

Is the Social Wall the new Discussion Forum?

An evaluation of student use of a Web 2.0
social wall on an online course

Julie Watson, Principal Teaching Fellow in eLearning
Modern Languages
25th January 2013

Overview

- Background
- The '*Get Ready for Southampton*' pre-arrival online course
- Social wall use
- Discussion forum use
- Initial evaluation
- Next steps
- Comments and questions

Background

➤ 2005 – 2010: *Arrive UK*

- short pre-arrival online courses for University of Southampton Pre-sessional Course students

➤ Since 2011: *Get Ready for Southampton*

- an open pre-arrival transition course for **all** University of Southampton international students

Get Ready for Southampton

- study pace and length of use *decided by individual student*
- *broad focus*: practical aspects of living in Britain + preparation for study at the University + UK academic culture and study skills
- *automated* course invitation, sign up process and account creation through a single entry point
- self-access *learning content with feedback* (activity-based 'learning objects')
- *community-building/personal contact* through Social Wall and other social software

Snapshot of general data from 2011/2012

- GRfS available from late May to mid Oct. both years
- Total no. of students who signed up and accessed the course: 1623 (2011); 2113 (2012)
- 27% (23%) = pre-sessional; 73% (77%)= direct entry
- Representing 105 countries (2011); 130 (2012)
- Applying for wide range of disciplines and at different levels: Foundation Year; U/G and P/G taught courses; PhD applicants; ERASMUS exchange students
- Feedback questionnaires received 9% (150); 8% (178)



wallwisher



murally

Pinterest

**Social Walls
(virtual cork boards)**

Students' use of Social Wall : 2012

I opened/read the Social Wall	127
I only read other students' messages on the Social Wall	44
I posted my own message on the Social Wall	37
I posted a picture with my message on the Social Wall	9
I contacted other students via Facebook (or RenRen) details they posted	19
I contacted other students via MSN or QQ details they posted	4
I contacted other students via Twitter (or Weibo) account details they posted	5
I contacted other students via email addresses they posted	12

General comparison : 2012

Social wall	Discussion forum
Wall posts: 375	D/F posts: 167
N/A	No. of threads: 55
Not available	Page views 4000
Posts with image: 60	Posts with image: 4
Posts with email details: 53 (14%)	Posts with email details: 14 (8.5%)
Posts with Facebook; QQ; other details: 12	Posts with Facebook; QQ; other details: 6

D/F thread topics

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Students from Mexico :) reunite
Students from Canada

MSc in Nanoelectronics and Nanotechnology

Students from Germany

Any Ugandan or East African heading to Soton

Undergrad math students!

Looking for a room mate to find a house

Students from China

Roomates to find a house

MSc Global Politics

Contacts

LLM Law

International students looking for house!

MSc Human Resource Management

MSc in Governance & Policy (Research)

MSc Corporate Risk and Security Management

MSc Transportation Planning & Engineering

MSC Web Technology

Students study foundation year

Pursuing Economics with Actuarial Science

University Accommodation for MSc students

Students from Middle east and North Africa

MSc Aerodynamics and Computation

Students from Greece

Students from India for Southampton

Hey everyone!

MSc Systems and Signal Processing

Student from Iran

Students' use of discussion forum

- Thematic similarity to The Student Room ?
- Longest threads:
 - ‘Students from India for Southampton’ (26 posts)
 - ‘MSc Nanoelectronics and Nanotechnology’ (13 posts)
- Long threads=‘conversational microcosms’ of whole forum:
 - self intro; practicalities – course, current location, visa, flight dates; seeking help and accommodation questions

