



Project Document Cover Sheet

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SPLASH:

Student Personal, Learning and Social Homepages

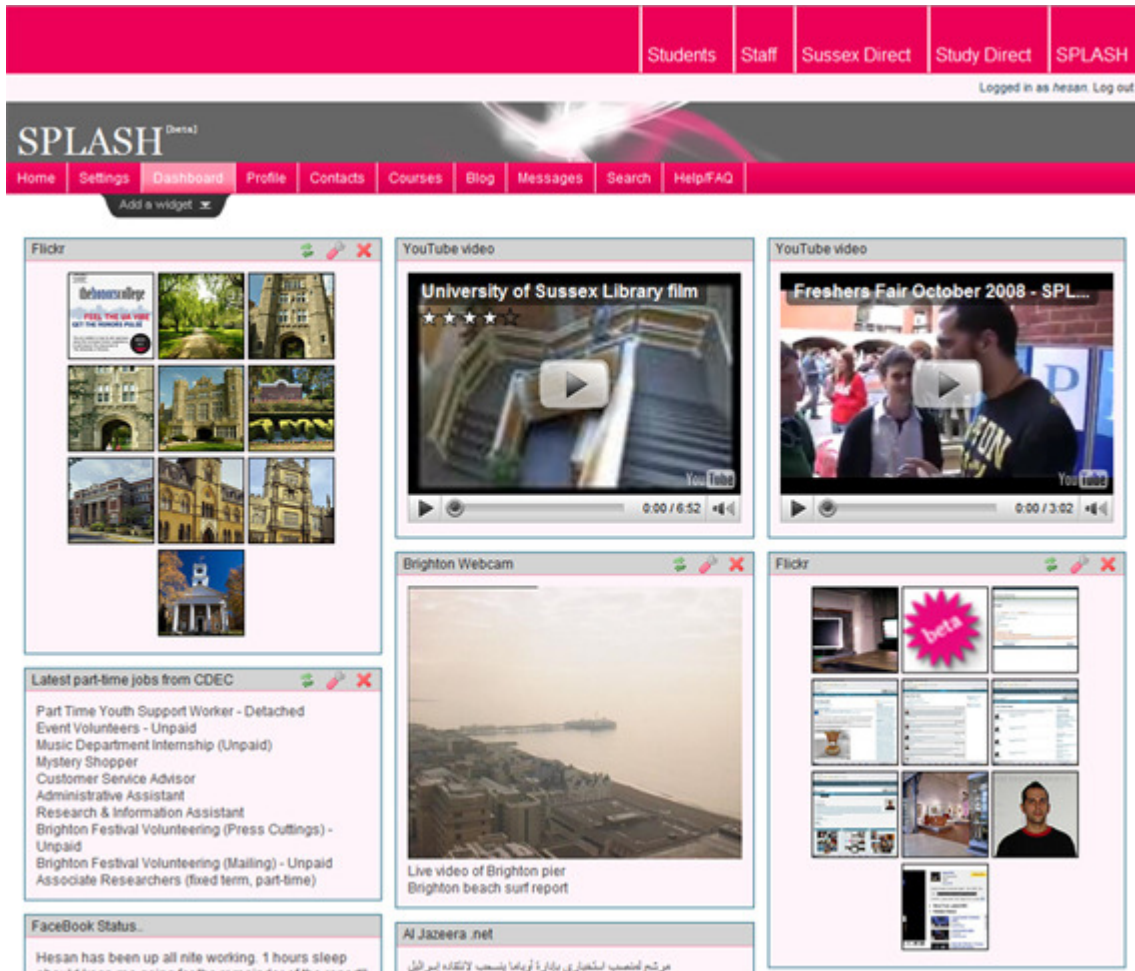


Figure 1 This image illustrates the authenticated dashboard page of the system which users see when they log in – the page has been personalised by a specific user (Hesan Yousif, SPLASH Client Manager).

JISC Final Report created by:

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- John Davies, Teaching and Learning Development Unit
- Carol Shergold, E-Learning Development Manager (IT Services)
- Beth Granter, SPLASH Client Manager (2007-8)

The screenshot shows the University of Sussex internal homepage. At the top left is the 'US University of Sussex Sussex Internal' logo. At the top right are links for 'Sussex external website | Help | Contact' and a search box labeled 'Search sussex internal'. Below this is a navigation bar with tabs for 'Students', 'Staff', 'Sussex Direct', 'Study Direct', and 'SPLASH'. Underneath is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'News and events', 'Student support', 'Schools and departments', 'Campus information', and 'Activities'. The main content area features a large image of a bee on a yellow flower with the headline 'Research lab a hive of industry'. To the right is an 'Events' section with two event listings: 'Event 1' on Monday 25th December at 11:00 and 'Event 2' on Monday 1st February at 14:00. Below the events is a 'Small ads' section with a 'View all' link. On the left side, there is a 'Latest student news' section with two news items, each with a 'Full story...' link and a 'View all' link at the bottom. On the right side, there is a 'Quick Links' section with two links: 'Sussex Sport' and 'Looking for part time work? Visit the CDEC web site.'.

Figure 2 This image shows a link to SPLASH as it will appear on the new University of Sussex internal homepage

1. Executive Summary

The SPLASH project's main aim was to provide a blueprint for a web-based piece of social software which provides increased personalisation of the learning experience. We aimed to achieve this by enabling students to create a homepage where institutionally owned data could be integrated with externally hosted artefacts. The concept of harnessing Web 2.0 technologies and approaches to enhance the student experience has been key to the project, in particular the use of 'widgets' to bring in content from a variety of sources. The SPLASH software is now in live use at the University of Sussex and is a key feature of the University web redevelopment which is due to go live in 2009.

A full system walkthrough and key features summary is available at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/deliverables.php>.

A key deliverable of the project was the ability for the platform to be released as open source software for potential adoption within other institutions and the code is now available for download from <http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/>.

The project took a coordinated approach to capturing user requirements from students (and later from staff members) across the institution and fed these into a programme of technical development work which led to a beta implementation of the software. The main findings of the project following the release of the software can be summarised as follows:

- There has been great enthusiasm amongst staff members as well as students not only for blogging on a range of topics but making use of the portal aspect of the system and using the system tools to enhance teaching practice
- The overriding feedback from all stakeholders is their desire to retain a sense of 'community' within their academic or support network:

"Due to the nature of the programmes, research students can feel very isolated and find it more difficult to meet other students and this is an issue we are keen to address". – Gail Barrett, the Sussex Institute.

(See Appendix 1 - Initial Pilot Group Overview and Case Studies)

- An initial assumption that the vast majority of students use social networking sites and are confident in their use has been challenged:

"I don't like social networking, is that what SPLASH is all about?"

