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Transforming Instructional Strategies for Student engagement in a HyFlex Information Literacy Course

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TRANSFORMING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN A HYFLEX INFORMATION LITERACY COURSE

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INTRODUCTION

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Purdue University and schools across the country transitioned classes to a virtual environment in the Spring 2020 semester. After extensive planning, the decision was made to hold classes on campus for the Fall 2020 semester with options for students who were either unable to or preferred not to return to campus. Librarians in the Parrish Library of Management and Economics teach a two-credit hour course for high-achieving freshmen in the Krannert School of Management and Economics, *Management 110: Introduction to Management and Information Strategies* (MGMT 110). For the Fall 2020 semester, the instructors were challenged to redesign the course for HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible) delivery, with classes held once a week on campus and additional asynchronous content provided online. To add to this challenge, a cohort of students were unable to be on campus, primarily due to international travel restrictions; therefore, the course had to also be available in an entirely virtual format. Further, Purdue had recently migrated from the Blackboard learning management system (LMS) to the BrightSpace LMS during Summer 2020, making this the first semester that both students and instructors used this new platform.

COURSE BACKGROUND

MGMT 110 teaches information literacy skills in an introductory business context. The course is required for high-achieving students in the Larsen Leaders Academy, a learning community for students with a minimum GPA of 3.7 and a 28 ACT or 1320 SAT score who are directly admitted to the Krannert School of Management and Economics (Purdue University, 2021). Previous iterations of MGMT 110 relied on active and experiential learning to allow students to practice making evidence-based decisions (Stonebraker & Howard, 2018). This exclusively in-person version of the course met twice a week: once as a large lecture and again in smaller lab sections that met in an active-learning computer lab. During the smaller lab sections, the students would work together in teams to solve case challenges related to the different areas of management that required them to gather information and use that information to make evidence-based decisions. The course content that focused on teaching students how to find information was presented in a flipped classroom, where class time was spent applying lecture concepts to real-world business challenges.

The course culminated in a case competition sponsored by Eli Lilly and Company. The students used the information-gathering and decision-making skills they had learned throughout the semester to complete a case wherein they compared two pharmaceutical assets and advised Eli Lilly judges about which they should acquire. Representatives from Eli Lilly visited the class to discuss the company and the case. The student teams were given a week to research the case, determine a solution, and assemble a presentation. Eli Lilly sends approximately ten judges to campus, while faculty from the Krannert School of Business and Economics and the Libraries and School of Information Studies also participated as judges. All teams presented to rooms of three judges in the morning, and finalists are invited back to present to a panel of Eli Lilly judges in the afternoon. The finalists are also invited to have lunch with the judges, giving them an excellent opportunity to network and build relationships that could lead to future internships. The Larsen Leaders Academy Executive Board is composed of students who have taken the course in previous years and who arranged the logistics for the competition, such as room reservations and lunch for the judges and finalists. The students were graded on their participation and a written reflection, and the event served as a low-stakes introduction to case competitions.

TRANSFORMATION TO HYFLEX

IMPACT X+

During the summer of 2020, instructors restructured their MGMT 110 course using an online asynchronous faculty development program called IMPACT X+ (*Instruction Matters: Purdue Academic Transformation*), which was offered through Purdue University. The goal of the program was to guide instructors through fundamental principles of course design and encourage the implementation of resilient, engaging, equitable, and student-centered HyFlex courses (Maybee et. al., 2013).

With the transition to online instruction in Spring 2020, many students felt disconnected and struggled with motivation. To address this growing challenge, IMPACT X+ modules were framed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a

motivational framework that supports autonomous externalized and internalized motivation by creating positive learning environments that fulfill a student's basic psychological needs. SDT presents motivation on a spectrum that begins with "amotivation" (i.e., a lack of intentionality) and moves towards "controlled extrinsic motivation," such as seeking praise and avoiding shame. Next are forms of "autonomous extrinsic motivation," including the understanding or feeling that course tasks can be used to promote personal goals. Finally, "intrinsically motivated" students find satisfaction or enjoyment from engagement in their courses.

