



# An Analysis and Evaluation of Using Facebook Groups to Support Student Learning

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Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) introduced as a retention initiative for level 1:

- Maths and Computing Science

Despite demand, very difficult to get students in the same place at the same time

- Large classes
- 3 subjects  $\Rightarrow$  timetabling problems
- Room bookings
- Expense
- Students commute/have part-time jobs/other responsibilities



## Virtual PAL using Facebook/Moodle

### Looking at the Digital Natives survey 2011 (2065 respondents)

- 97.6% have a Facebook account that they access at least once a month
- 96.8 % at least once a week
- 89.2% at least once a day

### Started with what we knew (Maths & CS)!

#### Model

- Closed groups
- Initiated and moderated by 2 members of (support) staff
- Senior students invited to join to make it more like traditional PAL



Academic and social interaction

Sharing resources

Always available (including during holidays)

- No need to wait for next week's session/tutorial
- Can come back to old threads later

Very quick responses

Everyone has equal voice

Staff interaction with one student but seen (or liked) by many

Clear articulation forced



## Due to success:

- Groups renamed and rolled over to level 2
- New groups created for level 1 Maths and Computing
- Introduced groups for level 1 Physics/Astronomy and Engineering

## Eventually:

- Entrants Group introduced two years ago
- Groups introduced for all subjects in College of Science & Engineering



## Pre-entry Facebook group for College of Science and Engineering (CoSE)

- Conversations with each other and senior students
- Become acquainted with Effective Learning Adviser for CoSE and Maths Adviser
- Ask questions (related to course or UoG generally)
- Access to resources prior to starting level 1 (MathCentre Algebra Refresher, Sample Skills Test, reading lists...)



Check every day!

August – setting up new groups, renaming old groups, posting messages in old groups etc. takes around half a day

September – invite new students and senior students to join groups

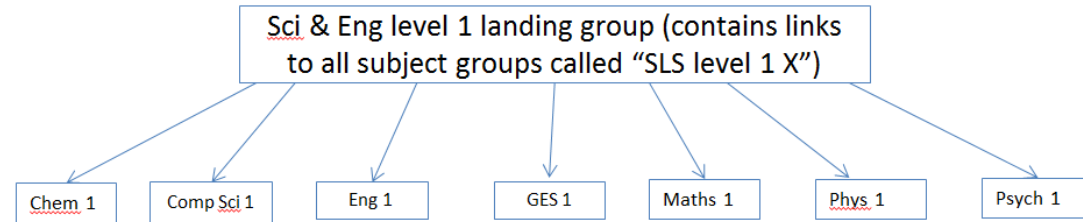
New groups require more input initially but plenty of senior-student help available. Bank of posts useful to have

Senior groups need very little input

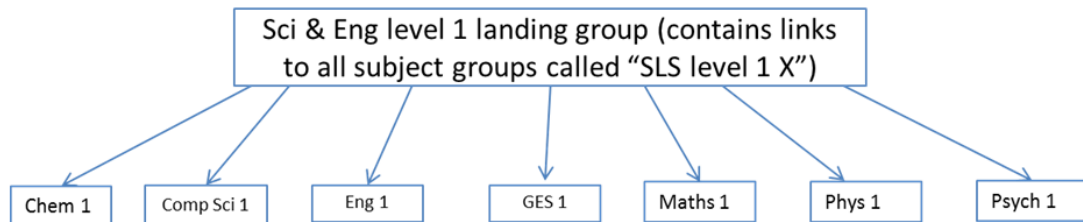
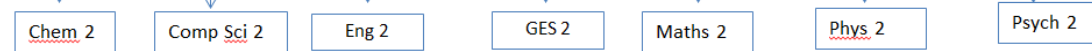


## Over 40 groups in College of Science & Engineering

August 2013: SLS set up all groups. LTC staff and senior students join groups.  
Recruitment Office email all freshers pre-induction.



August 2014: rename all subject groups to "SLS level 2 ..." Set up new level 1 groups as before.

