This Teaching Cycle of the PGCTHE portfolio has been submitted to CADAIR with the permission of the author detailed above. It is to be used as a resource for future PGCTHE candidates and other staff as part of their professional development at Aberystwyth University. If you wish to cite this work then please contact the author. Contact details can be found at http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/directory/.
Cycle II – The use of handouts

Methodology

The second cycle occurred during Semesters I and II - 2000/2001 within the jointly taught Modules RS22020 and RD27220 (Managing the wildlife resource). RS22020 is a second year degree module taken by most countryside management and all conservation students, whilst RD27220 is a parallel final year HND module taken by students on similar schemes. Class sizes tend to be between 60 and 70 students.
The modules were covered in 2000/2001 by a programme of lectures with limited class discussions. The lectures were delivered with the aid of PowerPoint presentations and each lecture (in Semester II only) was accompanied with a handout based on the PowerPoint presentation. The handouts were not identical to the PowerPoint presentation, as photographs were often omitted, (because they did not reproduce well) but key to the methodology being applied here, handouts contained additional information that was not referred to directly in the lectures. As in Cycle I, each lecture had an associated web page of supplementary information. Again the web pages available to support the lectures were produced using Microsoft FrontPage and were of the same format of those used in Cycle I. As with the handouts each web page contained unique trivial information as a marker that it had been used.

Outcome and Feedback

As in Cycle I, student feedback was received through a number of mechanisms, via informal student comments and anonymous individual student feedback forms summarised in the module review (see appendix). In 2000/2001 Steve Walsh (the then module coordinator) produced the module review. As for Cycle I the students made no direct comment about either the use of handouts or provision of web sites. Many of the students registered on this module also took RS24110. When students were asked directly, they expressed a preference for the PowerPoint style handouts because it helped with note taking. However, in spite of the students regularly requesting handouts during Semester I of the module, their exam scripts produced no direct evidence that the handouts used throughout Semester II had been read. Indeed the average mark for exam questions based on Semester I content (without handout provision) was significantly higher than the average mark for questions based on Semester II lectures (with handouts). Thus handouts seemed to be reducing the students’ ability to understand the issues being considered.
In contrast, the exam scripts provided evidence that students were extracting information from the web sites (as with RS34110). However, the level of web site use was apparently lower than with the Level Three module. None of the 30-HND students quoted material uniquely available on the web pages and only six of the 30-degree students. As with the third year module the average mark of the students accessing the web sites was higher than that for the students that did not. However, this difference was not statistically different on this occasion.

Of particular note for Cycle III is the comment in the module reviews that the students found that my lectures were aimed at too high a level (see Appendix).

**Reflection**

In spite of being bombarded with requests to produced handouts during Semester I, following their provision in Semester II, the exam performance provided no evidence that the handout had been used. Indeed the only evidence available suggested that handouts actually reduced exam performance. This is particularly intriguing given the students’ assertion that the handouts were useful and that their PowerPoint format aided note taking.

One cannot help but conclude that the students request to be given handouts was driven by a desire to reduce their work load and that the subsequent reduction in note taking was detrimental to the learning process. In fact one or two of the better students actually stated that they preferred not to be given handouts for this very reason. Strangely they seemed unable to disregard the handout and take notes once they had been distributed.

As with the evidence provided in Cycle I, the web page material appeared to be preferentially utilised by the more academic students, again supporting Briggs (1999) assertion that teaching methods that rely on the students' own motivation are likely to widen the gap between the more and less academic students.