Supporting Graduate Attribute Development in Introductory Accounting with Student-Generated Screencasts

Jessica K. Frawley, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Laurel Evelyn Dyson, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia
James Wakefield, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia
Jonathan Tyler, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

In recent years educational, industry and government bodies have placed increasing emphasis on the need to better support the development of “soft” skills or graduate attributes within higher education. This paper details the adoption of a student-generated multimedia screencast assignment that was found to address this need. Implemented within a large introductory accounting subject, this optional assignment allowed undergraduate students to design, develop and record a screencast so as to explain a key accounting concept to their peers. This paper reports on the trial, evaluation and redesign of this assignment. Drawing on data from student surveys, practitioner reflections and descriptive analysis of the screencasts themselves, this paper demonstrates the ways that the assignment contributed to the development and expression of a number of graduate attributes. These included the students’ skills in multimedia, creativity, teamwork and self-directed learning. Adopting free-to-use software and providing a fun and different way of learning accounting, this novel approach constitutes a sustainable and readily replicable way of supporting graduate attribute development. This paper contributes understandings that will be relevant to both researchers and practitioners.

KEYWORDS

Graduate Attributes, Introductory Accounting, Peer Learning, Student-Generated Content, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Government, industry and educational bodies have increasingly come to recognise the importance of “soft” or generic skills in the workplace over and above the domain-specific knowledge and expertise required to effectively exercise a profession (Litchfield, Frawley, & Nettleton, 2010). These include skills such as interpersonal communication, technological and visual literacy, teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, ethical decision-making, time management, project management, and skills for research and lifelong learning. Universities have responded by mapping graduate attributes across degree programs and embedding these into pedagogic activities.

However, there is still considerable debate over the best approach to developing graduate attributes in higher education. Additionally, some have raised concerns that university education in many fields is in danger of degenerating into “a technical training camp for business and industry rather than fulfilling its mission to educate and empower the individual” (Scott, 2010, p. 381). Thus, discussions around the importance of graduate attributes “have their roots in the contested territory of questions as to the nature of knowledge and the nature of a university” (Barrie & Prosser, 2004, p. 65).
Barrie (2005, p. 3) calls for a systematic, evidence-based approach to address the development of generic attributes, and notes that many universities have adopted mere “policy statements” and “surface mapping strategies”, which do not constitute evidence of attainment of generic skills by their graduates.

This article describes the implementation of an innovative screencast assignment found to be supportive of graduate attribute development in undergraduate accounting students. In addition to fostering soft skill development, this assignment also afforded students an opportunity in which to acquire accounting knowledge in a new and interesting way.

A screencast consists of the digital recording or screen capture of any actions taking place on a computer screen, accompanied by a voice narration (Educause, 2006). Screencasts have great explanatory power, since the images viewed on the screen are described and interpreted by the voice-over. Titles, captions and other written labels on the images further enhance the clarity of the message being conveyed and add to its explanation. This method and format has frequently been employed in instructional software guides and increasingly in education, the best-known application being the online Kahn Academy (www.khanacademy.org). Within educational contexts the predominant use of screencasts has been to disseminate teacher- or expert-generated content.

In contrast, this study reports on the use of screencasting technologies to support student-generated multimedia content that, in placing students at the centre of learning, moves away from more passive instructional methods. An example of this is illustrated in Figure 1, in which a student used screencast software to animate PowerPoint slides and accompany them with a voice narration in order to explain the concept of materiality. The authors argue that this approach better acknowledges the needs of today’s students, most of whom have been exposed to technology for much of their lives and require new pedagogical methods to engage them (Tapscott, 1998). This promotes learner agency by facilitating student expression through similar tools to those that they will have grown up with or at least employ from day to day. Students become “actively engaged in shaping their own forms of individualised generation of contexts for learning” (Pachler, Bachmair, & Cook 2010, p. 23).

Having students make screencasts provides many learning benefits. These include the development of generic skills in university students, such as technology skills, creativity, and the ability to communicate knowledge and work collaboratively (Mohorovičić, 2012; Shafer, 2010). Screencasts have also been shown to be highly motivating and enjoyable for primary school children to make,

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Figure 1. Student-generated screencast on the accounting principle of materiality
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