

National profile of innovative teaching

The Guardian newspaper has once again approached the Blended Learning Unit at the University to find out more about blended learning and the student experience. It has published two previous articles, but this time the education writers were interested in exploring "the student experience with using ICT in higher education".

Lauren Anderson, the Blended Learning Unit's technology mentor placement student who studies Marketing at the University, was asked a series of questions, relating to her experience of using technology during her time at University. She spoke of the benefits that StudyNet, the University's online study environment, has brought to her learning including the advantage of having international access. Lauren described StudyNet as an integral part of her learning giving her the ability to access all module information and online data resources; such as databases, books and journals. She also mentioned the benefits of having access to learning resources such as podcasts, highlighting the advantage of using them during revision as a way of reinforcing lecture notes.

Wikis' were also discussed with regards to collaborative learning and the benefits to group work. She stated that the use of a wiki allowed her team to identify those inputting time and effort and those who were being inactive. Lauren also talked of the wiki contributing to fifteen per cent of her overall module grade; ten per cent group work and five per cent individual, and how this affected the way in which they used it.

Lauren said that she believes there is a need for both face-to-face and online communication in order to develop all skills needed within the workplace, she said: "It is more enjoyable for students to use technology and it encourages independent learning but working in real life develops social skills too."

The Self, Consciousness and Cash

Philosophers at the University have gained two major grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) worth more than half a million pounds.

A two-year project entitled, 'The Construction of Personal Identities Online', will explore how people present themselves online, in virtual environments.

"Personal identities online can be created and developed to enrich our experiences; expand, improve or even help to repair relationships; or enable us to spend time in someone else's shoes, which may foster tolerance," said Professor Luciano Floridi, leading the project, "However, they can also be misconstrued, stolen, abused or cause disengagement with the actual world and real people."

It will fill the serious gap in understanding how to be ethically responsible online in a world where individuals increasingly live in digital environments.

Meanwhile, Professor Paul Coates and Dr Sam Coleman are beginning a three-year project to explore conscious experiences that contemporary science still cannot explain. By looking at psychology, brain science and at phenomenology and other forms of philosophical enquiry the project will attempt to answer the mystery of consciousness.

Professor Coates explains: "When we see a sunset or hear a symphony our sense organs, brains and bodies are moved in ways that are well understood by the physical and biological sciences. But during such experiences we also enjoy distinctive forms of conscious awareness. Yet this undeniable fact about our conscious lives is stubbornly resistant to scientific understanding."

In search of planets around the coolest stars



Artists impression of what a cool star rocky planet may look like. This illustration is an example of one of the three planets recently found around the red dwarf Gliese 581 (Image credit: The European Southern Observatory).

A team of University of Hertfordshire astronomers led by Dr David Pinfield of the Centre for Astrophysics Research is leading a major new European collaboration to search for and study planets around other stars (extra-solar planets).

Funded with £2.75 million from the European Commission, this research and technology network will focus on the search for rocky planets around cool stars and the development of future space-based technology to study extra-solar planets. Cool stars are much fainter than the Sun and are thus challenging to study, but they play a major role in astrophysics; they are the most common type of star in our galaxy.

"This fast moving field is at the forefront of modern astrophysics, and is moving towards a goal of discovering terrestrial planets like the

Earth around stars other than the Sun," said Dr Pinfield. "Learning about the diverse range of planetary systems that exist around other stars allows us to better understand our own place in the universe, and will reveal the extent of possible habitats for life elsewhere."

The project is built on the team's international collaboration with leading research institutes in the UK (University of Hertfordshire and Cambridge), Spain (Canary Islands and Madrid), Germany (Munich) and Ukraine (Kiev), and the space engineering company Astrium (based in Stevenage).

Over its four year life-time (December 2008 – November 2012) the project will employ fifteen doctoral and postdoctoral researchers to carry out new research, work with industry on technology development, and receive training

through a range of science and technology activities.

"This fast moving field is at the forefront of modern astrophysics"

The network will specifically pursue extra-solar planets that transit (pass in-front of their host star during their orbit) - currently an extremely active area of astronomy. For cool stars this technique is sensitive to smaller planets that could be warm rocky worlds.

By exploiting new survey facilities that are being led by Dr Pinfield and his network, they aim to improve their understanding of the broad nature of extra-solar planet populations, and explore new extra-solar planet territory around the coolest stars in our galaxy. Intersectorial activities will be carried out jointly at the University of Hertfordshire and Astrium, and will centre on the European Space Agency's Cosmic Vision 2015-2025 programme to implement the next generation of space-based observatories.

"The project will thus be looking to the future as well as focussing on the ongoing search for and study of planets around other stars," Dr Pinfield added.

New Professor of Pharmacy Law and Ethics

The University of Hertfordshire's School of Pharmacy has appointed a Visiting Professor of Pharmacy Law and Ethics to help to develop learning and research.

