

Don't take the goat track up the mountain: Developing undergraduates' historical thinking

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Overview

- Project title: *Developing undergraduate students' understanding of historical enquiry and research through flexible online learning and feedback*
- First year, undergraduate criticality
- Engagement in online materials
- Online platform devised

Action research

- Engages those 'who might otherwise be subjects of research or recipients of interventions' (Reason and Bradbury, 2013).
- Cycles of action and reflection
- Internal knowledge construction, rather than external analysis of situation (Elliott, 1994)
- Movement away from positivism
- Improving: practice, understanding of practice, or where practice occurs (Carr and Kemmis, 1986)
- Problem solving in groups or organisations (Brown and Tandon, 2013)

Those involved: students, PGRs, lecturers, researchers, advisers

Iteration 1

- EHU – platform complements the module
- Roehampton – platform is part of the module

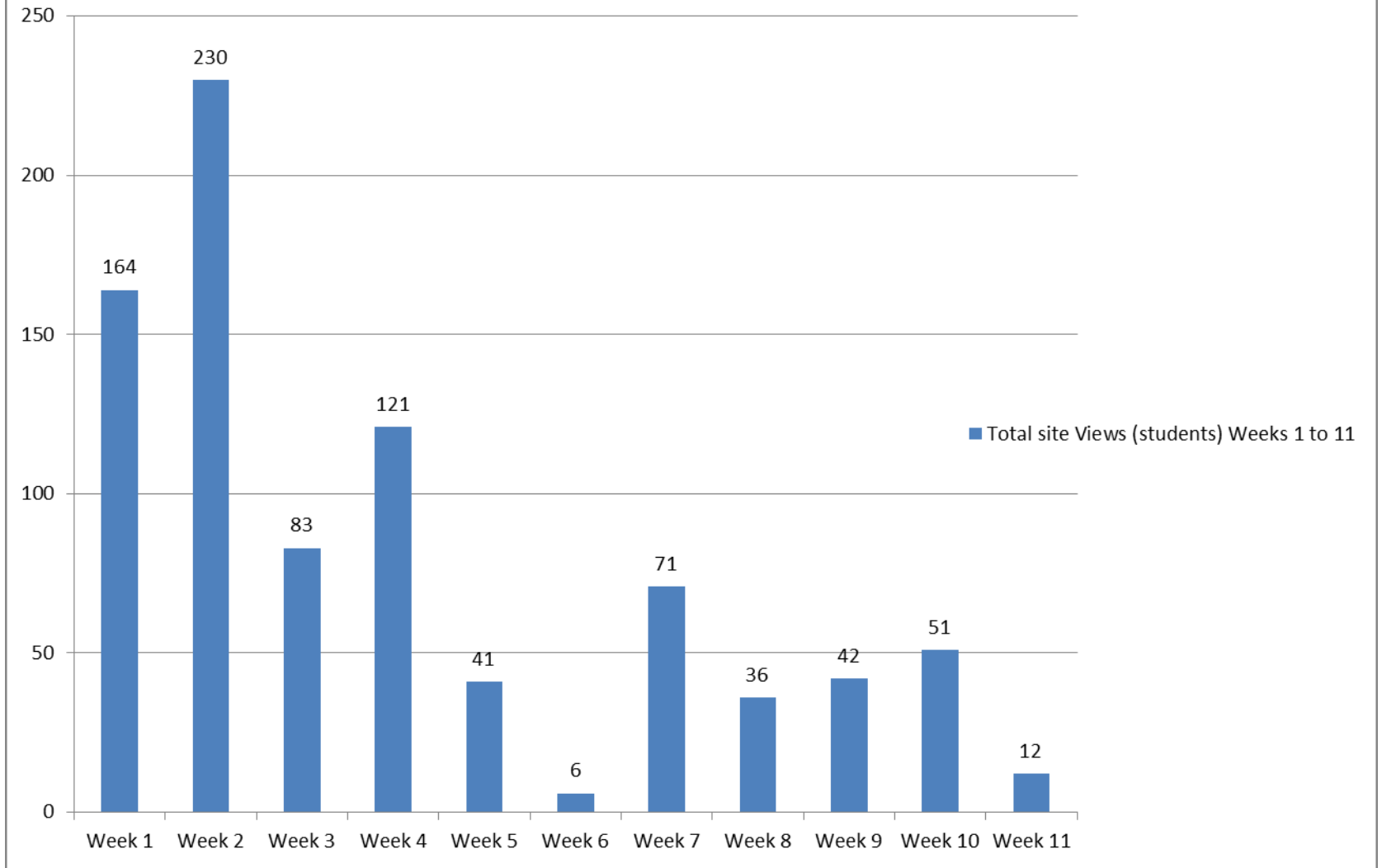
Data collection

Variety of sources:

