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NATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY JOURNAL

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Online Human Services, Social Work, and Social Science Rural Community College Students' Self-Reported Perceptions of Benefits and Challenges of Taking Online Social Science Courses in Their Program Curriculum: A Five-Year Case Study.

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Introduction

This case study examines five years of data (fall 2012 through fall 2017) collected from 62 online rural central Nebraska college students with human services, social work, and social science majors. It examines their self-reported perceptions of benefits gained from taking online social sciences. Respondents reacted to 13 demographic and two open-ended questions. The two open-ended questions are related to the benefits of taking social science courses online and benefits from them in their majors and future careers. The courses used in this research are Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Gerontology. There is virtually no existing research on this topic.

In general, the students' responses focus on learning about differences in people and cultures, responding to different social situations, the problem of stereotyping, media interpretation, understanding groups, understanding social backgrounds, and tolerance.

Purpose of the Study

The first purpose of this study is to examine if rural community college students view taking online social science classes as a benefit to their majors and future careers. We wanted to learn what self-reported skills students reported learning in their online classes that they thought could translate into their future careers. The second purpose of this study is to generate discussion on this topic in the community college literature. A review of the literature follows.

Review of Literature

The fields of Human Services/Social Work/Social Sciences are popular majors for many community college students nationwide. The primary function of the human services profession is to assist individuals and communities in functioning as effectively

as possible (<http://www.nationalhumanservices.org/what-is-human-services>). A person with a strong desire to help others, strong communication skills, and the ability to manage time would make a strong candidate for this field.

There are many aspects of this major that may lure a student into this field regardless of their age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic standing, or gender. Many of these traditional and nontraditional aged students majoring in Human Services are interested in helping others as their full-time profession. A few examples of jobs one may secure upon graduation with a Human Services degree include: Community Health Advocate, Substance Abuse Counselor, Life Skills Instructor, Gerontology Aide, Halfway House Counselor, Adult Day Care Worker, Child Advocate, and Crisis Intervention Counselor, to name a few (<https://online.grace.edu/news/human-services/what-is-human-services>) and (<http://www.nationalhumanservices.org/what-is-human-services>).

Estimates from 2013 suggest approximately 30% of U.S. higher education students are enrolled in at least one online course (Gregory & Lampley, 2016). Many community college students are nontraditional students with adult responsibilities such as work and family commitments, which may make attending lecture classes impossible. (Gregory & Lampley, 2016; Xu & Jaggars, 2014; Austin, 2010; Leist & Travis, 2010). Thus, this study seeks to answer how Human Services/Social Work/and Social Science majors view taking online social science courses as beneficial to both their major and future careers. These three aforementioned majors are in the “helping professions,” and this study seeks to discover what skills students believe they will obtain.

According to several different sources in the popular press, the fields of human services and social work are two of the fastest-growing fields of study at many community colleges and four-year colleges. A recent article from the Grace College, Human Services website, states that the field of Human Services will grow 22% by 2022 (<https://online.grace.edu/news/human-services/what-is-human-services>). Another source states that the field of human services is expected to grow even faster than the national average for all occupations, which is 7% (<https://www.allpsychologyschools.com/human-services/what-is-human-services/>). The Central Community College website used for this study suggests: “The job outlook is excellent. The need for human services workers is expected to grow by nearly 28% between 2010 and 2020” (<https://www.cccneb.edu/humanservices/>). According to Moore et al. (2015), the predicted job growth for social workers between 2010 and 2020 is 25%. Last, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, social science occupations are projected to grow 10% from 2016 to 2026, which is faster than the average for all occupations (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science-science/home.htm>). In sum, all three fields represented in this study are experiencing upward growth and promise, which will benefit both our current and future citizens in need of help. Thus, human services, social work, and social science majors have a very promising job outlook.

Further, the literature defines what human services, social work, and the social sciences are as major fields of study and what type of employment graduates in these fields typically secure. The differences between Social Work and Human Services are discussed by Grace College’s website. It states that both human services and social work are careers based on serving the needs of people, but in different ways. Human Services professionals focus on larger populations and seek to serve the needs of a

group of people, not just individuals. Social Workers, on the other hand, focus primarily on helping one individual with a problem (<https://online.grace.edu/news/human-services/what-is-human-services/>).

According to Xu and Jaggars (2014) distance education, through online education, has experienced strong growth, especially at community colleges nationwide. This growth has been largely attractive to nontraditional students. According to Leist and Travis (2010) many rural community colleges have incorporated online courses into degree and certificate programs to enhance their reach of students over large geographical distances. They also believe there is an economic benefit for both the community college and their students. Moore et al. (2015) state the benefits of online social work programs in a variety of situations. First, it is valuable to rural students. Second, it is valuable to students who do not want to physically attend as a result of financial or career reasons. Third, it may help active-duty military personnel or their spouses to receive a high-quality education. Finally, it allows students to personalize their education by seeking out programs that have their own personal specialized curriculum.

Other reasons rural community college students may prefer to take online classes is due to the sheer convenience and flexibility online education offers. Further, many rural community college students are nontraditional students and have both work and family obligations, which may make attending a lecture class impossible (Gregory & Lampley, 2016). Austin (2010) also offers a couple of reasons online classes may appeal to rural community college students. He suggests that developing online courses that provide a global perspective and are multicultural can be especially important to rural community colleges and their students who may not have other chances to learn about or experience other cultures.

There isn't any existing literature available that directly addresses the two research questions of this study. Other studies focus on building online programs in rural or urban areas. Then, they report how beneficial online courses are for people living in rural or urban areas, but not for the purposes of their majors or future careers. That is what makes this case study unique. This case study focuses on what rural community college students' attitudes are toward the perceived benefits of taking online social science classes for both their majors and future careers.

Methods

This research follows the case study method and is exploratory in nature. It uses data collected from 62 rural community college students majoring in the fields of human services, social work, and the social sciences over a five-year period. The survey instrument is offered each semester to all online social science students in three different social science classes: Introduction to Sociology, Social Problems, and Gerontology. It is not a mandatory class requirement.

The study seeks to answer why human services, social work, and social science majors take online social science courses and ask them how the online courses will benefit them in both their majors and future careers. Since these three majors are in the "helping professions," we believe the data collected for this research between the fall semester of 2012 and the fall semester of 2017 will provide insight into what knowledge students feel they are getting from taking an online social science class.

Data collection for this research comes from three different community college campus sites, including a learning center (all three campus sites and the learning center were within one community college, which covers 25 counties in central Nebraska). At these locations, students were taking online social science and online human services courses. Two of the 62 online student respondents were from two different four-year colleges in the state of Nebraska. Also, two online student respondents were from the state of Iowa.

The research instrument is a 23-item survey that asks 13 demographic questions and ten open-ended questions. Two of the ten open-ended questions are used for this research. The instrument was only administered to online social science students at the 100 and 200 level.

This instrument asks the demographic questions: the highest level of education completed, the highest level of education both parents completed, a major area of study, gender, age, political affiliation, income, race, and mother and father's occupation. The two open-ended questions are addressed in the "Findings" section below.

Findings

This case study focuses on two open-ended research questions. First, "How is taking a social science course online going to benefit you in your major?" Second, "How is taking a social science course online going to benefit you in your career?"

There are 62 online student respondents in this five-year study. Respondents plan to go into a "helping" field upon their graduation. Three different majors were included in this study. They include Human Services majors (45), Social Science majors (13), and Social Work majors (4).

The next three sections of the paper summarize student comments.

How is taking a social science course online going to benefit you in your major?

The reason these **30 student** respondents' answers are selected is because they best represent the main themes of this open-ended question/section.

Student 1: "It helps me with job flexibility."

Student 2: "It helps me relate to more individuals."

Student 3: "It helps me achieve a certification in Human Services for the elderly."

Student 4: "It helps me know what is going on in the world."

Student 5: "It helps me have a feel for social science."

Student 6: "It helps me know how to interact with the elderly."

Student 7: "It helps me be able to work at an assisted living home."

Student 8: "It helps me to become familiar with communication over the computer."

Student 9: "It helps me assist those who are different than myself."

Student 10: "It helps me understand the social environments of people."

Student 11: "It helps me find resources for families."

Student 12: "It helps me understand how people operate in the world."

Student 13: "It helps me open my views to the process of aging."

Student 14: "It helps me gain more knowledge about Human Services."

Student 15: "It helps me understand the aging population."

Student 16: "It helps me understand social situations that I have not been exposed to."

Student 17: "It helps me decide what population I want to work with."

Student 18: "It helps me understand different human situations."

Student 19: "It helps me understand the aging process."

Student 20: "It helps me learn about social problems."

Student 21: "It helps me show that I have worked with computers."

Student 22: "It helps me know what public policies are best practice."

Student 23: "It helps me get online experience."

Student 24: "It helps me with my major."

Student 25: "It helps me be well-rounded."

Student 26: "It helps me learn how sociology views problems."

Student 27: "It helps me learn about social problems."

Student 28: "It helps me have an open-mind."

Student 29: "It helps me focus on how society acts in whole."

Student 30: "It helps me to better understand people and their tendencies."

How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?

This section examines a sampling of 28 students' responses to the question above.

The reason these **28 student** respondents' answers are selected is because they best represent the main themes of this open-ended question/section.

Student 1: "It helps me with personal discipline."

Student 2: "It helps me generate discipline which is difficult for me."

Student 3: "It helps me to reach out to a wider variety of populations."

Student 4: "It helps me learn about aspects related to the elderly population."

Student 5: "It helps me to communicate over the computer."

Student 6: "It helps me work with the elderly population."

Student 7: "It helps me work with older adults."

Student 8: "It helps me work towards a career as a CPS worker."

Student 9: "It helps me to assist people that I may not understand."

Student 10: "It helps me work with children with behavioral & mental problems."

Student 11: "It helps me better understand individual relationships to society."

Student 12: "It helps me gain experience using the web and computer."

Student 13: "It helps me gain a certificate on top of my degree."

Student 14: "It helps me relate to people with backgrounds different than mine."

Student 15: "It helps me become a child protective service worker."

Student 16: "It helps me learn about using computers and websites."

Student 17: "It helps me with policies are best practice for changing society."

Student 18: "It helps me understand problems of classes, races and gender."

