SKILLS4STUDY CAMPUS REVIEW

2011 - 2013

ALISON DOYLE

DISABILITY SERVICE

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Contents

Executive summary

Skills4studycampus (S4SC) is a fully interactive e-learning resource, which helps students to develop the study skills they need to be successful and is suitable for students on all courses and in any year of study.   It covers a range of core skills through a wide variety of interactive activities, tests and assessments. The learning experience is therefore highly personalised and focused on their individual needs. This resource is not intended to replace the excellent service provided by Student Learning Development. However it is important to acknowledge that specific student groups are not always able to access support on campus as they may live outside of Dublin, commute long distances, have family or work commitments, are completing professional placement, or have timetables which do not fit with College opening hours.

In 2011 - 2012 this resource was piloted to first year students in the Disability Service (n = 182), School of Nursing and Midwifery (n = 312), Social Work and Social Policy (n = 45), Drama and Theatre Studies (n = 16), TAP (n = 169) and Mature students (n = 135). Feedback from staff was very encouraging; the School of Nursing provided a detailed comparison of student log in to S4SC and assignment results, which demonstrated a positive correlation.

In 2012 – 13, DS funded access to S4SC for all TCD undergraduate students and academic staff, at a cost of €10,428 (excluding VAT), a discount of 44% on the list price.   DS presented S4SC to the Undergraduate Studies Committee in early September, and provided instructor access to members of staff, on request.   Throughout the year regular email alerts were sent to students and staff, and promotional materials distributed around college and via TCDSU. Whilst there was some evidence of creative promotion and uptake - JF Drama and Theatre Studies students completed one module as an assignment, the School of Physics showcased S4SC on their website homepage, the School of Nursing continues to use this resource as part of their academic skills module to JF students – commitment to promotion by Departments / Schools was poor, consequently affecting uptake. Only 1,500 students (9%) accessed the site across the year, with peak viewing occurring in October and November. Of these, 4.6% were students registered with the Disability Service.

Introduction

The HEA / NCCA Report 'From Transaction to Transition: Outcomes of the Conference on the Transition from Second to Third-Level Education in Ireland' (2011) summarises the concerns expressed by stakeholders in second and third level education, in respect to the transition of students from second-level to third-level education. These concerns focused on the senior-cycle curriculum and the skills and competences of students, and in particular that 'greater attention should be directed to the reinforcement of foundational competences such as study skills, research skills, quantitative reasoning, essay writing and critical thinking, particularly for new entrants'. This document proposes a number of short, medium and long term actions those with specific relevance to HEIs are:

- Reinforce the issue of foundational skills and the first-year experience as priorities for concerted action across Irish higher education institutions.
- The incorporation of transversal skills without compromising discipline-specific content and academic rigour.

In April 2012 DS conducted an investigation into the First Year Experience (FYE) of DARE students (n=74), capturing both quantitative and qualitative data via a survey and individual in depth interviews.   Responses to questions about academic skills and preparedness highlighted a significant skills gap between second level and third level requirements, with 90% of students indicating that they needed help with gaining or improving academic skills. For some students this support was provided early on, but others found it took time to acquire the right kind of skills quickly and efficiently.

In 2013, DS subsequently repeated the FYE interviews with 23 students, finding very similar concerns around skills gaps. Students in FEMS felt well prepared via introductory courses, and expereinced less of an emphasis on academic writing and referencing. However FAHSS students expressed difficulties such as the practice of having two different referencing styles used within the same School / Department, and different lecturers having different preferences, with no opportunities to submit practice essays, and acquire feedback on academic writing. In November 2012, FAHSS conducted a research study (unpublished) to gain

a deeper understanding of how first year students manage the transition from second to third level education. In regard to academic skills, the freedom and independence of college was unsettling for many students, with little guidance on how to manage reading lists, or how to tackle assignments.

Ensuring that students are academically ready prior to entry, and especially during the first few weeks of first year, is critical. College provides excellent academic skills support through Student Learning Development, which hosts a 'drop in' study skills service for individual students, and group workshops throughout the year. However it is important to acknowledge that specific student groups are not able to access human supports as they may live outside of Dublin and commute long distances, have family or work commitments, are studying on a professional course with several weeks of placement, or have heavy timetables which do not fit with College opening hours. For these student groups 'anytime, anywhere' access to academic skills is vital. DS has traditionally provided one to one support for high needs students with disabilities, however mainstreaming independent learning which can be accessed as often as required, encourages self-determination, self-advocacy and the acquisition of transferable skills to encourage students to become independent as opposed to dependent learners. For this reason DS initiated a pilot VLE project for academic skills, which aims to assist students with the transition into university life, bridge the academic skills 'gap', and promote greater engagement with College resources in first year.

Skills4Study Campus VLE

Skills4studycampus (S4SC) is a fully interactive e-learning resource, which helps students to develop the study skills they need to be successful and is suitable for students on all courses and in any year of study.   It covers a range of core skills including how to write better essays, developing critical analysis, making clearer notes and facing exams with confidence.   Students are encouraged to complete a wide variety of interactive activities, tests and assessments, to keep personal notes, tags and a learning journal. The learning experience is therefore highly personalised and focused on their individual needs.

