



PTAS Project Report (for REGULAR PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title: CollaboratED

Project type (delete as appropriate) :

A Research Project (research focus on particular dimension of teaching, learning, assessment)

Principal Investigator : Dr Denitsa Petrova

Schools/department : ECA/ESALA - MSc Design and Digital Media and Digital Media Design (Online) Programmes

Team members (including Schools and Departments) :

Sabina Savadova, Research Assistant, PhD Candidate at the School of Education
Professor John Lee School: ESALA, Edinburgh College of Art
Eli Appleby-Donald, Edinburgh College of Art
Geoff Lee, Edinburgh College of Art
Alex Burford, School of Informatics

For further details, please contact:

Project teams must submit a report within 4 months of the conclusion of their project. Copies of dissemination material (eg journals/newsletter articles, conference papers, posters should be listed and attached (separate to the word count). The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Report (maximum 1500 words)

What did you do?

The focus of this project was to investigate the attitudes towards collaborative work between on-campus and online students from the two shared programmes - MSc Design and Digital Media and Digital Media Design (Online). CollaboratED looked into how effectively and successfully the shared experience has been created and is working across cohorts, and what factors are most important in determining the results in terms of student experience and learning outcomes. We asked students and academic staff about the benefits and challenges to group work, looking to find ways to successfully bring on-campus and online learners into a creative and shared studio environment. The actual research process involved questionnaires, observations, and individual interviews with students and lecturers on the programme. In total, we conducted four observations with online and on-campus students where we attended their weekly meetings and observed their work progress together. Following the observations, we conducted nine face-to-face and online interviews with students. The interviews were semi-structured with mainly open questions eliciting information about students' experiences in collaborative learning environment.



What did you find out?

The first round of questionnaires and interviews identified two key areas for future evaluation – assessment and grading; and social learning opportunities. The latter factor seems to be particularly relevant for this research, as collaborative and social learning mechanisms are crucial for the groups project courses of this MSc Programme.

The most prominent information to come from this study has been around students' perceptions of grading assignments undertaken as group work. Initial evaluation has shown that more than 80% of the students prefer to work on assignments individually rather than as a group. However, when delving deeper into the data, it was apparent that the focus of this perception was on grades and the feeling that grades given to groups may not reflect the individual effort of the student, or indeed lack of effort by class colleagues. This came through as the primary concern for students and tutors when discussing assignments and working with others for the purpose of assignment.

In summary, the research findings suggested that the challenges that online students face are mostly focused on balancing work and studies, but also relate to working from different time zones and overcoming cultural differences within the team. Despite these challenges, the students recognise the benefits of group discussion and sharing resources with their peers, mostly, however, they value the sense of being part of a community. Despite positive responses towards group discussion and collaboration, in both on-campus and online cohorts, the largest percentage of students prefer to work alone where course assignments are concerned. The biggest motivators for group work for both on-campus and online cohorts are focused on sharing resources and ideas, receiving feedback from peers and the inclusion of community. There is still hesitation around the concept of grading group work at group level with students preferring to either work alone on assignments or that their individual work is recognized and graded rather than that of the group. The value of social engagement and strategic brainstorming is highly recognised, therefore going forward, the focus should be on student interactions that trigger learning mechanisms.

How did you disseminate your findings?

We organised an internal presentation and workshop for tutors within the team.
We presented a paper based on the research findings at a conference in Portugal:
<https://digicom.ipca.pt>

Petrova, Denitsa, Sabina Savadova. 2019. *CollaboratED: Collaborative Learning in a Shared Studio Environment for Digital Media Design Students*.

The paper was also selected for publication in book entitled "Perspectives on Design and Digital Communication: Research, Innovations and Best Practices", published by the Springer Series of Design and Innovation.

What have been the benefits to student learning?

It would appear that the most successful examples of collaborative projects delivered through a cross-cohort setting occurred when an online student took on a leading role and managed the workload of the rest of campus team. Further insights into influence on the campus group from an online colleague emerged in situations where the campus groups had to be more organised for



meetings and keep the conversations focused solely on the project when their online colleagues were present through the computer screen. This proposes a base for further research into the dynamic of the social relationship between students in a cross-cohort setting and the effect of this dynamic onto group course project. This opportunity is already being explored in the Masters programme in Digital Media Design through one of the core courses, which requires group work. A number of students from the online cohort have been assigned to work with one of their peers from campus, thus the on-campus student is acting as the 'live' link between tutors and on-campus students. There is also scope for further incorporation of the social and community building aspects of online and on-campus collaboration, to assist the creation of a shared studio environment intended by the creation of this cross-cohort programme.

How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?

The benefits of this research might be useful for colleagues who are teaching in a hybrid or fully online programmes. The insights gained might be beneficial for courses in the School of Design and School of Art or any other programmes involving creative and studio work. The outcomes from the research into student collaborations would benefit any course where group work is an essential part of the course project. With online learning becoming increasingly mainstream during COVID, and hybrid models becoming more common, this projects might be used as a guide for some of the aspects of the transformation process from campus to online or a hybrid model of teaching.

Financial statement (please delete as appropriate):

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:

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