
FINAL REPORT: LING200

The project aims

The core aim of the project, supervised by Professor Alison Sealey, was to produce a suite of materials to support the 2nd year module in the Department of Linguistics and English Language (LING200) that prepares students for their 3rd year dissertations. Feedback from both staff and students suggested that the current format was not working as successfully as it could, and this project was designed to produce high quality online resources that would be used in conjunction with face-to-face teaching in the 2nd year and then remain available to students throughout both 2nd and 3rd years. My role was to contribute to the development and production of these resources, liaising with staff and students.

Before commencing work on the bursary-funded project, I had supported Alison in her earlier planning, by eliciting students' impressions on the structure of the module and the areas that could be improved or technologically updated, although this was not easy as the response rate was low. We were able to establish that students would prefer a more interactive style of learning, where the application of activities to the requirements of their degree was more apparent.

How we went about it

Despite some false starts and setbacks (see below), we liaised extensively with potential contributors to the planned resources and in July 2016 we made our first recordings, featuring two former students of the module. In these video-recorded interviews they reflected on their experiences of planning and carrying out their dissertations, including providing advice for students taking the 2nd year module as preparation for their own dissertations.

From the beginning of Michaelmas term, staff in the department who have previously taught on the module agreed to record videos relating to their areas of expertise. Although they were each able to do this at one 'sitting', I subsequently edited these videos so that they could be used flexibly as a stimulus in the face-to-face workshops. Each tutor presented material relevant to six stages in the dissertation process.

What we created

We have created a suite of six sets of short videos, each set taking a different area of research in Linguistic/English Language, and presenting in each case the stages of the research process, as outlined below:

Process	Description
Introduction	The lecturer introduces him/herself and provides a short overview of what his/her area (e.g. Stylistics, Political Discourse, etc.) is about. This video includes the lecturer him/herself, so students can identify them more easily in the department.
Topic selection	Lecturers talk about the common topics researched in their areas, foregrounding the available possibilities for research to the students.
Reviewing literature	Lecturers discuss the main authors/ works in their field. They also discuss how they can identify useful resources to carry out their research.
Research questions	Lecturers discuss recurrent research questions in their fields, providing concrete examples to students so that they are able to produce appropriate research questions on their own.
Data collection	Lecturers discuss the kind of data explored and analysed in their area. They also cover ethical issues with each kind of data, thoroughly informing students about the issues to be considered when gathering data to be analysed.
Data analysis	In the last video, lecturers discuss the different methods and approaches students can undertake when analysing their data. They describe what the most recurrent methods for different data sets are and how to successfully report results.

In addition to the recordings, tutors have provided for each topic an activity relating to every stage of the research process. This workshop format is currently being piloted with the current cohort of students, successfully fostering discussion and participation.

Tools

Our original aim had been to design materials using the optimal software for the pedagogic aims we identified. We had expected to be able to develop an interface and tools that would not be subject to the limitations of Moodle, and I had hoped to receive training and support in video-editing, for example. However, without the support available to help us pursue this more ambitious route, we decided to limit ourselves to using Moodle. One refinement we developed, in light of helpful advice from staff in the Library, was the integration of the materials into Xerte, which provides a more interactive layout for students to navigate through the contents. See the LING200 site within Moodle to access the materials.

During the project, I successfully learned how to use advanced features of PowerPoint, Xerte, and Moodle. I also learned about AnswerPad, when Alison needed to use some response software to elicit students' reactions in an early class and discovered that the supported software, Turning Point, was unavailable. AnswerPad is a free app to interact with students in the classroom, and I helped her as we both learned how to use it.

Results

The full results of the materials I have helped to produce will not be available until the current iteration of the module is evaluated at Easter this year, and it will not be fully integrated into the course until it runs in a revised form next academic year. Nevertheless, this pilot has already seen some improvements in students' responses to the content of LING200. These improvements are visible through two different aspects: attendance and students' engagement. First, attendance on the module is higher than previous years. Students are participating in class and engaging in discussions about the dissertation process. Second, students are engaging more with the contents in Moodle. There has been a slight increase in traffic and access to the module site on Moodle.

Challenges and lessons learned

One challenge for Alison has been the extensive negotiations involved in obtaining all the requisite approvals for revising the module to accommodate the innovative approach with

which these materials will be associated. These negotiations slowed us down more than we had originally planned.

There were also some challenges associated with the way ISS assistance was provided. I was initially assigned Steve Powell, but having been unable to make contact with him despite sending several emails, I contacted Gary Fairclough (the first person in charge of running the bursaries) to inform him that I had not been able to reach Steve. I was then transferred to Stephen Owens, who, although helpful at the beginning, also proved very difficult to contact towards the middle and end of the project. In the absence of tailored assistance with my specific needs, I resorted to free workshops in the Library to familiarize myself with some of the options Stephen had suggested and ended up finalizing the project without any assistance from ISS.

We also encountered some problems with equipment in the teaching rooms, where there were problems in accessing the necessary software to trial some of the approaches we were developing. We discovered by chance that there was video recording support available and benefited from assistance from Jonathan Kemp, who recorded the student interviews, although he subsequently left and these recordings were initially lost from Box. Department teaching staff also had some problems using Panopto to make their recordings, so we have resorted to basic, narrated Powerpoint presentations instead of the more professional output we were aiming for.

Overall, I would have found it very helpful to have had a much clearer idea about the exact nature and amount of support I could expect from ISS for this project.

Next steps

Proposals for the revision to the specifications for the modules for which these materials have been developed have now been approved at Department level, and Alison is optimistic that they will be finalised in time for full implementation in 2017/18. The new modules, which will include an assessed component of the students' work, will make full use of the materials developed in this Bursary, including taking account of any modifications made in light of the piloting that is currently under way.

Any questions?

If you have any questions about the project and/or would like to see the project yourself, please get in touch with Professor Alison Sealey (a.sealey@lancaster.ac.uk / +44 (0)1524 594014).