

Narrative 2

Andrew is a lecturer in his second year in the department of Meteorology. For the past four years, he has acted as convener for the Atmospheric Science field course module that is run jointly between his own and another university for final year students. The module is a one-week residential field course that takes place on one of the Scottish Isles, usually in September and aims to furnish students with a greater understanding of the atmosphere works through a series of observational activities in the surrounding environment. As a new lecturer, Andrew is also taking the university's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP).

As part of the Curriculum Design module on his PGCAP course, Andrew became involved in the Learning Design initiative along with other colleagues to pilot and champion Learning Design tools within his institution. Through face-to-face discussions and explanations of the tools at a virtual Elluminate event –organised by the OU and the coordinator at his university - and in conjunction with side-by-side support via email, he was able to select the appropriate learning design approach to tackle some of the issues involved in redesigning the field course module. In keeping with the collaborative ethos of the project, Andrew posted regular updates on Cloudworks, as well as recording detailed reflections on his designs on Vimeo.

To address the field course's perceived shortcomings, Andrew decided to introduce two new elements using a problem-based learning (PBL) approach. Although he had a clear understanding about why these should be incorporated into the module, he observed that a general lack of awareness of the whole module structure made it difficult to judge whether it was actually delivering on the learning objectives set out for students and, indeed, if the new activities were plugging any gaps. To resolve this issue, Andrew used the course mapping tool to draw a detailed view of the course structure which would enable him to identify specific elements of the course which were lacking, and provide a clearer insight into if and how the new activities mapped onto that structure.

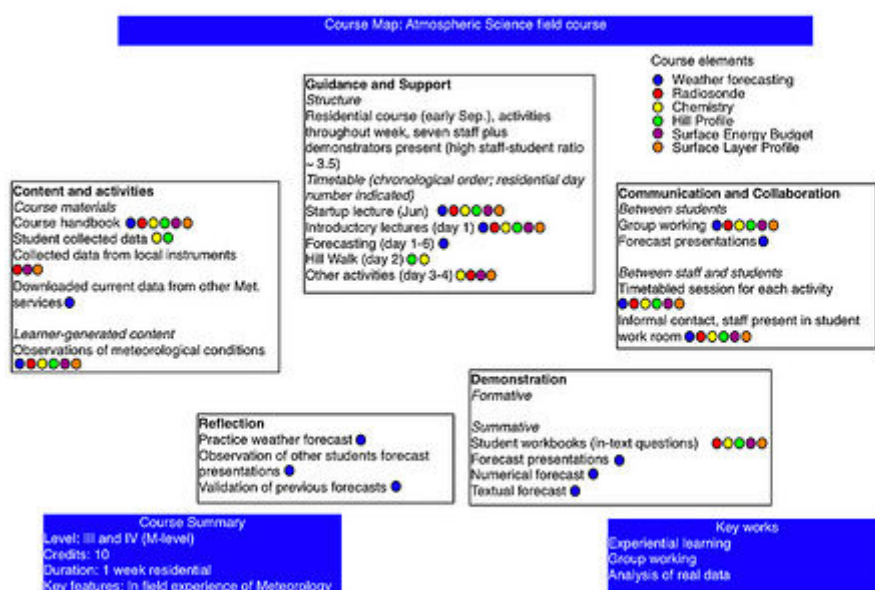


Fig 1. Initial course Map

Having constructed the course map, Andrew noted that two things became apparent about the structure of the module. Firstly, that one of the elements, relating to the weather forecasting, “*sat rather on its own*” in comparison to other elements on the course; secondly, that there was a notable lack of elements for reflection and formative assessment in other parts of the module. This

enabled him to: “go away and think about how the new activities – which I’d already planned on including, and have included – how they map onto that course map and if they do meet the kind of lacking criteria that we identified through this analysis.”

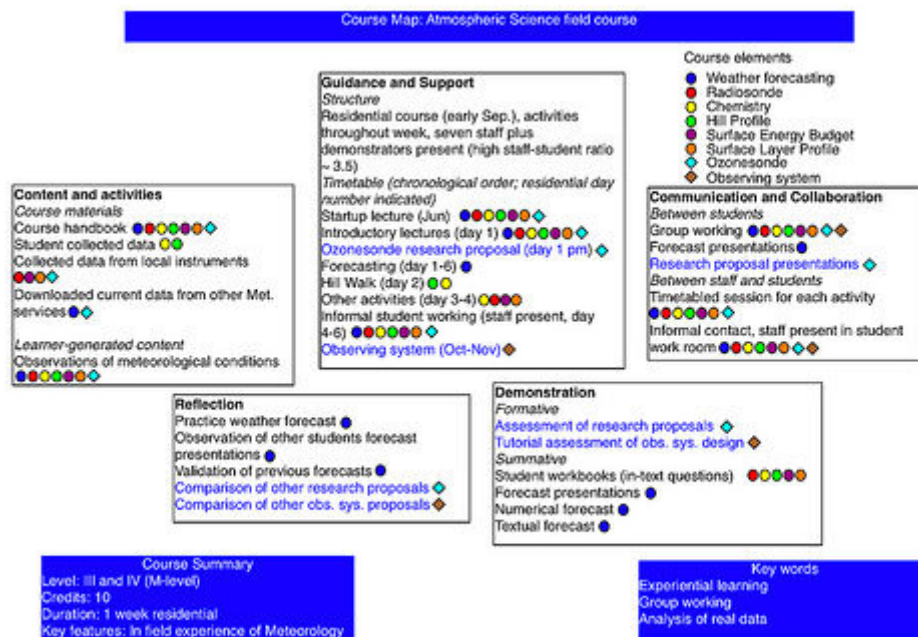


Fig 2. Redesigned Course Map

In addition, the Course Map prompted Andrew to reflect on how the different elements of the module fit within Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle:

“It’s clear that the activities map to different degrees onto that cycle and in particular some of the activities... really miss out key elements cycle... and it’s clear that we need to implement more activities in the course which allow for these in order to fulfil a broad remit that matches that learning cycle.”

Andrew kept a video diary of his module design activities and copies of his designs, both of which he shared on ‘Cloudworks’, a social network site for sharing and discussing learning and teaching.

Reflecting on his involvement in the Learning Design initiative, Andrew observed that it was a very useful process that had promoted thinking and reflection and supported his desire to incorporate a PBL approach in his teaching – surveys of the new activities showed they had achieved their aims. Typical of the students’ feedback to the changes is the comment:

“Applying what you learn to a ‘real-life’ situation focuses one’s mind and gives the learning/research etc a full purpose.”

However a general lack of interest in the course mapping technique from his departmental colleagues meant that Andrew’s participation in the initiative had had little or no impact on his School beyond the individual model, and he did not find that the process particularly promoted sharing and collaboration except among those colleagues working with him on the PBL project. Despite this, he concluded that aimed to ‘continue to develop courses in this fashion in future’.