

10 UniLearn Tips - Learning Bytes Session

28th Feb 2013

10 Change the style of the buttons/menus

- It makes your UniLearn site look more attractive to students and therefore more engaging.
- Customising the interface helps to differentiate modules from one another
- It makes it look like you have made an effort to make it more attractive rather than accepting defaults.
- It could tie in to module/course colour schemes or School themes to give identity.
- Exact colour choice is down to personal choice and subjective but avoid those combinations which may cause problems for those with colour blindness or dyslexia.

9 Add a banner

This is fairly self-explanatory and the same points to be made as colour of buttons/menu:

- It makes the UniLearn site more engaging and attractive to students.
- Makes you look like you have made an effort.
- Gives a module some character and identity.
- Makes students clear which module they are in and separates modules so they don't look all alike.
- Can be tied to School/Department/subject themes/colour schemes.
- The banner only appears in the Announcements area of UniLearn, no other pages.
- A recommended size for course banners is 800 pixels wide x 100 pixels high. (The resolution should be 72 dpi which is standard screen resolution).
- Speak to your technician or LTA if you need help creating or resizing an image.

8 Use email effectively

- Use the in-built UniLearn email functionality to target your emails at the correct group of people.
- Use the announcement email functionality when appropriate
- Don't bombard your students with too many emails.
- Don't send content of emails instead of uploading to the UniLearn site

- Think about developing a FAQ section on your UniLearn site to encourage students to check there first before emailing, and add any generic questions and answers to the page to prevent duplicating emails to many different students.

7 Keep your module tidy please!

- It is important to regular check your module and remove anything that is out of date.
- This will make it more intuitive for students and easier to navigate.
- This includes deleting all old announcement before the start of term – and there is an easy way to bulk delete announcements.
- Remove any old content and specifically any old Turnitin assignments.

6 Make use of adaptive release

- A bit complicated to deal with briefly but adaptive release allows certain bits of content to just be displayed when necessary and fitting certain conditions.
- It can be used to display things for certain groups of students which keeps thing uncluttered and unnecessary content hidden for the other students.
- Content can be date dependant so only appear on certain dates, and can be removed from display when no longer needed.
- Adaptive release can be used to appear when something has been marked reviewed, and then the next task appears – good for when you don't want the students thinking too far ahead.
- Can be dependent on a test result – giving different content for students who pass and those who don't make the pass grade.

5 Allow students space to talk to each other and you

- UniLearn is not good at the social side of things, you can't create profiles and students can't message each other unless the tutor sets up some sort of space for this.
- Because of that, you will find that people will take discussion elsewhere like msn, Skype and Facebook, but this may not be enough as all students on a particular module won't necessarily be on Facebook in the same social groupings.
- To cater for this it is a good idea to create some social and reflective spaces for students. This could be in the form of a discussion board which is set up for the student to communicate with each other or a blog space where student can reflect on their learning experience and comment on each other's posts.
- It is a good idea to make it clear whether the space is for student-student communication and that it will not be assessed.

- Do not underestimate the value of peer support and motivation, and learning from how other people learn and subsequent discussion.

4 Provide a welcome from you

- One really easy thing to do to make your UniLearn module more attractive and friendly is to add a welcome message from you the tutor.
- This is easy to do but has high impact. The students will feel that the site has more of a human touch, and feel welcomed into the environment.
- If you can add a photo or a video message it provides more human contact to engage the students.
- The first time the student encounters your UniLearn site you want it to be a positive and welcoming experience, first impressions last, and a sterile, person-less site will not be a nice place to visit or stay.

3 Add staff details and photos

- All UniLearn modules should have clear staff information, it is a really simple thing to do and is now clear a requirement for all modules. It is very important for student to staff communication.
- Adding staff details including how and when they can be contacted is vital for effective student-tutor communication.
- Please tell students both when they can contact you and how email/phone/ etc. If you hold office hours put the details down on the staff information page, and what your system is – do they need to book if so how? Can they just drop in?
- A photo makes such a difference – it makes you seem more approachable and friendly by providing a visual reference for your students.
- For any tutor/other staff not dealing regularly with the students it gives a friendly face with whom to connect.
- Once you have added your staff details to a particular module it is relatively easy to then copy these across to any other modules you have.
- There are still a high percentage of UniLearn module that have no staff information on – it is a 2 minute job so please check your modules when you return to you desks and make sure yours is not one of these.

2 Make your UniLearn site more visual by adding pictures, video and direct text

- One of the things that makes UniLearn quite unattractive is an abundance of just links and file attachments.
- One way to make this look a lot more attractive is by adding a few images and/or videos, which is quite easy to do, and there is a YouTube mashup to make it easy to add YouTube videos.
- This makes it much more attractive and engaging for students. Including images will help to differentiate between different sections of the module and can reinforce/emphasise the text content. There are some icons on the ipark you can download and use and a how-to guide telling you how to use them.
- Another tip is to put small bits of text directly onto UniLearn rather than putting as a file attachment to make it less click-heavy and more attractive.

1 Organise and signpost your UniLearn module

- The most important tip on making your UniLearn module better was seen to be making your module materials easy to find and that they follow the logical and natural structure of your teaching.
- Change the Learning Resources menu name and/or use folders to organise your content to reflect your course structure whether that be by topic, activity, weeks, etc.
- This will make it more engaging and logical to students who will see the organisation reflecting what they are doing in face-to-face classes or the activities online.
- Make sure files are there if you tell students they are! Check they are available and download correctly.
- Use copy/move to move content around the site or into folders
- Don't assume that because that because you know where a piece of content is that it is obvious to the students.
- Students won't thank you for too much content but they will be happy if what is there is organised in an easy-to-follow and intuitive way.