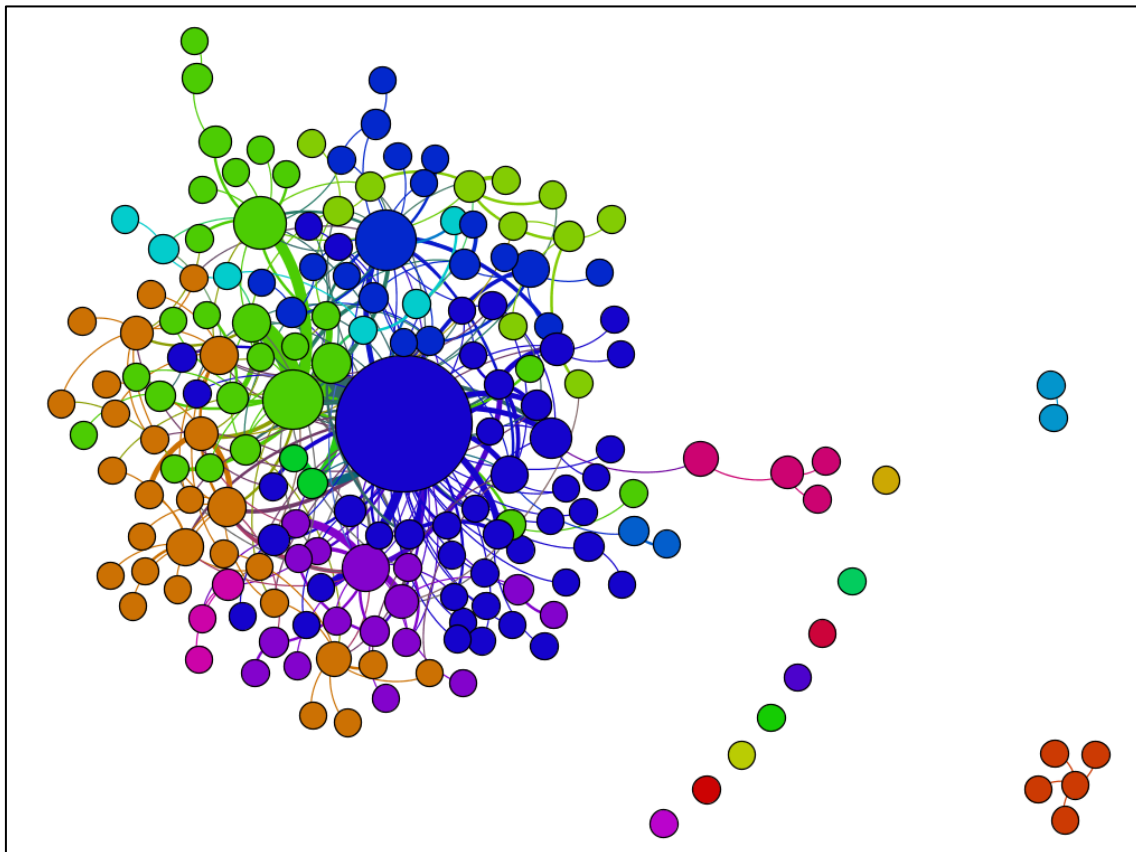


August 2015: rename all level 2 groups to level 3, all level 1 to 2, set up new level 1 groups.





## Entrants Group 2013-14



Over 700 members in group

18 communities within group

Average path length = 2.98

Diameter = 7



Current level 5 Maths and CS students/mostly Graduates

First ever cohort where Facebook groups ‘formally’ introduced

Questionnaire sent to all level 4 Maths and Computing students about how they had used Facebook groups over the four years

100 responses received



Most students joined groups in 1<sup>st</sup> year. Another spike in 3<sup>rd</sup> year (Honours class)

- 90% of Computing
- 75% of Maths

Reason for not joining was:

- “didn’t know about them”
- “don’t use Facebook”
- with one person specifying that they don’t use Facebook for university



Students said they **posted** questions/items of interest or **initiated** discussions anything between once a week and once a day, they **respond** to questions/discussions more often and **read** the discussions very regularly

Students found the groups helpful both academically and socially, with somewhat higher score for 'academically'



*...typos in notes/exercises identified*

**Course related discussions, revision help and useful resource sharing**

*Good method of sharing info/asking questions without having to irritate lecturers*

**Posting MacSoc (social) events**

*A good way to create a community from a large cohort of students. Really good that it didn't become cluttered with trivia and non-group related matters*

**I am very grateful for the groups, I think our year was the first to have them and it really did help having people to talk to**

*Would like it if the Facebook groups were more heavily used, like information about them could be given in the introductory lecture to increase the number of students actively using it. The Facebook groups have been really useful though and Shazia regularly responds to students which is great!*



Dear Shazia and Sarah,

It annoys me that I might be missing out on interesting discussions. I think that it is great to encourage learning and to discuss mathematics.

However, I refuse to use Facebook. Moreover, I don't think Facebook is the correct place for discussing mathematics - University is the correct place.

I don't want my university experience to become part of Facebook.

Kind Regards

Anon



Thank you for listening

Any questions?

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