This resource has been developed by the study skills team at Palgrave Macmillan and is based on the work of Stella Cottrell, the best-selling author of The Study Skills Handbook, Critical Thinking Skills and The Palgrave Student Planner.   It can be used flexibly either as part of a blended learning taught course or for independent self-study.   Students are provided with 24/7 access for unlimited simultaneous users via existing VLEs such as Blackboard or Moodle. Advantages include a module 'Getting ready for academic study' that can be made available to students pre-entry.   There are several ways to customise this resource. Content can be added and made available to all students at the login and/or the home page (Figure 1).
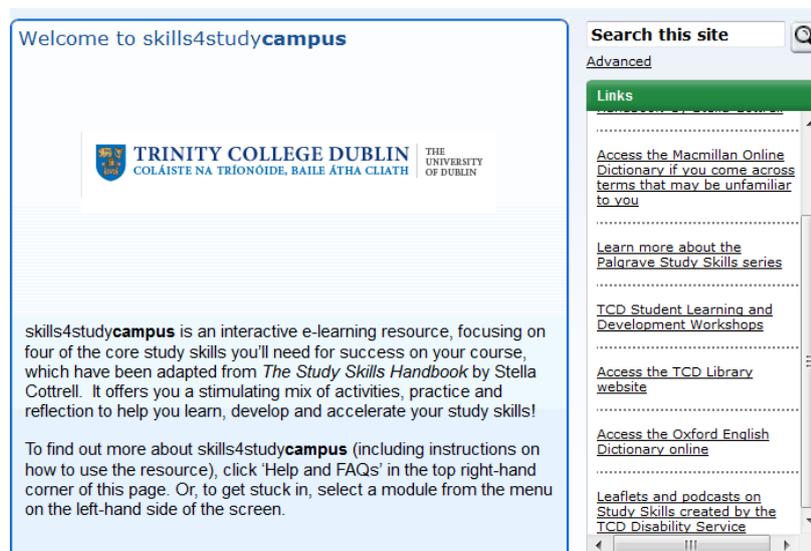

Figure 1. Customized homepage and TCD links

Subject specific content can also be added into the section pages and the diagnostic tests and module assessments. An institutional logo can be uploaded to brand all pages, as well as a larger version included on the student home page, together with links which are available to all the institution users.

Pilot study 2011 - 2012

A consortium rate for the Republic of Ireland was agreed between the publishers (Palgrave) and HEAnet, and consequently the Disability Service was given permission to use ESF funding for students with disabilities to pilot this resource. The pilot began in September 2011 and involved 918 students: all incoming JF students registering with the Service (n = 182), and all JF students

within the School of Nursing and Midwifery (n=312), Social Work and Social Policy (n = 45), Drama and Theatre Studies (n = 16), TAP (n = 169) and Mature students (n = 135). High needs students of any standing who registered with DS during the year or were attending Unilink, were also given access to this resource (n = 59).

In addition, academic staff from each Department / School, DS, Student Learning and the Senior Lecturer were provided with an 'instructor' log in. The programme was introduced to staff in each of these pilot groups. In the School of Nursing this resource was embedded in the first semester of teaching with an introduction to students provided by DS, reference to appropriate S4SC modules were added to the course handbook, and also referred to in academic skills tutorials by School of Nursing staff. DS added the Trinity logo, a link to the TCD library, the referencing guide from the School of Nursing, academic and study skills leaflets and podcasts, and a proof reading checklist.

Results

Results are based on the reporting facility embedded in S4SC (Table 1). The highest number of logins for the year was recorded in October with 20% (n = 165) of students accessing this resource. The average time to complete a module is 20 – 25 minutes, and it is clear from the average log in time that students were spending the recommended amount of time during their visits. During the course of the academic year monthly emails were sent to all student groups, drawing attention to relevant modules such as exam revision.

Institution name: Trinity College Dublin   **Subscription Type:** Subscription   **Expiry date:** 14-08-2012

Month name	Total logins	Unique logins	No of students	Average login time (hrs:mins:secs)	Sections visited	Pages requested
Sep-2011	121	47	735	00:07:03	39	149
Oct-2011	400	165	808	00:16:19	294	1374
Nov-2011	72	48	874	00:32:27	96	497
Dec-2011	41	29	875	00:32:51	52	309
Jan-2012	92	67	893	00:38:25	147	741
Feb-2012	132	77	908	00:34:53	209	1066
Mar-2012	30	14	912	00:30:52	54	325
Apr-2012	32	19	918	00:29:38	43	218
May-2012	1	1	918	02:27:48	5	35

Table 1: Access statistics September 2011 – May 2012

Reviewing the usage by group across the academic year, the highest user group of S4SC was Nursing and Midwifery students (n = 231 visits), followed by DS students (n = 130), TAP (n = 121), and Mature (n = 63). These students were also more likely to use the resource continuously across the year. In the first semester to December 2011, Nursing and Midwifery students accessed all modules in the S4SC suite, Mature students accessed 'Getting ready for academic study' and 'Reading and note-taking', and DS students accessed both of these in addition to 'Critical thinking skills'. Although Semester 1 represents the first exposure to written assignments, this module was rarely accessed.

