

Can an asynchronous online student conference develop students' critical evaluation skills?

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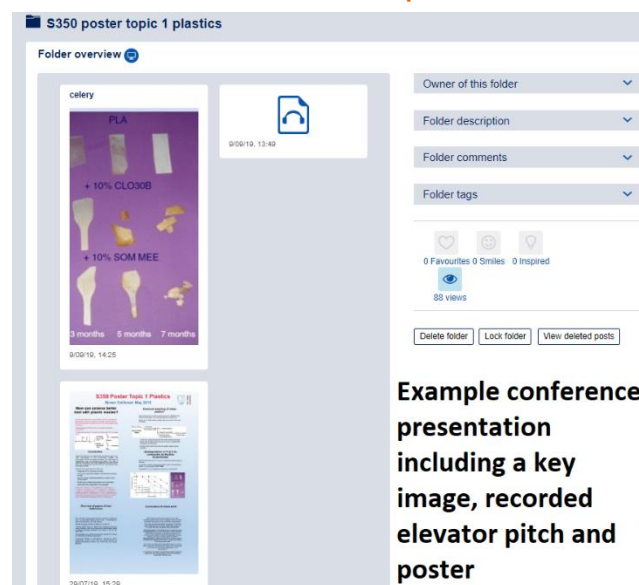
School of Life, Health & Chemical Sciences, The Open University

1 About S350 Evaluating Contemporary Science

- A level 3 module in Natural Science pathway
- Aims to give students the skills to explore areas of contemporary science and examine the 'science behind the news'
- Taught online to students on a range of science and health BSc pathways

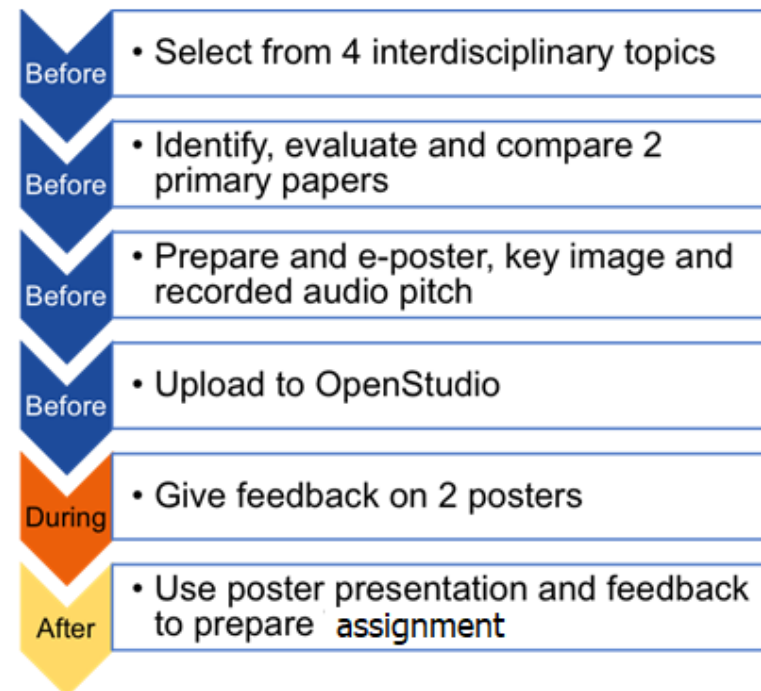
2 Conference aims

- Enhance student learning experience
- Target employability skills in
 - Communication
 - Critical evaluation
 - Data presentation
 - Elevator pitch (NB recorded)
- Encourage student peer learning by giving feedback in their own discipline and one other.



3 Conference format

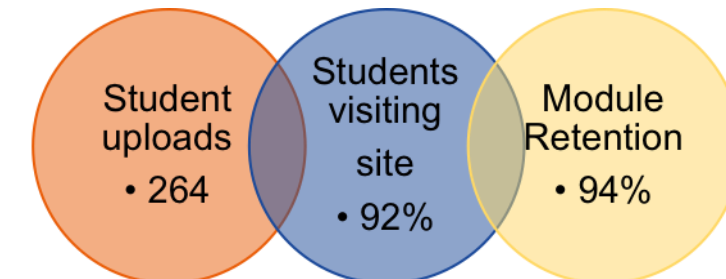
- Run online in the Open University's **OpenStudio** (NB a similar event could be run in an online forum) for 2 weeks:



4 Supporting material

- Activities earlier in the module prepared students for using **OpenStudio**
- Module material/activities introduced students to scientific conferences, poster presentations and giving balanced feedback
- Students were provided with;
 - An example poster presentation (see figure)
 - Detailed instructions on how to prepare and upload their poster presentation
 - A poster feedback form

5 Outcomes for S350



“My favourite block ... It was very interactive and represented a life-like situation a scientist would encounter.” *S350 student*

“I thoroughly enjoyed preparing the poster..... it was immensely interesting to read those created by other students too. The Student Conference was a wonderful, innovative idea and it brought a really interactive feel to an online module. The OU continues to come up with these ground-breaking ideas, it really is the leader in online learning.” *S350 forum post*

6 Lessons learnt

- Students add a transcript to aid the marking.
- Pedagogic project studied 100 student posters identifying best approach:
 - ‘Sensible’ choice of studies on related research (e.g. same organism with different experimental variables)
 - Focus on comparison of the two studies
 - Did their own presentation of results
 - Clear consideration of study limitations
 - Proposed ‘sensible’ and specific future research
 - Informed a ‘Top tips for S350 posters’ shared with students before 2020 conference