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**University of Brighton**

## Text Messaging to Students

Making Contact with Students on their Territory



The School of Applied Social Science

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**University of Brighton**

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The School of Applied Social Science

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## Introducing the Context

- Why is student retention an issue for the School of Applied Social Science ?  
Student numbers have increased dramatically over a short period of time, having an impact on the student experience both socially and academically and thus possible effect on student retention.
- Student retention issues within the school and how does this relate to first year experience ?

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## How do students maintain their social networks ?

The shifting context of social interaction



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## How do students maintain their social networks ?

The shifting context of social interaction

- Less face to face meeting
- More communication taking place via electronic media such as email, mobile phones and internet based communication ( Students are being actively encouraged to use web based communications at university, e.g. Managed Learning Environments)
- Long distance communication is no longer dependent upon a fixed home address but is focused on the individual wherever they may be. This allows the maintenance of long standing relationships.

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## The relevance of mobile phones (a tool of independence)

Mobile phones are ubiquitous amongst university students yet little is known about their use in this context.

- Mobile phones are the technology of choice for the current generation of undergraduates with studies showing 90% use in the UK for people aged 14-35 ( Office of National Statistics, 2003 ). Different countries show different levels of use.
- Mobile technologies support the 'nomadic' lifestyles of students.

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## The relevance of mobile phones (a tool of independence)

### The text messaging phenomenon

- SMS text messaging developed in Northern Europe as an adolescent phenomenon. Its use has been closely associated with the development of a social identity beyond the parental gaze (Ling, 2001).
- It has been suggested that this original use of text messaging promoted its current use amongst those now in their 20's and 30's (Ling, 2000).
- The benefits of asynchronous communication
  - emotional buffer
  - chance to collect one's thoughts before answering

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## The social impact of mobile phones

### Implications of mobile phone use

- 'Perpetual contact' ( Katz and Aakhus, 2002 )
- We now have an 'always on' society.
- The changing expectations of students with regards to the nature of communication taking place
  - Informality and immediacy
  - Changing plans along the way: hyper-coordination and microcoordination (Ling and Yttri, 2002)
- Disruption of established norms of social conduct – mobile phones ringing or students texting during lectures

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## Student Messenger



- Focused on sending text messages from a desktop PC to mobile phones.
- Mechanics of getting it to work
  - Installation
  - Collecting mobile phone numbers at induction
- Student messenger given to 2 personal tutors, administrative staff and the Student Support and Guidance Tutor

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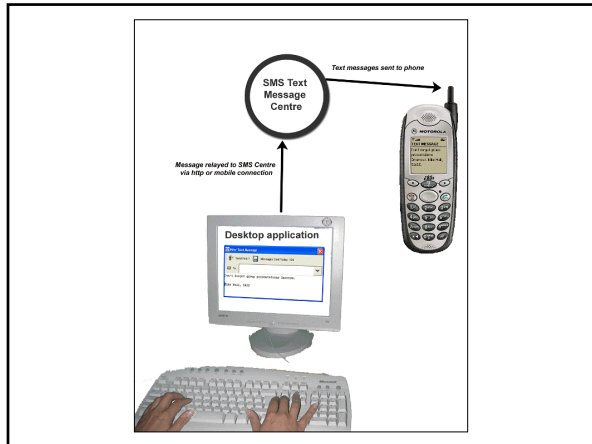
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### Using Student Messenger

- The role of the Student Support & Guidance Tutor
  - Providing information and support
  - Chasing up those who miss deadlines and are poor attenders
- How did Student Messenger fit in with this role?
  - Way that Student Messenger was used
  - Messages sent

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**Responses:**

*Thank u hope u had a gud one!*

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**Responses:**

*Thanks Sarah, I am revising now, woo! Hopefully I am absorbing it all. jjX*

*Thanx sarah, revisin at home, metin up 2moz 2 talk sociologicaly shold b fun! All da best LB x*

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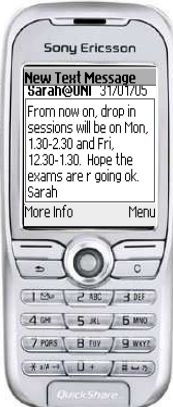
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**Responses:**

*The exam today went really well I believe. The guy next to me didn't do anything, ooh : (I believe I only have that exam?) jjX*

*Feel nervos and ive done mine! Thanx 4 text, take care x*

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**Dialogue:**

*Sorry sarah completely slipped my mind will be in soon if your still available got a bit sorted over the weekend*

- Hi John, just wanted to check on how things were going? Sarah.