(See <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/10/freshers-fair-and-splash-stand.html>)

- There is a need to communicate beyond the traditional email form in order to grab the attention of students who may not regularly be on campus

"SPLASH could also be used as a tool for advertising seminars, one-off lectures and training events. If we can use it as a central point for information and communication I think this will encourage students to continue to use the site. – Gail Barrett, the Sussex Institute.

(See Appendix 1 - Initial Pilot Group Overview and Case Studies)

Continuing varied relationships between participants in the SPLASH community are still emerging and flexibility in software design has proved essential in enabling different groups to tailor the system to reflect a range of priorities and needs. The software will continue to be supported and developed by the University after the close of the JISC funded project, though academic champions are needed to facilitate the development of the system as a tool for teaching and learning.

2. Background

The SPLASH project was funded under the Technology-supported learning environments: user-owned technology demonstrators strand of the JISC E-learning programme. The strand sought to “[adapt] personal systems to enable them to make use of services provided by institutional systems”¹ and the SPLASH project achieved this by enabling the creation of student profile pages that feature widgets² which bring in content from a range of University and external systems such as the VLE (Moodle, branded as Study Direct), student portal, Facebook and Flickr. The project employed the existing open source Zend Framework³ to leverage the web service APIs for key sites as well as employing the Netvibes web service⁴ where required.

The benefits of this approach were perceived to be:

- An improvement in the student learning experience by creating new ways for classmates to communicate with one another;
- An opportunity to harness the growing preference of students to communicate via online social networking and blogging sites;
- An increased scope for sharing and re-purposing content in support of a less modular and course-based approach to learning
- The creation of a widget based personalised dashboard and profile page which students and staff could use as a mash-up tool to draw in information they felt was relevant to themselves

The project team felt that the widget-centred approach outlined above could reconfirm individual and group relationships offline without the need to learn (and for institutions to develop) multiple new systems which may only be available to the student while they are a member of the institution.

The SPLASH project took as its starting point the fact that students entering higher education institutions spend increasing amounts of time online and interacting with Web 2.0 sites such as Flickr, YouTube and Facebook on which they have existing accounts. So whilst students are often already part of online communities when they arrive, until now there has been no way of allowing them to bring in content they have created in those spaces, either for personal and learning use or as a way of creating an identity within the University. By using such technology, content created for or in SPLASH whilst at the University will also be available to students when they leave.

The SPLASH project has therefore contributed to the outcomes and benefits of the overall JISC E-learning programme by utilising portal technology and exploring its integration into a flexible, personalised learning environment.

Please note that the public front page of SPLASH can be found at:

<http://splash.sussex.ac.uk/>.

¹ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/fundingopportunities/funding_calls/2006/09/funding_circular04_06.aspx

² <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/glossary.php>

³ <http://framework.zend.com/>

⁴ <http://www.netvibes.com/>

3. Aims and Objectives

The table below explores the specific aims and objectives of the project which were designed to contribute to the eLearning Programme by providing a platform for staff to explore the use of Web 2.0 in their teaching and for students to personalise their interaction with institutional systems. The framework used is open source and provides a high level of flexibility in the software it is used to create.

Aim/Objective	Comment
Create student personal homepages based around portal/mash-up technology Use mash-ups	<i>In response to demand from staff and to add to the number of users of SPLASH (and thereby maximise the value of the social networking aspect of the system) the project has also created homepages for staff users who have an interest in the system for both social and teaching purposes.</i>
Ensure that the content users will be creating, utilising and sharing that will have longevity Keep content available	<i>The full benefit to the institution of being able to supply this service without needing to supply continued authenticated access to systems was not fully apparent at the beginning of the project.</i>
Increase the benefit to the user of having an investment in such a system Find out what users want	<i>There was an assumption at the start of the project that the majority of student users would already be highly engaged with social networking tools. This has proven not to be the case and once the system was launched, academic staff members proved to be key in getting students using the system for learning activities</i>
Cater for students who have not used these technologies before Find out what support users need	<i>It has become apparent that a high proportion of students and staff do not currently engage in any social networking activity on the internet and therefore may need more support and/or guidance than text based help pages can provide.</i>
Introduce students to the benefits to be gained from the social interaction that blogs and other tools provide and the actual learning outcomes that can be achieved Find out why users want to blog and what they get out of it	<i>While blogs have had some success, the team has found that retaining new users has presented challenges.</i>
Allow students to use the tools provided to state personal goals, plan a project or essay and for self-reflection Provide useful tools that support learning	<i>While the tools exist (primarily via the blog) to do this, students are presently only doing so when directed by academic staff.</i>
Allow lecturers to engage with students in new ways of learning and interaction Make use of Web 2.0 style interactions in a learning context	<i>This required staff users to have full access to the system (as opposed to just viewing public student blog posts). This was an unexpected development.</i>

<p>Explore ideas around Web 2.0 approaches to online communication Find out how and what users want to communicate</p>	<p><i>Small self-defining group interaction around tasks was something that a number of pilot groups asked for so that they could discuss issues privately for a specific purpose.</i></p>
<p>Explore ways of producing student homepages by utilising already existing data held within the MIS system Generate pages automatically when users sign-up</p>	<p><i>In fact integrating the system sign up with registration procedures for new students was more problematic than actually creating the pages.</i></p>
<p>Draw upon the previous JISC funded MINTED project (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/its/minted/) Learn lessons from other projects</p>	<p><i>The project set up student homepages using data from the University management information and LDAP systems – this meant having an understanding of issues previously explored by the MINTED project. SPLASH leverages the person-group membership information that the MINTED project defined from the University Oracle database.</i></p>
<p>Provide a scalable, adaptable model for the automatic generation of customisable student homepages and for the automatic creation of user groups, friends and class lists Make it easy to get started</p>	<p><i>We have found it necessary to build in a much more complex permissions model than was originally envisaged. It was necessary for example to have both Dashboards (visible only to the user) and Profiles (visible to others using SPLASH) to enable only information such as Facebook and Ebay notifications only to appear to the user and so preserve security of access.</i></p>
<p>Create homepages which are customisable in both template design and syndication with content Support personalisation</p>	<p><i>Homepages are created with default templates that users can change – they can also add the widgets that they want, although they receive a default set. The set of available widgets has grown substantially as suggestions from users have been responded to over time.</i></p>
<p>Allow students to re-purpose existing content as well as continuing to develop new content which will still be available to them when they leave the institution Enable the use of new and existing content</p>	<p><i>Homepages have widgets which allow users to feature content from the VLE, their University timetable and external sites such as Facebook as well as creating content via the blog.</i></p>

4. Methodology

The project undertook broad consultation with a number of pilot groups before undertaking the technical design process. Students were surveyed and their requirements fed into a beta development of the SPLASH software. At key points in the development users (a mixture of pilot group students, other students and staff members) were asked to take part in usability testing exercises in which they were asked to navigate through to different screens in the system and note the ease or difficulty with which the operation was carried out⁵. Ongoing consultation took place with student (and staff) contributors during the project, with usability tests and small group meetings being used to explore how far the system design met the requirements of the pilot groups. This process led to an updated beta release of the SPLASH software in December 2008 and the production of case studies in support of the project's findings.