While pure intrinsic motivation can be difficult to achieve with all students, instructors are encouraged to design their courses and activities to meet student needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers specifically to providing choices for how students approach their coursework. Competence is the need to feel capable of successfully completing desired tasks or outcomes. Finally, relatedness is the desire to build meaningful relationships and connections with others.

Using SDT and other resources provided by the IMPACT X+ program, MGMT 110 learning outcomes and objectives, activities, and a course map were modified to support the new HyFlex format:

Learning outcomes: In prior iterations of the course, team management and quick evidence-based decision-making were significant learning objectives, especially when completing in-class group case challenges. Due to the HyFlex environment and COVID-related precautions, group work was moved to a virtual setting. To reflect this change, learning objectives were adapted to include effective virtual team management, which is also a relevant skill set in modern business environments. Because MGMT 110 is an introductory business course, instructors aimed to provide a structure for students to autonomously choose and explore professional development opportunities and career interests. As a result, learning objectives and assessment methods were added to reinforce this goal.

Reworking activities: Multiple strategies and considerations were used when adapting activities and assignments. First, instructors moved all course deliverables online within the BrightSpace LMS, such as quizzes, discussion boards, surveys, and assignment pages. For more complex assignments, like the final case competition, additional tools and platforms were used. Next, assignments were rewritten using the IMPACT X+ assignment template, which outlined assignment goals, and stated how these goals connected to student competence and relatedness.

Course mapping: Using a template from the IMPACT X+ program, instructors applied MGMT 110's instructional design to a course map that connected learning objectives to their methods of assessment (e.g., activities and assignments). Additionally, the template prompted instructors to consider SDT in their approaches, such as opportunities for choice in topics and team roles and offering virtual spaces for students to relate and connect with peers through informal discussion threads and chat groups.

Online Cohort

The instructors also redesigned the course to accommodate the cohort of distance learners, many of whom were based internationally, as well as students who were unable to attend class due to either a positive COVID-19 test or possible exposure. Each in-person lecture was recorded using software that captured audio from the classroom microphones and content projected from the classroom computer, and the recording was saved on the University's instance of Kaltura MediaSpace. Once the video was available, the instructors ran a program that generated captions, and then manually edited the captions for accuracy. The lectures were then made available in the course LMS for all students.

Students were put into groups at the beginning of the semester and they continued to work with the same group on all of their projects. The instructors decided early on that they would not isolate the online cohort into their own groups, but rather, would mix them in with the students on campus, giving them a chance to get to know additional students. This also provided opportunities for groups to practice managing virtual teams with members working across international time zones.

Case Competition

To transition the case competition to a HyFlex format, instructors incorporated virtual tools to manage the different teams online. Similar to previous years, the Larsen Leaders Academy Executive Board arranged the logistics, but they now used Purdue's Pitch platform, a case management tool that assists with coordinating participants, judges, and instructors, in addition to managing case information, student presentation videos, and judge feedback. A representative from Eli Lilly also visited the course live via Zoom to introduce the case and answer questions. For the first round, students prepared pre-recorded video presentations that were uploaded to Pitch and viewed by multiple judges from Eli Lilly, who provided feedback for each presentation. Following the first round, Eli Lilly Judges offered the opportunity for students to attend a live question and feedback session. For the final round, six finalists were selected to present live on Zoom, and three winning teams were chosen and awarded certificates.

Learning Communities

College learning communities are considered to be beneficial to the educational experience. Significant benefits of offering learning community experiences include enhanced student engagement as well as retention (Kern & Kingsbury, 2019; Piercey & Cullen, 2017). By encouraging active learning and emphasizing collaboration, participation in learning communities leads students to engage with one another more frequently, while contributing symbiotically to their learning community environment.

Although learning communities typically interact through in-person courses, gatherings, and events, the global COVID-19 pandemic complicated the in-person experience. To address this challenge, instructors of MGMT 110 provided both formal and informal virtual spaces and activities for students to build relationships with each other, as well as opportunities to connect with their instructors, guest speakers, and alumni. This included informal chatting in Microsoft Teams, discussion spaces in BrightSpace, virtual “coffee talks” with instructors, Q&As with guest speakers over Zoom, and an “interview an alumnus” assignment.

