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EUWiki – TENT Report 2008/09

Rationale and Background to the Project

The increasing complexity of EU institutional and political structures is posing a challenge to the scholars and student of European Studies. Scholars have long argued that such complexity contributes to the overall success of the EU as a policy actor, but its overwhelming failure to engender wide reaching support for the project amongst the people of Europe. The French and Dutch rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, followed by the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 highlight the general lack of popular support for "anything EU".

These widespread attitudes towards the process of European integration are permeating the classroom, therefore affecting the ability of academics to present a neutral portrayal of the EU as a political and economic actor. Otherwise capable students seem to develop a mental block when it comes to understanding EU politics and institutional dynamics. Part of the difficulties entrenched within the teaching of EU policies arise from the need for students to acquire an encyclopaedic knowledge base, with particular focus on the history and institutional structure. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this trend is not limited to University of Surrey students, but is widespread.

These trends are emerging at a time when understanding EU politics, policies and institutions is become increasingly important for students of politics and international affairs. Understanding how the EU works and which interests are represented within it is necessary to engage in a meaningful debate about the challenges facing the Union in the 21st century. Moreover, the EU's emergent role as an international actor signifies that EU studies are a canonical part of the discipline of politics/IR. The challenge facing EU scholars today is how to communicate the EU effectively in order to encourage students to master its complexity and understand its role in the international system.

One way that the academic community has sought to engage students is through role plays/simulations. This provides students with an opportunity to develop negotiating skills, meanwhile consolidating their knowledge of EU institutions and policy processes. This is a very useful way to expose students to how decisions are made within the organisation, however it requires detailed knowledge of the institutions, the Member States and specific policy areas. It is therefore more appropriate for advanced students, such as Level 3 and MA students. New teaching and learning technologies provide an opening for innovative thinking about teaching this subject at the level of introductory modules. New technologies, such as wikis, provide an opportunity for students to familiarise themselves with an impressive range of issues, therefore covering the breath of knowledge required for this area of the discipline.

POL2013 "Evolution of an Integrated Europe"

POL2013 (formerly POL 2007) is the main vehicle for exposing Politics students at the University of Surrey to EU politics. It is the first time students on the Politics/International Politics Programmes are introduced to the workings of the EU. The module therefore presumes little knowledge of the institution. Starting with an overview of the history and the main institutional set up of the EU it quickly moves on to tackling different policy areas and current debates about the future of the Union.

The overall objective of the module is to help students to understand the social and political structures that define the parameters of the idea of Europe. In order to do this, students need to develop an encyclopaedic knowledge of the EU. This means that students have to become proficient in EU politics, policies and institutions, in a way that cannot be achieved through knowledge

transfer alone.

This module has three main aims:
1. To facilitate the acquisition of encyclopaedic knowledge about European institutions, policy areas, and current debates about the future of the Union.
2. To encourage our students to become independent and reflective learners
3. To expand the skills base acquired in Level 1 of our programme.

EU Wiki

Wikis provide an exciting medium through which students can take ownership of the learning process. It is an opportunity for students to become independent learners and feel part of a community of learning. By constructing the wiki in a creative way students will be able to contribute to the development of a body of knowledge and in so doing expand their own knowledge base. Wikis also provide students with tangible outcomes in terms of personal and professional development. Ultimately, our hope at the beginning of this project was that it would establish a community of learning that extended beyond the duration of the module and the project.

At the beginning of the project we set out three key criteria for the construction of the wiki as an open access site on the EU:
1. Reflectivity
   The work produced has to be reflective rather than critical. We asked students to produce entries that used sources analytically and selectively in order to create an "encyclopaedia" of European integration, rather than to engage in a critique of the argument set out in the sources used.
2. Collaboration
   In order to become part of a community of learning, students need to support each other in the process. This means that interactions should be collaborative rather than competitive.
3. Detachment and validity
   The Wiki was not to be seen as a platform for personal views about European integration. Students were therefore asked to set aside personal prejudice to the highest degree possible and create a gateway into the EU.

In addition students were presented with detailed assessment guidelines/criteria, both for the individual portfolio and the wiki as a whole. This was supposed to provide students with guidance as to our expectations for the project, as well as transparency for the purposes of marking the work submitted. It was hoped that open discussion of the assessment criteria would help to provide students with a clear set of boundaries required for Quality Assurance without stifling creativity. Ultimately, the teaching team expected that open discussion would help the students to take ownership of the project.

