

Concrete blogs

Abstract:

The increasing use of social technologies in learning and teaching begs the question of their appropriateness and the manner in which they are deployed. This case study outlines a specific use of blogs and wikis in a fourth-year Civil Engineering course on Durable and Sustainable Concrete Structures at the Australian Defence Force Academy. As the students were close to graduation, academic staff sought to encourage a student-centred, authentic learning environment for the course. Students were given a design brief and divided into two teams; each researching suitable concrete mixes and design details to be found for disparate and harsh environments. Despite the class being face-to-face, online tools were included since much communication in the field is online even if team members' offices are in close proximity.

Blogs and wikis, as well as other communicative tools, were used in order that students share their research findings and subsequent conclusions. These were read by the lecturer, and formative assessment and feedback were provided promptly. The other team also read and commented on each entry, providing peer feedback and assessment. Discussions occurred regarding the suitability of various proposed mixes and designs. Emphasis was placed on communication and collaboration within and between teams. Final assessment was provided in the form of a presentation.

Changes in teaching approaches are discussed, together with the difficulties experienced in using tools new to both students and staff and the tension between pedagogy and university policy requirements. Responses by both staff and students are examined, along with proposed changes for the next offering of the course. Implications for expanding this methodology throughout the program are also explored.

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