RESOURCE-BASED LEARNING IN FIRST YEAR PSYCHOLOGY: AN EVALUATION REPORT

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Learning Environments, Learning Services,

March 2002

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1 1 Background

Over the past three years the teaching of first year psychology has undergone a series of changes to improve students' learning. In 2001, a resource-based approach was adopted with the aim of encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and become more independent learners. A range of print-based, online, and multimedia resources was made available to students in order to cater for their different media preferences and learning styles.

2 2 Dimensions of the Learning Environment

Students studying HPS*** during 2001 were required to use TopClass to access study guidance, assessment information, class announcements and discussion. The study guidance directed them to several other resources including texts, CD-ROMs, and web links. The learning environment consisted of pre-packaged learning resources, (some accessed through TopClass), a TopClass communication environment, and face-to-face classes for on-campus students.

2.1 Prepackaged learning resources

2.1.1 Print-based prescribed texts

Subject matter textbook. (Morris and Maisto, A. (2001). *Understanding psychology, 5th Edn*. New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.)

Commercial study guide (Bishop, J. (2000). *Study Guide to accompany Understanding Psychology*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.)

Guide to report writing: Findlay, B. (2000). How to write psychology laboratory reports and essays, 2nd Edn. Sydney, Prentice-Hall.)

2.1.1 Online resources:

TopClass learning resources (study guide, student manual, assessment requirements, assignment, psychology electronic warehouse introduction)

Psychology Place Website

Publisher Website

2.1.2 CD-Roms

Psychology Electronic Warehouse

Mind matters

2.2 TopClass computer-mediated communication

TopClass was used for electronic communication of announcements from the Unit Chair and discussions about course content and administrative matters. (See Appendix ** for detailed analysis of how it was used.) The online discussion forum provided an opportunity for off-campus students to engage in debates about their study and feel connected to what was happening on-campus.

2.3 Face-to-face teaching

Three face-to-face contact hours per week were offered to on-campus students. These consisted of one two-hour lecture and one one-hour practical class. For first semester 2001, a new lecture format was trialed. Rather than offer the traditional content lectures based largely on the text book, the new format allowed for the first lecture in a module to provide a review of the topics and learning objectives, while subsequent lectures were to be of an applied nature, though still linked to learning objectives.

An evaluation was conducted during 2001 to ascertain staff perceptions about this format.

3 Evaluation Findings

3.1 Accessing the Coursework

Data represented in Tables * and * indicate that:

- Many students accessed the coursework from more than one place, but most accessed it in the Deakin laboratories and at home.
- Slightly more students accessed TC from home than from Deakin.
- Approximately 3/4 of the students spent less than 2 hours per week working with TopClass.
- Very few students spent more than 6 hours per week online.
- 60% of on-campus students and 55% of off-campus students found it difficult to access TopClass initially.
- More than half the on-campus students found it difficult to learn to use TopClass.
- Almost 2/3 found it difficult to find material in TopClass.
- On-campus students found it more difficult than off-campus students to access, learn to use and find material in TC.

Place of access	**Total of students**	**< 2hrs**	**3-6 hrs**	**7-10 hrs**	**> 10hrs**
Deakin computer labs					
At home					
At work					

Friend’s place					
Other					