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Collaborative Presentations in the Time of COVID-19

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In support of the undergraduate certificate in Clinical Healthcare Management, the Health and Medical Care Delivery Systems course was offered online in the fall of 2020. The course was designed to be condensed/accelerated and targeted towards working professionals, UK (University of Kentucky) healthcare employees in particular, who wanted to earn the certificate to advance their careers. The course is also part of two undergraduate majors (Clinical Leadership and Management, and Human Health Sciences) and is typically taken during students' first year in the program. The undergraduates are mostly traditional college-aged students and usually take the course in person. It is one of the first courses in the major program, and therefore often their first encounter with a professor and other students in their degree program. It was a great place to begin setting expectations for the programs and to build relationships with peers. Unless, of course, there is a pandemic.

What was intended as a condensed/accelerated course for working professionals was suddenly filled with first-time college students trying to navigate not only the usual challenges of freshman year, but also beginning college while living at home in another state and juggling courses in multiple modalities, all while worrying for their own health and safety and that of their loved ones. These

circumstances presented me with the additional challenge of teaching two quite different demographic groups with various levels of experience with both the healthcare system and with relevant technology. To meet these challenges, I sought to develop an assignment reliant on simple, accessible technologies that allowed students to interact with their peers in an asynchronous manner.

My participation in CELT's Teaching Innovation Institute (TII) coincided with my managing of these diverse learning environments. The assignment I chose to rework during TII was titled the "Both Sides Presentation" which required students to prepare a presentation defending a particular angle of a relevant healthcare topic. Approximately six students were assigned to a topic: three to the "in-favor" side and three to the "against" side. Their classmates watched both arguments, and then took a position on the topic and wrote a discussion post explaining what they learned from their peers.

In terms of content, the goal of the project was to give students a chance to take a deep dive into several timely topics from an otherwise general survey course. In terms of skills, students had the opportunity to practice working collaboratively, conducting academic research, evaluating the quality of popular media sources, communicating information about topics from their home discipline, and honing their public speaking skills. Because the course was asynchronous, this was also the primary way students could interact with peers.

Logistically, presentations were spread across three days situated several weeks apart. The topics for the first presentation day related to the content in the first third of the course, and then the second day tied to the second third of the course, and so on. Each group therefore served as presenters once and audience members twice.

Without any face to face or synchronous meetings, one of my instructional priorities was to provide students with plenty of support to stay on track with the project. I assigned students to their groups and topics early in the course, and then asked each group to complete a group contract indicating which member would be responsible for which portion of the project. I also required students to establish a timeline for meeting milestones and connecting with other group members. After that, students submitted a list of sources two weeks prior to the presentation. These requirements ensured that students worked ahead of the deadline and allowed me to identify any issues with group dynamics early on. This process also provided me with the opportunity to assess the quality of the sources students used to develop their presentations before they shared with the rest of the class.

Given the fully online and asynchronous nature of the class, the project was entirely reliant on the use of technology. While it was tempting at first to try shiny, innovative software and tech tools to facilitate these projects, I decided it was more important that I choose something I was comfortable with. I wanted the assignment and instructions to be fool-proof and the tools for completing it to be familiar and user friendly. This decision to keep the requirements simple benefited the students as well. Because so many courses had been forced entirely or partly online for the semester, I felt that asking the students to learn something new just for this course and risking that each student had five instructors with the same expectation was an undue burden on the students.

I asked students to use the Google suite, assuming it was fairly ubiquitous and that at least some students would have prior experience with it. Collaborative documents were expected to be completed in Google Docs. I provided students with a Google Doc template for their group contract, and groups were expected to submit their reference list as a Google Doc as well. The use of Google Docs provided a bonus of allowing me to view a record of which student made changes to each document and assure that all digital "signatures" on the contract came from the actual student.

Students also used other technologies to complete the assignment, such as Zoom and Canvas. I asked students to record their presentations using Zoom, and the course itself was conducted on Canvas. This was consistent with all other UK courses, so there was some expectation that the students would already be familiar with the learning management system or would at least have access to good support. Students posted their completed presentations to Canvas, and after previewing them I posted them on the discussion boards.

Ultimately, the students' projects were quite successful. The assignment would benefit from a few tweaks in the future. For example, I will remind students to make sure the windows that display their faces do not cover the content of their slides. I will also encourage students to do a run-through before the recording to check the timing of their presentation as some went overtime. I also may adjust the assignment length to give them more time as well. Lastly, as the instructor I would like to find a format that would allow me to view the presentations at a faster pace for faster grading.

In terms of a philosophy of technology use in the classroom, the "keep it simple" strategy seems to have served me well and been a relief to both students and I during these unprecedented times. The technology described was sufficient to achieve all pedagogical goals, and few technical issues were reported. That is really the best one could hope for under the circumstances.

Media

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