The School of Nursing and Midwifery conducted a comparison of monthly log in statistics for individual students, with their results for a specific module that pushes S4SC. It was clear that, with a few exceptions, the majority of students who did well in their assessment were the same students who logged in and used S4SC extensively. All participating courses were invited to submit feedback on the pilot. Responses were received only from the School of Nursing and TAP, who were broadly supportive of this initiative.

On the basis of these results, DS was encouraged to subscribe to campus-wide subscription on a trial basis.

Campus-wide study 2012 - 2013

In 2012 – 13 DS funded access to S4SC for all TCD undergraduate students and academic staff. Throughout the year regular email alerts were sent to students and staff, and DS provided a wide range of electronic promotional materials to the Student's Union and administrative staff. There was some evidence of creative promotion and uptake, for example JF Drama and Theatre Studies were tasked to complete three modules to fulfil the requirements of an assignment, and the School of Physics continued to display a prominent link to S4SC on their website homepage. The School of Nursing continued to use this resource as part of their academic skills module to JF students.

Results

A usage report was provided by Palgrave to th end of April 2013 (Tabel 2). Only 1,500 students (9%) accessed the site across the year, with peak viewing occurring in October and November. Of these, 4.6% were students registered with the Disability Service.

Institution Name	Total Logins	Unique Logins	No of Students	Average Login Time (hrs:mins:secs)
Trinity College Dublin	1307	714	1507	00:31:43

Month	Total Logins	Unique Logins	No of Students	Average Login Time (hrs:mins:secs)
Sep-2012	292	146	1121	00:27:46
Oct-2012	343	219	1300	00:29:04
Nov-2012	344	190	1429	00:36:22
Dec-2012	109	67	1447	00:40:14
Jan-2013	80	44	1468	00:30:59
Feb-2013	61	35	1487	00:27:33
Mar-2013	48	33	1500	00:27:30
Apr-2013	30	21	1507	00:33:19

Report run 29/04/2013 15:35

Table 2: Access statistics September 2012 - April 2013

Since September 2012, 386 new users have accessed S4SC, in addition to the 328 students from AY 2011 – 2012, who have continued to use this resource. The average log in time is 31 minutes, and over 350 hours were spent completing the modules.

Table 3 describes the number of page views for each study module, accessed by each group registered to use S4SC. Students identified as 'Self Registered' did not assign themselves to a Department. Reviewing usage across the academic year, students accessed S4SC predominantly in the first semester, and .

DEPARTMENT	Self Registered	Drama and Theatre Studies	Disability Service	Nursing	Education	2011 Pilot
TOTAL PAGE VIEWS	1198	384	85	14	10	9
Getting ready for academic study	277	87	1	2	3	3
Reading and note-making	227	113	23	0	2	2
Critical thinking skills	78	35	4	0	5	0
Writing skills	372	108	39	2	0	1
Referencing and understanding plagiarism	156	30	9	1	0	0
Exam skills	82	11	9	9	0	3

DEPARTMENT	TAP	Mature	Economics	Social Studies	TAPFC	Physiotherapy
TOTAL PAGE VIEWS	8	5	3	2	2	1
Getting ready for academic study	2	2	0	0	1	0
Reading and note-making	3	0	0	0	0	0
Critical thinking skills	3	1	0	0	0	1
Writing skills	0	1	3	2	1	0
Referencing and understanding plagiarism	0	0	0	0	0	0
Exam skills	0	1	0	0	0	0

Table 3: Total page views for each module, by student group 2012 - 2013

The study skills course provided to JF Drama students (n = 40), directed them to complete at least one module of their choice in S4SC, as a formal assignment. However it is clear from the results above, that some of these students accessed more than one module across the whole semester. This implies that directing students' attention to S4SC increases uptake and engagement.

Conclusion

Mainstreaming learning support provision as described above encourages self-determination, self-advocacy and the acquisition of transferable skills to encourage students to become

independent as opposed to dependent learners.   This resource was not intended to replace the excellent service provided by Student Learning Development, who provide a 'drop in' study skills service for individual students, and group workshops throughout the year. However it is important to acknowledge that specific student groups are not able to access human supports as they may live outside of Dublin and commute long distances, have family or work commitments, are studying on a professional course with several weeks of placement, or have heavy timetables which do not fit with College opening hours.

There is an argument for continuing campus-wide access for a second year, as the resource is now embedded on the TCD Local homepage, in the orientation packs for JF students, and within some Schools, which theoretically could mean increased uptake with each subsequent year.   In the long term, S4SC still provides a more cost effective solution to increasing academic skills, when compared to the costs of human support. Student Learning Development are creating a new study skills module available via Blackboard, which will include existing materials provided as Word, Powerpoint and audio-visual materials. They key to matching the versatility of S4SC is to build-in an interactive aspect, as providing text-based materials is arguably just adding to the existing reading load for students. It will also be vital to ensure that all materials are fully accessible to all students, including those with a sensory disability.