Professor Joy Wingfield, LL.M, M.Phil, B.Pharm, FRPharmS, Dip Ag Vet Pharm, FCPP is Special Professor of Pharmacy Law and Ethics at the University of Nottingham and has been appointed as a Visiting Professor at the University of Hertfordshire.

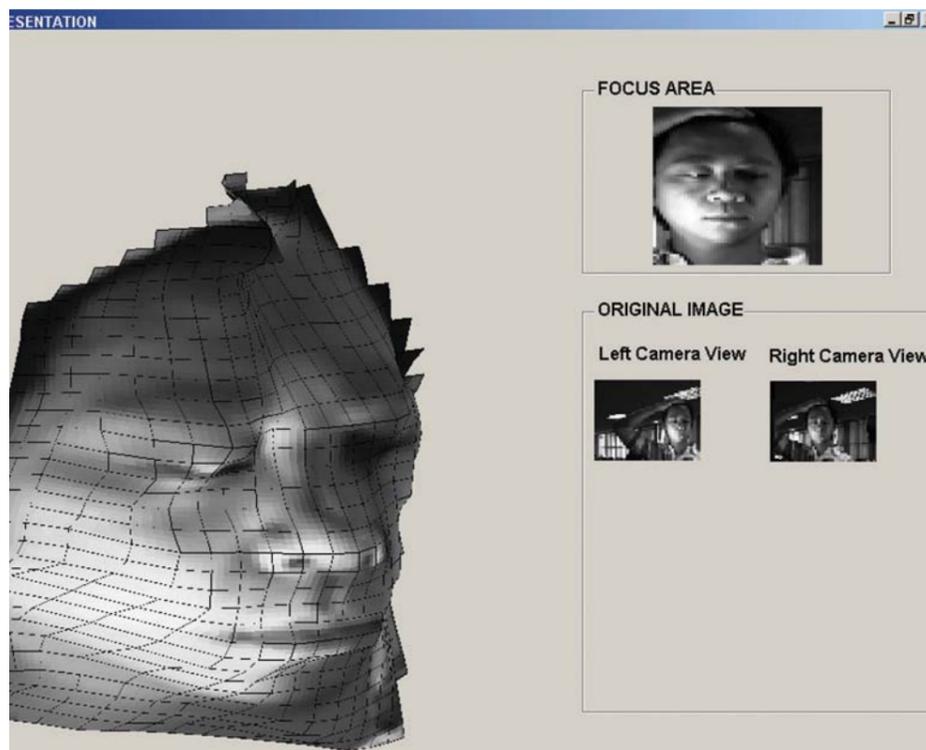
Following a career that began in community pharmacy and the Pharmaceutical Society as an inspector and subsequently Head of Ethics, she was Assistant Pharmacy Superintendent for Boots before being appointed to a Chair as Boots Special Professor of Pharmacy Law and Ethics at the University of Nottingham.

Professor Wingfield has postgraduate qualifications in European law and in law and medical practice and is a regular journal contributor and speaks widely on pharmacy law and ethics. Her publications include joint authorship of the standard textbook, Dale and Appelbe's Pharmacy Law and Ethics and Pharmacy Ethics and Decision Making, both standard textbooks in the field of law and ethics.

Professor Wingfield will play a key role in helping the School to develop the broad areas of pharmacy law and ethics and professionalism and establish a Centre for Law, Ethics and Professionalism to take forward post-graduate teaching and research.

Dr Richard O'Neill, Associate Head of School and lead for Law, Ethics and Professionalism, commented: "Our collaboration with Professor Wingfield will support the strategic developments in the School for learning, teaching and research and ensure our graduates develop the core skills required of young professionals."

New systems to provide reliable face biometrics



An example of how 3-D face imaging looks, to be used in security.

A novel 3-D face imaging system which will capture detailed images of people's faces as they pass through high security zones has been developed by academics at the University.

The system, which uses multimedia technology, was developed by Dr Sooda Ramalingam from the School of Electronic, Communication and Electrical Engineering, and was run at the Stuff Live show at ExCel London in November.

According to Dr Ramalingam, this face imaging system which applies new mathematical algorithms to standard Matlab software and uses a stereo camera setup from Videre Design, captures detailed images of people's faces and processes them in real time.

"Other two dimensional face imaging systems

capture people's faces, but if people are wearing make-up or wigs, they can cheat the system," she said. "Our new 3-D vision system goes beyond the skin and is equivalent to measuring the bone structure. As people stand at border control, detailed images can be taken and processed immediately."

Dr Ramalingam's system also enables specific segments and features of a person's face to be photographed, which can then be checked to see if the features match the overall photo.

"We believe that this system, which is now ready to use as a research product, has many commercial applications," said Dr Ramalingam. "This is much faster than any 3-D system and processes twenty-four frames per second in real time."



Professor Joy Wingfield, appointed a Visiting Professor of Pharmacy Law and Ethics at the University of Hertfordshire.