

JISC Developing Digital Literacies programme Case study

Title	Digital recording of lectures in a first year Classics course and a report into digital literacy and digital teaching in an undergraduate university context to inform the development of the Part 1 Classics syllabus.
Subject area	First year Classics
Scope and context	<p>The project was two-fold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of audio podcasts of lectures for the spring term CL1CB Augustan Rome ancient history module (first year undergraduate students) by Dr Nicholls and his colleagues. • A report into digital literacy and digital teaching in an undergraduate university context to inform the development of the Part 1 Classics syllabus.
Rationale and aims	<p>The rationale for the project centered on a need to overhaul the provision of first year undergraduate courses to ensure that the skills taught and the information that students accumulate suits them for years 2 and 3 of their study and for employment.</p> <p>Digital literacy is an increasingly important part of this (and is not included within the current curriculum) and Dr Nicholls wanted to investigate ways to build digital literacy into the Classics curriculum.</p> <p>Digital literacy has become a critical element of employability for Classics students e.g. knowing how to employ digital tools for enquiry, research and expression (written and oral) and acquiring practical skills e.g. to filter and process information from the web – as well as transferable skills such as how to critically research and evaluate using e.g. the Web, Google, journals, books etc.</p> <p>The project objectives were two-fold:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a report on digital literacy and digital teaching in a Part 1 undergraduate university context and use this as a resource as the Part 1 syllabus is developed. • Experiment with audio capture of undergraduate lectures.
Digital literacies addressed	<p>The key digital literacy skills addressed are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital literacy • E-resources for research • Grammar, style, and orthography in academic writing • Audio capture and editing.

Overview	<p>The first part of the project - audio capturing of lectures - was fairly straightforward with Dr Nicholls and his colleagues using portable MP3 recorders to record lectures. Instructions on how to use them were provided together with a guide for uploading files to the Blackboard VLE. This has resulted in the production of a bank of audio lectures. Use of the podcasts has been monitored and Dr Nicholls has evaluated student feedback using a modified student feedback questionnaire.</p> <p>The other more complex part of the project was commissioning a graduate student (Maria Lloyd) to survey the scene of digital technology at Reading and at other national and international Universities and produce a written synthesis of current practice at Reading and where good practice can be borrowed together with how digital literacy can be incorporated into the Classics Part I curriculum. The report will contain a range of possible themes, exercises, and subject material for seminars in the Part 1 Greek and Roman world courses to develop student study skills, particularly in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital literacy • E-resources for research • Grammar, style, and orthography in academic writing <p>She is also including an evaluation of the usage of the audio lectures in the report based upon data from the VLE.</p>
Digital resources and know-how used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital audio recorders (Sony ICD-PX312M). • Uploading podcasts to Blackboard VLE.
Benefits and impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student feedback on the availability of audio recordings, gathered via the Staff-Student Liaison Committee, was positive; • Students felt that the audio recordings offered a useful chance to catch up and clarify their notes, and that they would be useful for revision. • Dr Nicholls believes that the audio lectures have been a success, though some of his colleagues have reservations (see below). • The project has helped staff to think about digital literacy in the curriculum. • The report provided a foundation to underpin the re-design of Part 1 undergraduate curriculum. • Low-cost technology.
Conclusions or lessons learned	<p>Some of Dr Nicholls' colleagues have reservations about the audio lectures – they prefer a natural 'conversational' lecture delivery, from notes and slides rather than reading from a script, but felt that what works well in a one-time lecture-room 'performance' (in terms of ad lib elaboration of points, answers to questions, etc) might stand up less well to repeated listening at home; they also do not like the sound of their own recorded voices, and felt that attendance suffered as the term went on and students increasingly came to rely on listening to the lecture recordings rather than attending in person. This is hard to quantify, since there are no attendance registers for these very large lectures, and always experience some late-term drop-off in attendance – but it would bear further investigation. It will be important to take account of lecturers' experience and preferences as this sort of technology becomes more widespread, and to balance student</p>

	<p>expectation against what can works well in different contexts.</p> <p>Dr Nicholls also had a reservation that first-year students' current over-reliance on lecture notes for revision would be accentuated by providing audio recordings of the lectures but, having recently moderated the exams for this cohort, he is not seen any greater tendency to do this. The Blackboard data analysis for lecture downloads shows, as expected, a large spike around revision time, but this did not seem to translate into more lecture-based exam answers. He warned students against leaning too heavily on the lecture recordings in the revision session and perhaps this message went home.</p> <p>Dr Nicholls wanted to ensure that the project did not “reinvent the wheel” and the research project sought to establish good practice in other universities on which Reading could build.</p> <p>The research into Digital Paedagogy in Classics (authored by Maria Lloyd) enabled him to commission a report surveying the scene within our own institution and in similar departments elsewhere, to look at the sorts of learning technology they use. This is a helpful baseline in determining what my department can and should be seeking to do as we reshape our Part 1 curriculum and incorporate more digital literacy material.</p> <p>Secondly, the report gave him some ideas to report to colleagues and to the Digitally Ready community for exercises or tools we could look to employ in our reworked curriculum.</p> <p>Thirdly, it allowed him to involve a current student in curriculum research and design, something that the University values. Finally, it provided the student concerned, PhD student Maria Lloyd, with a useful and remunerative project that builds on her own professional interest in teaching and information design, and will be good on her CV.</p>
<p>Links and further information</p>	<p>http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/digitallyready/2013/06/11/2685/</p>
<p>Further opportunities</p>	<p>Dr Nicholls and colleagues intend to carry on using the digital audio recorders for Part 1 lectures next year, and have already started to find other uses for them like recording dissertation viva exams. These inexpensive and accessible bits of kit allowed them to make a start with lecture capture in a quick and easy way.</p> <p>The report that Maria produces will underpin future curriculum re-design and support e.g. seminars on digital research techniques for Part 1 students in the academic year 2014/15 onwards.</p> <p>Matthew has talked about his experience in lunchtime colloquium in order to disseminate his experience and good practice.</p>

**Contact details for
further information**

- Dr Matthew Nicholls - m.c.nicholls@reading.ac.uk
Senior Lecturer in Classics (Ancient History)
<http://www.reading.ac.uk/classics/about/staff/m-c-nicholls.aspx>
- Maria Lloyd
PhD Student
<http://www.reading.ac.uk/classics/about/staff/MariaLloyd.aspx>