- Interviews
- Questionnaire
- Polls at dissemination events
- Online
- Journal
- Discussion boards

Students enrolled on the site Iteration 1	52
Students enrolled on the site Iteration 2	44

Total site Views (students) Weeks 1 to 11



Iteration 1

First iteration

Undergraduate feedback

- Willing to engage if the topic is right – e.g. politics
- Useful to have postgraduate students
- Videos were useful
- Many liked the idea of a one-to-one, private discussion area
- Limited engagement
- Weak connection to the modules and assessments
- Fear of posting because of criticism or *exposure*
- ‘Needs to be relevant to what I am learning’
- Need for tutors to signpost in lessons

Some thoughts

- ‘Developing historical thinking is a high level skill. It can’t be done by watching videos’
- Discussions online are helpful but ones who need it most usually don’t engage
- Students may not be ready at this stage in their learning
- Time may be a barrier as majority have jobs
- Some material is coming from a particular generational viewpoint (i.e. class video)

What did we learn from this?

At the end of iteration one there was a need for:

- Overall engagement to be raised;
- The online platform to be more user-friendly;
- Greater awareness of the material;
- Some prompting online (students responded positively to this);
- The material to connect with the module assessments;

Iteration 1

- EHU – platform complements the module
- Roehampton – platform is part of the module

Iteration 2

- EHU and Roehampton – platform is part of the module

The second iteration

- Greater links between the online resources and the classroom activities
- Overall engagement soared
- Undergraduates' postings illustrate deeper engagement with the materials and strong interactions with postgraduates/lecturers
- Evidence of historical thinking in discussions

How far were discussion boards dialogic?

Assumptions

- Dialogue requires threads (sequences of posts) made up of exchanges (in which contributors respond to each other).
- Ideally, threads should contain more student posts than staff posts.
- Ideally, a discussion thread should contain posts by more than one student.

What value, if any, do the photograph and the video have as historical sources, in your view?

I believe that both sources have value as historical sources on the concept of the class system in Britain, yet it's important to remember that the video was made for entertainment purposes and will exaggerate the idea of a class system for comical use. However, it does give an idea of how people may have viewed the class system in the 60's. The photo on the other hand clearly shows a distinction between the two groups of boys, and as a primary source it is useful in showing a concept of the class system from the late 1930's, yet once again it is important to remember why the photograph was taken. The photographer may have wanted to show a clear division between classes and therefore asked the boys to stand by each other as the Times article suggests.

STUDENT

This is good- you have analysed both sources well, and grasped the basic points about them. However, why is the photograph more reliable than the sketch? Toffs .v. Toughs, as it is entitled, is surely putting words into our mouths about the significance of the photo?

POSTGRADUATE

2. A dialogic thread

What value if any, do the photograph and the video have as historical sources?

I think that the photograph does show the divide of social classes during the 1930's as in the photograph it looks the two upper/middle class children are turning there

Having read the source material in regard to the photograph, is it not feasible to presume that the Etonians were, in fact, unaware of the class distinction apparent and only awaiting the arrival of their ride home? It does show, on some level, the difference in class but is this because of the dress or is this from the body language visible in the boy's postures and poses? if it be the former, then we

I believe your argument that the video shows how people in the 1960s viewed the class system in the 1930s to be a good point. By providing very blunt statements as how the classes behaved the video suggests people in the 1960s had very rigid definitions of what it was to belong to a class in the 1930s. But

also

It clas

You make some interesting points....but is there not an element of contradiction in your statement? How could people in Britain have, at the same time, rigid attitudes towards social class AND live in a society in which the idea of class was less important?

LECTURER

What do Historians do?

Historians study the past and use their knowledge to try and prevent the same thing repeating itself. they apply their knowledge to everyday activities, such as:

- politics, teaching, religion

Whilst studying History for the 1st week, I can say that my opinion of what historians do has changed a little. As at first I believed that History was just the study of the past as now I can see that History can be applied to many other aspects and subjects not just the obvious English and Politics, but economics alongside business.

