How does online learning work?

The MSc Sustainable Development (Distance Learning) uses one main online learning interface. This is called ‘The Hive’. The Hive is an innovative learning tool provided by the Graduate School of Education that enables a large amount of interactivity between staff and students in an environment similar to social networking sites such as Facebook.

On the Hive, individuals create their own profile that can be viewed either publicly or just to individuals who are logged on or part of a particular community.

The Hive is therefore based around a series of ‘Communities’. For the MSc Sustainable Development, we have created one overall community that acts as a portal for general course discussions, information sharing and blogging. It is possible to store files, link to YouTube videos and create an archive of useful websites.

In addition, each module taken by students has its own community, from where module material is linked.

Accordingly, when you register for modules and want to start online learning, you must register with the Hive and use the search facility to find your relevant communities.

Full details of how the Hive functions are provided here:

http://education.ex.ac.uk/thehive

Important note: The Hive is one of two online learning resources at the University. For students not on the MSc Sustainable Development, online learning is provided by a system called Web-CT. This system creates an online learning environment for each module, but there is no facility to network between modules or to create profiles and share documents and videos.

You should note that for modules GEOM101 and GEOM102, access will only be via Web-CT. This is because many students taking this module are not from the MSc Sustainable Development and they do not use the Hive. For modules GEOM101 and GEOM102, please go to the following web link to log in to this material:

https://exeter.blackboard.com/webct/logonDisplay.dowebct

When you have logged in, the modules you are registered for will automatically appear.

If you have enquiries about online learning, please contact geographyhelp@exeter.ac.uk in the first instance rather than the module leader.

What can I expect from my tutor?

Your tutor is your first point of contact for any academic questions you have. She or he will also work with you on developing and reviewing your personal development plans. The personal development plan template is available on-line. Some people have frequent contact with their tutors, and others only sporadic e-mail contact when necessary. Your tutor’s name can be found under the student record tab of WebCT. Your tutor should contact you on a regular basis to see how things are going. However, they are only human, too, and might be busy with other things, so if you don’t feel well connected to him or her, especially as a long-distance student, don’t be afraid to contact them and make sure you get the support you need. If you still don’t feel you are getting anywhere don’t be afraid to contact the admin team (geographyhelp@exeter.ac.uk) and explain the problems you feel you are having. All of the staff are here to help.
Whom should I contact regarding administrative financial matters?

If you are paying online you can email questions to epay@exeter.ac.uk, or contact the Fees Team on +44 1392 263409 or email on fees@exeter.ac.uk (9:00 until 5:00 Monday to Friday).

What online resources can I use?

**Web-CT** is the most important resource for you as a distance learner. Through WebCT you gain access to course content/syllabus, deadlines, on-line library resources and information about your status as a student. It is wise to take time to explore the different tabs of WebCT and become familiar with how this system works.

While the basic structure for on-line course content is similar not all elements are used for all courses, and the content varies considerably from course to course. For example, some courses use only slide presentations, while others combine slides with audio and video clips. A few courses require the purchase of software from the University, and as a distance learner it is important to be aware if this is necessary early on in the module so that you allow for order processing/delivery time.

On WebCT you can fill in an on-line profile of yourself, including a picture. It’s a good idea to do this early in the course as this facilitates getting to know the other students, including the distance learners, better.

**Online resources of the Exeter university library**
The online library is very useful, however make sure you allow plenty of time for research using this method. Generally on selecting the Library tab (in MyExeter) you can start searching here, however if you don’t have any success using the various search options (keyword/ author etc) with ‘E-resources’ selected, you will need to click on Electronic Resources (top right hand side). In the new window that opens you can try searching again. If you still don’t have any luck click on the first ‘Find Resources’ and another window will open with all the journal resources available on line. Suggested resources to use are: EBSCO EJS, INGENTAConnect, JSTOR, Nature, New Scientist, ScienceDirect.

**Google Books**
If you can’t find the books you’re interested in a library near you, check out google books (go to google.com and check out the different search options in the top bar, the “more options” button among other gets you to google books). It’s an online data base of scanned-in books. Most of them are copyright protected, so you can only see certain, parts as agreed with the author, usually the first 100 pages or so with a few missing inbetween. But you still get quite a good idea of a book’s main content and ideas and will at least be able to decide a lot easier whether it is worth the purchase.

**Google Scholar**
Similarly, google scholar lets you search for scientific articles. You can search by key word, article title or author and will get different links to the original articles as well as suggestions for key authors on a topic etc. Again, you often don’t get the full text, but just an excerpt and then a link to EBSCO or similar, but it is a very helpful tool to find out about relevant articles you can then try access through one of the university resources.

How do I hand in course work?

Coursework is submitted electronically via Turnitin. It’s important to check the deadlines carefully on WebCT because coursework that is submitted late even by a minute will be marked down. In order to avoid late submissions due to IT problems, it’s a good idea to submit at least a few hours in advance of the deadline. If you don’t have a PDF writer installed on your computer the School suggests downloading PrimoPDF (a free package) which easily converts your documents into PDF for electronic submission.

All of the hand in procedures are written in the Geography Handbook for you to follow and you can always email geographyhelp@exeter.ac.uk with any additional queries you may have as the course progresses.

How do I get my results?

Within four weeks your results are emailed to you by the School administration team. Depending on where you are based a few days/ weeks later you receive by post a copy of the BART cover sheet and your submitted work with comments. Your student record will also be updated with the marks you have obtained.

Who can help me with:

- **Organisational Questions** You may first want to have a look at the Geography Student Handbook. This has a lot of information about the most commonly asked questions and issues. If you still have questions,
How do I prepare long-distance presentations?