The project employed a client manager whose role was to act as the primary point of contact for pilot groups working with the project and to lead the development of our case studies. The client manager was responsible for contacting the different pilot groups and capturing their requirements for a system that would meet diverse social networking and learning needs. This exercise took the form of small group meetings with the client manager. The key groups the project team interacted with initially were Product Design (part of the Engineering and Design department), the Student's Union Gender Society and Social Work department. For an overview of the pilot groups please see Appendix 1.

For the full initial user analysis see:

<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/05/meetings-with-pilot-groups.html> &
<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/05/meetings-with-pilot-groups-ii.html>.

Student's initial reaction to the proposed system was varied:

"Is this just another system I have to learn"

"Oh, is SPLASH just another Facebook site for students?"

"I don't like social networking, is that what SPLASH is all about?"

"I love the idea of SPLASH. It's about time we had something like this in the University".

"Is SPLASH going to replace [the VLE]?"

"Is SPLASH going to be integrated into other University systems?"

More reactions can be found at:

<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/10/freshers-fair-and-splash-stand.html> &
<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/10/interim-comments-by-student-users-of.html>.

Technical design was undertaken by the lead developer in conjunction with other colleagues from the project team. The project team used the information that had been gathered from the user analysis to produce mock-ups of the design and also explored options for the

⁵ Usability is a **quality attribute** that assesses how easy user interfaces are to use. The word "usability" also refers to methods for improving ease-of-use during the design process. Usability is defined by five quality components:

- **Learnability:** How easy is it for users to accomplish basic tasks the first time they encounter the design?
- **Efficiency:** Once users have learned the design, how quickly can they perform tasks?
- **Memorability:** When users return to the design after a period of not using it, how easily can they re-establish proficiency?
- **Errors:** How many errors do users make, how severe are these errors, and how easily can they recover from the errors?
- **Satisfaction:** How pleasant is it to use the design?

There are many other important quality attributes. A key one is **utility**, which refers to the design's functionality: Does it do what users need? <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html>

technical foundations of the site. The initial design considerations were firstly therefore to identify integration priorities from the user needs (e.g. which sites would be most important to them), to identify potential links with the VLE and student portal and to identify key site components and whether existing social networking systems could supply these.

For the full blog posts on analysis and design see <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/05/stage-1-analysis-and-design.html> and <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/06/tools-we-may-wish-to-integrate-with.html>.

Mock-up sites were created to allow small scale usability testing of the software front end. The initial mock-ups offered limited functionality with a Flash frontend, primarily so that we could carry out usability testing with students and technical colleagues and simulate how the login function would work, and also illustrate widgets and front end visual effects, such as fades, widget placement etc.

For outcomes of initial usability testing see: <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/09/usability-testing-feedback.html>

The project team also carried out a large scale demonstration of the mock-up site in the InQbate Creativity Zone at Sussex University (<http://www.ingbate.co.uk/content/view/33/97/>), to which all students in the pilot groups were invited. A great deal of useful feedback was collected and the exercise resulted in a plan to extend the pilot in order to maximise the potential for a social networking 'community'. The realisation was that increased numbers of users would be required to fully explore the social networking aspect of the system and that the maximum numbers of student users could be captured by carrying out a beta release of the software at the beginning of the Autumn term. As well as extending usage to other student groups, the team also decided to broaden the scope to incorporate staff as those involved in the pilot groups were keen to be able to access the system at the same as their students.

The full details of the InQbate session can be found at: <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/11/mockup-demonstration.html>.

A period of intensive development and iterative usability testing followed from December 2007 as the team worked toward the beta release which was successfully deployed in September 2008. These usability testing sessions defined the priorities for the development team leading up to the beta release however it became clear as time went on that some technical issues needed to be resolved before significant development could take place to address the key recommendations of the pilot groups.

Usability testing outcomes are summarised in the Implementation section below and are presented in full on the project blog at: <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/06/usability-test-overview.html> & <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/09/it-services-usability-results-8th.html>

The project team worked with the communications division to produce a publicity plan in support of the roll out of the software and the system was made available to students from early September 2008 so that new students could access the system once they had registered online for the new academic year. Although testing had taken place it was found that the widgets were very slow to load when it first went live - this required further investigation to resolve and did have some impact on reactions of early users to the system.

Due to changes in key departmental staff (and the fact that the Gender Studies group no longer existed) the client manager found that it was difficult for case studies to be put

together with all of the original pilot groups. The case studies carried out during the period to March 2009 therefore focus on the History and Social Work departments plus the Sussex Institute. Further work was carried out with other units who expressed an interest in using the system to support students. These were the Career Development and Employment Centre, International and Study Abroad office, Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) and Student's Union. See Appendix 1 for an overview of these areas.

A second beta release was also planned so that the project team could respond to suggestions for enhancements from the user community, although it was possible to add widgets to the live system in the interim. The 0.2 beta release was deployed in December 2008. User statistics for October 2008 (and February 2009) are presented on the project website at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/userstatistics.php>.

The project would have benefitted from the provision of more workshops or online instruction for users new to Web 2.0 technologies and this is something the team will be investigating for the future – while both student homepages and the blog system feature user-managed access controls which allow students to create content which is not universally viewable (and therefore to build confidence in their use of these tools) it is likely that more targeted support would be beneficial.

5. Implementation

5.1. Technical development

The project team found that a great number of social networking sites were available on the web, and that the majority had the key functions of:

- Contact a friend via messaging or wall (similar to private blog post)
- Use of widgets to bring in external information (often bespoke)
- Games and Entertainment applications (usually bespoke)
- Creation of groups
- Profile pages and status information
- Sharing of web information (through links or articles)

The Project Team therefore initially assessed existing open-source social networking software to see if it could meet the student user (and technical) requirements and provide a minimal set of standard features. The assessment revealed that particularly in the area of blogging and the permission models available, these systems were not able to meet the requirements we had identified. A statement of technical requirements for the system was also created and used to assess the available options for a supporting framework.

For a comparison of Elgg and Mahara, and the technical requirements analysis, see: <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/02/technical-documentation-potential.html>.