Student 19: "It helps me understand patients from different cultures."

Student 20: "It helps me become certified to teach 5-12 social science courses in Iowa."

Student 21: "It helps me understanding people's culture & situations."

Student 22: “It helps me understanding social problems.”

Student 23: “It helps me understand people’s backgrounds.”

Student 24: “It helps me with the cultural differences of my patients.”

Student 25: “It helps me obtain a better understanding of the elderly.”

Student 26: “It helps me understand social problems.”

Student 27: “It helps me use convenient online courses.”

Student 28: “It helps me understand people in the context of society.”

No Answer/Negative/Unsure

Out of the 62 student respondents in this study, two students did not answer the “...benefit you in your major?” question. And three students did not answer the “...benefit you in your career?” question.

A few students had negative points of view on one or both of the two open-ended questions. Five student responses follow.

Student 1: “I struggle with web-based classes.”

Student 2: “Taking this class online does not benefit my major.”

Student 3: “The online class does not help me obtain my degree.”

Student 4: “I would rather take the online class in a classroom setting.”

Student 5: “I would not take web-based classes ever.”

Limitations

There are numerous limitations to this study. This study focuses on rural Midwestern community college students and the barriers they experience in obtaining higher education through online learning. Some barriers the respondents mentioned included: driving distance, bandwidth issues, access to the internet in very rural areas, access to internet based on socio-economic status, family obligations, single mothers finding reliable childcare, time management issues, and lack of confidence in using technology.

Students at community colleges in an urban setting may not experience these issues. Also, students at other rural community colleges throughout the United States will most likely have their own unique set of issues, which may be significantly different from the ones at the community college in this study.

Certainly, another way this study could have been enhanced would have been to distribute the survey to other rural community colleges in the surrounding Midwestern states and then compare the results from those states with the findings in Nebraska.

Another limitation was gender bias. There were 55 female respondents who represented 89% of student respondents in the study. There were only seven male respondents, which represented 11% of the study. There was also a racial bias in the study as 90% of respondents were white, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 3% African American and 2% Asian American. The researchers would like to point out that both gender and racial bias may be related to the types of majors represented in the study. The fields of human services, social work, and social sciences are predominantly female. Additionally, for the 2016/17 year at Central Community College, exactly 60% of the students were female, and 40% of the students were males (Enrollment Report, Central Community College, 2016-2017).

Other limitations include: 1.) This study only surveyed online rural community college adults in three different majors; permission was not granted for the survey to be administered in other online social science classes. 2) Only three social science courses were permitted to be used for this study. 3) If future research is conducted on this topic, other rural community colleges around this state and country need to be examined to better generalize outcomes. 4) Numerous online social science courses need to be included in various fields such as psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and political science in future studies. 5) More student respondents would likely strengthen future studies on this topic.

Conclusion

This case study addressed two primary questions as they relate to online Human Services majors, online Social Work majors, and online Social Science majors at a rural community college in the Midwest. The two questions guiding this 5-year case study project included: 1) How is taking a social science course online going to benefit you in your major, and 2) How is taking a social science class online going to benefit you in your career?

Many of the rural community college students' responses in this study are in line with the literature reports in terms of the benefits of taking classes online. For example, students reported that the online social science classes would help them understand the following: 1) various cultures; 2) various religions; 3) family backgrounds; 4) being sensitive to the LGBTQ community; 5) understanding older adults in retirement; 6) children's behavior based on their family situations; 7) group behavior; 8) understanding people from different backgrounds; 9) how to interact and socialize with the elderly population; 10) learn about social class; 11) socioeconomic issues; 12) understand public policy and laws; 13) understand current issues; and 14) understand the causes of many of the world's social problems.

The present community college student literature does not address the topic of self-perceived, learned skills from taking an online social science course. Our study attempts to address this gap in the literature. Some of the most common responses students provided in the study include: 1) time management; 2) budgeting time; 3) flexibility in completing tasks; 4) learn to use the computer better; 5) complete tasks online related to my major and career; 6) deal with situations where I only communicate with someone over the computer; 7) appropriate communication over email; 8) learn my field over the computer; 9) help me problem solve in my major; 10) confidence of working with computers in my field; 11) work independently, 12) complete paperwork online; 13) how to work with others; 14) making good solid judgments on the job; 15) sensitivity to issues clients are facing; 16) making me aware of my own flaws; 17) appropriate communication over the computer; 18) understanding other people's culture will make me more effective on the job; 19) utilize learned theories and how to apply them to the job; and 20) tolerance.

Lastly, this study is meant to be a starting point for understanding how online social science courses can benefit rural community college students both in their major and careers. Future studies related to this topic need to include: Numerous rural community colleges throughout the country; more student respondents; and should include a larger variety of social science classes in the sample. Doing these three things

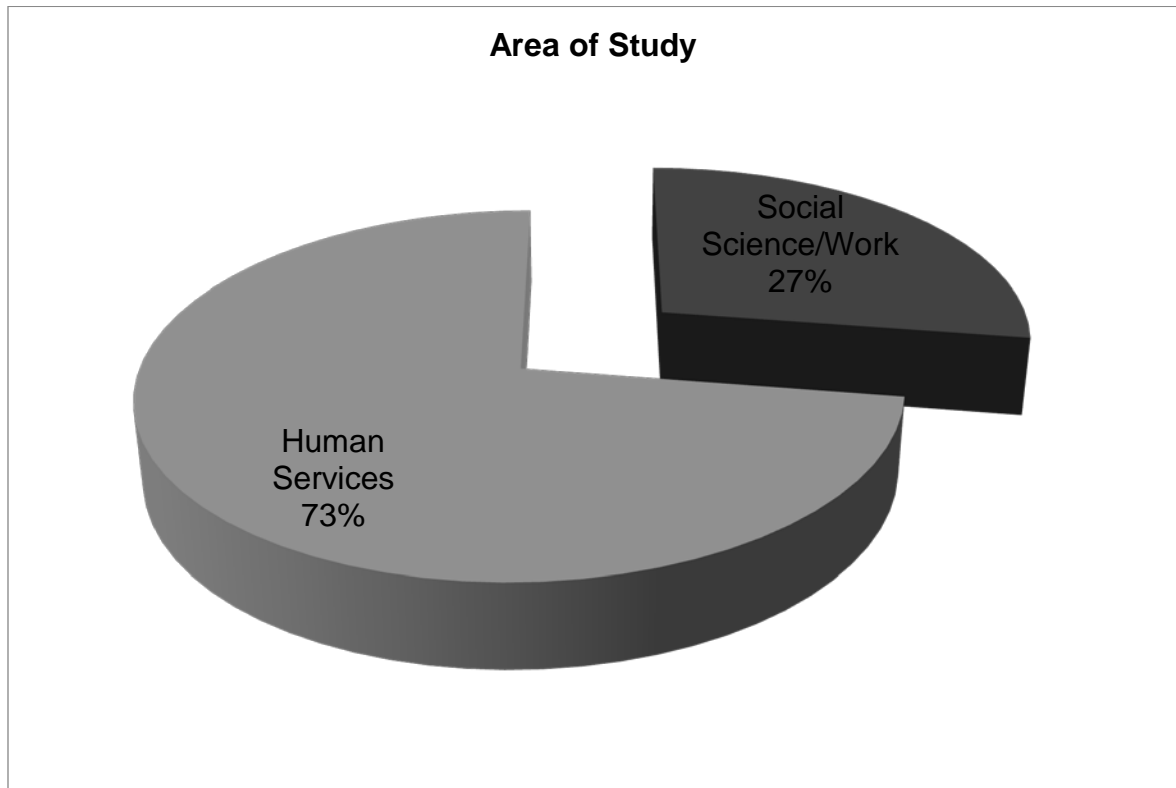
would enhance the understanding of students' perceptions of the benefit(s) of taking online social science classes in both their major and future professions.

The researchers would like to acknowledge the 62 students who participated in this study. This case study project would not have been possible without their willingness to participate in the study.

