# Student Life Cycle- Distance Learning

## Distance Learning Case Study Worksheet and Information

All documentation for this Case Study is attached above (beside the paper-clip symbol), so please feel free to view these documents as well.

Attachments include a list of Distance Learning courses at UCL and an overview of Distance Learning activity at ICH as well as documentation relating to draft UCL Distance Learning Guidelines. UCL's e-learning Strategic Statement 2005-10 is also attached for information.

### Teaching Administrator Digital Literacy Project

**Case Study**

Please complete all details in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study Title</th>
<th>Distance Learning at UCL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Leader/s</td>
<td>Alison Gilry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study TA Team Members</td>
<td>David Blundred, Karin Charles, Anne Dickens, Michele Pannaman, Sangita Patel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Case Study Student Member/s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Study Academic Member/s</td>
<td>Dr Moriyama (PG Diploma Clinical Neurology Distance Learning) has reviewed the case study and commented that it “encompasses all the comments we have been discussing in our team”.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In completing your Case Study, TA’s should aim to answer the following questions. If there are any other documents, resources or comments that you feel would be useful to the Case Study, please feel free to attach an extra page or fill in the ‘Any Other Comments’ section.

Table 2
**Question One** (1000 words)

**As Teaching Administrators, what is current practice in this case study area? (Please reflect upon what your current practice is as well as what skills and technology it involves in fulfilling your role in this area of work)**

**Distance Learning Overview**

A range of distance learning (DL) courses are currently provided/marketed at UCL. Approximately 20 discrete DL courses (see attached) are provided/marketed at UCL, although the current status of all these courses is not always clear.

Most courses offered are Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and/or Masters qualifications (10 courses) or are CPD courses (7 courses). Some courses have been developed to satisfy specific sector/subject need, such as the SysMIC course (Systems training in Maths, Informatics and Computational biology) for the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, or, are run jointly or in collaboration with other institutions. E.g. MSc Medical Mycology is run in collaboration with the British Society of Medical Mycology. The School of European Languages, Culture and Society (SE LCS) offer a DL module developed and run by the University of Helsinki’s Centre for Nordic Studies. The Distance Learning PG Diploma in Clinical Neurology is run in conjunction with E-Brain (UCL has a collaboration with the European Neurological Society and Journal of Neurochemistry).

A key Distance Learning provider at UCL is the Eastman Dental Institute which provides the following flexible study courses by online distance learning: British Dental Journal & Eastman CPD online; Core CPD; DCPBites (CPD); Radiography update; and an MSc in Medical Bacteriology (by Distance Learning). Distance learning language courses are also offered by UCL Dutch and by SELCS in collaboration with the University of Helsinki’s Centre for Nordic Studies. At least three postgraduate courses are converted courses, including MSc Drug Design and MSc Sports Medicine, Exercise and Health by Distance Learning which are new courses for Sept 2012, and MSc Musculoskeletal Science.

The majority of the CPD courses are offered entirely at a distance from e-Learning for Systems Approaches SysMIC which offers a series of intensive study events (weekend study schools plus one day classes at various UK centres). The Distance Learning Certificate in Crime Analysis requires students attend an exam.

Similarly the accredited courses are mainly studied entirely at a distance, although blended learning formats are also common:

- Distance Learning PG Diploma in Clinical Neurology offers regular personal tutor contact.
- MSc Medical Bacteriology (by DL) includes an option to attend UCL for four days.
- PG Cert/Dip/MSc Medical Mycology (DL) includes up to three practical courses run by Bristol and Leeds Universities and three tutorials a year at UCL or via Skype/telephone.
- PG/MSc Sports Medicine, Exercise and Health (DL) has a mandatory short residential at UCL at the end of each semester to facilitate teaching of important hands-on skills such as joint examinations, and clinical activities can be local or at UCL.
- PG Cert/Dip/MSc Drug Design (DL) includes an optional one week summer workshop (extra cost).
- PG Dip/MSc Healthcare Associated Infection Control includes two one week modules studied externally at the Health Protection Agency and at Fallfield.
- MSc Musculoskeletal Science DL students based in the UK attend a viva alongside traditional students.

