



## It's academia Jim but not as we know it ...

Mid career academic Professor Jim Newell has girded up his past, assessed the present and walked into the future, Jim has launched his own web page and blog!

**I**t is now widely accepted in academic circles that with the onslaught of new media, the changes in the way our society acts and interacts socially and professionally through social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, that some kind of web presence has acquired a heightened significance for the successful continuation of the academic trade.

Jim, a Professor of Politics at the University said: "There are at least four reasons for this. The first is the development of the Internet itself, with the first generation of web technologies having been overtaken by the second we now have a medium that allows users to be the producers and contributors of information as well as its consumers. Through blogs and social networking sites, such as Methospace, and SciVee, users can comment on content in a way that has resulted in decentralisation, the generation of information from the 'bottom up'. Through these and other sites, such as YouTube and Wikipedia, users can now share information and interact as information providers, rather than being the passive recipients of information provided to them. Second, the Internet now offers students and scholars unrivalled opportunities to share research findings, to engage in discussion of their work and participate with others in the development of scholarly communities. Thirdly it offers unparalleled opportunities to engage in dialogue with those outside the academic community and to demonstrate the relevance of what we do to those outside the

'ivory towers'; it enables us to be 'visible'. Finally, for all of the foregoing reasons, a web presence seems likely, at a certain point, to become an essential prerequisite of the capacity to engage in the ordinary processes of social interaction at all".

In creating his website and blog Jim has been aided by Cristina Costa, the University's Research Technologies Development Officer, who is a keen enthusiast of social networking for students, lecturers and researchers at the University, introducing new ways of talking, teaching, connecting and communicating research.

So far Jim's development of his media presence is going well especially in his own area of Politics, in fact he says: "blogging seems particularly well adapted to political reflection insofar as a blog's distinguishing features are commentary or news on a particular subject, and the ability of readers to engage with that commentary through comments of their own. Politics, after all, is carried on through the medium of discussion. The writing of commentary, I have found – offering as it does the opportunity immediately to publish unfiltered reflections on a topic – is every bit as satisfying as writing for any other kind of outlet".

If you would like to know more about Jim's research contact him at: [j.l.newell@salford.ac.uk](mailto:j.l.newell@salford.ac.uk) or visit his blog at: [www.jlnewell.com/](http://www.jlnewell.com/)

## Innovative ways of working

The School of the Built Environment's (SOBE) EXCEL-DL project has been selected to participate in the HEA Discipline-focused Learning Technology Enhancement Academy programme for 2010.

**T**he project is supported by the Higher Education Academy's Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE) and is one of the current round of projects, focusing on strategically improving the use of technology to enhance learning, teaching and assessment.

The EXCEL-DL project aims to evaluate the use of Elluminate Live, a synchronous online collaboration and delivery tool which is currently widely used with postgraduate distance learners studying in the School of the Built Environment. The project team is carrying out detailed research into the use of Elluminate within SOBE to discover and learn from the insights of staff and students who use this software regularly and investigate how postgraduate HEI provision can be aligned with the delivery and educational needs of situated learners, employers and other stakeholders.

From this initial research, examples of good practice will be identified and collected and used to extend pedagogic and technical training provision and to form an evidence base for extending its use.

The EXCEL-DL project team have organised an Elluminate webinar and one-day conference on the 10th of November 2010 from 1pm till 4pm, and will disseminate the findings of the project through the ECE Learning Technology Good practice event in January 2011 and the Salford ECE conference later that year.

If you have experience using Elluminate or other virtual classroom systems as an educator or learner and would like to help with EXCEL-DL's research contact Brodie McAdam at: [w.b.mcadam@salford.ac.uk](mailto:w.b.mcadam@salford.ac.uk)

## Bellcurve

An European Union (EU) labour force survey in 2008 reported that there is a mismatch between graduate skills and labour market requirements, the report highlighted the need for university programmes to be structured to enhance the employability of graduates and to offer broad support to the workforce more generally in order to overcome this persistent mismatch between graduate qualifications and the requirements of the labour market.

**U**niversities also should be able to offer innovative curricula, teaching methods and training/retraining programmes which include broader employment-related skills along with the more discipline specific skills. This requires a much clearer commitment by universities to lifelong learning opportunities. Lifelong learning presents a challenge, in that it will require universities to be more open to providing courses for students at later stages in the life cycle.

With this EU Report in mind, here at the University of Salford, a research project led by Professor Dilanthi Amaralunga, Dr Chaminda Pathirage and David Baldry along with others at the School of the Built Environment and supported by the European Commission have embarked on a project called BELLCURVE (Built Environment Lifelong Learning Challenging University Responses to Vocational Education). This project considers 'student engagement' as a continuous through-life process rather than a temporary traditional engagement limited by the course duration.

This through-life studentship defines the



essence of the new innovative "Lifelong University" concept, whereby providing an opportunity for learners to acquire and develop skills and knowledge enabling responds to changing construction labour market needs on a continuous basis. BELLCURVE aims to promote the concept of 'lifelong university' in modernising Higher Education Institutes (HEI) to be more responsive to labour market skills and needs. 'Lifelong university' encourages graduates who are either employed or unemployed to inform their university on the labour market skill requirements. This will provide the opportunity for HEIs to be appropriately responsive, to provide the right mix of skills, training and retraining programmes.

If you would like to know more about this research project contact Dilanthi at: [r.d.g.amaratunga@salford.ac.uk](mailto:r.d.g.amaratunga@salford.ac.uk)

## Skype Research Supports Students!

Melanie Stephens, International Link Lead and Lecturer in Adult Nursing, from the School of Nursing and Midwifery at the University, is moving her action research practice into an educational virtual future!

**M**elanie is currently leading on a research project which is evaluating the effectiveness of Skype as a tool for promoting internationalisation of the nursing curriculum. In the past, the University of Salford's School of Nursing students on international placements used a blog to communicate with their peers and lecturers, this practice originally developed from a Socrates Erasmus initiative to allow students to connect with their peers within an action learning group. The evaluation from the first cycle of action research made many recommendations, which included training ground rules level of support and visual improvements to the blog

the course material. By using the blog it captured the student's thoughts and comments about their learning 'as it happened', thus aiding their development of analysis and deep reflection. The additional value of using a blog was the provision of an international perspective of nursing care to the action learning group. The evaluation from the first cycle of action research made many recommendations, which included training ground rules level of support and visual improvements to the blog appearance and regular student contribution. A crucial factor was that students still prefer face to face communication and missed this interaction whilst on their international placement, as the students still felt socially isolated which reduced their motivation to continue with their studies. In the second cycle of this research project, Melanie and her colleagues, Dawn Hennefer, Mike Barker, Denis McGrath and Annabella Gloster, will aim to gain an insight into the effectiveness of Skype as a medium for student support whilst said students are on international placements, enabling them to contact other Skype users nationally and internationally, enhancing the international experience of the students and staff and increasing their virtual mobility. Academics who are involved as a modular team member, personal tutor or part of the international strategy group will also take part in this action research.

If you would like to know more about this research contact Melanie at: [m.stephens@salford.ac.uk](mailto:m.stephens@salford.ac.uk)