From the What do historians do quiz where different types of historians were and I was perceived to be a post-modern Historian. This is where you tend to look at text and other pieces of evidence with a little doubt. as a postmodern historian tends to look the text and see that there could be only a little truth behind the evidence compared to other types of historians , who use other analytical skills to come to a conclusion on how reliable a piece of evidence is, is there ant truth behind it etc. Alongside the use of other skills learnt along the way on the History course.

STUDENT

Were you happy with your quiz result? Do you agree with it, and did you think you would be revealed as something else?

POSTGRADUATE

2. Dialogic journals

Historical Significance

Historical significance is something that will be debated and everyone naturally has a

You raise some interesting points [Student name]. You seem to be suggesting that Bismarck has had a lasting effect on Germany. Do you think that a person of historical significance has to have a lasting effect? I am looking forward to reading

I believe that to have any historical significance then someone has to have made some impact and effect. I'm not so sure if it has to be a lasting one as such, but

This is a very generous view, but surely when a historian develops an interpretation s/he is, at least implicitly, saying that those who have a different

I agree that in some cases a Historian has to state that someone is wrong, however, in this context I don't agree. Historical significance is something that is built on opinion and is different for everyone. I still don't see that someone

I wonder [Student name] if there is no argument or debate about the significance of someone- say in a totalitarian state- does that mean that they are still significant. But I think that you make a valid point, it is through consideration, interpretation and debate that meaning can be ascribed to history. You have engaged well with the task and I look forward to reading more posts.

Teething problems of the second iteration

Issue:

Perceived weak connection between module and assessment despite mapping onto module content:

- Necessity to signpost better
- Connection to assessments
- Resources more assessment-focused
- Emphasis on modelling rather than supplying content

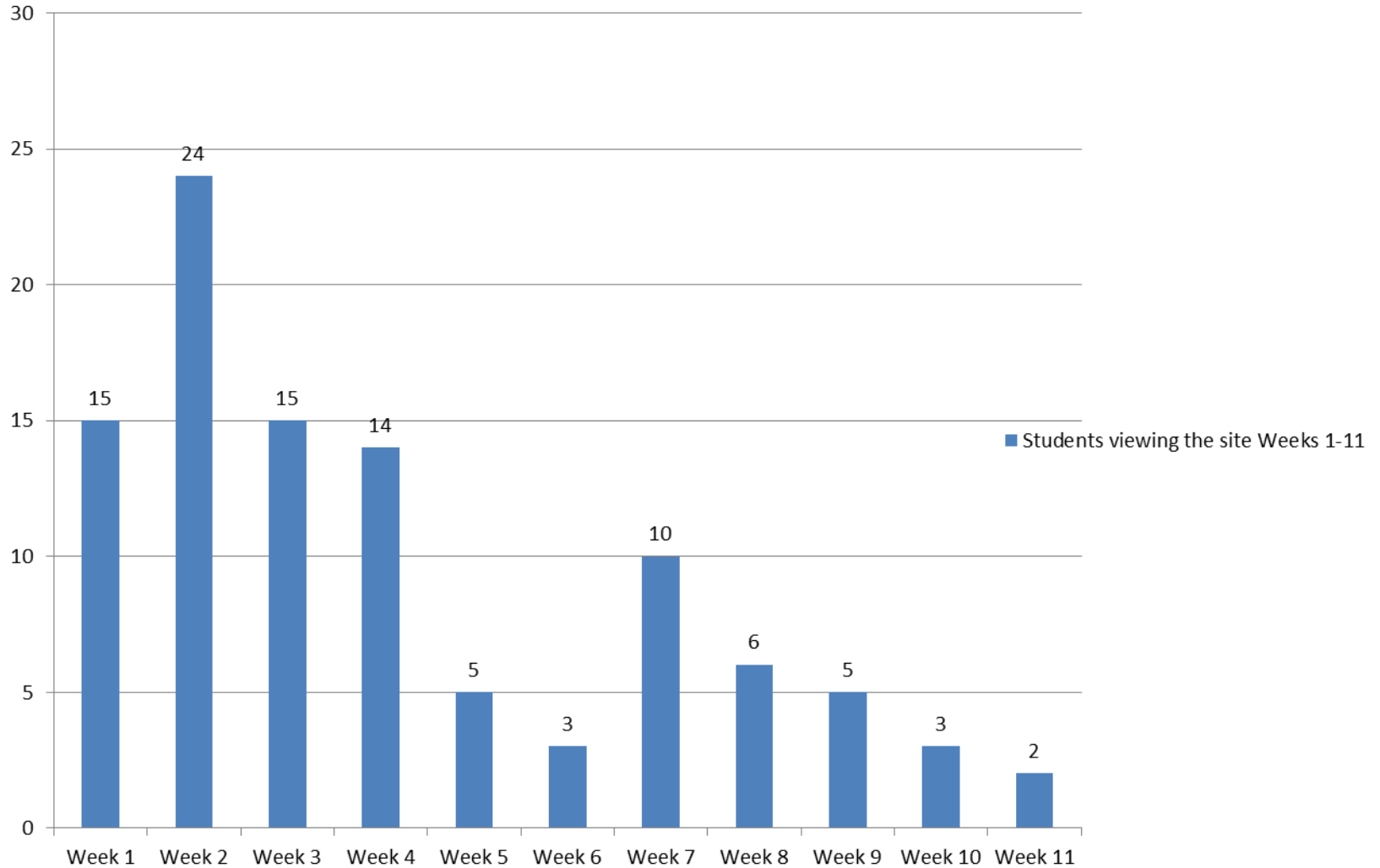
What can we learn from this?