Assessment of the Project

On the whole this has been an exciting and worthwhile project. Despite students' concerns about the breadth of the project, it seems to have engaged students with current debates about the EU and, for most it has helped them to develop a new range of skills.

There are a number of issues worth noting from our experience of using a wiki to supplement traditional teaching methodologies on the EU:
   Weaknesses of the project:
   - The amount of work involved for the teaching staff was not commensurate to the percentage

attributed to the project. This type of project requires a lot of nurturing from the teaching staff to address students' concerns and anxiety over completing a new and different task

- The novelty and complexity of the task contributed to high levels of anxiety amongst the student body, thus increasing the workload of teaching staff, particularly in respect of contact time.
- Training requirements exceed what is normally expected of this type of module.
- Although one of the main aims of the project was to foster students' ability to become independent learners, it required the teaching staff to provide students with detailed direction throughout the year.
- The Task Matrix and Formative Feedback (see appendices 3 & 5 below) were our *ad hoc* responses to high levels of student anxiety and demonstrate the need for those using New Technologies to consider the fact that they may well have to be more reactive than in modules using traditional methods of teaching. The project may have been unmanageable, however, had we not team-taught in this the first year, and so been able to share the considerable extra burden.

Strengths of the project:
- Despite the students' reluctance to engage in the project to begin with, ultimately it provided them with a platform for exploring the complexities of European integration as a community of learning.
- It helped students develop a new range of skills, such as editing and web design to complement the academic objectives of the module and the project.
- It helped us to understand students' skills base better (many students showed a complete lack of facility with even basic computer technologies) and necessitated a greater level of reflection on our part as educators – it was, in short, a lesson in why never to be complacent!

On the whole we were satisfied that the project adds an interesting and worthwhile dimension to the teaching of European integration at undergraduate level. Clearly, the way in which the task is approached, the role of the students in defining the scope of the project, and the levels of training required is something that the project/module team need to consider in detail for future years. Despite students' concerns during the year over the overall quality of the final product, we were satisfied that the students produced a good piece of work that meets all quality assurance criteria whilst fostering knowledge sharing amongst students.

Roberta Guerrina and Maxine David

Appendix 1: Assessment Criteria

<u>EUWiki Assessment Criteria Guidelines</u>

Your work will be marked on the basis of the criteria outlined below. You are advised to read these carefully and think about your individual and group contribution.

1. Accuracy

You will be assessed with reference to the accuracy of the final product.

It can be assured by ensuring that you:
- Use up-to-date, correct information that reflects recent changes within the EU.
- Use authoritative sources
- Reference consistently and comprehensively
- Provide links to sites and sources.

2. Critical Judgment

Reflection is a necessary part of building and conveying knowledge.

Credit will be given for demonstrating evidence of understanding of the process of European integration. You will be assessed on the basis of your ability to differentiate between what constitutes critical, vital information, therefore warranting inclusion in the final product, and background information.

You need to consider:
- What to include
- What to omit
- What constitutes indispensable information.

2. Accessibility

The wiki project incorporates elements of learning that transcend the Politics discipline. Transferable skills, ability to present information in a palatable and agreeable fashion and general understanding of skills related to building a Personal Development and Planning (PDP) portfolio will be rewarded.

We will be assessing on the grounds of:
- Navigability
- Good presentation
- Attractiveness
- Coherence across the wiki

3. Breadth and Depth of Knowledge

Students are required to make critical decisions on inclusion of materials related to the History, and Institutions of and Debates on the European integration process. Such decisions must be informed by an excellent comprehension of, for example, the institutional make-up and the historical

processes that underpin the wider European integration process and about the nature of the EU itself.

In the context of the final product, this is not about presenting justification of choices but demonstrating that some information is indispensable.

This criterion will be met best if students engage in a reflective learning process. In making your critical decisions, you should imagine that *you* are accessing the wiki in order to learn about the EU and ask yourself what *you* would want, and expect, to see.

4. Utility and Longevity

In order to have life and be useful beyond the current academic year and assessment, the information provided within the wiki must be reliable and verifiable. (See discussion of validity in Rationale section. See also Hill quote above)

Students are therefore reminded of the necessity of setting aside biased and prejudicial views. You will be assessed on the basis of your ability to demonstrate a balanced reflection of arguments relating to European integration.