Based on the above analysis a decision was taken to develop the application platform in-house and leverage the power of a pre-existing framework as the backbone to the application. The Zend Framework (ZF), <http://framework.zend.com/>, was chosen for reasons including the following:

- ZF is designed to run on PHP v5.2.3 and greater and has clear coding standards
- ZF has an extensive set of components to interface with various external APIs
- The flow of the application in terms of coding standard was optimal and the framework had already been adopted by large corporate businesses, such as IBM

- The styling of the framework was straightforward and relatively easy to implement
- Framework retained regular updates
- Scope for scalability was high
- Agile development was possible
- The component-centric structure of ZF does not force a high level of conformity which allows high level of experimentation

Further information about Zend Framework can be found in on the project web page at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/methodology.php>.

The framework manual and API code can be found at (respectively):

<http://framework.zend.com/manual/en>.
<http://framework.zend.com/apidoc/core/>

For the database backend, MySQL 5 was chosen. This was due to the fact that it is familiar to many developers of open source software and is available on many key development platforms. It also provides a stable database backend with a responsive data store. This responsiveness is essential when trying to limit resource bottlenecks.

Collaboration was necessary between the project team and colleagues with responsibility for the VLE. In order for SPLASH to access related course information for a student, or for a member of staff to have their tutor related sites linked within SPLASH, it is necessary to gain this information from the University's Moodle-based VLE (branded as Study Direct). Earlier, more detailed collaboration with colleagues responsible for server hosting may have helped to identify and resolve issues with the system speed earlier on.

5.2. Testing outcomes

Outcomes from small group meetings with the client manager and of usability testing sessions were vital to gauge to responses to the pilot groups to the site as it was developed.

Some key outcomes from the usability testing with students were in June 2008 were:

- Users weren't as confident with the technologies as we expected, for example the term 'widget' needed to be explained and the concept of tagging by topic was new to most users
 - This later lead to small group sessions being arranged with pilot groups so that the team could explain some of the key features
- We could see a way of using data we already hold on institutional systems to provide a default set up such as a default profile picture, name and possibly degree programme – users expected to see this
 - This development was included in the beta 0.1 release in September 2008
- Users expressed delight at seeing a list of their course mates and seeing what courses their friends are taking
 - This was a useful indicator that student's would enjoy engaging with their course mates using this platform

The full results of the usability can be read on the project blog: <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/06/usability-test-overview.html>.

Testing also took place with colleagues in IT Services which supplied an increased focus on technical issues that required resolution. The major issues revealed were:

- The speed with which widgets loaded was very poor (up to 30 seconds per page in actual load time) and this put people off

- This was found to be related to the use of Mac OSX Tiger on the web cluster. This was resolved primarily by the upgrade from Tiger to Leopard, which showed significant improvement in file system traversal. APC, a byte code pre-compiler and caching engine, was also installed to alleviate many repeated file system calls.
- The blog required design enhancements to ensure it was clearly readable and navigable
 - This development was included in the beta 0.1 release in September 2008

Full results from testing can be found at <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/09/it-services-usability-results-8th.html>.

5.3. Beta 0.1 launch

The main features of the first release of the software in September 2008 were as follows:

- LDAP Authentication module
- Access Control List functions (permissions)
- Login interface
- Layout template in three 'styles'
- Widget 'skeleton' for basic feed display
- Class list display
- 'Friends' management and display
- Groups functionality
- Basic minimal blog with permissions

The initial beta 0.1 version of the software was launched at the beginning of the academic year 2008/09, in advance of Fresher's Week at the University campus. It was planned at this time so that the SPLASH team could gain maximum publicity and grow awareness among new undergraduates who could potentially continue to use the site over a number of years. The plethora of information being given out to students at this time meant we had to grab their attention in a unique and special way. The project team were conscious that students may see SPLASH as 'just another site' or potentially a 'university imposed' application.

After a thorough brainstorming session, it was agreed that the team would source local jam and brand the jars with the SPLASH name and its specified URL. We felt by using something a little different and zany, to the normal give away pens, we would grab the student's attention and interest – this seemed to have the desired affect. After labelling up over 1000 of these, a stand was prepared with the relevant branding and screenshots of the site, (viewable at the technical blog: <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/10/freshers-fair-and-splash-stand.html>) and gave these out free to students. As the project team gave out the jam and talked with students they were able to initiate discussions about the SPLASH site, what features it offered and how it had been developed.



Figure 3 Freshers Fair stand and SPLASH jam

For the full jam related blog post, see <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/10/freshers-fair-and-splash-stand.html>

The Freshers Fair was very successful in building awareness among students across campus (reflected in the user statistics for October 2008, <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/userstatistics.php>). Alongside this, the launch of the site was advertised in the staff Bulletin newsletter

Workshops and presentations were also held to illustrate the main features of the site to staff from academic departments and other campus units, which gained some very positive responses and a desire to engage in the future development of the site from (amongst others) the Career Development and Employment Centre and International and Study Abroad office as well as the History department and Sussex Institute (focusing on DPhil students). See Appendix 1 for an overview of these areas.

Although resolution of issues with the speed of the system was achieved this did result in a delay in the roll out of the software by a few days. More rigorous testing may have helped identify these issues earlier.

5.4. Beta 0.2 development and release

Following the initial publicity drive, the focus moved to developing the case studies and carrying out further technical development of the site (in relation to the Zend framework, speed and load times of the site and cleaning and streamlining the back-end code). The project team began working towards the creation of version beta 0.2 to include new functionality suggested in the previous round of usability testing.

During the latter part of 2008, the project team had been concerned about the lack of momentum with regards to blogs and interaction on the site after the initial launch. Specific areas of concern were:

- Public and private facing blogs
- Returning visitors
- Individual user activity within the site, such as setting up profile/widgets etc

The user statistics for the period September -December 2008 illustrate a peak in the month of September which correlates to the Fresher's Fair and the publicity raised during this time. Just after the event, users continued to log into the site, but the numbers are lower. After September the number of users logging into the site continues to decrease due to a lack of continued publicity following the Fresher's Events. During this period the project team were focussed on establishing relationships with the departments involved with the case studies but had not started to carry out targeted activities such as workshops.

The team hoped that user numbers would improve over time but recognised that further collaboration across the University would be the key to engaging users and improving user statistics. Priorities for development were therefore guided by not only usability testing outcomes but by direct suggestions to the Web Team helpdesk and meetings with the Student's Union as well as growing engagement with academic departments and student support services such as the Career Development & Employment Centre.

In December 2008 the project team publicised the need for 5 students (via the Career Development & Employment Centre) to carry out further usability testing on the 0.2 beta site in order to refine site's functionality and the overall user experience. Some key outcomes of this round of usability testing were:

- *"I [...] found it very useful to find other people on the same courses as me whom I don't know very well."*
- *"I like the idea of everything being on one page and all together."*
- More than one user did not know how to add an image from an online location
 - As a result we have improved the help files and have plans to add help tips. We are also planning to standardise the icon set across Sussex websites so users become familiar with the icons used.
- More than one user had problems in finding the widget permissions location

Full usability results from this session can be found at:

<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2009/03/splash-usability-report-december-2008.html> .