Part time accredited courses can take between 1-2 years at PG Cert level, 2-4 years at PG Dip level and 3-5 years at MSc level to complete.

**Question One** (1000 words) continued

**As Teaching Administrators, what is current practice in this case study area? (Please reflect upon what your current practice is as well as what skills and technology it involves in fulfilling your role in this area of work)**

The information here contained is based on interviews with the five TA Case Study ‘members’ and so is a small sample but presumably representative of the DL provision at UCL.

**TA current practice**

**Course content/delivery**

- Lectures are available to students via the VLE (Moodle) and consist of PowerPoint slides, handouts and other supporting materials. Some lectures are more interactive and offer videos, pictures and quizzes e.g. some Clinical Neurology lectures.
- In addition, lectures may be delivered via Blackboard Elluminate/Collaborate – a virtual web conferencing programme which provides virtual classroom sessions for T&L – as in the case of the MSc/PD Dip in Healthcare Associated Infection Control. Blackboard Collaborate records these sessions and a link to the recorded sessions are placed on the course Moodle page.
- The MSc/Pg Dip/Cert in Medical Mycology T&L materials include DVDs originally filmed externally and updated by UCL Multimedia. The DVDs are posted to students using DHL.
- MSc Musculoskeletal Science is run conventionally and as a distance learning course; the lectures delivered to attending students are recorded using the Lecturecast system and uploaded to Moodle. This is the resource that the DL students use. Prior to the Lecturecast system, teaching was delivered via uploaded PowerPoint presentations.

**Communication with students/interactivity**

- Email and Moodle is used to communicate with students.
- Moodle forum is used for students to interact with each other and the Programme Tutor(s) (MSc/PD Dip Healthcare Associated Infection Control, MSc/PD Dip/Cert Medical Mycology).
- Skype or telephone is used for one-to-one tutorials (MSc/PD Dip/Cert Medical Mycology).
- One TA reported that in the first year of operation the Distance Learning course was interactive, making use of forums and discussions, but this is not happening now to the same degree.
- A minimum number of visits to the VLE and participation in the online discussion forum is expected of Nordic Welfare States students.
- The Distance Learning PG Diploma in Clinical Neurology uses Skype Professional as a virtual classroom. Acrobat Professional has also been considered as a possibility for the future.
Course Evaluation

- The MSc/PG Dip in Healthcare Associated Infection Control which started in 2011/12 will use Opinio to gather student feedback on the course. Students also attend staff/student meetings (student representation is compulsory) conducted by the Programme Tutor using Blackboard Collaborate.
- The MSc in Medical Mycology requires students complete an Opinio survey at the end of each module before assessment results are released. Feedback on lectures is collated using a rating of 1-5 and students’ expectations are monitored. At the end of the course a paper survey is conducted.
- Nordic Welfare States collects student evaluation on line using Moodle provided by the University of Helsinki. Previously students evaluated the course via Moodle anonymously, but could read the comments that the other students make. The DL tutor also collects student feedback and enters a summary onto Opinio, in line with SELCS’s procedure.
- One course inconsistently applies evaluation methods for their DL students compared to traditional (campus based) students.