Powerpoint allows you to include a sound track with your presentation. Sometimes you may be asked to submit a reflective commentary in addition to the presentation where you reflect on what you learned in preparing the presentation. A description of how to prepare a powerpoint presentation with a recorded soundtrack can be found at the hive.

Your powerpoint is then usually emailed to the course tutor and Mike Jeffries (email details above) or you are provided with a specific area on WebCT where you can upload your work for your fellow students to share. An additional copy (with notes) is emailed to geographyhelp as your submitted work for assessment.

What is a learning journal?

Many courses require you to keep a learning journal. This is a record of your learning experience and reflections on the material as you proceed through the course. It is not a summary of the content but rather a reflection on insights that you have had as a result of the course, or changes in your thinking as a result of the learning experience you have undergone.

Students often find this challenging because it is not as clearly delineated as some of the other projects (e.g. essays, presentations). Each person’s submission will differ considerably depending on their background and area of interest, so there is not one correct version of the learning journal. Just use it as a personal tool to consider questions like: What am I expecting from this course – What did I get out of it? What were surprising learnings? How have my ideas about the topic changed? Which areas are still unclear? Which would I like to pursue further?. It’s a good idea to write a little bit relatively frequently, as it will be interesting to see your thoughts evolving. – And don’t feel scared to really write down whatever is on your mind – you’ll be allowed to edit it all as much as you want before officially handing it in.

To help you formulate ideas in the early weeks of preparing your learning journal, the WebCT content of the module will have links to directed entries which take the form of very specific questions on elements of the module. You can however, make entries within your journal at any time during the module and these often take the form of comments upon specific learning achievements of significant changes in perspective that have occurred.

Your tutor will have access to your learning journal during the course of the module and can add helpful comments or additional questions that they feel may encourage further entries.

Your final submission for assessment takes the form of a summary of those entries which you feel are most relevant to your development during the module and this can be edited from the original prior to you submitting it.

How do I hand in the learning journal?

At the end of the course you will need to edit this journal down to the word count indicated for the project and include some reflective comments/conclusions (again, word count and deadline is available on WebCT). This is often quite a daunting and time consuming task so be sure you start well before the deadline.

The learning journal in WebCT has an export function, and you can copy this into a word document to edit it. You may also find it useful to select your posts on the discussion forum and include some of these in your learning journal as well. The learning journal is normally submitted chronologically.

What options do I have to stay in touch with other students?

There are a number of different ways of keeping in touch with other students. Within WebCT you can access your university email account and can mail other students from this account. There are also lists that go to all Sustainable Development MSc students. Also, some of the classes include discussion forums where both long-distance and on-site students can exchange their thoughts. In order to benefit from this, it is helpful to keep more or
less the same timing as the on-site students. The schedule on WebCT tells you which units they are dealing with at which time – try to do the same, so you can join the debates when then others are having them.

Starting last year, a number of MSc Sust Dev distance learners have organized a regular on-line chat session to discuss any issues or problems. These can be a very good way to get to know some of the other distance learners.

The hive, like Facebook, allows you to post questions and comments for your fellow students.

There is also an email list geo-susdevdl@exeter.ac.uk which all Distance Learners will be added to, to facilitate discussions.

What if I would like to visit the university?

There is not an official programme or process for distance learners wishing to visit the campus, but you may want to time your visit around lectures or seminars that are of interest to you, and include a face-to-face meeting with your tutor. If you send a message to the Sustainable Development list serve usually there will usually be some on-campus students who are willing to meet, and show you around a bit. There is also a Senior Common Room for the Amory building (the location of the School of Geography) where students go to have lunch and socialize.

The campus is about a fifteen minute walk from St David’s railway station (up hill!). There is a minibus service that runs from Streatham Campus to St David’s Station Mon to Fri 08.00 am to 09.30 am. The evening minibus service runs from the Great Hall car park to St David’s, from 16.10 - the last bus leaving the Great Hall car park at 17.40. Traffic permitting the service should run every 20/25 minutes. There are a variety of B&Bs close to the campus. One nice, hotel close to downtown and the campus is called Queen’s Court.

Queens Court Hotel (http://www.queenscourt-hotel.co.uk/welcome.html)

If you are visiting out of term time, the University offers accommodation on campus.

What study support is available for long-distance students?

In the beginning, you can feel quite alone and disoriented as a distance learner, therefore it’s a good idea to spend some time at the beginning getting to know the WebCT tool, and reading the student handbook carefully. It’s also good to start early participating in the on-line discussions for each course, and chat sessions when relevant.

The following 2nd and 3rd year distance learners have offered to serve as a contact for new students or other distance learners with questions. You are not alone!

Bruce Haase: bjh206@ex.ac.uk
Belinda Gambin: big204@ex.ac.uk
Sandra Roling: sr298@ex.ac.uk
Clare Hagerup: clh219@exeter.ac.uk

If you are having trouble with general study skills (writing papers etc.), the university study services are also open to long-distance students (see university website, student support). They will, for example, have a look at your course work and give you detailed feedback for improvement, and also offer different manuals and tutorials.

What part of the career services can I use?

The career service, too, is open to long-distance students (follow links from university website). They can help you with general job orientation, application processes (how to write CVs etc), ideas for traineeships etc. Just write them an email and they will be glad to assist in whatever way is suitable. There is also an active alumni service that might be able to put you in touch with former students who are now working in the field you are interested in. The university might also contact students during the year to make you aware of support tools designed especially for the Sustainable Development students, like an option to ask job-related questions on WebCT, sample CVs and lists of further resources.

Will I have access to the seminar series that campus based students attend?

Some of the seminars are available on-line at various locations. Even if the particular seminar is not available online, if there is a topic that particularly interests you, it may be worthwhile contacting the speaker or organiser who in some cases may be able to provide you with the slides she or he used.