- Platform works well when it not only complements but is interwoven in the modules
- Does deeper engagement lead to potentially higher grades?
- Posting can increase confidence and supports greater engagement in the classroom
- Students are starting to develop an awareness of historical enquiry as the discussions progress

Lecturers' feedback

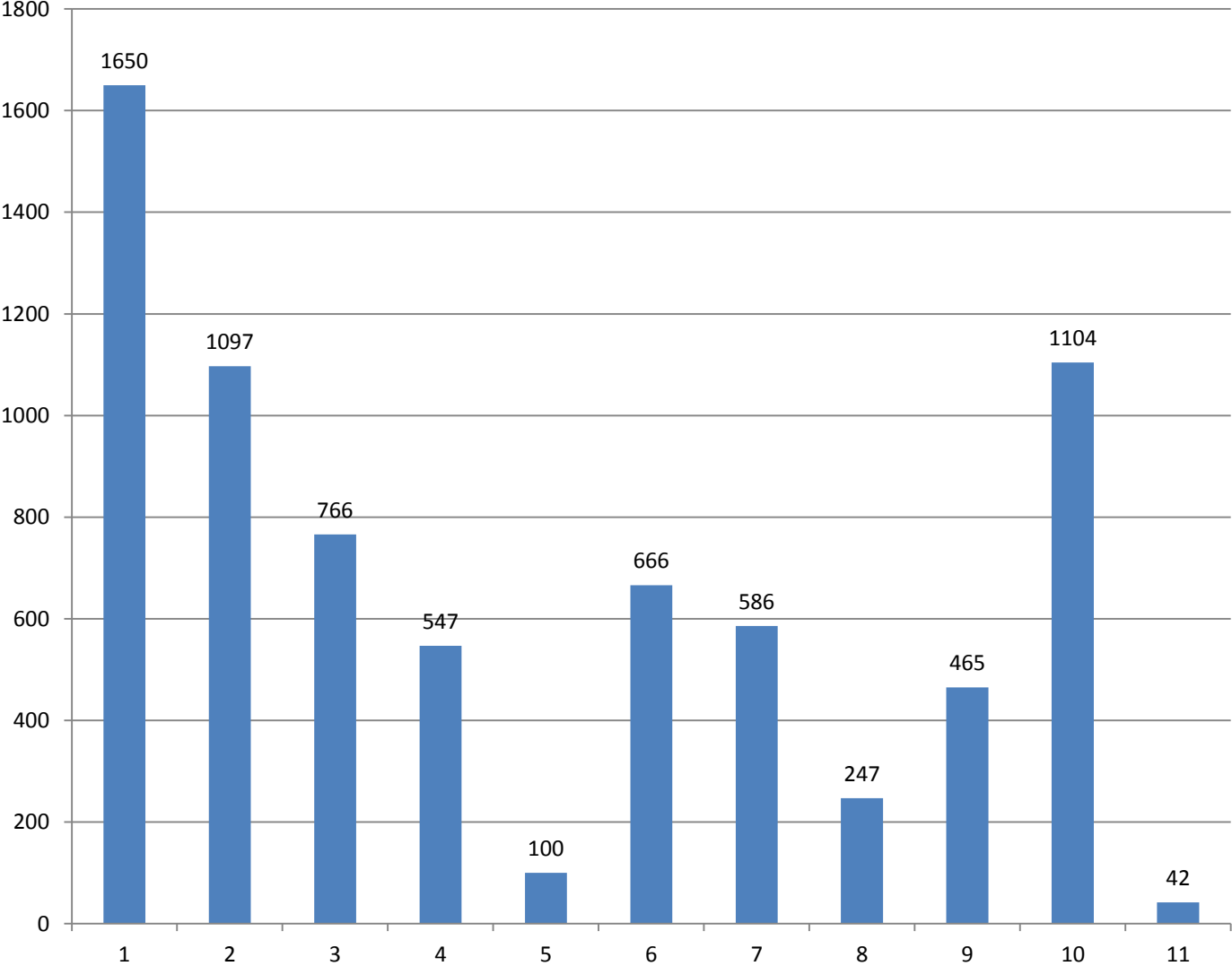
- Great idea!
- Reference was made to online materials in the first few weeks and students mentioned that they used these materials to prepare for some sessions
- The resources mapped well to the module
- Discussions online are helpful to get to know the students in a different way
- It has resulted in a bank of resources we can use and add to
- General impression that students excel through using it
- 'As an observer, it has given me ideas about my own planning and teaching for my modules – maybe I will experiment with similar resources'
- 'Second- and third-year students use technology in modules and they like it'

