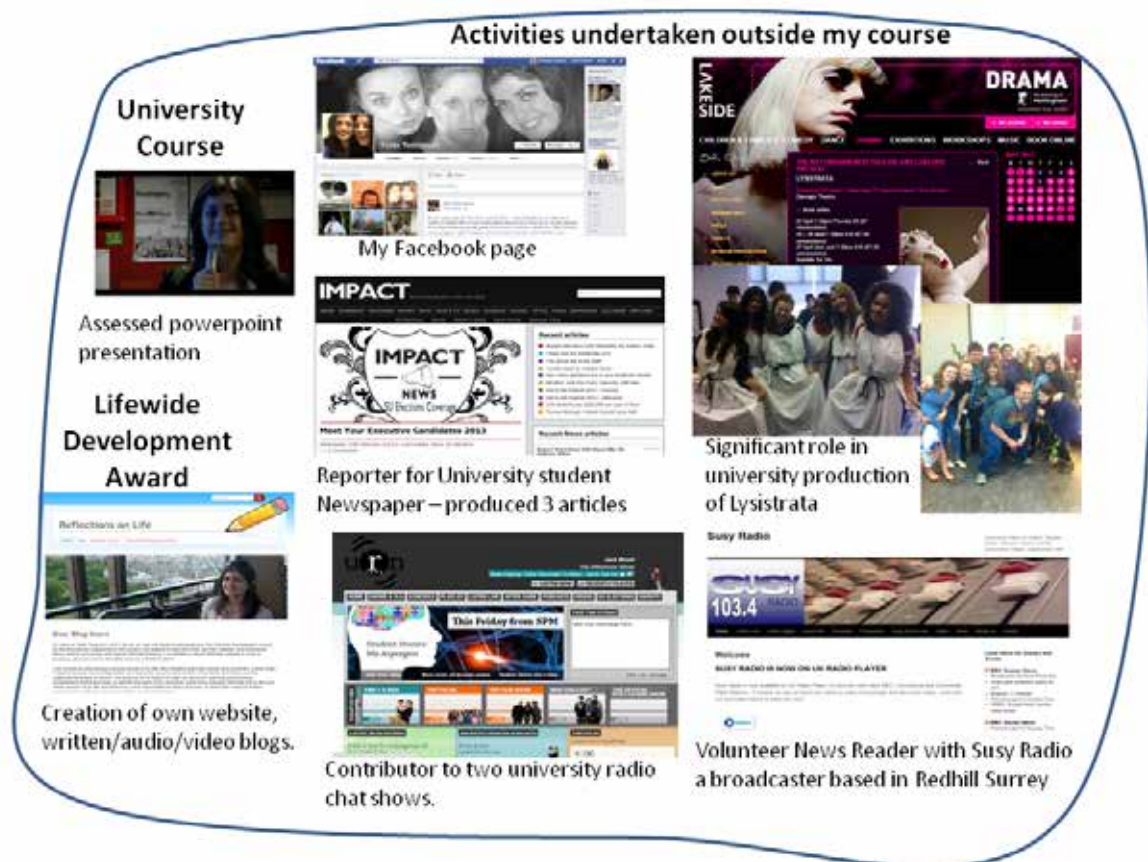


Developing My Communication Skills

Having just completed my first year at Nottingham University I looked back on my Personal Development plan. In this plan my goal was to develop myself as a communicator in a range of different contexts, including use of new media and making new friends. I set this goal because I am thinking that working in the media industry might be something I could do when I leave university. As the year unfolded I have embraced many opportunities in the hope of fulfilling this goal summarised in the figure below. However, what I was not expecting was that my goal would itself evolve as a result of different experiences.

The activities I undertook to become a better communicator.