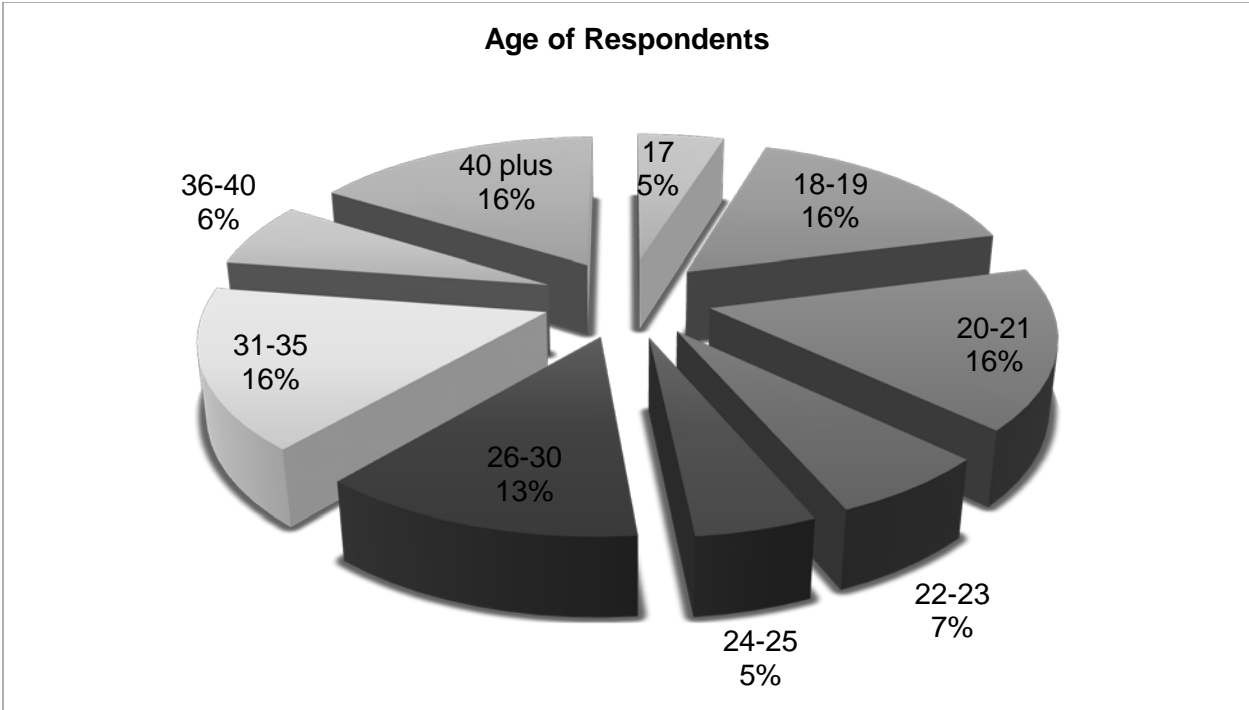
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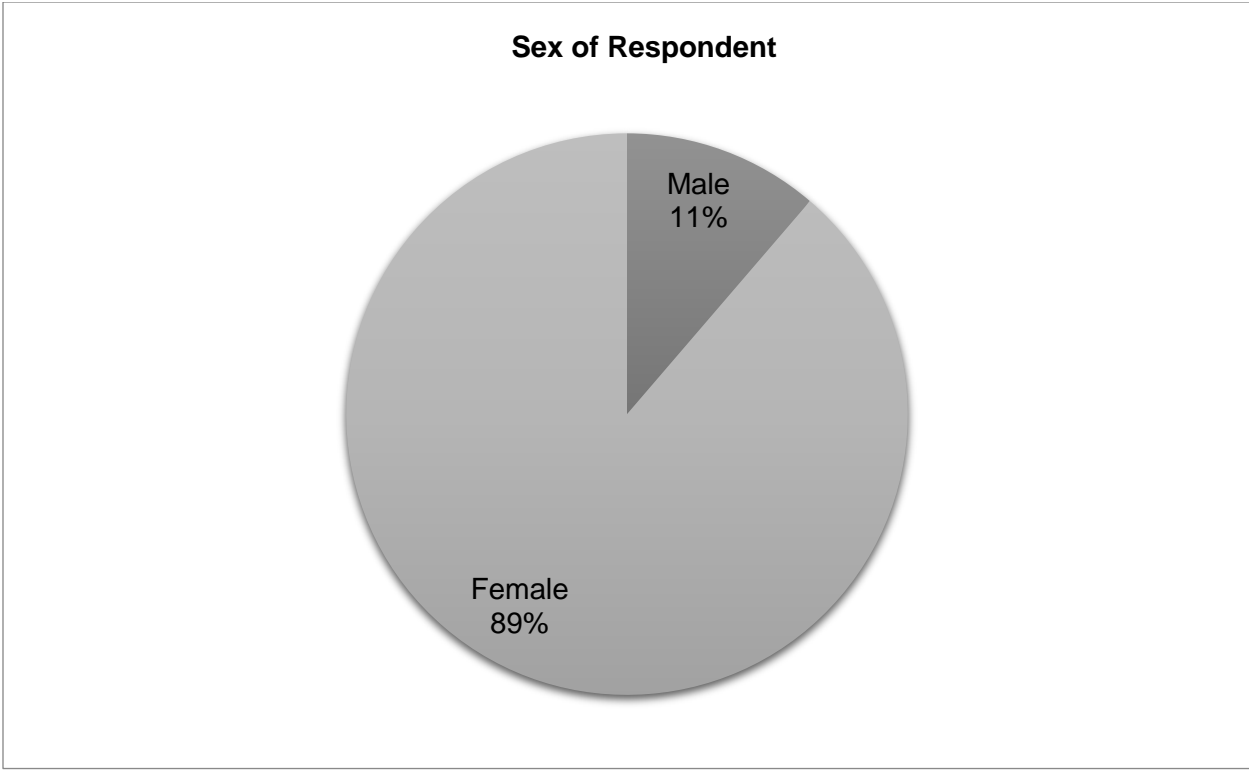
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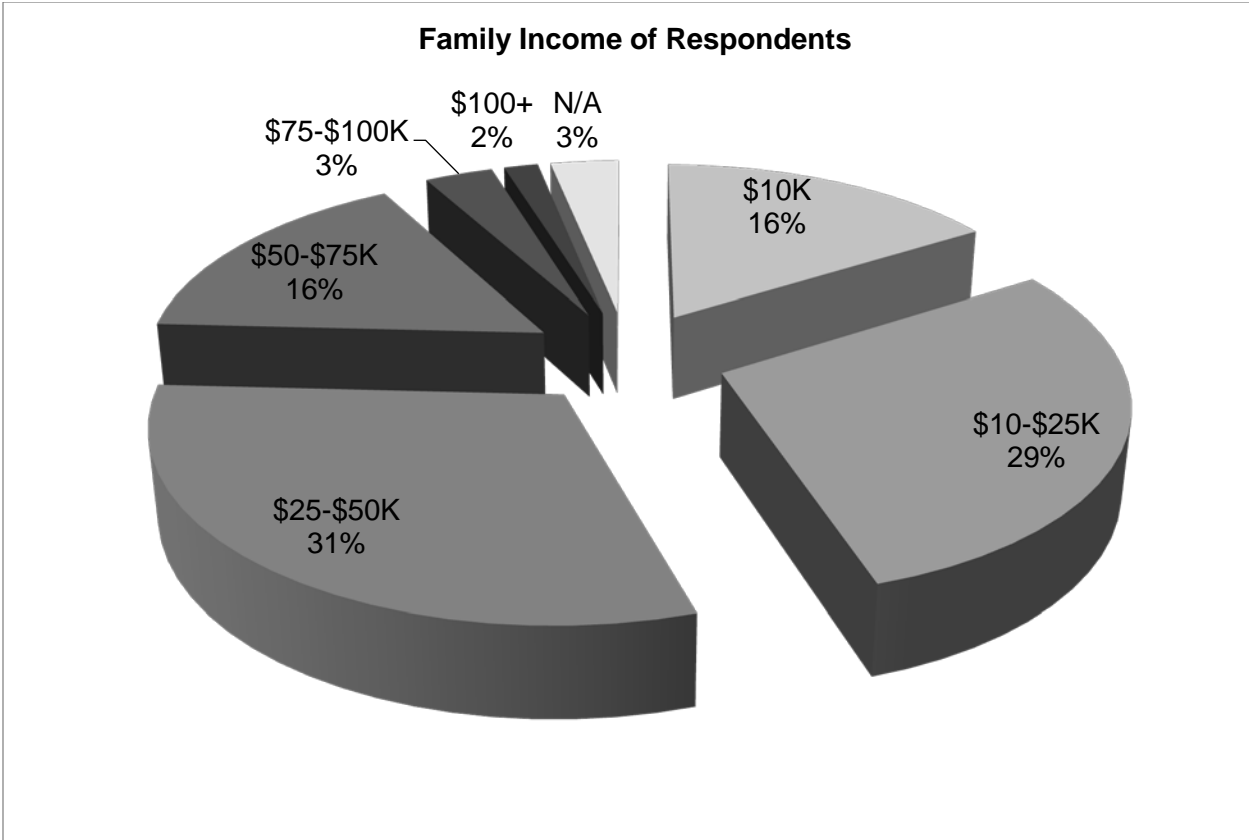
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Human Services	4	5



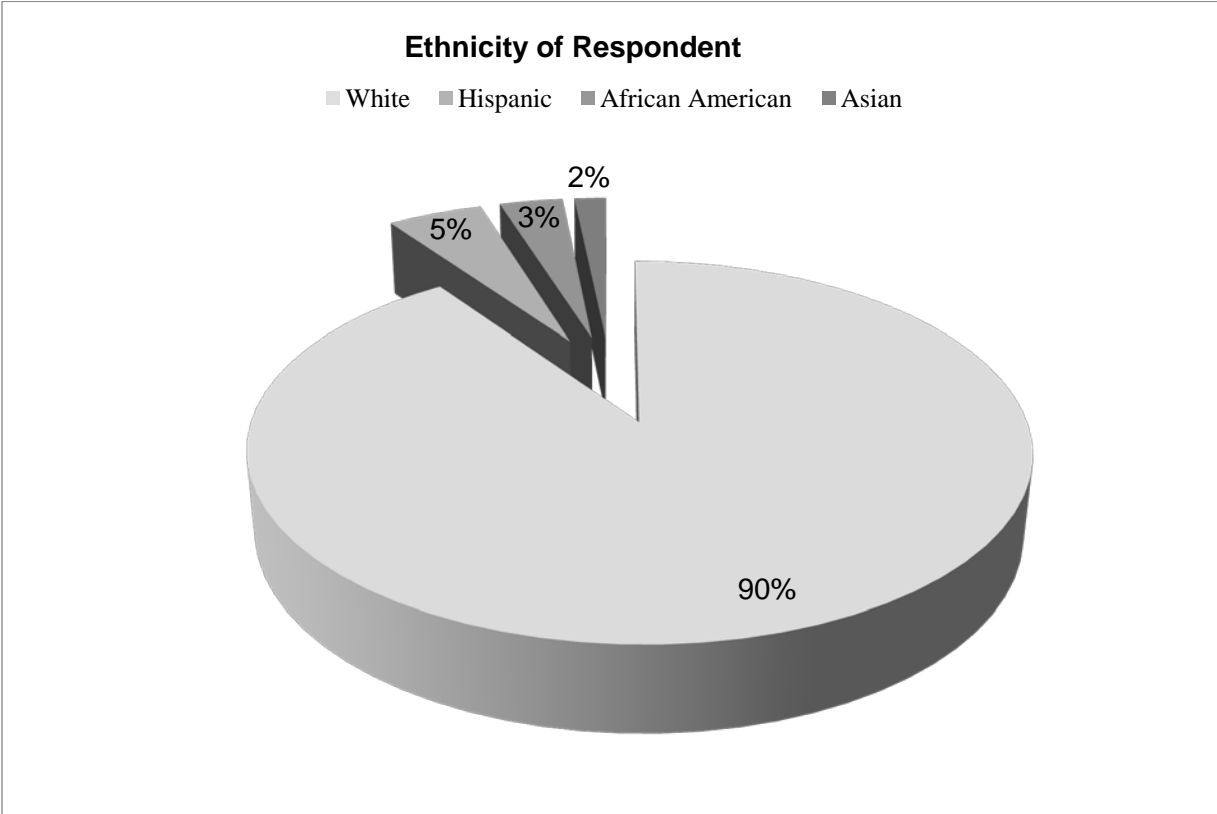
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2	1
0-21	0
2	4
2-23	3
2	8
4-25	1
2	0
6-30	1
3	0
1-35	4
3	1
6-40	0
4	1
0 plus	0



