Investigating communications sent to students studying level 1 MCT and science modules

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Introduction

The main method of communication to Open University students is electronic messages, i.e. email. The overall aim of this research project is to determine the effectiveness of email communications to students. Are students overwhelmed by the number of emails sent from the university or do students value the electronic communications received?

The findings presented in this poster are from the initial research phase which determined the quantity and origin of emails sent to students studying level 1 MCT and science modules in 2014B. The second phase of the project will be a qualitative study of the student's experience.

Method

For each of the level 1 MCT and Science modules, a sample of four students was randomly selected from those who had completed the 2014B presentation. VOICE records were used to determine the number of emails sent. Three modules, U116, SDK125 & S142, were selected for further investigation.

Communications to each of the four sample students were analysed in greater depth to identify the origin of messages.

Discussion

Quantitative analysis of the number of email communications (logged on VOICE) sent to students studying one MCT or science level 1 module in 2014B (Table 1) revealed:

1. Significant variation in the number of emails sent to individual students studying the same module. The number of messages sent varied from 32 to 145 for individual students on S142.
2. Variation in the average number of emails sent to students on different modules. (55 emails on MU123 and 124 on S142).
3. No correlation between the average number of emails sent and credit rating of the module.
4. No correlation between the 2014B retention rate and average number of emails sent.

These finding are in line with those reported by the Initial Learner Engagement Project who looked at AA100 students studying in 13J [1].

Further analysis of 4 students on S142, SDK125 and U116 (Table 2) showed that the majority of messages are sent by the Tutors office and eTMA system. The increase in emails sent on S142 was due to an increase in emails sent from the faculty, region and 'all other areas'.

Results

Table 1: Level 1 MCT and science modules showing the total number of email communications logged in Voice sent to 4 students who completed their study of the module in 2014B. Messages sent from module start to result notification.

Module	Credit	Total number of emails sent (to 4 students)	Average (n=4)	Retention % completion
M140	30	43,50,64,100	64	74
MST124	30	37,54,62,90	61	42
MU123	30	30,57,60,75	55	70
S104	60	76,87,107,112	71	45
S142	30	78,114,145,160	124	58
SDK125	30	32,52,82,86	63	46
TU100	60	71,75,76,81	76	49
T174	30	44,46,49,61	50	58
U116	60	42,47,57,84	58	72

Table 2: Origin of email communications logged in VOICE sent to 4 students on 3 level 1 modules in 2014B

Origin of message	Average number of emails per student		
	U116	SDK125	S142
Tutors Office	11	20	27
eTMA system	15	14	19
Student services	6	7	9
MSD Computer centre	5	7	9
Region & SST	5	5	10
OUSA	5	6	5
Faculty	3	4	13
Exams	3	5	9
Library	4	1	3
All other areas	1	7	20

Data excludes emails sent directly to the students from private mail addresses, such as from their tutors

Further work

This quantitative analysis gives an overview of electronic messages being sent to students on level 1 MCT and science modules. However, it is thought that students do not read all the emails they receive.

The second phase of this project involves qualitative research in which 20 students on S142, SDK125 and U116 on the 2015B presentation will be interviewed about their experience of communication from the university. It is hoped to establish a student perspective of which emails they want to receive and find useful.

Reference

1. Initial Learner Engagement Project (2014) Early Project Recommendations Paper