As with any assessment, awareness of your audience is critical. You are advised to reflect on the optimal style and fashion in which to convey your selected information in order to appeal to your audience.

POL2007 / 2013 Individual Portfolio Guidance

Students are reminded that the Wiki project is in place to help them learn how to take control of achieving their own learning outcomes. Academic staff therefore seek to avoid prescription in order to allow a more individualistic approach to the learning process.

The advice below should be treated as just that, therefore, and is not an exhaustive list. It should be considered in hand with the Assessment Criteria, also posted on U-Learn.

Using U-Learn
- We have set up a discussion thread linked to this part of the assessment.

- In the spirit of collaborative enterprise, students are encouraged to post questions here and their peers are encouraged to "help out" where they have the answers, more questions, comments and suggestions.

- The discussion will be monitored but academic staff will only intervene once it is clear that a discussion is underway and only then to correct obvious misunderstandings and clear up ambiguities.

  o Staff intervention is therefore contingent upon proper student interaction.

- Academic staff will not respond to individual requests for clarification – please therefore use U-Learn for your questions.

Application of Skills

As with any module, students should be building on skills acquired elsewhere in the programme.

Study and research skills modules are particularly helpful in this context.

Examples of applicable key skills:
- Research
- Reference
- Critical thought
- Structuring
- Summary
- Writing

Examples of applicable transferable skills:
- Group work
- Presentation
- Organisational

The shape of the final portfolio will vary according to the individual student. There is no *one* type of portfolio possible, nor can model portfolios be provided.

Key points to remember:
- This is for formal assessment.
- A clear and accessible structure is vital
- It must contain verifiable evidence
- You must demonstrate excellent judgment and summary skills.
- A reflective element is key – it is here that the necessity for justifications should be considered and incorporated and insights provided
- It must be accessible to the reader.

Appendix 3: Formative Feedback

AREAS THAT NEED WORK

Referencing
- There is a real lack of consistency here – Harvard or Chicago?
- You also must acknowledge all sources (including copyrighted pictures)

Links
- Check all links still work – some do not.
- Use the Wiki as a tool, i.e. make sure you are aware of topics covered by the wiki and use tagging.

Sources
- Some of these lack authority and are wholly inappropriate for students on a UG degree course.
- This also applies to links used!!

Editing
- Much more needs to be done in this respect. Many sentences are poorly crafted and arguments either not well structured or well expressed.
- There are some truly inexcusable spelling mistakes, e.g. Coal and *Steal* Community

Content
- Some contributions are very positive in that they are clear 'student' contributions.
  - **However**, even these need to be underpinned by a good evidence of knowledge and the need for analytical frameworks.
    - 'Identity', for instance, is discussed in places without any real reference to definitions or understandings or methods of analysis.
- You also need to consider the relevance of the content for the purpose of the Wiki.

Housekeeping
- There is a clear relationship between certain pages and yet they are not formally grouped together.
- Housekeepers need to gather relevant pages and put them under a suitable heading and sub-sections.

Design
- Design is not coherent throughout the wiki. This must be addressed as part of the coherence criterion.

Accuracy
- There are many questionable statements and some extremely questionable inclusions.
- Consider inserting more dates – or 'Last updated' information so browsers know whether information is of the minute or not.

Hindrances to Feedback
- Some sections incomplete or non-existent bar the title.

ADVICE
- Focus on editing and accuracy.

- Send out clear guidance on design aspects – find one section that fully conforms and circulate it as an example of what all sections should look like.
- Referencing:
  - Include only authoritative references.
  - Remove particularly all links to poor sites.
  - Use one referencing system.
- Remove all internal comments/discussions etc that the public do not need to see.
- Insert 'Last updated' info at foot of pages.
- Remove all incomplete or empty pages – if these people have not written anything and their contribution is not *vital* consider reassigning them to an editing or some such task.
- Housekeepers
  - pay particular attention to keeping relevant pages within each section together.
  - Where overlap *between* sections is identified, consider whether to add in more tags or even links to other EU-wiki pages.
- Editors – there is some overlap between sections. Once Housekeepers have moved pages, they will need to be edited in order to reduce repetition.