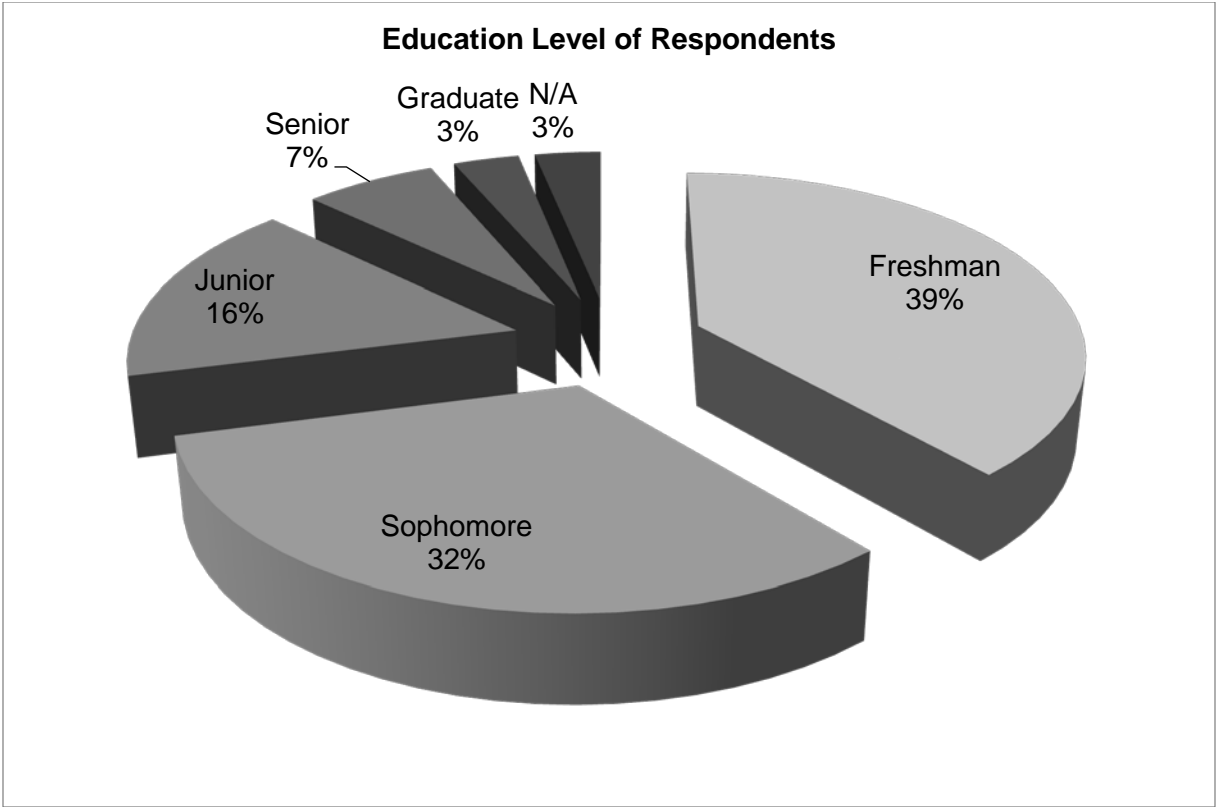
	G	R
ender	aw #s	
ale	M	7
emale	F	5



Income	Raw #s
\$10K	10
\$10-\$25K	18
\$25-\$50K	19
\$50-\$75K	10
\$75-\$100K	2
\$100+	1
N/A	2



Race/Ethnicity	Raw #s	R
White	56	
Hispanic	3	
African American	2	
Asian	1	



Class	Raw #s
Fres hman	2 4
Sop homore	2 0
Juni or	1 0
Seni or	4
Gra duate	2
N/A	2

Utilizing Multiple Modalities in Graduate Public Affairs Education

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Abstract

This research examines the concurrent use of on-campus, synchronous online, and asynchronous online modalities in public affairs courses. Student choice and performance are analyzed to determine student preference.

Introduction

Public affairs programs occupy a unique space in the universe of graduate education. In addition to educating new cadres of public and nonprofit sector leaders, graduate public affairs programs serve unique constituencies. Public affairs students are often part-time students and full-time employees with family and life obligations beyond the classroom. As such, it is imperative that graduate public affairs programs employ creative andragogical modalities that are accessible to these students while still providing a rich, interactive learning environment. One method for accomplishing this is through the concurrent use of multiple modalities.

Over the past several years, graduate public affairs programs have continued to migrate their curricula online using a variety of methods. This movement to online education has produced a plethora of research on the topic and the emergence of a subset of literature on the topic.

Review of the Literature

The literature on online education is comprehensive, and it is far beyond the scope of this exploration to exhaustively chronicle it here. However, there are several aspects of the online education research that have import for the analysis of concurrent delivery modalities. A brief examination of these themes and foci are appropriate to create a frame of reference for this research.

What is Online Education?

It is a disservice to view online and traditional education modalities as a simple dichotomy. As Gargano and Throop (2017) illustrate, online education is more of a

continuum as opposed to a mutually exclusive alternative to face to face (F2F) instruction. This type of blended approach in which instructors combine aspects of F2F instruction with online elements has become far more common today than in the past (Schmidt, 2004; Patel and Patel, 2006). Ginn and Hammond (2012) conducted a survey of 96 NASPAA accredited graduate public affairs programs and found a tremendous amount of diversity in modalities used in these programs. Online approaches are better viewed as gradations along a spectrum of the incorporation of online technologies into a program's curricula.

Methods of online delivery also demonstrate great variation as well. Dutra et al. (2015) found that the appropriate mix of audio and text is imperative in effective online courses. Specifically, they determined that students who received audio instruction responded more efficiently than those who received text-only instruction. Students who received text-only instruction reported higher levels of cognitive overload than their audio-based colleagues. Video has also been reported to be an effective tool in online education for enhancing information retention and student achievement (Shere and Shea, 2011).

Benefits of Online Education

Flexibility

One of the primary reasons for this diversity in approaches is the need for flexibility for students and faculty members (Ginn and Hammond, 2012). Online modalities provide flexibility for students in choosing when to attend sessions and when to complete assignments. O'Neill and Hong (2014) also found that students gravitate to online education because of the flexibility that it provides. Indeed, Shea and Wang (2016) found that effective online courses are those that share characteristics such as low structure and high levels of learner autonomy. Low structure and high levels of learner autonomy require flexibility in course content and delivery.

Impacts on student achievement

One of the primary areas of focus in the literature is student achievement and effectiveness. Bell and Federman (2013) produced a meta-analysis in which they identified three areas of focus for the achievement and effectiveness literature: a focus on whether or not a modality is effective, the factors that contribute to effectiveness, and the barriers to effectiveness. The central indicator of effectiveness is obviously student achievement. Ni (2013) compared online and traditional research methods courses in a graduate public affairs program and found no relationship between mode of instruction and student performance measured as course grades. This finding is in accordance with the findings of McCray (2000), Warren and Holloman (2012), and Neuhauser (2002). However, others such as Xu and Jaggars (2013) did find a significant difference in student achievement between online and traditional modalities for community college students. Yukselturk and Bulit (2009) indicated that gender might have an impact on student achievement in online courses. While they did not find a significant difference between genders in terms of motivation or self-regulated learning, they did find that test

anxiety in online courses was more prevalent among females while task value had a larger impact on males.

Impacts on student satisfaction

Ni (2013) also found that participation tends to be less intimidating in online courses, and the quality and quantity of student interaction is higher than in traditional courses. Riffell and Sibley (2003) also found far more interaction in online courses as compared to traditional delivery methods. Driscoll et al. (2012) compared three online and three F2F courses and found no significant differences in student satisfaction rates. This finding is similar to Powell (2007) and Neuhauser (2002) who found no significant differences in student satisfaction levels between modalities.

Costs associated with online education. Another potential impetus for pursuing online modalities is cost reduction. Intuitively, when courses are provided online, universities can save space and reduce overhead costs associated with traditional classroom settings. Bartley and Golek (2004), Deming et al. (2015), and others documented the potential cost savings associated with migrating traditional courses to online modes of delivery. However, effective online education also requires an investment of time and resources for faculty training and student preparation. Instructor training is imperative for successful course delivery as familiarity and experience with technology, and online pedagogical and andragogical strategies are closely associated with positive student experiences (Crichton & LaBone, 2003; Marek, 2009; Romiszowski, 2010; Livingston & Condie, 2006; Skinner et al. 2006; Meeker, 2017; Shea et al. 2015). Aversa and MacCall (2013) found that student support, administrative support, faculty preparation, and varied delivery methods are essential to effective learning and student achievement.

Students also need to be trained to effectively use online tools prior to enrolling in these courses. Bozarth et al. (2004) found that student success in online courses was directly correlated with how prepared these students were to succeed in an online environment. Bozarth found that student orientations were critical to online student success and achievement. Given the costs associated with faculty training, student orientations, and initial learning management system (LMS) costs and maintenance, costs often offset some of the savings that programs may realize from migrating to online courses. However, the marginal costs of LMS acquisition and faculty training decrease over the life of the selected LMS.

The development of online courses may also require more of a focus on pedagogical issues and well-structured course designs than traditional courses. Rivera et al. (2002), Meeker (2017), and Woo (2013) all discussed the importance of clarity in course design. The time and effort to create online courses often exceed what is required for traditional, on-campus courses.

Student and faculty motivations

To borrow a line from Hollywood, “if you build it, they will come.” Programs obviously need to assess student demand for online course delivery prior to committing resources for LMS acquisition and faculty training. Students are motivated to take online

courses for a variety of reasons. As mentioned earlier, one of the primary reasons for student preference for online education is flexibility. Nollenberger (2015) found that MPA students chose online courses for the flexibility that they provide. However, self-selection is a major factor in determining which students will opt for online education. While some students prefer online modalities for flexibility, other students eschew online courses and prefer F2F courses due to a need for interaction with instructors and classmates.

