

Blogging Project Encourages International Collaboration among Dental Students

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The University of Birmingham's School of Dentistry has signed up to International Peer Review in Blog Format, a new media project that encourages professional development and global citizenship.

As today's graduates need to negotiate the complex cultural and social challenges that this 'global' world brings with it, the blog advances dialogue and collaboration among dental students from the universities of Birmingham, British Columbia, Southern California San Francisco, Hong Kong, Melbourne, Tec Monterrey Mexico and Saskatchewan.

The format allows students from the different dental schools to congregate online and evaluate each others' work by peer review. The project is led by Karen Gardner from the University of British Columbia.

Professor Damien Walmsley, the coordinator of the project at the University of Birmingham believes this is a unique way that students learn from the experiences of others around the world.

"Blogging is a great way to include reflective learning by sharing experiences but also allows our students to experience other cultures and views on the world" Prof. Walmsley reveals.

The project which operates at the undergraduate level, is being funded by Universitas 21, a network of research-led universities around the world.

Many providers of medical and dental education have embraced the use of new technologies - blogs and podcasts for delivering learning materials.

Over the past three years, the University of Birmingham's School of Dentistry has been developing a library of podcasts for a number of teaching areas.

Professor Damien Walmsley and his team recently carried out a study to evaluate how clinical students reacted to the use of podcasts for undergraduate teaching.

Their research reveals that short podcasts are a useful vehicle for delivering learning materials to students. They offer flexibility and are in tune with students' love of downloading materials to use when they wish.

In 2007, the University of Birmingham's School of Dentistry won the Outstanding ICT Initiative category at the Times Higher Education Supplement Awards, in London. The team consisted of Damien Walmsley, Giles Perryer and Deborah White.

Professor Walmsley reveals: "This initiative was student-driven: we embraced new technologies to provide an interactive style of communication, which has really captured the interest of both students and staff."

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