought!

Now is the era of the amateur. No one paid me to write this.

Discuss - (0 Marks)

www.bemakeshift.com