

# Enhancing Digital Portfolios



Commenced: 2005

## What is it?

A second year social science module on historical-comparative sociology has employed portfolio methodology for some years. In 2005/06 this has moved towards a digital portfolio with students submitting analyses of specific topics using video, sound files and web pages according to their interests and to the topic at hand. Thus some students are exploring comparisons between the French and Russian revolutions using images, while another student is exploring how terrorist campaigns were responded to by government and non-government agencies over a period of years, using media reports.

## What is involved?

The simple starting point was that of simply requiring students to use digital media which does require a level of training and support. It has also been useful to provide students with Ipods on which a number of video clips are recorded. These clips were taken from interviews the tutor conducted with internationally known sociologists. They form part of a national teaching fellowship project. A further requirement was to abandon the formal weekly lecture-seminar format with prescribed topics in favour of a more flexible student-led session where different student groups can explore sociological issues and how these can best be represented and commented on in a digital portfolio.

## Why is the project important to the CETL and the University?

This project hands control of learning and responsibility for the curriculum over to students within a single module. It does so in a safe and calculated way. The movement to student control is gradual, takes account of individual needs but is driven by the fact that students know more about learning than tutors do and that often students become experts on a particular field which they can then use in different ways in other contexts: work, community activity etc.

## What do you hope the project will achieve?

The project will provide a basis for enabling tutors on other modules to use similar approaches and make best use of student enthusiasm and interest. It will enable students to get the best out of their learning in ways they can record and use in a personal development plan (PDP) and which they can develop further in employment or other contexts.

## What impact do you hope the project will have?

- Impact goes through a number of stages. For students completing the module the initial impact is on how they view their learning and how they analyse their development. They are required to do this as part of their assessment. It then gives them ideas for further development in their final year, e.g. in their dissertation.
- It will help with future employment since social science graduates with effective technology skills are in demand.
- The approach is also being used for teaching a BA In Applied Social Science in Hong Kong where the module is offered. Again the student response has been enthusiastic and this means the skills can be developed in a different context.
- It is also of benefit to tutors who are wanting to explore ways of enhancing learner responsibility.

## Future Developments

The module which has been used for this work is coming to an end in its current form. That does not mean the field is no longer being continued! On the contrary, historical-comparative sociology is being strengthened through being developed across a range of modules. Future developments will see this work initially continue across modules in BA Politics and BA Sociology and it will be taken up elsewhere. It is planned to take this forward with work in Humanities and possibly in Business Studies.

The heart of the future development lies in how learning spaces are used to best effect in the future. Using more open space with technology can help learners engineer a number of different scenarios, including recreating past events. It is also possible to generate future scenarios such as counter terrorist responses to new forms of terrorist attack. Whether past or future the experiences will enable learners to act as consultants and representatives, to gain clear understanding and personal ideas which are of value in future employment.

## Contact details

Anthony J. Rosie  
0114 225 2399  
A.J.Rosie@shu.ac.uk

This information can be made available in other formats.  
Please contact us for details.