These results were positive and illustrated the value of the improvements made on the site as a result of the first round of testing. However while SPLASH was considered a great resource by those that took part, some of the students stated that they were unaware of the SPLASH site prior to the testing session, primarily as they were not involved in the Fresher's Week activities which were targeted at new students – this backed up the need take a wider audience into account in future dissemination.

The main developments included in the beta 0.2 release (which went live later in December 2008) were:

- Ability to create groups of contacts – for example a tutorial group or project team, not just course-base connections drawn from institutional records
- Messaging service using University email function
- New widgets: an alert to show when library books are due back, a Sussexsport information feed and a bus timetable

- Improvements to the blogs, privacy settings and search function

5.5. Pilot groups and case studies

The SPLASH team initially identified pilot groups who contributed to the requirements analysis which formed the basis of the system design and provided valuable feedback on the site mock ups. These pilot groups evolved over time for a number of reasons.

- A larger sample group was required to make a SPLASH ‘community’ viable at the launch
- Key staff left and groups ceased to exist in the new academic year
- As a result of the campus publicity drive interest grew in the system in areas not previously anticipated and not only for academic purposes
- We could not see evidence of students independently using the system for learning purposes
- Key staff were keen to make use of the system for teaching

Based on the user statistics referenced earlier, it became clear that a more targeted approach was required and that staff could play a key role in promoting student engagement, particularly those in regular contact with students in a teaching or support context. There was therefore a need to grow the user community and to ensure that ways of using the system for learning purposes were fully explored.

Even when new groups had been identified for the case studies, problems were experienced in developing the beta 0.2 release in terms of coordinating the departments taking part and trying to maintain the momentum of the relationship. This issue was mainly due to the nature of the workload of academic departments and the client manager had to work hard to find appropriate times to hold meetings and maintain regular updates on progress.

From January 2009 the team carried out specific studies with academic departments and held workshops where the team could explore the possibilities of developing the site with small targeted groups. The project team planned and executed 1 hourly workshop sessions over 4 weeks to introduce and explain SPLASH to Sussex Institute research students (in conjunction with the Sussex Institute DPhil Co-ordinator), with the aim of encouraging a more cohesive sense of community among this group of students.

Full details of these targeted activities are recorded on the project blog at <http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/12/usability-pilot-groups-case-studies.html>.

These sessions focussed primarily on:

- Setting up your profile (including tagging)
- Searching for user tags and research interests
- Introduction to the mash-up/widgets

Some key academics have been extremely proactive in introducing SPLASH to their students and to illustrate in very practical terms how students can use the site in the context of a particular course. For example the History department introduced their MA Video Documentary module within SPLASH and this module still has an active presence within the system. Our case studies finally developed from these areas of engagement and enabled us to gain the consistency required which it was not possible to maintain with the initial pilot groups.

An overview of the pilot groups and the full case studies are included in Appendices 1 & 2.

5.6. Open source release

In addition to embedding the SPLASH system at Sussex University the team also had to prioritise making the code available to other institutions who might want to implement SPLASH in the future. In order to ensure an appropriate open source release for the software, the developers had to ensure that:

- The code relating to the APIs can run automatically, without the need for manual updating
- The backend system code was tidied up (manually) to ensure accessibility and to add detailed commenting (important in order to allow other developers to implement the code easily)
- The database structure of the platform could be exported to PDF for guidance and contained within the SPLASH project pages on Google Code

The application code, API documentation and MySQL schema were added to Google Code, the Open Source online repository, in March 2009 and released under the New BSD License. The project page is at:

<http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/>.

The code and documentation is contained within a Subversion repository and it is possible to browse the revisions online through Google Code or anonymously checkout a copy of the code. The repository is accessible at:

<http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/source/checkout>.

The project page contains an issue tracker at:

<http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/issues/list>

Users and developers can submit bug reports and enhancement requests. Regular monitoring and maintaining is now required to ensure regular releases and responses to potential users who may wish to adopt the platform elsewhere within a higher education environment.

The project wiki offers further help and information around getting started with SPLASH. It is accessible at:

<http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/wiki/>

The system requirements for SPLASH implementation are:

- PHP 5.2.3+
- MySQL 5.0.6+
- Zend Framework 1.6.2+
- A working knowledge of PHP and Javascript (preferably using the jQuery Framework)

The project also has an Ohloh page which provides useful code analysis tools:

<https://www.ohloh.net/p/splash-project/analyses/latest>

5.7. Acceptable Use Policy

The SPLASH system supports the creation of blog content which is hosted at the institution and all other user-owned content is held externally and brought in using widgets. This

presents certain issues around acceptable use and the need to protect student users from abuse whilst at the same time not wanting to stifle creativity and be perceived to be monitoring use of the system in a heavy-handed way - as one of our earliest student contributors said *“We don’t like being checked up on”*.

The project team therefore introduced a light touch acceptable use policy which makes reference to existing institutional policies:

<http://splash.sussex.ac.uk/help/index/section/policies/topic/aup>.

It was particularly important to include in this a clear complaint and take down procedure in the case of offensive posts. The site also features a disclaimer which protects the University from association with student-owned content in SPLASH. To date there have not however been any serious incidents requiring the policy to be tested.

6. Outputs and Results

System walkthrough

A walkthrough of the SPLASH system can be found on the project website. This presents each of the main system functions and pages and gives a good flavour of the user experience. The system provides student homepages and allows customisation of templates and ‘widget’ content from the University VLE and information portal and from external websites. Students can view and communicate with coursemates via blogs and messaging and can create small groups of contacts and post content only to those groups, thus facilitating private group work and discussions.

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/methodology.php>

Open-source release of the SPLASH software

The software was released under the new BSD License via Google Code at <http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/> in March 2009. Regular monitoring and maintaining will now be required to ensure regular releases and responses to potential users who may wish to adopt the platform elsewhere within a higher education environment.

<http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/>

Addressing privacy and communication issues

SPLASH has assisted with the practical issue of exchanging email messages between students for academic purposes without disclosing email addresses. In the early ongoing consultation with the USSU Gender Society, one finding was:

“The group has, however, set up a Facebook profile but is concerned about the public listing of members. It does not currently have a Myspace profile. Its main communication is via an emailing list to which all members can post”.

The SPLASH platform enables communication in two primary ways, blogging and messaging. Neither service requires the inputting of either a Sussex email or a private email account. This retains personal privacy, but still allows for communication to individuals, groups or entire academic departments via the VLE.

Building a campus community

Since the initial launch of SPLASH, the publically accessible blogs have gathered momentum and are slowly generating pace as a *campus-facing* information source. These blogs cover a range of topics and have been very popular with staff members wishing to disseminate information about specific topics (e.g. IT security) or to share photographs and experiences with other users.