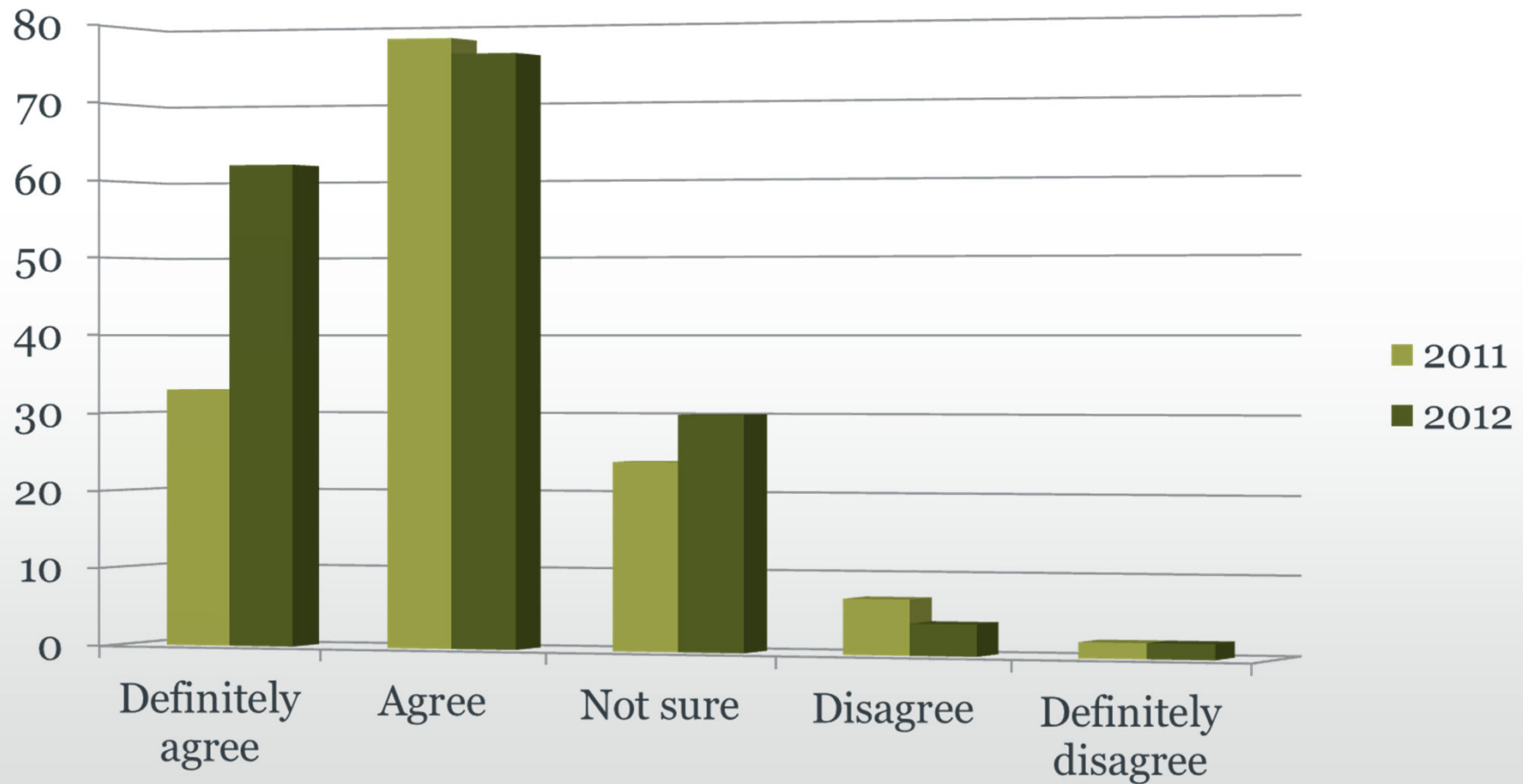
Student comments 2011

- *I found it very useful and reassuring and give me **self confidence and sense of ease***
- *It is really a good experience by the UoS to make newcomers feel welcome and guide them in the tough beginning where everything is supposed to be done in short time.*
- *In my opinion, GRfS is very useful and the University should continue to provide this service to future students. It was interesting, informative and **easy to use**.*
- *It is still not the same as being in place but **it helps somehow**.*
- *It is very educative so I think even **other universities will follow the same**.*

Student comments 2012

- *I was surprised by the **size of the site**. It really helps you to prepare for **every dimension of living and studying** in Southampton. Well done!!*
- *Generally, it's helpful and informative especially for those who are coming to the UK for the first time. It gives **a whole picture** of what university life is like in Southampton.*
- *It helps International students on **what to expect** when they plan to study in the UK.*
- *Get ready for Southampton has been an eye opener to me. I hope **if provided an opportunity to study there**, the hints about Southampton which I have acquired will simplify my stay within and outside the lecture room.*

GRfS has helped me prepare before coming to the University of Southampton and the UK



Tentative conclusions

- The Social Wall is **not** the new Discussion Forum
- The Social Wall offers advantages of: message versatility; student centeredness; attractiveness; multimediality
- The Discussion Forum offers advantages of: extended discussion; organised interactions
- They appear to work quite effectively alongside each other, even with some overlap
- Inclusion of both offers advantage of flexibility/catering for student preference

Next steps

- Explore more data
 - regarding take-up, participation and student feedback
 - different affordances of Social Wall and DF (Conversation Forum?)
- Evaluate role of GRfS as a confidence-building tool for helping students make the transition
- Publicise through departmental and other UoS websites/create more connections with International Student Welcome Programme

Thank you for listening
Any questions or comments?

J.Watson@soton.ac.uk

www.elanguages.ac.uk