Students who choose online education often have higher expectations than their traditional classroom counterparts (Mudinga et al., 2006). Online students have much higher expectations for instructor feedback and presence in online courses than students in traditional courses.

Faculty members also have differing motivations for engaging in online delivery modes. Myers et al. (2004) found that online teaching is far more attractive to younger, junior-level faculty members as opposed to their more veteran colleagues. Faculty members choose online education to upgrade teaching skills and update their vitae as opposed to a desire to learn new and emerging technologies.

The literature makes a compelling argument that online courses require a great deal of time and effort to properly design and also require high levels of faculty engagement and communication. Delivery modes should be varied, and faculty/student preparation is vital to creating an effective and successful online course. Most importantly, the literature demonstrates that the online/traditional discussion goes far beyond a mere dichotomy and should be viewed as a continuum in which different approaches can be combined together in a non-mutually exclusive manner to provide a varied and holistic approach to enhance student achievement.

Method

To measure the impact of offering different modes of instruction concurrently, student use of three different modalities within one public budgeting course was analyzed. The public budgeting course was offered for six weeks during the summer session with four live synchronous sessions that met from 6-8:45 pm on Monday evenings. The live sessions could be attended either in-person or via synchronous Zoom session. The in-person and Zoom sessions were conducted concurrently, and recordings of these sessions were provided as a link in Blackboard that students could access at their convenience.

The course enrolled 26 students who were either completing their first or second year in the MPA program. Students were provided the option of either attending the in-person sessions, participating virtually through Zoom, or watching the recordings at a later time. The options were not mutually exclusive, and multiple students utilized all three modalities throughout the course.

Students who attended via Zoom were required to have a microphone to participate in the virtual sessions but were not required to utilize video to participate. However, all students who participated via Zoom and utilized their webcam for video for all or part of each session.

One of the interesting aspects of this approach was that students were permitted to freely choose which modality to select and did not need to inform the instructor in

advance. Therefore, it provides some preliminary insight into the preferences of students. It also allowed any student to register for the course regardless of his/her preference for a specific modality. This made the course available to all interested students. It resulted in a strong demand for the course as the initial enrollment cap was increased from 20 to 26 to accommodate this strong student demand.

The instructor recorded the number of students who attended the in-person sessions, the number who attended the virtual sessions, and the number of recordings accessed by each student.

Limitations

A primary limitation of this analysis is the small sample and preliminary nature of the study. The study only looks at one course with a very small sample size, and the results are not generalizable to a larger population of students. It does, however, provide some preliminary indications of the efficacy of multiple, concurrent modalities in a single MPA course.

Results

After the first week of classes, there was great consistency in student choice of modality. Students who began attending on-campus sessions continued to do so throughout the duration of the course. Students who were first adopters of Zoom continued to attend the Zoom sessions as well. Attendance in on-campus sessions varied between 11 and 12 students per session. Attendance at virtual Zoom sessions averaged 5.5 per week. The remainder of students opted to watch recordings of the sessions and adopted a more asynchronous approach to the course. Seven (7) of these students viewed the recordings each week of the course. Five (5) students viewed three of the four recordings that were made available in Blackboard. Three (3) students viewed two weekly recordings, and five (5) viewed one recording. There were six (6) students who did not view any recordings. All six of these students attended each on-campus session. The frequency of modality use is represented in Table 1.

Table 1
Average Weekly Modality Use – PPA 555 Public Budgeting – Summer Session, 2019

In-Person Sessions	Virtual Zoom Sessions	Zoom Recordings
11.75	5.5	7*

Note: * indicates the number of students who viewed the recordings each week

There were six (6) students who did not view any recordings. All six of these students attended each on-campus session, so it appears that these students viewed the in-person sessions as largely sufficient. However, six in-person students still accessed the recordings at a later point in each week to review the sessions again. This

speaks to the utility of providing recordings that students may access at later points in the course to prepare for assignments, exams, etc.

Approximately one week after the conclusion of the course, students were provided with a survey to examine their use of the modalities offered in the course. The survey was administered using Qualtrics and consisted of five closed-ended and one open-ended question. It was designed to be concise and extract information regarding student use of, and experience with, the three modalities offered in the course. A total of 11 students responded. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.

Students were asked which mode of delivery they used during the course. The modal category selected by students was Zoom recordings (7) followed by in-person sessions (6), virtual Zoom session (3), and “all of the above” (3).

Table 2
Modality Used – PPA 555 Public Budgeting – Summer Session, 2019

Modality	Number of Respondents
Zoom Recordings	7 (36.84%)
In-Person Sessions	6 (31.58%)
Virtual Zoom Sessions	3 (15.79%)
All of the Above	3 (15.79%)

The responses illustrate that students did not view the modalities as mutually exclusive but, rather, as complementary approaches in a more blended approach. Based on the survey results and the contemporaneous observations of session attendance, it appears that students preferred asynchronous recordings and in-person sessions to virtual Zoom sessions. This could very well be a function of the rather new implementation of Zoom as a modality in the MPA program.

Students were also asked which of the three modalities they preferred. The responses are provided in Table 3.

Table 3
Preferred Modality – PPA 555 Public Budgeting – Summer Session, 2019

Modality	Number of Respondents
Virtual Zoom Sessions	3 (27.27%)
In-Person Sessions	5 (45.45%)
Zoom Recordings	3 (27.27%)

Respondents favored in-person sessions as opposed to virtual Zoom sessions or Zoom recordings. Of course, this could be due to selection bias in the composition of students who chose to respond to the survey. Five (5) of the respondents attended virtual sessions, so it does appear that virtual attendees may be overrepresented in the sample. However, the data correlate well with the contemporaneous observations of modality use.

As illustrated in the review of the literature, online courses often require more preparation and focus on design than on-campus courses. Therefore, it is important for programs to consider student modality preferences prior to committing the time and resources to migrated courses online. Students were asked how likely they are to enroll in a future course that utilizes only virtual Zoom sessions and Zoom recordings. Essentially, would they be willing to forego in-person sessions in future courses? The responses are reported in Table 4.

Table 4
How likely are you to enroll in a future class that uses only Zoom sessions and recordings (no in-person meetings)?

	Number of Respondents
Extremely Likely	5 (45.45%)
Moderately Likely	2 (18.18%)
Slightly Likely	2 (18.18%)
Neither Likely Nor Unlikely	0 (0%)
Slightly Unlikely	2 (18.18%)
Moderately Unlikely	0 (0%)
Extremely Unlikely	0 (0%)

The majority of respondents (9) are likely to enroll in an online course in the future. Only two (2) of the respondents are slightly unlikely to choose this type of course. It appears that PPA 555 students in this sample are inclined to seek out future online courses.

The literature review indicated that one benefit of online courses is that they may encourage more dialogue and interaction than in-person classes. Often, students who are reticent to participate in-person are much more willing to participate in a virtual setting. Students were asked if the virtual Zoom sessions made them more or less likely to participate in class. A filter question was used to screen out students who did not participate in the virtual Zoom session, which left five (5) respondents for this contingency question. As seen in Table 5, only one (1) of the respondents who participated in the virtual Zoom sessions felt more likely to participate in the session.

Four (4) respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This is somewhat surprising based upon the prevailing wisdom from the literature but is in alignment with the contemporaneous observations of the instructor during the sessions. It was unusual for participants in the Zoom sessions to contribute to the discussion or ask questions. This is in stark contrast to the active and frequent participation of in-person attendees. It was unusual for an in-person session to end without participation by every student in the classroom. However, it was unusual to have more than one virtual student participate despite active engagement by the instructor. At the conclusion of each new topic, in-person and virtual students were prompted for questions or discussion points, usually to silence from the virtual students.

Table 5

The Zoom session made it more likely that you would participate in discussions than the in-person sessions.

	Number of Respondents
Strongly Agree	0 (0%)
Agree	1 (20%)
Somewhat Agree	0 (0%)
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	0 (0%)
Somewhat Disagree	0 (0%)
Disagree	2 (40%)
Strongly Disagree	2 (40%)

One possible reason for this lack of participation on the part of virtual students can be related to logistical issues. A final open-ended question was asked to determine what would have enhanced the virtual Zoom sessions? The primary impediment for Zoom students was audio. While virtual students could hear the instructor well, they often struggled to hear questions from in-person students. This occurred despite the presence of multiple ceiling-mounted microphones throughout the room. It underscores the importance of adequate technology and support for online courses.

Analysis

The results of the analysis indicate that there is strong interest in virtual sessions and increasing virtual offerings could better meet the needs of MPA students. It is also apparent that students appreciate the availability of multiple modalities in one given course. This allows students to still enroll in the courses they want with the instructors they prefer and select the modality that most closely approximates their unique learning

styles. Students did not view the different modalities as mutually exclusive but, rather, utilized multiple modalities depending on their learning styles and schedules.

Using multiple modalities concurrently requires adequate technology but does not require much additional effort on the part of the instructor. Recording and streaming live lectures only requires minimal effort after class in extracting and posting recordings to Blackboard. The utilization of automatic captioning on sites such as YouTube makes recordings available to all students for review at their convenience.

While preliminary in nature, the analysis demonstrates that delivering a course in multiple modalities in a concurrent fashion may better meet the diverse needs and styles of students while imposing relatively few burdens on instructors.

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Appendix A

PPA 555 Public Budgeting Survey

1. As you know, we used three different modalities in our PPA 555 course this summer. These included in-person class sessions on Monday evenings, Zoom virtual sessions that ran concurrently with our in-person sessions, and recordings of these sessions that could be watched later. Which of these modalities did you use during the course? Please select all that apply.