<http://splash.sussex.ac.uk/blog/public>

<http://splash.sussex.ac.uk/blog/for/eb94> (example Year Abroad posting)

This has been of particular value to student who may spend the majority of their time off campus as illustrated in this quote from the Sussex Institute Postgraduate Coordinator.

“We feel that our DPhil students pay a considerable amount of money and most of whom physically visit the University of Sussex campus every few months or in some cases, once a year. There is a distinct need to bring these research students into a wider sense of community and give them the ability to stay in regular contact with other colleagues, events and be able to search for similar research interests. We are also looking to utilise a singular platform whereby we can communicate to individuals beyond the traditional form of email, many of whom do not access regularly or feel disengaged from the idea of blanket correspondence”.

Internal communications

Our engagement with pilot groups illustrated a need for easy, open and direct communication to students of an entire course year. For example a student representative expressed the need to communicate with his year group peers around representation. Within the Moodle VLE, a new group site can now be created specifically for this purpose and a specially created web service exports the group data to SPLASH.

This offers the flexibility for ad hoc groups to be set up in the VLE to meet a range of requirements and for SPLASH to leverage this data to enable communication via the SPLASH platform.

SPLASH and the VLE

The University’s Moodle VLE (branded as Study Direct) is used by academic departments to present course related tasks, documents and information to students and thereby to enhance the student’s learning experience. This site existed prior to SPLASH and was therefore an ideal platform from which to synchronise course related information.

A working relationship was established between the project team and VLE team to ensure that SPLASH could bring all relevant data across to its platform, under the *Courses* area. From the launch of SPLASH, the VLE has had the ability to link directly to a user’s SPLASH blog. A SPLASH profile can also be shown within a user’s Study Direct profile.

Work is also being planned in establishing a pilot where a link is inserted into various Study Direct courses to specifically tagged blogs in SPLASH. This is being taken forward as part of the ‘Online Learning for Social and Cultural Studies’ project:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/elearning/embedding.php>

This will be used as testing ground for future integration between Study Direct and SPLASH.

7. Outcomes and Impact

The project team have produced a very appealing piece of software based on open source principles which has achieved a high degree of user acceptance at the project's home institution.

SPLASH will continue to be supported following the project close and will appear as part of the new University of Sussex internal homepage (due to be released during 2009). A mock up of the new internal homepage featuring a clickable link to a version of the SPLASH homepage which features aligned web templates can be found at the following URL: <http://wwwnew.sussex.ac.uk/students/>⁶. The SPLASH code can be downloaded from <http://splash-project.googlecode.com/> and is released under the new BSD License.

Continued and varied relationships between participants in the SPLASH community are still emerging and developing

Users are interacting on the system in a variety of ways – public blogging, reflective journals in blogs, small group activities. Continuing engagement with key academics will assist in embedding the system and directing its use for teaching and learning purposes. Practical issues around exchanging email addresses between students have been addressed by SPLASH with its extensive privacy settings as has the need for easy, open and direct communication to students of an entire course year. Currently the same users are returning but user-ship is not growing extensively <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/userstatistics.php>.

Input from students and staff has continuously informed the project and provided an invaluable source of ideas for implementation on the live site

The project team have worked to reflect user priorities on the system adding numerous widgets and new features and have balanced the need for a managed approach to software releases with a responsiveness to user demands which has helped maintain engagement. Suggestions and ideas have been gathered from usability testing, small group discussions, presentations and direct emails. <http://code.google.com/p/splash-project/w/list>

Flexibility in software design is needed to enable groups to tailor the system experience to reflect their priorities and needs

Priorities for different pilot groups have been quite different – e.g. privacy, internal and/or external communication. The provision of both Dashboard (personal) and Profile (public) pages allows users to manage tools for their own use and present a 'face' to the outside world. Staff and students now have the ability to communicate in a private space where small ad-hoc groups can be formed to carry out targeted activities or discussions. This flexibility of design has enabled the project to deliver what the JISC Personal Learning Environments project calls 'individualised systems created as a coordination of personal services'.

⁶ Please note that this site will be taken down when the new University site goes live and will be replaced by <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/students/>.

Future potential for SPLASH is exciting, but further development and investment in the system is paramount

There is a need to develop the system to ensure good quality of access across a range of mobile platforms. The increased popularity of sites such as Twitter and the fact that not all students will be on campus or on a PC or laptop mean it is vital to ensure that the site is fully functional on a range of platforms and can be accessed on the move. This may enable it to increase in usefulness as a 'one-stop' information point for students. A summary of future focus and proposed developments can be found at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/splash/deliverables.php>.

8. Academic champions are needed to have continued success both in the use of the platform and to build awareness across the University

Stemming from comments from students and staff we believe student engagement and the use of SPLASH for learning purposes will be greatly increased and improved if we establish further contact with academics who can champion its use. The value of the use of the system would be increased if artefacts presented on the system become part of formal assessments as suggested in Case Study I.

9. Conclusions

- There has been great enthusiasm amongst staff members as well as students not only for blogging on a range of topics but making use of the portal aspect of the system and using the system tools to enhance teaching practice – the team had not expected such a strong take-up from staff
- The overriding feedback from all stakeholders is their desire to retain a sense of community within their academic or support network (see Case Studies in Appendix 1)
- An initial assumption that the vast majority of students use social networking sites and are confident in their use has been challenged (<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2008/10/interim-comments-by-student-users-of.html>)
- Staff and students want to communicate in private spaces where small ad-hoc groups can be formed to carry out targeted activities or discussions
- There is a need for easy, open and direct communication to students of an entire course year and a need to communicate beyond the traditional email form in order to grab the attention of students who may not regularly be on campus
- Students can find the overlap between social and academic spaces challenging but

10. References

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<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningcapital/tsle.aspx>

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<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html>

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<http://www.rodspac.co.uk/blog/2008/12/use-of-social-networking-web-20-in.html>

iCrossing Digital Marketing Consultancy
(Social Media and Trends)

<http://greatfinds.icrossing.com/wp-feed.php>

Ofcom Social Networking Report

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/socialnetworking/report.pdf

The new BSD license

<http://www.opensource.org/licenses/bsd-license.php>

Appendix 1 - Initial Pilot Group Overview and Case Studies

The project started out with three case studies in mind; Product Design, Social Work and the Gender Society – of these, only one (Social Work) was able to be involved during the 08/09 academic year. We managed to find further subjects for case studies but these were not as comprehensive as we would have wished due to the changeover of groups. The information gathered does give useful feedback however and has helped the team extensively with plans for future dissemination and development.

