
CHALLENGING OUR STUDENTS, WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Rudi Clause and students of Communication and Multimedia Design (CMD)

Avans University of Applied Sciences has 18 faculties in three locations: Breda, Tilburg and 's Hertogenbosch. We offer 20.000 students and 2000 staff-members an effective and inspiring rich learning- and teaching environment, based on a social constructivist view. The objective of Avans University is to prepare our students for their professional future and to encourage them on self-development, knowledge exchange and mutual cooperation.

In this presentation we will focus on our experiences and lessons learnt in implementing a digital portfolio for 160 first year students at one of the schools of Avans University by challenging them.

In March of 2007 Avans University started a new project to implement a digital portfolio as a tool for self-reflection, aimed at 160 first year students of Communication and Multimedia Design.

As these students were not automatically enthusiastic about having to use the Blackboard Content System and its portfolio module, we as project managers, opted for an implementation strategy based on a challenge.

By doing this, we hoped to achieve the following:

- triggering students to really use the Blackboard Content System,
- broadening their view and challenge them in creating exiting and attractive portfolios, as they had a history in making websites,
- stimulating students to include a 'fun factor' in their products, but also giving others insight in how their design ideas evolved and how they used feedback from other students to improve the final result,
- stimulating reflection and the use of communication skills in their reflection-processes,
- giving us as eLearning consultants more time to train their coaches,
- getting all the technical problems solved before really implementing digital portfolios as a learning and coaching tool,
- and finally stimulating knowledge-exchange, as we used students from other schools within Avans to support the CMD-students.

We challenged these students by giving them an assignment, which focused on the changes they went through, during their first year at CMD, as they started their journey to become a future designer. They had 8 weeks to produce a digital portfolio in which they showed their development as a future designer, their reflection on it and the way in which they incorporated feedback from others.

Further issues were:

- they had to use the Blackboard Content System and its portfolio module,
- the design and content of their portfolio had to form a unity,
- the portfolio had to contain at least one menu-item,
- they had to actively use the comment-function,
- the size of each portfolio was limited to 4Gb.

We facilitated them with a short technical training in how to build a digital portfolio and how to really use the Bb Content System. The finished results after 8 weeks were judged by a jury of students, coaches, a mystery guest and us. Each group of students could nominate their top three portfolios. In a final meeting each 3 winning students presented their portfolio to their peers, got a small reward and a chance to win one of the two grand prizes. This project was really successful. We as eLearning consultants, although we had quite some experience in portfolio implementation projects, learned more from our students than we ever thought possible. Our presentation will therefore be given with the help of the students involved in this project. They will present you with their findings, their creativity and solutions for really making multimedia-based portfolios.