In-person sessions
Virtual Zoom Sessions
Zoom recordings
All of the above

2. Which of the three modalities did you prefer?

In-person class session
Attending live Zoom sessions virtually
Watching Zoom recordings

3. How likely are you to enroll in a future class with only live Zoom sessions and recordings? (No in-person sessions.)

Extremely likely
Moderately likely
Slightly likely
Neither likely nor unlikely
Slightly unlikely
Moderately unlikely

Extremely unlikely

4. Did you attend any of the live Zoom sessions?

Yes

No

5. The Zoom session made it more likely that you would participate in discussions than the in-person sessions.

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

6. What would have enhanced your experience in the live Zoom sessions?

Research-based Online Diversity Teaching Resources for Flipped Learning and Remote Instruction Platforms in the Social Science Classrooms

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Abstract

The metaphor of the United States as a melting pot is no longer in vogue since we as a reasonably enlightened, yet still struggling society, are learning to accept and appreciate the value and complexity of each culture on its own, rather than seeking to promote a homogeneous mixture of sameness. Dynamic and quality online resources for diversity teaching and learning in social studies classrooms are highlighted in this article. These enduring sites remain effective even as new features and links are continuously updated and expanded, making these websites optimal COVID-19 and post COVID-19 teaching tools for modified or hybridized face-to-face learning, flipped learning, and teaching. Learning through the popular real-time synchronous teaching platforms such as *Google Meet*, *Zoom*, and *WebEx* remain active and very effective tools for applicable flipped teaching and learning in K-16 social science settings.

Keywords: diversity teaching, diversity resources, online resources, flipped classrooms, flipped learning, synchronous platforms, social science, social studies, k-12 classrooms

Introduction

With the changes required in schools related to the COVID-19 pandemic, online flipped learning and remote teaching platforms such as *Google Meet*, *Zoom*, and *WebEx* are becoming essential tools for teachers (Sutterlin, 2018). According to the latest update in The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) America is global to the extent that 51.5% of elementary and secondary students in public schools come from diverse backgrounds as of 2017. The current teaching and learning reality require teachers to find, organize, and use high-quality online resources to meet the needs of diverse students and diversity curriculum standards for all. This article provides a curated list, with short descriptions of online resources for teaching diversity-related topics. These resources are kept up to date, for instance, with current topics such as Black Lives Matter, police overreach, race and ethnicity, the concept of woke, gender, bullying and bias, issues of social justice, and many other diversity topics. These resources can be used in a face-to-face classroom, a flipped classroom, or with remote teaching teleconferencing software and apps, as mentioned above.

Accordingly, this study was designed to promote and foster an enhanced method of teaching an appreciation of the most diverse topics in social science classrooms through the use of online flipped learning techniques with top-tier resources (Konijn et al., 2018). In the pages that follow, the best of those researched resources are featured.

Using Flipped Learning as a Catalyst for Improved Diversity Learning and Appreciation

Research shows that flipped learning may be the best answer for creating diversity and multicultural learning environments in not only social science classrooms but in most core curriculum subject areas (Chen et al., 2018). Therefore, we have endeavored in this research project to provide scholars with a carefully selected collection of what appears to be the best online teaching materials for incorporating diversity topics into any social science classroom. These benefits can effectively be achieved by utilizing flipped learning methodologies that lead to a highly beneficial and rewarding experience for students and teachers (Goedhart et al., 2019). To preface the use of these online resources, the general concept behind flipped learning should first be clarified.

Flipped learning is a model for running a classroom in the exact opposite order from the classically usual. In a traditional classroom, the teacher lectures, the class then works together with students to grasp the basic concepts of the day's lesson. Then the student leaves school with homework to accomplish alone to gain mastery of that particular lesson. Through flipping the classroom, learning takes a 180-degree inversion, which starts with the student going home after school to receive targeted instruction via an online text, audio, or video resource. In flipped learning, there is no homework in the traditional sense. Many lessons are delivered through online content where the student is merely introduced to the topic, for example, through streaming video lessons by presenters who are often top experts in the field. Alternatively, the lessons may be directed through reading materials on assigned or self-selected web resources. It is these experts who take the place of classroom teachers as the *sage on the stage* for their introduction to the lesson. Educators who embrace the flipped learning model can bring some of the best and most diverse teachers in the world into their content

teaching as online guest lecturers. This can greatly enhance their social science teaching efficacy (Fanguy et al., 2019).

The next school day in class, the students begin working on the previous day's flipped homework assignment while the roving teacher has a chance to individually help students who may be struggling and can assist them in ways that facilitate the students in mastering their homework with the instructor's personal guidance and insights. With flipped learning, students work toward completing their homework with the guidance of the instructor and their classroom peers. This leads to their experience of being taught by the notion that perfect practice makes perfect results.

Shortly before the end of the face-to-face class, the teacher has the option to assign another flipped learning lesson for the next day's lesson at home and informs the students of the online resources and lessons they need to review before returning to the face-to-face class the following day. These lessons can be provided to all students on the teacher's school website, by email, through QR codes in class, or other evolving digital communications such as social media, or even live through *Zoom* teleconferencing when students are social distancing and schooling at home (Lawson-Santos, 2018). This concisely describes the essence of flipped learning.

There are both advantages as well as disadvantages to using flipped learning. One major barrier is that to use teacher self-made videos for students for a flipped learning assignment, the teacher must become familiar with the recording and editing software and equipment, which may be expensive to buy and time-consuming to learn to use effectively (Snyder et al., 2014). Psychologically, many people, including lots of teachers, do not like seeing their image or hearing their own voice on the video, and this self-consciousness becomes an obstacle to making one's own instructional videos. These two factors alone discourage many teachers from using flipped learning (Lo & Hew, 2017). However, an effective solution to these problems is for teachers to use previously developed high-quality lessons such as those featured in this article to flip their instruction.

Other barriers to flipped learning include the extra time that a teacher must put in to find appropriate online lessons and videos as well as helping students make the transition to the flipped learning model, still a relatively new pedagogy. Teachers may also not feel qualified to provide tech support to their students who have trouble with their devices or their internet connectivity, but quality diversity teaching websites such as those described in this article are device neutral and can be easily accessed by students connected to the web from most devices. Of even more concern is for state and local governments to solve problems some students may encounter with not having access to appropriate digital devices, like a computer or tablet, and/or the ability to have or connect to Wi-fi at home to engage in flipped learning experiences (Lo & Hew, 2017).

At this point, one might ask what flipped learning in social science classrooms has to do with bringing diversity into our schools? A major diversity and multicultural learning advantage of flipped learning is that a classroom teacher can assign a variety of lecturers to their students, representing educators who come from as many diverse countries and cultures as practical, which allows for a greatly expanded outlook on many topics (Fanguy et al., 2019). Similarly, as illustrated in the descriptions below, truly excellent teaching materials are freely available online. These material assets have been specifically designed to help students celebrate their diversity, open their eyes to

social issues of the past and present, and teach students how to become activists in the never-ending quest for equity (Banks,1997).

Flipping Instruction with Distance and Remote Learning Platforms

Flipped learning also works well with *Zoom*, *Google Meet*, *WebEx*, and other remote teaching teleconferencing platforms so that instructors can screen-share, to provide guidance and navigation for using the websites. Students can interact and discuss the recommended websites in real-time as they screen-share while instructors can help students navigate to the most important parts of the websites in what amounts to a virtual tour of these interesting and valuable sites in real-time (Nicolaou et al., 2019). This will increase students' understanding of the awareness of the websites, how they are organized, and how to use them to find information critical to their learning in the social sciences. Importantly, these critical websites can be overviewed as rich and varied resources that motivate students to explore and learn. Tele-conferencing can also be used to follow up on students' individual learning from the recommended diversity websites in class discussions, break-out groups, as well as individual or small group tutoring sessions.

What follows are the best websites for helping teachers with resources for broadening one's teaching and learning repertoire to address current diversity issues, engaging all students, and teaching in a very modern way using the aforementioned widely available digital tools.

Essential Online Diversity and Multicultural Teaching and Assessment Resources for Social Science Classrooms

Before proceeding any further, know that the inclusion/exclusion criteria of these online resources listed below were based on the following guidelines: If any website featured only one facet of diversity, as in only one culture or group benefited, it was excluded from our investigation, since the very concept of diversity suggests it is all-inclusive. The resources that remained were chosen for the depth and variety of the teaching resources they offered, and the fact that they were perennial, freely available to anyone, as well as the uniqueness of the resources. We strove to assure that these online resources would be beneficial to as many different types of social science classes as possible and determined which websites would be frequently updated with the promise of offering additional contemporary resources by being continuously updated. The ordering of these resources is not based upon any scale of preference, but in fairness, they were placed solely according to a grade-level appropriateness order. Only teachers themselves who are using them can decide which resource is most pertinent to the topic they teach and the diversity of the students within their classroom.

***Teaching Tolerance* - For Grades K-12**

The Teaching Tolerance website (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020) is a rich source of continuously aggregating teaching materials for diversity topics. This multifaceted website is parsed into a variety of salient and comprehensive sections. As

an example, the Teaching Tolerance portion of their site currently contains 60 pages of lessons containing several lessons per page. The lessons they provide fall mainly under two targeted goals, one of which is to promote social justice, and the other is to help students develop critical social-emotional knowledge. In doing so, Teaching Tolerance fosters classroom discussions that are designed to challenge bias and to delve into the debates about diversity that would not ordinarily happen at school. This site also provides 25 pages of learning plans that promote critical literacy while meeting Common Core literacy standards. Besides offering learning plans, this section also incorporates a program that allows educators to build their individual learning plans based upon the library of reading materials available for free as provided by the site. Their extensive resources include a searchable library of stories that align with the complexity of recommendations of the *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013) while at the same time aligning themselves with social justice standards (Porter, 2017). The online library contains not only stories and editorials but also provides an array of infographics, interviews, photographs, political cartoons, and samples of classic social justice literature. Many of these resources are available in Spanish, which may be especially helpful for Spanish-speaking ELL students.

Perhaps the most important area in the Teaching Tolerance website is the section that is composed of assessment rubrics and performance tasks that measure such social justice attitudes as awareness, civic engagement, and critical literacy skills. Part of their assessment resources includes *Write to Source*, tasks that feature social awareness expanding prompts that allow students to compose expository, narrative, and persuasive essays on important social justice issues. Besides writing prompts, there are also *Do Something* challenges that task students to promote actual positive social change in their community through action research. Additionally, they offer printable *One World* posters as well as film kits that give teachers all the resources they need, other than the film, to offer lessons for eight classic social justice movies that can commonly be found online, through libraries and other public sources. Another popular resource on this site is their *Immigrant and Refugee Children: A Guide for Educators and School Support Staff* that focuses on unique approaches for teaching immigrant and refugee children.