The first step in my journey to develop myself as a communicator was embarking on my university European Politics course. Whilst I was used to writing essays when studying for my A levels, my experience in group presentations was limited. Through my course I learnt more about forming relationships and communicating in small groups in order to create presentations on various topics. I also improved my oral communication as I gave presentations, both on a political topic and self reflection. My experience in technology and social media grew as I used facebook to communicate with my group also I learnt how to use various university websites. This was alongside my personal blog which I have kept on this website using weebly to record my experiences and reflections on my journey of self-development. Interestingly, I started with a written blog but later decided to record my

thoughts as an audio file to experiment with this medium. I found it much easier and less time consuming to record the conversations I had with my mentor than to write.

The first few months at university were very busy settling in to a new way of life but over the Christmas holidays I resolved to get more involved with opportunities that would help me develop as a communicator. I soon realised that some of the best opportunities for developing my communication skills lay outside my course.

I enrolled as a campus reporter on 'Impact' the student newspaper to gain some experience of working . In particular I wanted to try to develop a journalistic style. As a member of the editorial team I had to write a piece each week. I had some training in interview techniques and once trained I covered the university elections interviewing candidates and following them on the campaign trail writing articles for publication. I had to work to very tight deadlines and this discipline has helped me to become more focused in my course work.

Halfway through the year I had the opportunity to join a production of "Lysistrata" which was a collaboration between the university theatre group and a professional director. Through the play I learnt to work and communicate with people from different backgrounds to me and also people who are both older than me and with a greater level of acting experience. The production involved a lot of improvisation and the trick was to use communication to develop a deeper understanding of each other, to help us combine our different visions to create the production.

It was through the play that I was first introduced to the university's radio station as a couple of us were given the opportunity to advertise the play on a news show. After enjoying my role as guest on the radio show I talked to my friend about other ways I might get involved in radio and she recommended that I guest on her show, and so one opportunity led to another. This showed me how important my networking with friends was in giving me the opportunities to try new experiences.

When I went home for the summer break I decided to look for experience in Radio, I called up lots of radio stations but no one was able to offer me any work experience. I realised they would only hire me if they had a need for me. I decided my best option was to utilise my knowledge of social media, which stemmed from my use of social networking sites and my personal website. I ended up applying for a job at Susy radio as a social media executive. However, when I arrived for my interview I was informed that the role had already been filled. But I seemed to get on well with the presenter who interviewed me and when I told her about my work on the university newspaper and my interest in politics she told me that there was an opening within the news team as a news broadcaster. So after expressing an interest in the position I was offered the job. After a week of training, I took over as a news reporter, preparing a four minute bulletin and reading it on air.

Working as a reporter has been a very steep learning curve. Instead of communicating through discussion which is where my interest originally lay most of my communication has been through presentation. One of my greatest assets in this field is my voice which because of past experience and coaching gained through drama and Lambda I am able to modulate, which makes it more interesting for the listener. Written communication has also been very important to the role, but in a different style to what I have used before, as I had to write a script that is short, gets straight to the point and is factually correct. Geoff, who presents the show I work on, has shown me just how important a mentor can be in

helping me develop and providing me with new opportunities for development. He has helped me improve many aspects of my performance on the radio, offering me advice and enabling me to analyse my performance by helping me spot where I have done well and where there is room for improvement. George's role is similar to the role my director played in Lysistrata both of them tried to improve my performance without taking away my creative freedom. Both these experiences have helped me realise how vital communication in the form of sensitive and constructive feedback is as I try to improve myself.

I could not have imagined at the start of the year that I would be where I am now. Looking back I can see that I sought out opportunities to develop my communication skills and that what I have done is enabling me to experience the world of journalism and broadcasting that is totally new to me. In the process I have used a range of media to communicate, and I have made many new friends in the process so I have been true to my original goal. My next step in my personal development plan to improve myself as a communicator will be more focused. I now know that presenting on radio seems to come naturally to me and I enjoy doing it so I am looking at the possibility of presenting a programme which discusses the news and presents opinions, so my main focus will be on refining my interviewing and presenting techniques and continuing to network.