

Improving Student Engagement in Online Discussion Forums

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Introduction

According to the Admissionsly.com (2022) survey of online programs, nearly 75% of colleges have moved to some level of online programming and 42% of undergraduate students take online courses. At the same time, new online students are worried about the potential lack of quality in online programs and the perceived lack of interaction and community among classmates and with the professor. Beyond the desire to more strongly engage our students, we want to make sure students are staying engaged in the course topics. This will build off of the earlier work of Fu, van Alst & Chan (2016) and O'Riordan, Millan, and Shultz (2016) to determine the best methods of analyzing course artifacts to analyze the level of engagement of the discussion methods implemented in our asynchronous online courses.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does student choice in asynchronous online discussion boards generate more student engagement? (Student engagement)

RQ2: Does the addition of a video-based introduction requirement increase student engagement? (Student engagement)

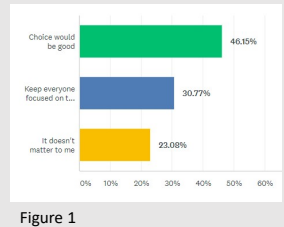
Methodology

This study conducted an ex-post facto analysis of the student responses to weekly discussion prompts in multiple sections of asynchronous online graduate courses. Some of the discussion prompts provided students choice in what to discuss and others did not provide for student choice. The initial review was a brief analysis of the number of posts per student and the overall word counts of those responses. The fact of whether or not students were asked to participate in a video introduction to their classmates was considered as a potential factor in developing student engagement (RQ1 & RQ2). In addressing encouragement of higher order thinking skills (RQ2), a qualitative analysis student responses to the weekly discussion prompts was conducted by coding responses to their alignment with Bloom's Taxonomy.

Results

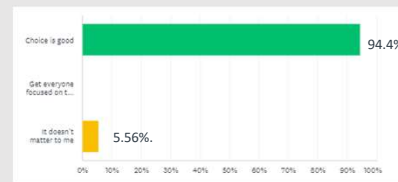
Before Choice

Queried students in the Graduate Education Online (GEO) program:
 Would you prefer to have a couple of questions to select from or continue to have everyone in the class respond to the same questions?
 Responses in Figure 1

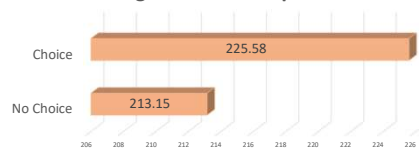


After Choice

After choice was implemented, students were again asked: Do you prefer to have a couple of questions to select from in the discussion threads or would you prefer less choice in the discussion prompts? Responses in Figure 2



Average Word Count per Post

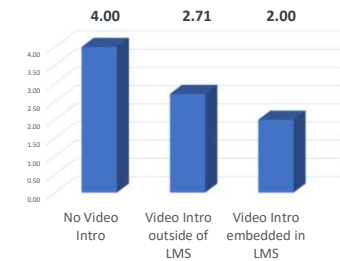


Introductory Videos

Student Video Exemplar

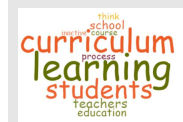


Average Points Missed in Discussion Posts



Findings (So Far)

- Introductory student videos in asynchronous online courses improves engagement as measured by discussion participation.
- Students appear to feel more connected in courses with introductory videos.
- Instructors feel students are more engaged in courses with introductory videos and with choice.
- Students appear to be more engaged when allowed choice in discussion threads.
- Students appreciate choice in discussion threads.



Word cloud based upon discussion thread with choice in EDAD 711

Yet undetermined:

- Does choice raise the level of discussions as measured by Bloom's Taxonomy?

Student Voices



Instructor Voice



References

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What do you think?
 (Provide Feedback)

