



Gemma Edwards

# Project: Making it Count: Personalised Exam Guidance and Feedback in Sociology

**School:** School of Social Sciences

**Course:** BSocSc Sociology **No. of students:** 150+ **Level:** UG

**Themes:** Student Engagement, Personalised Learning, Audio Feedback

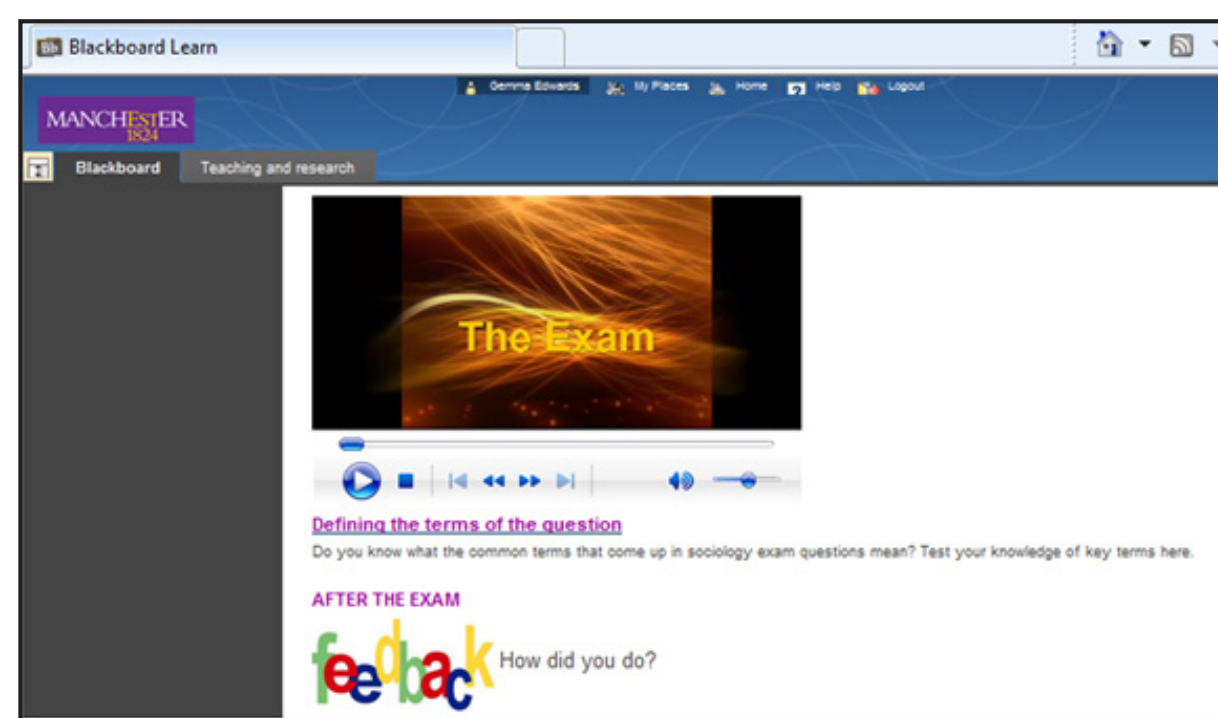
## TESS 2011

### Teaching Enhancement and Student Success

TESS is a University-wide initiative, funded by the Faculty of Humanities. Working with the Faculty eLearning Teams, academics set up projects aimed at developing course content specific to their needs, through eLearning tools and skills development.

## What was the problem?

Recent National Student Survey results highlighted two key areas for attention in Sociology: student engagement with the discipline area and feedback. A related TESS project set up a 'Sociology Student Portal' on Blackboard to try and improve communication between staff and students and build a sense of online community. However, we recognised that students would be more likely to visit the portal if they could access valuable DA-specific resources through it. For example, we regularly get asked for additional help and guidance in areas like essay writing, referencing, and exams. Exams have been a particular concern for students, especially in the final year, and they are one area in which students currently receive little/no feedback on their performance.



