Mar 9th, 3:00 PM - 3:45 PM

Using Virtual Conferences to Integrate Online Content with the Classroom

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Using Virtual Conferences to Integrate Online Content with the Classroom

Michael Amlung & Denise P. Domizi
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The University of Georgia

Session Overview

- Using online media as an effective learning tool
- Overview of TED.com
- Virtual conference assignment
- Adapting this exercise for your courses
Imagine...

“My Stroke of Insight” by Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor

Source: www.ted.com

Online Media as a Learning Tool

- Why use online media?
- Especially important in disciplines where ideas are dynamically changing
Online Media as a Learning Tool

- Tailors teaching to our students’ virtual worlds
  - “Digital natives”

Design of innovative assignments & activities is a key priority
- “Simply presenting information in a stimulating and interesting digital video format will not automatically lead to in depth learning” (Krappinen, 2005, p. 235)
How do you use online media in your courses?
- Or, how could you use it in your courses?
- Brainstorm 3-4 examples

Potential drawbacks of using online media
- Time intensive
- Accuracy / credibility
- Inappropriate content
- Advertisements
- Technology problems
- Copyright / legal issues

So what can we do?
TED.com

- TED talks can be streamed online, downloaded as mp4 video, or viewed on mobile devices

- Creative Commons (CC) license

- Drawbacks revisited
  - Time intensive
  - Accuracy / credibility
  - Inappropriate content
  - Copyright / legal issues
  - Advertisements
  - ?? Technology problems
### Virtual Conference Assignment

- Undergraduate cognitive psychology course
  - Two sections; 61 students total; sophomores-seniors
- Semester-long assignment (20% of course grade)
- Three components
  1. Attending a “virtual conference”
  2. Lecture commentaries
  3. Reflection paper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual conference lectures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“How the Mind Works”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each student chose 6 TED.com talks from list of 11 talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average talk duration: 18 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Virtual Conference Assignment

- Lecture commentaries (6x; 1-2 paragraphs each)
  - Reason for choosing lecture
  - Extract main ideas
  - Identify particularly interesting or confusing topics
  - General impression of speaker

- See handout for sample student commentary

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Virtual Conference Assignment

- Reflection paper (1-2 pages)
  - Explore common themes across the talks
  - Reflect on what they learned
  - Provide written feedback on activity
Reflection Paper Excerpts

“When looking at all of these lectures it is clear that they all share a common theme that involved the way thought processing, communication, and cognition can be looked at in the mind… whether it is regular, irregular, in humans, apes, or artificial intelligence technology.”

“While the series title How the Mind Works says a great deal about the theme of these lectures, How Differently Each of Our Minds Work may have been a more appropriate title.”

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Let’s Pause for a Moment...

- Questions or comments?
### Student Evaluation

**Anonymous student survey* (n=47 volunteers; 77%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The virtual conference:</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Neutral (3)</th>
<th>Agree (4)</th>
<th>Strongly Agree (5)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped me learn more about cognitive psychology.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>4.4 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided a clearer understanding of cognitive psychology research.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>4.3 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulated my critical thinking about connections between course topics.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4.4 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was interesting and worthwhile.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>4.7 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was fun and enjoyable.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4.5 (0.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be included in future semesters of this course.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>4.7 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Approved by UGA Institutional Review Board

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### Student Evaluation

**Anonymous student survey* (n=47 volunteers; 77%)**

**Open-ended questions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Favorite aspect of this assignment:</th>
<th>Least favorite aspect of this assignment:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching the lectures (36%)</td>
<td>Writing commentaries / paper (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning about exciting research (23%)</td>
<td>Too few lecture options (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide range of topics (15%)</td>
<td>Length of lectures was too long (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to choose own topics (13%)</td>
<td>No opportunity to discuss lectures (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real-world applications (6%)</td>
<td>No response provided (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to complete on own time (6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Approved by UGA Institutional Review Board
Student Feedback

“It was a good way to break up the normal routine of a college course. I wish that more classes would have assignments like this one.”

“It adds a new flavor to learning.”

“I am glad that we were given a list of lectures to choose from because my peers and I come from different backgrounds and will therefore be interested in different topics.”

Future Directions

- Incorporate opportunities for student discussion
- Increase number of TED talk options
- Implement virtual conference assignment across range of disciplines and class sizes
Adapting Virtual Conference

- How can this exercise be adapted to meet the unique demands of your discipline?

Final Thoughts

- Online media provides an innovative supplement to traditional teaching and learning techniques

- Student experience with virtual conference was generally positive, but did suggest some areas for improvement

- Sample materials available upon request
  - Assignment descriptions, grading rubrics, sample commentaries & reflection papers
  - PPT slides also available
  - Email: mamlung@uga.edu
Acknowledgements

Funding Sources:
- Faculty Development Grant from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP)

Other Support:
- Interdisciplinary Certificate in University Teaching Program, UGA Graduate School
- UGA Psychology Educator Development Association
- UGA Center for Teaching and Learning