Student Assessment

- The MSc in Healthcare Associated Infection Control will use grademark to mark student submissions. Online multiple choice questions, laboratory write ups and exercises will also be used.
- Students on the MSc Medical Mycology (by DL), PG/MSc Sports Medicine, Exercise and Health (DL) and MSc Healthcare Associated Infection Control courses also attend exams at UCL.
- MSc Medical Mycology students submit work using Turnitin. The work is double marked and course supervisors meet students to give them their marks and feedback face-to-face.
- Nordic Welfare States students submit work via the University of Helsinki’s online service, and marks are entered into Portico. Previously students uploaded course work onto Moodle. The course Senior Lecturer would still like the students to be able to do this, as a central pedagogical element of this course is that students read each other’s work and comment on it. Assessment consists of a practical online test (20%) and a 5,000 word essay (80%). The online test serves to assess students’ participation in the discussion forums.
- MSc Musculoskeletal Science DL students complete an online multiple choice exam. (There is a different marking criterion for this exam to the on campus exam sat by traditional attending students).
- The Diploma in Clinical Neurology via Distance Learning offers 3 assessment types; 1. Tutor based assessment (attendance and engagement), 2. MCQ’s, 3. Case Presentations (practical and related to their work – peer and tutor reviewed with the mark awarded by the tutor).
- One course receives course work differently, depending on the category of the student: attending students submit work via Turnitin; UK based DL students post hard copy course work to the TA and overseas DL students email work to the TA. Marking is done via hard copy so these methods have been chosen by the TA to reduce time spent dealing with emails and producing hard copies of students work for marking.

Skills and Technology

TAs supporting DL courses need to be competent using a range of digital tools including Email, VLE (Moodle), Lecturecast, Blackboard Collaborate, Turnitin, Skype and Opinio. They also need an understanding/knowledge of Grademark.

One TA commented that she is not confident about using DL systems but is confident about practical stuff e.g. alerting students, putting up resources etc.

Question Two (500 words) What difficulties do you currently face in this case study area? (Please reflect upon what practical difficulties you face as well as what difficulties you face in terms of technology in fulfilling your role in this area of work)

Practical problems/difficulties reported by TAs focus on communication and procedural problems with registry/academic services or Portico:

- The PG Diploma in Clinical Neurology via Distance Learning students can enrol at any point throughout the year but when they apply the information does not reflect this fact.
- Problems with students paying fees, selecting modules and enrolling.
- In order to recruit students one course missed the enrolment deadline. This had an impact on the students’ ability to choose and select their modules on Portico.
- DL students were sent instructions as if they were attending students.
- TAs don’t know what information the students are given by Registry and Academic Services. TAs would like to give students more information in order to pre-empt queries such as fees for example.
- Problems with enrolments for overseas students, especially new not continuing students. However, these problems may improve when applicants are given a Portico username as part of the application process.
- “There does not appear to be any help available during the admissions process and it is hard to get help for this cohort generally”. This problem is exacerbated for TAs who are not based on the main campus – they can’t “pop in” to the Registry Office if there is a problem during the enrolment period.
- “The Distance Learning student experience is not an inclusive experience from Registry down. The Portico online process may improve matters.”
- “We are failing at the first hurdle.”
Other problems:

- Students and staff have sometimes found it difficult to find the required information on the UCL website.
- The MSc Musculoskeletal Science course, taps into 4-5 hours of lectures per day, 5 days per week, during Term 1 - delivered to attending (traditional) iBSc Orthopaedic Science students and MSc Musculoskeletal Science students (combined cohorts). Lecture cast maintenance would therefore be considerable for the DL TA. After much discussion it was agreed that individual Module Lead Tutors should be responsible for administering Lecture Cast i.e. editing and uploading them onto Moodle. Consequently a web officer has been recruited on a temporary contract to do this work.
- Another practical problem raised by the MSc Musculoskeletal Science course: “we don’t know when DL students finish a module”.
- How do you administer exams? Where would these be held?
- Students complete modules at their own pace and can sit assessments at any time, so there is a need for a large question bank that changes questions constantly, making sure that the exam reflects the lecture content.
- How to engage fully with students who are not physically here.
- It is “difficult to get a group spirit”.
- Technological difficulties: - “One student in Gibraltar couldn’t get a suitable broadband connection in time and had to defer their place”. (Incidentally next year they will be a distance learning student in the UK).