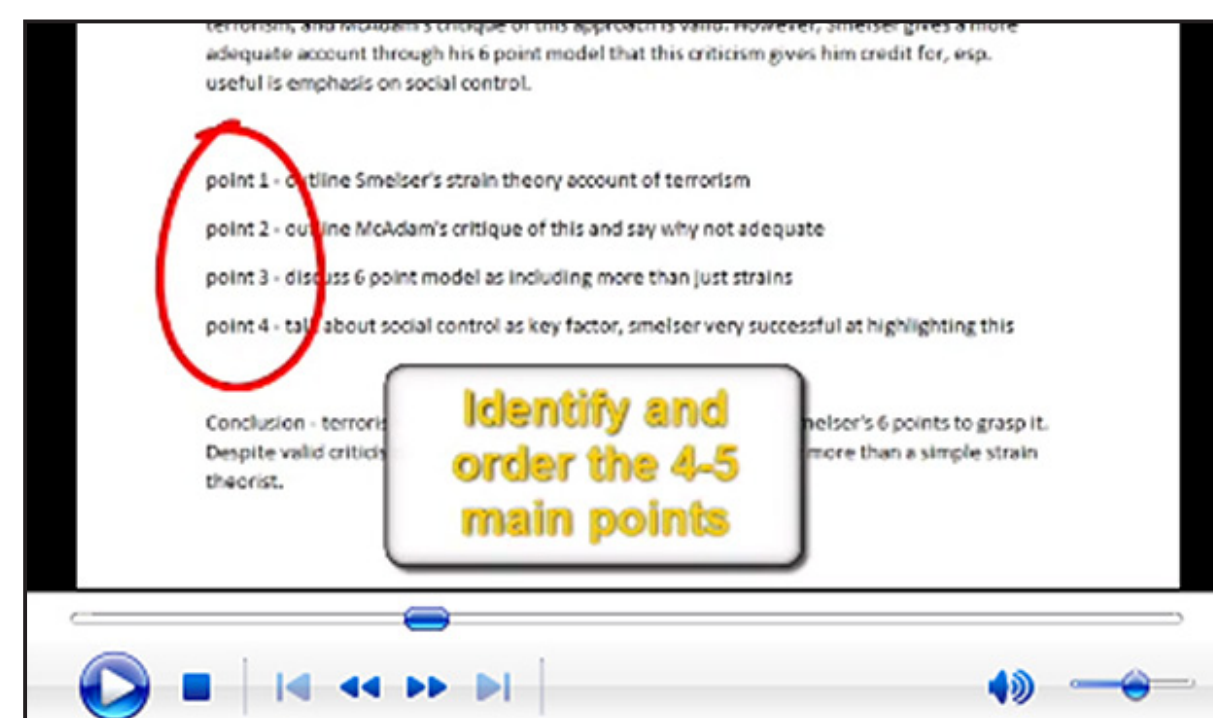
## How successful was the solution?

The outcomes of the project are being widely disseminated through presentations at Faculty and School level. The project outcomes will also be presented to staff in Sociology at a session scheduled for our annual 'teaching day' next year. Here we will consider student feedback on the project and discuss how to develop the portal and DA resources further. We envision that the exams site will provide us with a model for developing additional study skills resources on the portal relating to areas like essay writing, referencing and dissertations. In particular, we intend to pursue the use of Camtasia studio for creating videos that communicate generic advice to our students in an engaging way. I am supporting other colleagues in the Faculty who wish to use this software to communicate to students about similar issues.

The Humanities eLearning Team are on-hand to provide advice, guidance and demonstrations to academic staff on the opportunities for using technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

## How was the problem solved?

To address these issues, the project developed an exams guidance and feedback area on the Blackboard 9 Sociology Student Portal. A multi-media, self-directed delivery sought to personalise guidance and feedback in order to engage students. Camtasia studio was used to create MP4 movies giving advice on sociology exam techniques and essay writing. Videos were made of lecturers giving their top exam tips. The videos were embedded on Blackboard 9 alongside quizzes, supporting documents and links. A feedback section was designed where lecturers can post an audio file after exams which gives students on the module group feedback on their performance (such as the spread of marks, key strengths and



weaknesses, and ways to improve for next time). Eventually, Turnitin will be used for students to upload a practice exam essay and conduct peer reviews.

## What did the students think?

The success of the project will be fully assessed next semester, when all of the site's features will go live. This semester, students only had access to the exam movies which we embedded onto the Blackboard 8 portal (sociology students are not migrating to Blackboard 9 until September 2011). So far, the movies have been positively received by staff and students. Students told us that they found the video on exam technique and essay writing 'very helpful', with one 3rd year student commenting that 'it will be a big help with how to structure the intro/conclusion which I usually struggle on in exams!'. We will collect more extensive data about the project from September, with a student feedback survey built in to the Blackboard 9 site.