Initial Pilot Group Overview

Definition	Why included?	Key contact and role	Focus	Initial priorities
Student's Union Gender Society	A Student Union society seeking to share resources and information online as well as representing their group identity.	Student members	Sharing resources and information online, representing group identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “They are keen to network with non-university groups and individuals. This means that at least some information should be accessible off-campus and unrestricted”. “They would like a 'restricted area' where members can discuss things privately” <p>http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/05/meetings-with-pilot-groups.html</p>
At the start of the academic year 2008/09, the Gender Society had ceased to exist and could no longer take part.				
Product Design <i>(part of the Engineering and Design department)</i>	Students want to present themselves and their work in a positive light on the web – BSC can include a sandwich year.	Peter Childs, Professor of Engineering Design	E-portfolios, publication of student design work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Many students would benefit from being able to publish examples of their work in order to get constructive comments from other students, and also to display to potential employers/work placement providers. “Publishing work for the latter purpose, in the sense of a 'cv', would create an 'ePortfolio” <p>http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/06/meetings-with-pilot-groups-iii.html</p>
The Product Design area became disengaged from the project in 2008/9, due to a key contact leaving the department. This group were however involved in defining user requirements.				
Social Work department <i>(academic department, part of the Sussex Institute)</i>	High proportion of mature students, off-site and distance learning elements of the programmes.	Cath Holmstrom, Lecturer in Social Work	Maintaining communication during off-campus placements and blogging as a tool for reflection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Some assignments involve 'reflective learning journals'. Blogs seem likely to be a suitable tool to aid this task”. “In the second year, many students take up off-campus placements. The ability to maintain communication between classmates during this time would likely benefit their studies and social live”. <p>http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2007/05/meetings-with-pilot-groups-ii.html & see Case Study III below</p>
The Social Work department contributed to requirements capture and formed one of our Case Studies.				

History Department <i>(academic department)</i>	Large numbers of humanities undergraduates interacting in a variety of smaller seminar and special interest groups.	Dr Lucy Robinson, Lecturer in History	Introducing the MA Video Documentary course, interfacing with the VLE	(See Case Study I below)
The History department formed one of our case studies but were not involved in initial requirements capture.				
Sussex Institute <i>(School of study)</i>	Houses subject areas with a strong professional context – Education, Law, Social Work, Continuing Education –high numbers of off-site and mature students.	Gail Barrett, Postgraduate Co-ordinator	Engaging Research (DPhil) students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“There is not a lot of opportunity to meet other students”</i> • <i>“Research students can feel very isolated and find it more difficult to meet other students”</i> (See Case Study II below)
The Sussex Institute formed one of our case studies but was not involved in initial requirements capture.				

The objectives of all these groups in using SPLASH can be summarised as follows:

- (a). To use SPLASH as a system to improve communication within the department in terms of disseminating academic information, for example encouraging event attendance and conference participation, or sharing interesting research articles or information sources on the web. Class and year representatives also wanted to discuss teaching with their peers and create individual profiles for their period in post.
- (b). To see whether the use of a different, visually stimulating and customisable environment would engage students, complementing their use of the VLE
- (c). To instil a sense of community and encourage peer-led engagement amongst students
- (d). To enhance e-learning with the inclusion of media, such as video, images and explore the role of blogs in student-led projects
- (e). To investigate aspects of course delivery through the SPLASH platform
- (f). To enable discussions to occur between small groups (based within a module, academic discipline or school of study)
- (g). To investigate whether distance students, part-time students and mature students would engage with SPLASH and thereby achieve better cohesion amongst the student cohort and within the academic department as a whole

The case studies included below explore some of these objectives in more detail.

Case Study I: History department

Background

Dr Lucy Robinson is a Lecturer in History at the University of Sussex and delivers both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. She says of her role:

“As well as teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses on Contemporary British History, I am Year Two Tutor and involved with facilitating a number of student led initiatives.”

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/history/profile22808.html>

Lucy became involved with SPLASH following the system launch when she attended a presentation to staff about the new system.

Experience

The SPLASH client manager worked with Lucy on two models of incorporating SPLASH into the academic experience using student-centred and student-generated models, one aimed at the postgraduate community and one at the undergraduate community. One of the models is aimed at course delivery and one at wider issues of student feedback and support. These two complimentary models were chosen in order to explore the maximum amount of possibilities in the most manageable way.

1. Video Documentary in Contemporary History

Full details of the Video Documentary in Contemporary History course can be found at the web address below. This file makes reference to the involvement of the course with SPLASH and also echoes the sentiments of the DPhil Coordinator in the Sussex Institute saying:

“Working in groups can be both a positive and a frustrating experience. A good deal of research and publication depends on teamwork, and there are those who argue that the experience of postgraduate research, especially work for a doctorate, can be isolating and lonely. Having to articulate ideas regularly, to explain them and defend them to non-specialists, can be extremely valuable. The experience of working together and commenting on other groups’ proposals is intended to foster skills of co-operation as well as critical self-reflection, helping students to develop criteria for measuring quality and evaluating the significance of their own, and other people’s academic work.”

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/gchums/documents/contemporary_history_video_doc_outline_spring_2009.doc

This course is assessed using group projects. 70% of the mark is awarded for the group creation of a short history documentary video and 30% for an individual reflective essay. Lucy says of this arrangement:

“This very successful flagship course has had a couple of perennial problems; firstly students have been engrossed in the practical and creative side of the group project and have neglected to put consistent preparation into the reflective essay. Secondly there have been occasional problems over assessing individual contributions to the group project where there have been problems, in the past this has been dealt with by occasional recourse to a ‘viva’. The viva option has been very unsatisfactory.”

To address this issue, students are now expected to create an online individual portfolio in the institutional VLE, designed to be built alongside a set of weekly reflective tasks organised around readings, viewings, practical training and seminar discussions as well as

to record individual contributions to the group task. This is linked to a group discussion and a collaborative area where the whole group work together.

Currently this requires a number of separate sites to be set up in the VLE, an arrangement which has not been entirely satisfactory. The major problem has been that the group settings in the VLE mean that the individual space cannot be allocated until the students get into their groups for the project. There is also a lack of student control over the format and function of the space. Lucy says of the current set up:

“It is doubtful whether this particular model could be rolled out into significantly larger sites as it is time-intensive to set up each group’s page. However it is clear that for many students both the collaborative possibilities and the areas for reflection have been very useful.”

In January 2009 16 students were using the existing sites to a greater or lesser degree and based on their experiences, detailed feedback and usage reports it is apparent that SPLASH will be able to provide a viable alternative. This will in future allow a greater flexibility for student format and groups, the possibilities of shifting subgroups for example, and for students to have their own individual area (blog) up and running from even before the course begins. Lucy says of the possibilities:

“If this is successful it would act as a very useful model for the increasing number of courses that are based on both group and individual assessment.”

