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# EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY

The Trusted Voice of ICT in Education

## MASSIVE OPPORTUNITIES

How the much-hyped MOOC  
is making real inroads in higher  
education e-learning

## A PERFECT BLEND

Blended learning now set to make  
teaching ever-more interactive

## A 3D FUTURE

Can 3D printing really take the  
education sector to a new dimension?



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**I spend 20 minutes to  
find exactly what I'm  
looking for.**

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**CLAUDIA Moulin**  
BA English Literature student

**What  
students  
really  
think  
about  
using a  
VLE**

Claudia Moulin is a typical first-year English Literature student. Her institution has a virtual learning environment (VLE) that she uses daily to access course information and course materials. She finds it difficult to navigate, clunky and dated. She is also frustrated by the differences in how her lecturers use it - some use it a lot, others not at all.

During Fresher's Week, her institution offered VLE training but Claudia did not attend. She assumed that because she can easily learn how to use other websites, platforms, and apps, she wouldn't have any trouble using the VLE.

A month after classes begin, Claudia signs into the VLE to upload an assignment. It's 11:52 and her assignment is due at 12:00. Unable to easily find the submission link, Claudia misses the deadline and has a 10% grade penalty.

### **So why is Claudia's story important?**

Claudia's story is one that we've heard countless times from students who express frustration at having to use a VLE that does not meet their needs. CoSector – University of London (formerly ULCC) has conducted user experience research to explore these issues to further develop our own VLE - Bloom. Claudia is in fact a fictional persona developed from this work and the many personal experiences students have reported.

**Our research has found students use their VLE to complete three main tasks:**

- Finding and accessing course information/materials.
- Uploading assignments.
- Receiving grades and feedback.

Students also use the VLE for other activities like quizzes or forums, but often only when these activities are directed.

Personas represent typical users and incorporating them into the project ensures that teams focus on user needs during design and development processes. Claudia represents a synthesis of the first phase of our ongoing user research project - more than 200 survey responses and 20 in-depth conversations with students. When we started to analyse the responses, common patterns emerged - students reported the same frustrations and pain points in the same areas.

These findings have been mapped into Claudia's user journeys and they have informed the creation of new VLE prototypes that are continuously validated and refined through user testing.

## Why engage in user research and design?

User experience research and design in higher education is an emerging area of work. However, the changing landscape of higher education in the UK (with fee increases, the planned introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework and the importance of NSS scores) as well as the proliferation of digital technologies in wider society; means that delivering high quality digital tools in higher education is now more important than ever. By understanding student needs through comprehensive and rigorous user experience research, we believe that we can improve the overall student experience with well-designed digital services.



Claudia's ideal user journey of finding her grades and feedback

For example, in the 2015 NSS report, only 73% of students reported satisfaction with assessments and feedback, which was the lowest scoring metric tracked.<sup>1</sup> We think that a good VLE can improve scores in these areas and we have focused our initial user journeys on how students can submit their assignments and receive their grades and feedback.

Additionally, research from the University of Liverpool found that

"inconsistency in the use of VLEs has led to dissatisfaction amongst students."<sup>2</sup> While Teach Online has reported that students have "greater expectations for the use of technology-rich environments for learning".<sup>3</sup>

While improving the VLE is only one part of improving the overall student experience, we think that focusing on how users like Claudia interact with a VLE will ensure improved satisfaction. We also think that considering how

lecturers engage with and use the VLE is critical to the student experience, and the next phase of our research will focus on lecturer use and needs.

So watch this space for more research outputs on how we're transforming the VLE experience to enhance the overall student experience.

<sup>1</sup> <<https://goo.gl/0gSROJ>> [accessed 20 September 2016].

<sup>2</sup> Peter Reed and Simon Watmough 'Hygiene factors: Using VLE minimum standards to avoid student dissatisfaction' E-Learning and Digital Media, 12.1 (2015), 68-89 <<https://goo.gl/rYdRko>> [accessed 20 September 2016].

<sup>3</sup> <<https://goo.gl/zZvgbi>> [accessed 20 September 2016].

For a more in-depth exploration of our research findings, download our white paper, *Top 5 Research Findings About Student Experience with Moodle*, at [bloom.london.ac.uk/research](http://bloom.london.ac.uk/research)

And feel free to get in touch with the User Research team at [user-research@london.ac.uk](mailto:user-research@london.ac.uk)

Bloom is a service provided by CoSector | University of London