Students viewing the site Weeks 1-11



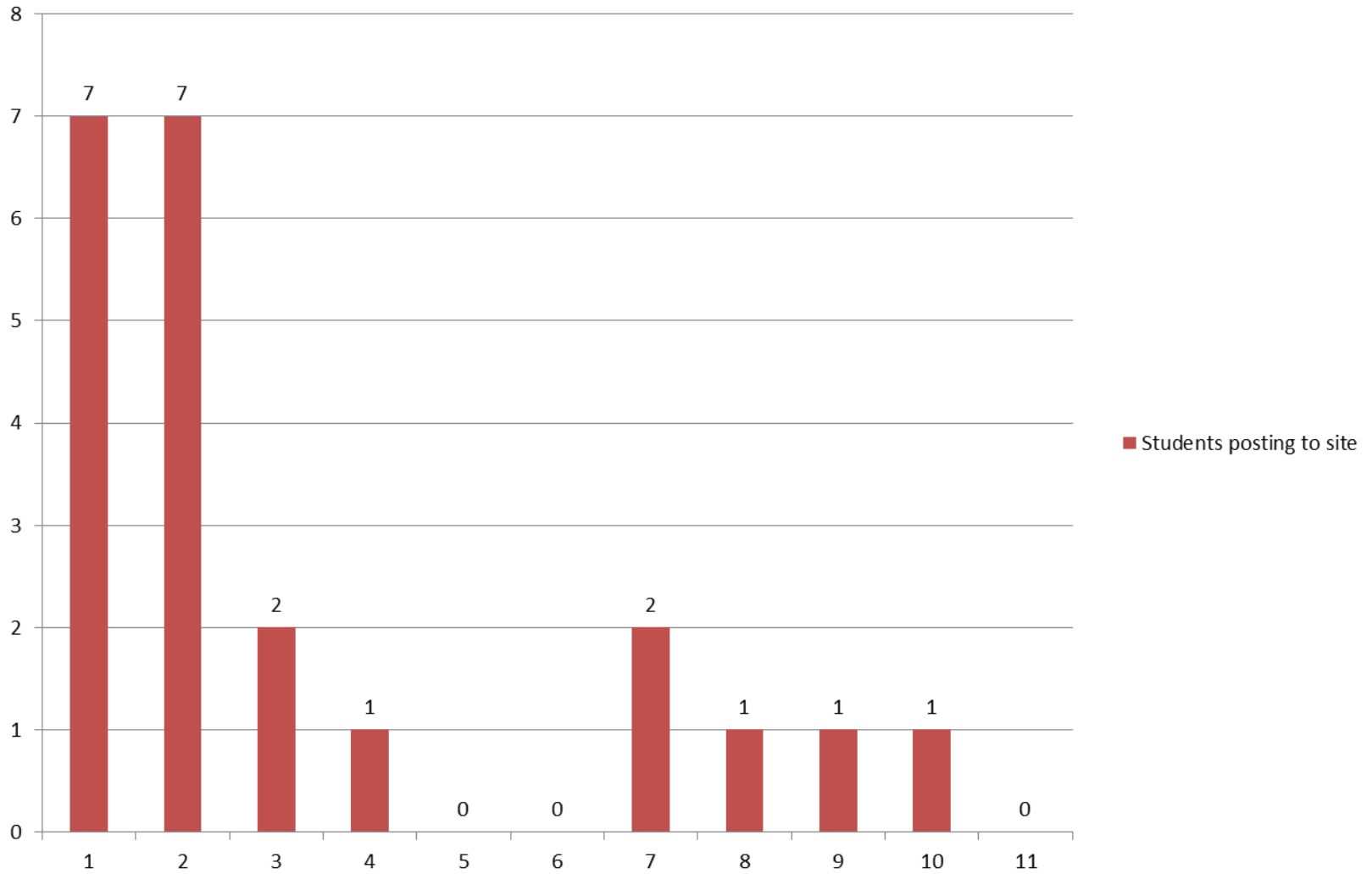
Iteration 1

Total site views (Students) weeks 1 to 11



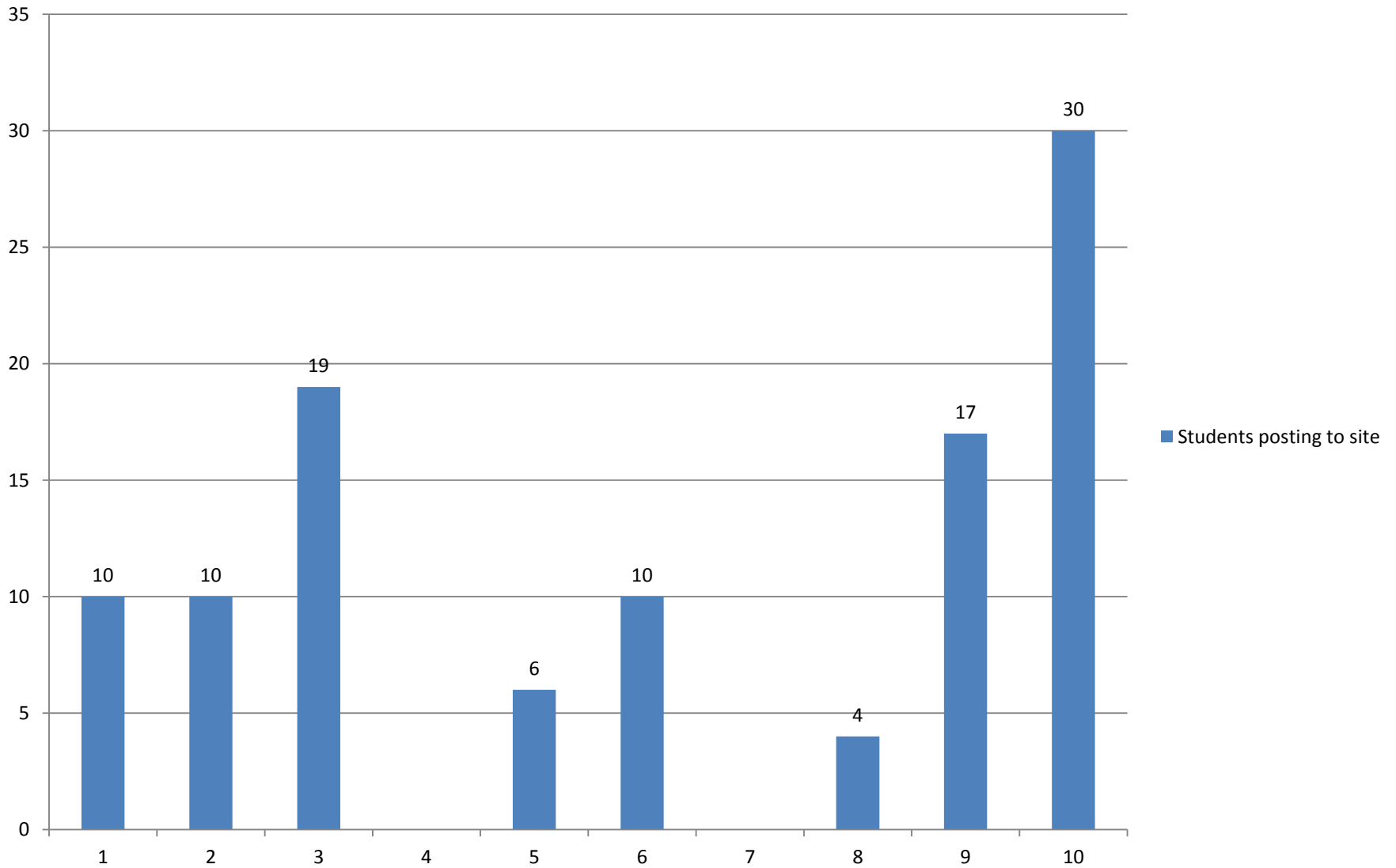
Iteration 2

Students posting to site