Question Three (500)

What do you view as being best practice in this case study area? (Please reflect upon what you view as being the ideal practice for this as well as what tools can be used to help follow best practice in this area of work)

- A minimum number of visits to the VLE and participation in the online discussion forum is expected of Nordic Welfare States students.
- The Distance Learning PG Diploma in Clinical Neurology uses Skype Professional as a virtual classroom.
- The MSc/PG Dip in Healthcare Associated Infection Control requires student reps to attend staff/student meetings conducted by the Programme Tutor using Blackboard Collaborate.
- Use of grademark for assessment.
- Ensuring a consistent approach and standard of teaching, learning and assessment for DL students compared to campus based students.

Question Four (250 words)

What are the main skills within this case study that you believe are in need of improvement through training or do you feel you are adequately skilled to complete all relevant tasks?

One TA commented that the core skills for supporting traditional and DL courses/students are the same.

“There is a need to improve the way we communicate with students who are not on site, to engage in a way that keeps them motivated and involved. These students require a lot of support and this should be emphasised”.

The Digital Department’s Teaching Administrator Digital Literacy Questionnaire (Jan 2012) provided some data on TAs use of digital tools currently of particular relevance to supporting distance learning courses (Blackboard Collaborate, Lecturecast, Moodle, Opinio, Skype, Turnitin). The following data is provided by the general TA community and does not necessarily represent the views of distance learning TAs who are a minority group. The questionnaire did not ask TAs about Grademark.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools TAs use</th>
<th>% use</th>
<th>% confident</th>
<th>% want more support</th>
<th>% of TAs using a tool and would like more support/training</th>
<th>No TAs interested</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moodle</td>
<td>75.82</td>
<td>68.92</td>
<td>31.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turnitin</td>
<td>56.04</td>
<td>69.33</td>
<td>30.77</td>
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<td>Opinio</td>
<td>32.97</td>
<td>51.52</td>
<td>48.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>85.71</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecturecast</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>66.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blackboard Collaborate</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>% of TAs not currently using a tool but interested in using it</td>
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To put this use into context, the questionnaire asked TAs about their use of 36 digital tools. Moodle, Turnitin and Opinio are among the top 10 digital tools most used by TAs. Blackboard Collaborate and Lecturecast are among the 10 digital tools least used by TAs and are also used with least confidence. Skype ranks among the 10 digital tools TAs are most confident using. Blackboard Collaborate, Lecturecast and Opinio are among the 10 digital tools TAs do not use but are most interested in using.

Question Five (200 words) In practice, have you encountered any technological innovations at UCL in this area?
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<th>Any Other Comments/ Information?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TA comments:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• &quot;I’d like to give students more information – what we give them seems a bit mean considering how much they pay.”</td>
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<td>• “Distance learning students get a raw deal”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “I think DL students do not get the same level of education and student experience that those on site get. It seems that a lot of courses have been rushed, and this has resulted in problems with admissions, enrolment, paying fees. I think there needs to be a realisation that DL is a complex and difficult area to administer courses and a lot of work needs to be put in to make it a success”.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case study recommendations:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Case Study should include someone involved in enrolment and module selection from Registry i.e. David Ashton <a href="mailto:d.ashton@ucl.ac.uk">d.ashton@ucl.ac.uk</a> and Abigail Garner (Admissions Project) <a href="mailto:abigail.garner@ucl.ac.uk">abigail.garner@ucl.ac.uk</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• During admissions there should be a dedicated, office based person who can take queries from TAs and/or DL students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• UCL needs to provide guidance for distance learning students, including an FAQ e.g. “how do I enrol”, “how do I get a Portico password?”, “how do I select my modules?” and minimum IT requirements for DL courses which should be circulated to departments.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Additional information</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Digital Department has consulted the UCL Distance Learning Forum about draft UCL Distance Learning Guidelines. The notes from this meeting and related documentation including DL Forum feedback and advice from library services are available (also attached above).</td>
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