*As it happens i have been ill all weekend been doing some readings and checking on lectures but i still fail to see practical applications sure it will be fine*

- Hi John, how r u? Dont 4get that u need to join a grp 4 research methods. The list is in Mayfield reception. Take care, Sarah.

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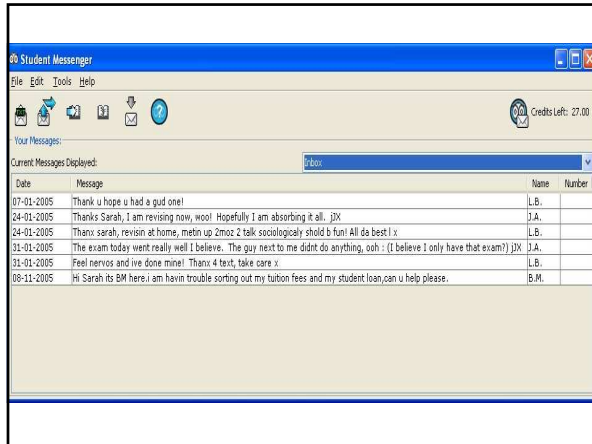
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### Evaluation

- 20 students who had received the text messages from the school were interviewed about their experience of receiving them.
- The interviews were also used as an opportunity to explore students' different uses of communication media.
- An action research approach was taken, in that feedback from students was immediately used to identify appropriate uses for Student Messenger.

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### Students' use of communicative technologies in general

We found that...

Prolific use of text messaging.

- 18 out of the 20 interviewed said that it was their most frequent method of communicating with others.
- The other 2 said Instant Messenger

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So what did students make of  
being texted ?

Generally students were positive about the  
initiative

**A sense of belonging**

“It was nice. I don’t know, cos university is such a big  
place, you sometimes feel a bit deindividuated so it is  
quite nice to know that someone is thinking about you  
or if you have got any worries when your drop in times  
are.” (Julia, 20)

“I think they (the text messages) are beneficial for a  
number of reasons, one as I said earlier is about giving  
you the feeling of belonging, we are in this altogether,  
that sort of thing” (Peter, 43)

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So what did students make of  
being texted ?

**Motivation/Reminders**

*To what extent do you think these text messages  
are beneficial, if at all?*

“Well it has let me know pretty quick and obviously  
there is a deadline, it has got to be done by next  
week but it is good, it has got me sort of doing it, I  
came in and did it. It is the quickest way to get hold  
of someone” (Pamela, 37)

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So what did students make of  
being texted ?

**Easy access over other methods**

“cos everyone has got a phone, so everyone will know,  
everyone has got the same information”(Fiona, 19)

“I think email would have been just as good, it doesn’t  
really matter which way it is done. Although, saying  
that my phone is always on me and I haven’t always  
got access to a computer” (Jayne, 19)

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So what did students make of being texted ?

**Negative responses**

***And would you use that (text messaging) as a way to communicate with staff ?***

"I think texting is quite impersonal I suppose, well it is a mixture of impersonal and personal, so I don't know, I don't feel that familiar to text a member of staff really."(Pamela, 37)

***What did you think about the messages; how did it make you feel?***

No it was good actually, it was a bit like who is this from? No, it is nice, especially in the first term definitely, it is nice to know that there is someone out there thinking about you. (Pamela, 37)

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So what did students make of being texted ?

**The limitations of the medium**

***Do you feel comfortable say to contact staff by text or using the phone...?***

"....I don't think I would do it by text message cos if I was to contact staff then I would probably need a more in depth answer that what a text message probably would say" (Matt, 19)

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**Final thoughts**

- The first year is a critical time of transition
- Communicating in this way supports the work of the SSGT in providing an informal adjunct to the teaching, easing the transition and supporting the growing independence of students

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Any questions?

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