What is SPLASH in Week 1 introduced the students to SPLASH, how to use the basic functions of the site, such as amending their profile, adding widgets and the creation of blogs to specific groups or academic year groups. This was done by the Academic, rather than a member of the SPLASH team.

2. Student Representation within SPLASH

The National Student Survey has flagged up issues surrounding student feedback. Lucy is currently exploring a number of ways to use SPLASH to improve the student experience including working up a cycle of feedback between faculty and students and between students. The first of these involves working with the SPLASH client manager and the year 2 student representative to build a ‘student rep’ SPLASH site to set up clearer communication between reps, students and the department.

Lucy is keen to allow students to track which issues have been raised before and what the response has been. She says on this subject:

“This would allow reps to get immovable issues out of the way and focus on representation and feedback. This will both encourage students to see SPLASH as their own space and build links between the SPLASH and the rep systems.”

Lucy has discussed the idea with student reps and agreed that one of them will post a regular blog. She is optimistic that the idea could very easily be rolled out to each year cohort, saying

“Students are very positive about the idea, including those who did not really know much about SPLASH yet.”

Small group activity is illustrated here:

<http://splashproject.blogspot.com/2009/03/small-group-activity.html>

Case Study II: Sussex Institute research students

Background

Gail Barrett is the Postgraduate Programmes Coordinator for the Sussex Institute.

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/si/>

Students from all research programmes in the Sussex Institute were invited to attend a series of SPLASH workshops. This included all DPhil, MPhil and New Route DPhil students from Education, Social Work, Law and CCE, as well as Professional Doctorate students from Education and Social Work. The workshops were triggered by a request from research students who have found it difficult to find other students carrying out research in similar areas. Gail says:

“Due to the nature of the programmes, research students can feel very isolated and find it more difficult to meet other students and this is an issue we are keen to address.”

Experience

Sussex Institute research students are predominantly using the site to set up their profiles detailing their research interests and to search for others, and are also keen to put more detailed information about their research on the site. As the Sussex Institute Postgraduate Co-ordinator, Gail has also set up a profile so that they can search for things they may need advice on such as intermissions, conference attendance etc.

Gail suggested these potential uses of SPLASH for the future:

1. I think it would be good if members of faculty could get involved in SPLASH but appreciate the time constraints. It is possible to view faculty research on the web, but SPLASH may be useful for communication between students and supervisors.
2. SPLASH would be of particular benefit to distant DPhil students and students on the International Professional Doctorate in Education – these students come from all over the world and spend just three or four weeks at Sussex over the summer. They remain in their home country for the rest of the year and I think SPLASH would be a very good way of helping them stay in touch with each other. As it would be difficult for them to attend a workshop as the other students have, I would like to try and put together a mailing for them explaining what SPLASH is and providing step-by-step instructions.
3. I would also like to suggest that SPLASH be introduced to students on the MA in Education Studies. Although classified as a taught programme, students on the MAES work on projects with one-to-one supervision from a supervisor and so there is not a lot of opportunity to meet other students
4. SPLASH could also be used as a tool for advertising seminars, one-off lectures and training events (perhaps with links to Elluminate, TLDU etc.) – if we can use it as a central point for information and communication I think this will encourage students to continue to use the site. We have also experienced problems with mailing lists and students not using their Sussex email addresses, so this could perhaps be a good way to ensure that students receive all the relevant information.
5. New students could be introduced to SPLASH at induction to encourage them to use it right from the start.

Gail says:

“We have so far had a very positive response to SPLASH from students and hope that this is something that they will continue to use to help build our research community. In conclusion I think SPLASH is exactly the kind of thing needed to bring research students together and help improve their experience at Sussex.”

Case Study III: Social Work

Background

Cath Holmstrom is a Lecturer in Social Work within the Sussex Institute:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/socialwork/profile118300.html>

“The majority of our students are ‘non-traditional’ and have needed time to build confidence with e-learning. However, all first term and second term they are required to use Study Direct regularly and were introduced to SPLASH in the autumn.”

Experience

Cath says

“Of those who responded to [my enquiries], only 2 regularly use SPLASH. They have it configured to suit their own purposes and use this to then access Sussex Direct and Facebook etc. They were very positive and talked about how useful this has been and how they like the interface (although one wants me to show them how to do something else too). They don’t like having to log into Sussex Direct again after logging in to SPLASH!

The remaining 10 all said that they had struggled enough with Study Direct and that although we supported them with this, I had maybe underestimated the time it needed for them to feel confident. Only now were they able to feel ready to ‘branch out’ and think about personalising their Study Direct pictures and then to think about SPLASH. Most said that they had everything they needed via Study Direct and Facebook and a few more said that they just could not cope with anything else. However, this is where I have been remiss.

If I had reminded them of the features in January 2009 they may have run with it more and also I should have trialled this with my third years as think they’d use the blogs within tutor groups more especially whilst on placement.

I suspect that I over cater via Study Direct, so maybe that is counterproductive?”

Non-academic departments – summary of activity

Career Development & Employment Centre, (CDEC)

This support hub within the University provides students with part-time work, vacation work, research project advice, advice on long-term career goals and advice on commencing postgraduate studies and internships.

CDEC approached the SPLASH team to consider the idea of using the ‘Profile’ page within the SPLASH site as a way in which they could include a link to a students C.V. or a page dedicated to displaying their skill set, previous/current employment experience, projects they have worked on during University and any external work or community based relationships they have formed whilst studying at the University.

This area has potential for development beyond the close of the JISC project.

International and Study Abroad office

The International & Study Abroad Office provides services to international students who are applying to Sussex and those already studying at the University, and administers exchange programmes between Sussex and its partner institutions in North and South America and Europe (including those under SOCRATES/ERASMUS).

The SPLASH team were approached by Emily Sinclair, Head of International Programmes with an idea to invigorate Sussex students who were already studying abroad at another institution by encouraging their use of SPLASH, primarily the blog system whereby they could share their thoughts and experiences. Some activity of this had occurred on the public facing blogs of SPLASH, but further collaboration was likely to be needed if this 'sharing' of experiences was to develop further.

An example of a blog that was created via this route can be found here: <http://splash.sussex.ac.uk/blog/for/eb94>.

The Student's Union

Interest has also been expressed from our Students Union for more appropriate representation and a one-stop location for communication regarding welfare, educational policy, grievance and an ability to express open opinions regarding key matters. SPLASH has been indicated as a potential platform in which to do this and this is currently ongoing and will likely proceed beyond the close of the JISC project.

Centre for Continuing Education (CCE, part of The Sussex Institute)

Many CCE students spend a considerable amount of time off-campus and may find having the facility to stay in contact with coursemates valuable in particular relation to maintaining a sense of *'belonging'*. This is currently still ongoing and this collaboration will commence within their class representatives meeting at the end of February 2009.