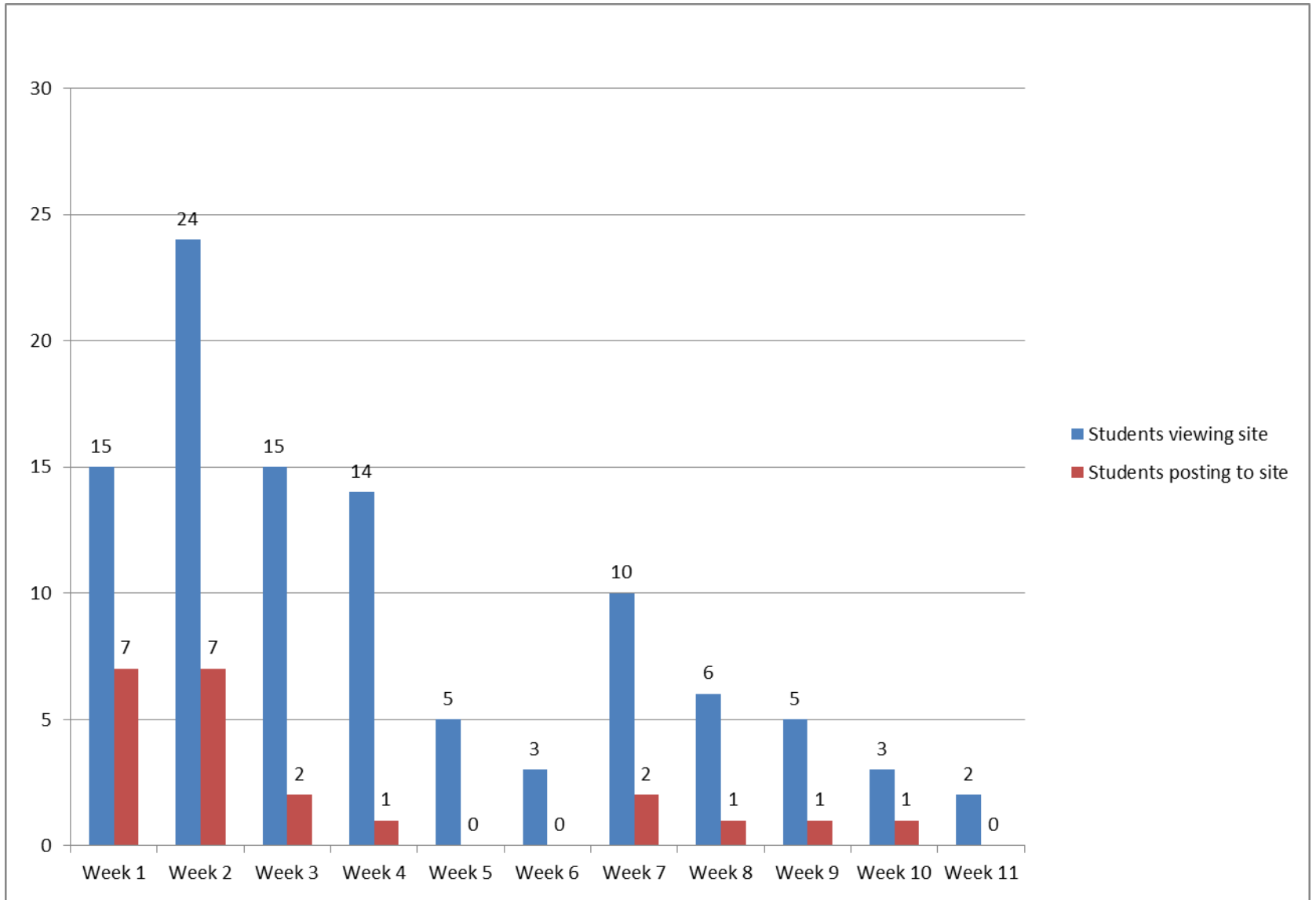


Iteration 1

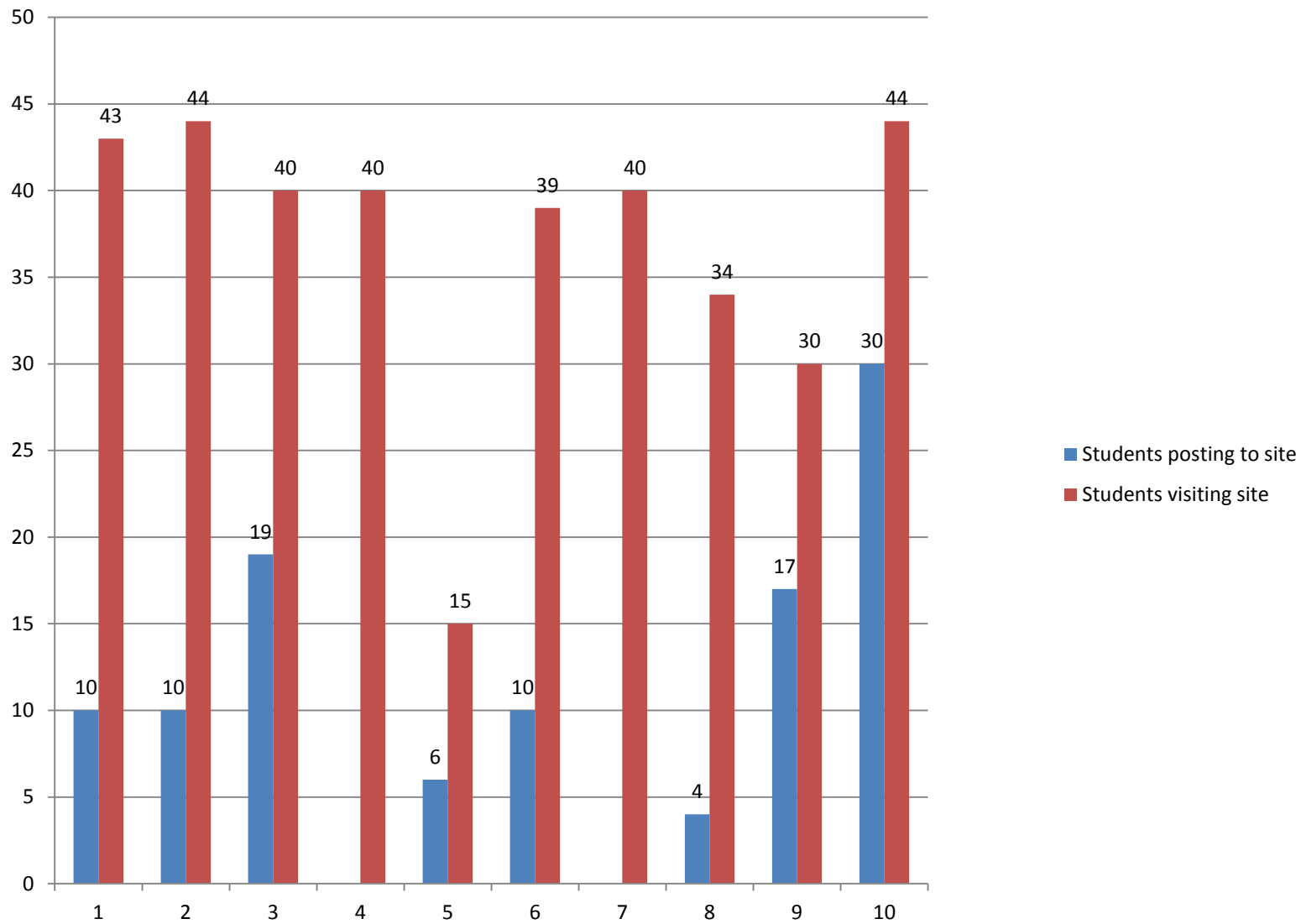
Students posting to site



Iteration 2



Iteration 1



Iteration 2

Visits to the site

Mean	16.5
Median	3.5
Mode	0

Iteration 1 201314

Visits to the site

Mean	163.0
Median	150
Mode	112

Iteration 2 201314

Developing thinking

- PGRs give feedback to students and encourage reflection
- Student posts are developed through lecturer and PGR input
- Evidence of greater engagement with historical artefacts
- Evidence of deeper criticality

Thanks for listening

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