The University of Edinburgh
Principal's Teaching Award Scheme

'Digital Detectives' - Final Report

Dr Helen Bond, Dr Jeremy Kidwell, Mr Andrew Kelley
Divinity

Summary of Project
The Divinity team used the Principal's Teaching Award to develop an innovative web-based learning environment to support a new level 8 course, *Jesus and the Gospels*. We used the web-based Omeka software platform to enable students to 'curate' a digital exhibition of ancient biblical-related artefacts. The project hoped to encourage student-produced co-learning within a multi-disciplinary framework. In effect, students would become 'Digital Detectives,' researching and curating a unique gallery within each tutorial group which would enhance their understanding of the first century Jewish and Roman contexts of emerging Christianity. Once artefacts were created, they would serve as a public resource which would remain indefinitely (housed within one of the School's research centres), being added to by subsequent cohorts of students. Omeka had not yet been piloted at Edinburgh, nor indeed in any School of Divinity throughout the world. We hoped that public access to the 'exhibition' would enhance Edinburgh's standing as a centre for digital resources, and the 'exhibition's permanent home within a research centre would reinforce our commitment to research-led teaching.

Outcomes
The Omeka software platform was set up as outlined in the original proposal. The platform was fully embedded in the course and a technician was appointed (Andrew Kelley, a PhD student) to provide guidance and support to the students. We gauged student reaction to the project through a number of different means: informal discussion, a mid-semester oral survey, focus-groups, and a final lengthy evaluation sheet. In addition, the final class was dedicated to a (virtual) 'trip to the museum' at which small groups of students presented their 'exhibit' to the whole group; this was a lively event with refreshments and some impressive presentations. Students came away greatly enthused by their efforts (and visiting staff members were highly impressed by the level of teamwork and innovation displayed).

As hoped, students agreed that the project helped them to develop a better sense of the Graeco-Roman environment of the gospels, that it had allowed them to present their research in a creative way, and that it had helped them to develop independent study

skills. Rather surprisingly, the area which students liked least was the group aspect of the project, and some found the Omeka platform difficult to use. The team concluded that the core objectives had been met, and that Omeka was an excellent way for students to connect their research into the Graeco-Roman environment of the gospels to physical artefacts in the real world. Indeed, students proved to be unexpectedly resourceful: some found pictures, videos, and online lectures to include on their Omeka pages; one group even interviewed experts on the artefacts that they were researching and included their videos as part of the exhibition; and a student who travelled to Israel mid-semester for a study trip brought back photographs of archaeological remains.

Now that it is up and running, we will use the Omeka tool the next time that the course is taught. The technician has written a workbook on the use of Omeka so that subsequent tutors can easily see how it works. Our experiences this time have helped us to see where improvements/enhancements can be made, particularly to the 'museum' feel of the project. Next time there will be a large gallery of existing 'artefacts' that students can see; we intend to take the students on a visit to the Scottish Museum to look at artefacts there; and perhaps to ask a museum curator to come and talk to students about the process of curation of artefacts. All of this will enhance the sense that students are dealing with real objects from the past.

Dissemination of Results
We proposed three ways of disseminating the project's outcomes. All of these have been done or are underway:
1) Helen Bond, Jeremy Kidwell and Andrew Kelley have written a jointly authored pedagogically oriented paper for an education journal: "Digital Detectives"; the Use of Omeka as a Tool in Humanities Teaching.' It is currently under review with the *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*.(A copy of the article is attached)
2) At School level, the results of the project will be presented and discussed at the P&R meetings on 29th October 2014.
3) The public 'exhibition' of artefacts is currently being tidied up by the technician prior to becoming part of the Centre for the Study of Christian Origins website (christianorigins.co.uk). There are some technical difficulties with the move from Omeka to wordpress, but these will soon be resolved and the first batch of 'artefacts' will go on display.

For fuller discussion of the project, please see the attached article.