General Impression

Some areas are far more developed than others and clear attempts have been made to fulfil all the assessment criteria. Such pages show off your skills and talents and should give the contributors a real sense of pride and achievement. Some pages fully meet our hopes and expectations and make it easy for us to recommend our own peers to look at the wiki as an exemplar for what students are capable of. The main page of the Debates section, for instance, is well thought-out (albeit incomplete) but the summary sections work nicely and meet the criterion of providing accessible information for the wiki users.

But the wiki gives an inconsistent impression. Other pages suffer from poor or incomplete content and/or poor writing, a lack of structure and little evidenced attempt to conform to standards. Content can also be a major problem. This lack of consistency ultimately undermines the good work done in the other sections. Don't forget we will be assessing the Wiki as a whole!

Your task now will be to distinguish between the excellent and the mediocre and even poor. You need to think about what can be salvaged, what is dispensable and what just needs editing – albeit quite heavily.

Department of Political, International & Policy Studies

ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK FORM

Student's URN: Module:	Level 2 Cohort	Level:	2
	POL2007/2013	Type of Assessment:	Group Wiki
Marker:	R Guerrina & M David	Moderated (Y/N):	Y
Provisional Mark:	64%	Moderated by:	R Guerrina & M David

Accuracy:	Despite interim feedback, there remain questionable statements and questionable inclusions. Editing functions have been fulfilled poorly. This failure occurs at individual and group level but was not picked up in the final editing process either.
Critical Judgment:	All key issues have been covered, though the inclusion of some topics raises significant question about the function and structure of the EU, e.g. the Council of Europe is **NOT** an institution of the EU.
Accessibility:	On the whole, this is good but the inconsistent presentation means that it is difficult to get a sense of how to navigate the wiki and so make best use of it as a source. It also detracts from the 'attractiveness' of the end product.
Breadth & Depth of Knowledge	Coverage is extensive although a reduction in some of the issues covered would have left more time to focus on depth of argument but also housekeeping, editing etc. More categorisation would have helped to provide coherence and consistency of analysis of the issues presented, for instance, Enlargement as an overarching topic in the History section, with sub-sections within that to cover the chronology.

There is real inconsistency here. Some sections are dealt with in a good deal of detail, others are sketchy and superficial. For instance, within the Institutions topic, the author has recognised the need to break down material into sections and links. This structure ensures deep coverage of key issues related to the Commission. The ECJ, by comparison, while still achieving good coverage, does not include the same level of detail. This has implications for utility (below). |
| **Utility & Longevity:** | The inconsistent nature of the wiki obviously reduces the utility of the wiki as a source. Dates needed to be used much more widely to indicate the current applicability of the information presented. |
| **Further Comments:** | Overall, we have been impressed with the quality of the end product. We are particularly pleased with the work of those students who have engaged with the process throughout the year. Inevitably, this is a task that has the potential to reward students in a variety of ways. The more effort put in, the more potent the achievement. We are happy with the way that individuals (and the group) have achieved the overall learning outcomes indicated at the outset. This is not to say there is not room for improvement, particularly in the way that students take direction and take |

	responsibility for learning outcomes.

EU WIKI LEARNING OUTCOMES MATRIX

Task Components	I have considered doing or thought about	I have (actually) done	What I have done well	What I need to address/improve
Understand aims				
Break down task – understand elements				
Reflected on how to work effectively in a group				
Communication				
Group participation				
Individual participation				
Collection of data				
Analysis of data				
Sharing of information				
Editing & proofreading				
Referencing				
Uploading info				
Creating links				
Wiki 'gardening'				
Wiki presentation, inc navigability, editing etc				
Accuracy				

Reflection on, eg - utility, breadth, appropriateness				
Wiki coherence				

Task Component	I have only skimmed	I have read them	What I read and understood what is expected of me	I understand what I need to do next
I have read and understood guidelines and instructions provided				

Instructions

- Complete the above matrix.
- Mark boxes with an 'X' against the relevant component, except for column headed "What I need to address/improve".
- This final column requires a more substantive reply.
- Rows may be increased in size as required for these purposes.

Advice

- Please remember this is a reflective task.
- You may include it as part of your individual portfolio submission but **the primary purpose is to facilitate you in considering the nature of the task, its component parts and your role within them.**