Participation

Because the cohort of online and on-campus students was unable to attend in-person sessions, much consideration went into devising equitable means of participation. Most participation took place online through weekly posts within BrightSpace discussion boards. However, some in-person sessions also included synchronous classroom activities to develop an active learning environment. Under these circumstances, alternatives to class activities were provided online.

OUTCOMES

Failures

Throughout the MGMT 110 course, the instructors were met with various challenges and successes, which would inform future approaches to the course in its HyFlex format. Among the key challenges in the course were obstacles regarding the use of Microsoft Teams, the physical layout of the classroom, and the struggle to build relationships with students. To allow students in the Larsen Leaders Academy an opportunity to engage with one another informally, Microsoft Teams was provided as an alternative virtual space for questions and dialogue. Unfortunately, student use of Microsoft Teams was low and instead other methods of communication were preferred. The instructors also found out later that the students were being asked to use multiple platforms for their other courses and were overwhelmed. Additionally, the physical classroom space posed its own array of challenges. Students attended class socially distanced in a large room, seated at tables that did not directly face the front of the room. Given the table positioning, the location of students seated at the front and back of the room, and the required use of masks that hid facial expressions and muffled voices, students were less inclined to participate in person, which also made it difficult for instructors to get to know their students. To offer a more organic approach to interacting with students, the instructors held virtual “coffee talks” via Zoom. These Zoom sessions were optional and not well attended, though the students who did show up seemed to enjoy the chance to connect with their professors. Group and interpersonal activities in the classroom were also limited and had to be reimaged due to safety precautions, limiting chances for interaction with students in the in-person setting. Though virtual opportunities to build relationships were extended in the form of discussion boards, virtual coffee talks, and office hours, none were quite as beneficial as in-person opportunities would have been.

Successes

Despite the challenges posed during the MGMT 110 course, there were several notable successes, including the transition to a team-teaching approach, the various new opportunities for student-engagement in the HyFlex format, and the incorporation of guest speakers to supplement course materials. Rather than the course being delivered by a sole instructor, the course benefited from the collaboration of three instructors with various business perspectives, backgrounds, and teaching styles. In addition, activities for engagement encompassed a wide variety of learning modalities, including case challenges, group work, in-class work, and the opportunity to interview an alumnus. In particular, the case challenges had students approach problem solving from a managerial mindset using realistic business scenarios, and allowing students to work effectively in groups inside and outside the classroom. In-class work often leaned towards formative assessment, giving students time to interact with the content individually, as well as within socially distant pairs or groups. The “interview an alumnus” assignment gave students the chance to engage with Purdue alumni beyond the confines of the classroom, allowing them to network remotely with an individual who was actively working in a certain facet of business. The incorporation of a broad range of guest speakers also served to enhance the course by offering students the opportunity to engage with individuals who represented an area of business covered in class. Among the various internal and external organization guest speakers were employees from Eli Lilly, who judged the case competition and shared their work experiences with students, as well as internal faculty and staff highlighting opportunities for international study and the importance of international

business. Moreover, the MGMT 110 course concluded with a Zoom presentation from a high-profile alumnus who highlighted career experiences and helped guide students through a self-SWOT analysis. The Zoom platform allowed online students to watch his presentation live and ask questions via chat. The use of in-person and remote speakers proved to be a successful way to reinforce course content and will be retained as an effective teaching strategy.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the MGMT 110 course and its learning community setting offer a rich overview of information strategies and business career opportunities for students aspiring to take on managerial roles. Transformed from an in-person experience to the HyFlex classroom model, the course reimagined assignments and introduced new activities to enhance the learning experience in a combination of remote and in-person methods. Though many challenges were encountered during the progression of the course, successes were also evident. An examination of course challenges and successes will help the instructors to revisit course content and teaching strategies as reflective practitioners aiming to provide a meaningful and engaging learning experience for their students during the pandemic and beyond.

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