***Anti-Defamation Leagues (ADL) Educator Resources* - For Grades K-12**

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was established in 1913 and has become a leading anti-hate organization. ADL is a global leader in revealing extremism and delivering anti-bias education. ADL's ultimate objective is a world where no group or individual suffers from hate or bias discrimination. The ADL offers numerous programs for anti-bias training such as *No Place for Hate* and *A World of Difference Institute*, which is anti-bias and bullying prevention programs for schools that also include professional development for teachers and administrators. ADL also offers *Words to Action*, an education program that helps students effectively respond to anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias, *Bullying and Cyberbullying*, which provides prevention workshops for students and teachers, and *Holocaust Education* programs for students and teachers.

Additionally, ADL offers numerous resources for educators such as K-12 lesson and unit plans that assist educators in teaching current events topics through the lens of diversity, bias, and social justice, comprehensive book lists with reviews that deal with bullying, bias, discrimination, hate, social justice, gender and sexism, disability and ableism, race and racism, religion and religious bigotry, LGBTQ people and homophobia/heterosexism, identity and culture, and additional diversity issues. Anti-bias tools and strategies is a section that provides tips, tools, strategies, and lessons for K-12 educators, administrators, students, and family members to promote safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environments and finally, bullying and cyberbullying resources including data and laws on bullying and cyberbullying, and additional resources for educators and administrators.

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility - For Grades K-12

The Morningside Center may contain the largest collection of timely lessons to support the teaching of social responsibility and to aid in the growth of social and emotional learning. At last count, there were close to 800 *Teachable Moments* on their website that dates back to 2003. There are so many lessons available, and it takes 30 minutes to scroll through the entire collection. Fortunately, they offer the means to filter these resources and greatly narrow down the search through major categories such as *Current Issues*, *Restorative Practices*, *Social and Emotional Learning*, and *Tips and Ideas*. One can also perform searches via 50 wide-ranging subjects or through grade levels that cover elementary through high school. There is also a helpful *Keyword Search* to pinpoint highly specific topics of interest. These comprehensive lessons contain news stories, tweets, related stories, handouts, agendas and objectives, videos, class discussion points, social definitions, eyewitness accounts, discussion questions, etc. In short, these *Teachable Moments* potentially represent the most comprehensive number of lessons online for covering the most recent social topics happening in society and on the news.

Zinn Education Project - For Grades K-12

History is such an important part of social science, but there can be a major difference between mainstream textbook history and the history of those who have been considered marginalized. Wanting to help set both history and herstory straight, the *Zinn Education Project* has put together a set of excellent historical articles on their site called, *If We Knew Our History*. Do not be fooled by the main resource page that makes it appear as if there are only a couple of articles in that section. Clicking on the title of that series takes one to where nearly 50 insightful articles on diversity await to be read by school children and their teachers. This section of articles even includes motivational blogs concerning success stories to do with *Teaching a People's History*. Their website also offers an *Explore by Theme* section that allows an educator to find articles and lesson plans in 30 broad social justice topics, including civil rights movements, democracy, and citizenship, immigration, imperialism, laws and citizen's rights, LGBT, slavery, specific ethnicities, as well as additional diversity-related concerns. There are even themes available for disciplines outside the social sciences, such as art, music,

language arts, math, science, and sports. These themes consist of teaching activities, articles, and text and audiobook reviews. To give an idea of how extensive the list of themes is, know that the theme of slavery contains over 100 resources. Likewise, the website contains a plethora of free teaching activities that range in size from 3 to 130 pages. Besides exploring *A People's History* by themes, the website offers teachers and other researchers the opportunity to develop classroom lessons by relevant time periods such as colonization, revolution through the Constitution, early 19th century, the Civil War era, reconstruction, the industrial revolution, turn of the century, World War I, the great depression, World War II, the Cold War, people's movement, post-civil rights era, and 2001-present topics. The *Zinn Education Project's* ever-expanding website stands as one of the most broad-reaching online resources that currently exist for educators teaching any subject and has especially rich content for social science teachers.

Americans Who Tell the Truth: Home - For Grades 3-12 - For Grades 3-12

The mission statement of *Americans Who Tell the Truth* (AWTT) is that it provides an abundance of portraits and narratives that highlight citizens of courage who address issues of environmental, economic, and social fairness. While that sounds like a present tense statement, this website is filled not only with modern accounts of brave and honest Americans but also contains an excellent historical database that could be considered a mandatory resource in unbiased history classes for all ages. In their *Portrait Galleries* section, educators can find well over 200 biographies of people who championed human and environmental rights. This extensive list of biographies can be filtered by choosing approximately two dozen different historical periods or subject themes such as civil rights, environmental issues, homelessness issues, indigenous people's rights, LGBTQ rights, the prison pipeline, and related matters. Although the main focus of this online resource is their *Portrait Galleries*, other teacher and student research resources include their blogs containing insightful posts that date back to 2004, plus an equally extensive news section complete with AWTT newsletters. They also offer a small but interesting set of lesson plans under their *Education* section.

Multicultural Pavilion Teachers Corner Equity and Social Justice Education Resources - For Grades K-12

The link above represents the main resource area of the *EdChange* portion of the website for teachers and is known as the *Critical Multicultural Pavilion*. Perhaps the most important launching point for acquiring diversity teaching materials is the area on that page titled *Resources & Praxis*. There, one can find links that go to equity awareness quizzes, equity exercises and activities, historic speeches with social justice themes, and multicultural curriculum materials. There is even an entertaining *Social Justice Song Index* that contains an extensive collection of the world's greatest social justice songs. One does not have access to the music on that site, but teachers can access all the lyrics and share them with their class or find the musical renditions of the songs on YouTube. Moreover, *EdChange* provides an excellent selection of printable or forwardable handouts, which are intended as much for professional development and

motivating teachers, both in-service and in teacher training programs, as they are meant for inspiring students.

History Matters: The US Survey Course on the Web - For Grades 6-12

One of the largest collections of new media history lessons, which are designed for middle, high school, and college students, can be found online at the *History Matters* website. Very few controversial American historical topics are not represented among their nearly 100 downloadable lessons located on their *Digital Blackboard*, each of which includes a description of the lesson, goals, sources, and at least one detailed assignment, besides other helpful classroom materials. The website also contains an excellent section of primary resources for teaching about major American events and figures in history. Not only does this unique site provide reference material, it even supplies an extensive set of articles in their *Reference Desk* to teach students how to cite sources properly. This site is a marvelous training ground for current and future history teachers and their students. There is even a section called *Talking History*, which contains dialog with many leading historians offering professional advice on how to teach major topics of U.S. history. Likewise, highly experienced history teachers also share their best advice on teaching strategies in the section titled, *Secrets of Great History Teachers*. *History Matters* has a small section of annotated syllabi and offers ready-made history quizzes in the *Puzzled by the Past* archive. Very helpful for creating rubrics and providing examples of work from outstanding students of history is the section that provides dozens of papers from *Students as Historians*.

Facing History and Ourselves - For Grades 6-12

The *Facing History and Ourselves* mission seek to have students learn about hatred and bigotry to facilitate preventing their occurrence in the future. The website is divided into three areas. The first area is *Supporting Educators*, which includes high-quality resources for teachers, professional development, and their personal approaches to pedagogy. Teacher resources include high-quality teaching strategies, multimedia materials, lessons, unit plans, a lending library, activities to connect current events to the classroom, and additional resources. The second area, *Transforming Schools*, engages with schools, individual teachers, professional development, educator resources, and a whole-school model. The third area, *Gathering Communities*, engages with community members, provides community speakers to discuss what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society, and to inspire positive change in the world.

Conclusion

Considering the speed at which websites come and go, research to pinpoint the potentially best and enduring and constantly renewing resources for classroom materials to support diversity and multicultural teaching strategies and learning techniques is never-ending. The website resources for diversity teaching and learning described in this article are dynamic, continually evolving, and can be bookmarked by social science educators as new features and links are continuously expanded, updated to be outstanding teaching tools for flipped learning in the social sciences as well as

with face-to-face students. These valuable websites can be effectively used with the various types of online and remote teaching now being embraced by teachers for diverse and equitable classrooms.

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Utilizing the DISC Behavioral Assessment for Group Assignments in an Online Agricultural Course

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Abstract

This study provides online instructors with tools and insight to assist in implementing group assignments in an online platform. Hulett (2019) discussed the need to implement intentional engagement activities to foster a sense of belonging and retention in online programs. The purpose of this study was to further explore the engagement and quality of group assignments in an online classroom. This study utilized the DISC Behavioral assessment to group students according to the dominant, influential, steadiness, and compliance categories of behavior to determine if it would enhance the quality of group assignments in an online agricultural course. The behavioral assessment is designed to test individuals' behaviors in a variety of settings and categorize the most common behaviors. The premise of this states that an effective group will have four of the main behavioral categories: dominant, influential, steadiness, and compliant. Two different sections of an online graduate agricultural education course were selected to participate in this design. One course served as the control with random group assignments. The treatment group took the behavioral assessment and were placed into groups according to the four different behavioral categories. The results indicated a significant statistical difference for the treatment group.

Keywords: Online learning, Online Group assignments, DISC Behavioral Assessment

Introduction

As the exponential trend for online education continues to increase, the demand for more inclusivity within the online learning platform is needed. The National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, (2018) reported that 6.6 million students were enrolled in distance education in post-secondary institutions. In the same report by NCES (2019) in the 2016-17 academic year, 1.9 million students received an online bachelor's degree, and 800,000 received a master's degree online. The focus of many online degree programs has been quality of education and instruction in the online courses and programs. As online pedagogy and andragogy have improved drastically within the last twenty years, the focus is now shifting to creating a sense of community and belonging. Hulett (2019) discussed the need to build an online community in your classes is essential to success. The implementation of group assignments, discussions, and presentations into the curriculum is vital to online learning and lends to overall greater retention rates (Paulson & McCormick, 2020).

