Connected Teaching and Learning – Using online delivery and social media for more engaged and effective learning at Queen's University

Opportunity

In a 2010 presentation, Sidneyeve Matrix, Queen's National Scholar and Assistant Professor at Queen's University in Kingston, explored how social and mobile technologies could be applied in post-secondary education to engage students and improve learning outcomes. She outlined the challenge as designing new learning environments to support established pedagogical goals. Among the learning outcomes she suggests are:

- Encourage participation through user-generated content;
- Increase engagement and interactivity with the content and peers;
- Develop digital literacy;
- Increase perceived relevance of content;
- Support peer-to-peer collaboration;
- Encourage self-directed learning; and
- Inspire students to spend more time with the courses.

In the courses that Dr. Matrix teaches in the Department of Media and Film, she develops and applies a plethora of technological tools and resources, offering students options and flexibility in learning opportunities.

Innovation

In May and June 2012, Dr. Matrix is offering Film260: Digital Media Theory and Trends as an online course through Continuing and Distance Studies with enrolment limited to 300 students. As the course has no pre-requisites, it is open to the public and students at other institutions. The two main course objectives are to introduce key concepts in digital media theory and improve students' ability to think critically, write clearly, engage and communicate professionally online, and design creative digital media texts.

The design of the course is fully online, using the FILM260.com blog site, supported by the learning management system, Moodle, for online testing and access to the gradebook. The online elements include:

1. A weekly 90 minute webinar, with a slide show by the professor.
2. Students participate through opinion polls, a webinar chat, and by completing a short exit survey.
3. For those who miss the class, the webinars are posted for later viewing, accompanied by a quiz.
4. Weekly required readings (in lieu of a textbook) are posted on the blog.
5. Blog posts and threaded blog discussions by course participants.
6. A Facebook page with relevant information from the web. These resources can be crowd sourced in that students can contribute links and information as well. In previous classes, looking at what the students choose to post provided Dr. Matrix with an insight into how they are viewing the course. Students use YouTube and news sites as the major sources for their video postings. Participation in the Facebook page is optional.
7. A Twitter feed linked to the course for short announcements and points. Becoming a follower on Twitter is also optional and no important information is conveyed by Twitter alone.
8. Assignments include development of a personal profile, an infographic (a visual presentation of data), blog posts and participation, webinar participation (live or through quizzes with recorded lectures), self and course assessment, and online tests.

9. Online office hours are available and, using coveritlive.com software, transcripts of the live chats are saved so that other students can consult them for answers to questions.
10. Students can sign up for a text messaging service, through Remind101.com, in which reminder messages about classes, assignments, and other announcements are sent to phones.

In some courses offered by Dr. Matrix, the online resources, including the webinars, are available as a mobile app, as an additional point of access. To address what was seen as class information overload, Dr. Matrix designed ClassCaddy, a mobile learning organizer app that brings together the lecture videos, links, tweets, podcasts, slides, and various other digital learning objects in one place for greater ease of use. The app also allows social connections for information sharing

When a course, such as FILM 240X, is offered in a live classroom as well as online simultaneously, a videographer records the lecture for future online viewing. The lecture is also edited by the Media and Film students and the highlights are available online, along with the outlines for the lectures/webinars, lecture slides, and the podcasts. Film240X is offered synchronously to 700 on-campus students and 400 online students.

Netiquette or network etiquette is critical in online learning environments and so *Community Guidelines* have been developed to address issues of online behaviour and communication, as well as copyright, plagiarism, and the right of Queen's to remove objectionable material from the branded course sites. The document is available at http://film315s.com/resources/community-guidelines

Outcomes and Benefits

Using the WebEx web conferencing system allows for an exit survey at the end of each online class to ask students about content and to solicit further questions. These assessments, in addition to the ones at the end of each course, have provided considerable input concerning effective design for online learning and its benefits, as well as ongoing challenges.

The weekly synchronous webinars have consistently high participation – with 75 to 80% of students in attendance. A small portion of the grade is assigned for active participation, but at 5%, this is not enough to require attendance.

The archived webinars are used quite extensively for review by many students, both in-class and online, especially by English-as a-second-language students and athletes who are often away from campus.

Students reported that they would not have participated in the threaded discussion online if there had not been a portion of the grade attached to their contributions. However, once they began to post, they often exceeded the number of required posts as they found it an interesting and enlightening process.

About 30% of students sign up for the text reminder service and they report finding it helpful. It is important to limit the number of messages. The professor can enter all the messages at the beginning of the semester and the system distributes them at the appropriative times.

Course materials are available on the course blogs and on iTunesU, with the audio enhanced slides as the students have said that they find this approach agile, flexible, and succinct. The slides on iTunesU are enhanced for that format with all course business slides removed and the content optimized for online learning.

Challenges and Enhancements

Dr. Matrix describes the greatest challenge with social media and online classes as "becoming a 24-hour professor" with students expecting instant access and response.

Integrating a complex set of technological tools in delivering a class results in "digital pain" as the professor talks, brings up video, monitors live chat, and performs a number of other tasks simultaneously, often without support. Responding to technical problems

experienced by individual students is not possible in real time during the classes. Dr. Matrix does provide extensive one-on-one technical support before and after classes.

Students prefer to watch the full lecture to review and prepare for the exam rather than the lecture highlights also offered online, as they are nor confident that the highlights cover all material on the exams. Editing the lectures to produce the highlights video does provide valuable experience for the Media and Film students.

Potential

Everything in Dr. Matrix's course is available online, except for the testing and personal information contained in the learning management system. Her web site, http://sidneyevematrix.com, links to her courses, blogs, presentations, publications, podcasts, and many other resources concerning digital media and learning. Her approach is to produce with various communities in mind so that there is one research and preparatory phase, but the content is able to be used in multiple formats.

Dr. Matrix, sees the potential as endless as "we have barely even started" in exploring the possibilities for digital learning.

For Further Information

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