Literature Review

Engagement in Online Learning

The interaction and engagement amongst students and educators in online learning has been viewed as paramount to the success of online education (Paulson & McCormick, 2020). These interactions create a sense of community and belonging for the student in the program and thus to the institution. The main opposing views of online learning over the years have stemmed from the argument that you could not provide quality education and a sense of belonging in an online platform. However, online learning is not going away, and numerous programs have been successful throughout the country (Linder & Hayes, 2018). Particularly this year, due to the pandemic and widespread closures of higher education institutions, a further examination into the effectiveness and high impact practices of online programs have been sought out (Paulson & McCormick, 2020). Ouzts (2006) discussed the necessity to create a sense of community within online learning while continuing to concentrate on the quality of instruction. Ouzts focused her study on using Rovai's (2002) Classroom Community to Scale to measure the western land-grant universities sense of community within online classes (Ouzts, 2006). The research revealed courses that focused on graded discussion boards that required student responses scored higher on the classroom community scale (Ouzts, 2006). Generating a sense of community in our classes is vital to the success of our students, whether that is in a traditional course or online. Many universities are now focusing more of their attention on retention rates of all students due to funding models sanctioned by state governments or by their board of directors. Retention has been the main focus of universities nationwide (Woodley & Simpson, 2014). Many campuses are putting dollars and efforts into dormitory designs, green space, and in all communal living spaces on university campuses in an effort to retain students (McFarland, 2014). However, these do not address the needs of online students. Online students also desire a sense of community and belonging within the university setting and in the classroom. Several research studies have concentrated on an athlete's sense of community and retention not only on campus but in the virtual learning space (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Until recently, very few studies have looked at online student engagement. Farrell and Brunton (2020) followed 24 students' engagement in their online courses throughout one academic year at a university in Ireland. The study indicated that a student's involvement factored on key themes such as peer community, professor interaction, and confidence in the course design (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). These themes can be used to create key initiatives and pedagogies in engaging and retaining students in online learning.

DISC, Behavioral Assessment

In 1924, William Moulton Morrison began to study the concepts of a person's will, sense of power, and the effect this has on personality and human behavior. His book, *Emotions of Normal People*, was published in 1928 and presented his findings on personality and behavior. He then published a second book in 1931 titled *DISC, Integrative Psychology* (Bonstetter & Suiter, 2019). Although Marston did not develop

the actual DISC Test, DISC Assessment, or DISC Profile, his findings of human behavior led to the theory behind the actual test. Bonstetter and Suiter (2019) discussed that in 1940, Walter Cook took Marston's theory of behavior and developed the first assessment. The DISC behavioral assessment does not measure a person's experiences nor intelligence. The DISC describes how people approach a problem or situation based on their natural tendencies and behaviors.

Many organizations today utilize personality and behavioral assessments in the hiring process. Nix (2019) looked into an urban North Texas educational system where principals used behavioral assessments as strategies to hire quality teachers. His multi-case study focused on interviewing, using survey data and assessment data from the district to determine if the behavioral assessments provided enough evidence of quality teacher hires. The premise that effective groups increase sense of community, organizational culture and improve efficiency or in Nix's (2019) case, test scores have been reviewed in multiple research studies and are showing strong evidence of success.

Purpose of the Study

Data has indicated that more students are taking courses online and even completing their entire doctoral, specialists, masters, bachelors, and associate degrees online. High impact practices within online courses have emerged within the last decade. The desire to create high impact group assignments in an online course is greatly needed in generating a sense of community and engagement amongst students. The idea that a sense of community through peer support in a well-designed group project could aid in retention rates along with successful grades (Hulett, 2019). Group assignments, in general, are a struggle in most traditional courses and even more so in an online course. The research question for this study was:

Research Question 1: Does assigning groups based on the DISC behavioral assessment increase quality of the group assignment?

Research Design

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine if there was statistical significance in the quality of group assignments by assigning groups using the DISC behavioral assessment. This study used convenience sampling in two graduate-level courses in agricultural education. The treatment group had 24 students that received the DISC behavioral assessment. A module was built into the course to discuss the results of the tests and explain the behaviors mentioned in the assessment. The module had a PowerPoint lesson and video detailing the DISC behavioral instrument recorded by the instructor prior to placing the students into groups. Based on the assessment results, six groups of four were created based on the dominant, influential, steadiness, and compliant behavioral areas. Each group had one representative from each of the four areas of behavior theorized by Marston (Bonstetter & Suiter 2019). The control group had 20 students in the course. The students in the course were randomly assigned to 5 groups of four students each for the assignment. The control group did not receive any DISC behavioral assessment tests nor information concerning the theory of behavior. Each course was given a group assignment four weeks into the

semester. Semester courses consist of sixteen weeks with a break halfway through the semester. The assignment required three synchronous zoom meetings within the online Canvas platform, a written paper, and a presentation at the end of the semester. One synchronous meeting took place prior to the semester mid-term break. Different rubrics were used for both the presentation and the written assessment. Attendance points for the three meetings were awarded and factored into the overall grade for the group project.

Findings

In Table 1, the two-sample assuming equal variance t-test, you will see the mean score on the group assignment from the DISC treatment group to be 90. The control group's mean score was 83.6. The group assignment included a paper, a presentation score, and points awarded for attending three synchronous meetings. The results show 9 degrees of freedom, and the P value was 0.04. The T value was at 1.89. With the directional hypothesis, it is statistically significant to assign groups based on the DISC behavioral assessment compared to the random group assignment in the control group.

Table 1

T-Test for Groups Assignments based on DISC Behavioral Assessment

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances		
	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Control</i>
Mean	90	83.6
Variance	38.4	25.3
Observations	6	5
Pooled Variance	32.5777778	
Hypothesized Mean		
Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	1.85175502	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.04853973	
t Critical one-tail	1.83311293	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.09707946	
t Critical two-tail	2.26215716	

In Table 2, descriptive statistics are given on gender and years of teaching. In the DISC treatment group, there were six males and 18 females. In the control group, eight males and 12 females. The years of teaching were recorded by 1-5 years, 6-10 years of teaching, 11-15 years, and 15+ years of teaching agriculture. In the DISC treatment group, there were 11 teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience, 6 teachers with 6-10 years, 6 teachers with 11-15 years of teaching experience, and 1

with 15+ years. In the control group, there were 9 teachers with 1-5 years of experience and 11 teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience. There was no representation in the 11-15 years and none in the 15+ years of experience in the control group.

Table 2
Descriptive Teaching Statistics for Participants

Descriptive Statistics	Treatment	Control
Male	6	8
Female	18	12
1-5 years teaching	11	9
6-10 years teaching	6	11
11-15 years teaching	6	0
15 +	1	0

Conclusion

The data indicated a statistical significance for students' grades on their assignment, who had been placed into groups based on the DISC behavioral assessment compared to those who did not receive the treatment. As we look to improve efficiency in our online learning classes, creating more effective means for students to work in groups will be essential to their overall success. Ideally, we will continue to increase online learning courses in all areas of higher education. In doing so, finding resources and tools to assist in creating higher impact learning will be beneficial for the success and retention of students in the course.

The research looked into the gender of the students in two agricultural education courses. The trend shows a higher number of female education students compared to male students. This trend is typical of most agriculture education programs throughout the nation. The years of experience were also recorded and indicated that the majority of those in the master's program had 1-5 years of teaching experience compared to those in the other categories.

Limitations

There were limitations in this study. The study focused only on two agricultural education, graduate-level courses at a regional comprehensive university in Kentucky. The study did not look into any other descriptive statistics such as ethnicity or age. The DISC behavioral assessment was a free online assessment from Tony Robbins website. The students did not pay the additional fee to see the full results and only saw an abbreviated version of the results.

Implications of Future Research

The research focused on two graduate-level online courses, and future research could look at expanding the number of graduate level courses, as well as undergraduate classes. Along with increasing the number of courses participating in the study, breaking down the data further with age, ethnicity, and number of courses taken online. The DISC assessment was a free online assessment. In future studies, utilizing a more extensive behavioral assessment would provide more validity and reliability. Last, adding a qualitative component could shed light on the perspectives of the students participating in the treatment and the non-treatment group.

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Learn How to Create a Wix Website: Current Best Practices

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Introduction

With the increased interest in online learning resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, web design and development have increased in value as an excellent knowledge asset and tool. This paper provides a learner-friendly approach to putting valuable instructional design content online for your learners. Web design and development skills learned can also be used to create sites for service learning, organizations, fundraisers, and parent communications. Alternatively learn about a free, easy-to-use web authoring program your learners can use to create their sites based on research in their areas of interest. Learners can work individually or in groups to create a website.

This paper demonstrates the ADDIE Model (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate) for creating the Wix websites. Begin with Analyzing the learners or target audience to determine their needs, desires, and expectations. This analysis can be accomplished by creating a (free) digital survey, then give it to the target audience. Once issues are identified and analyzed, those worthy of inclusion are aligned with the targeted goals. The reason for the analysis in web design is to enable creating user-friendly sites making it easy for visitors to quickly and easily find the information they need/ want on any device. The more user-friendly the website is, the more confidence you will inspire in site visitors, as the website needs to fulfill the user's expectations (Boyer, 2020). By aligning the evaluation of needs and desires to the design and development of the site, it is more likely to be a valuable resource to the end-users.

The identified goals can then be rewritten as performance objectives to guide the design and development of the website. The performance objectives should include the knowledge or skills to be learned. Bloom's Taxonomy is often used in education to organize learning into cognitive, affective, and sensory/psychomotor domains. It was developed to promote higher forms of thinking like analyzing, evaluating concepts, processes, procedures, and principles to move learners beyond simple memorization (Wengroff, 2020). The revised Bloom's Taxonomy of Action Verbs (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) can be used to describe what it will take for students to master the learning objectives.

Implementation of the Wix website training should include criteria used for measuring identified objectives to be accomplished. The criteria should use a project quality rubric or checklist, with the conditions of accuracy expected, such as 80% or greater. These objectives become the basis for all items added to the site, including text, images, videos, and interactive media. Any post evaluations need to then assist in

aligning the stated objectives. In this way, everything added to the site will then align to the goals and serve the intended purpose.

Along with the content objectives set forth, the International Society for Technology in Education presents a framework for education innovation. These standards help educators and education leaders worldwide to prepare learners to thrive in work and life. The standards can be implemented in the website design and development process. The objectives listed on their site include both student and teacher versions. The standards are based on the knowledge and skills needed to contribute to both our local and global societies. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) student technology standards include empowering learners, digital citizens, constructors, innovative designers, computational thinkers, creative communicators, and global collaborators (ISTE, 2020). Overall standards are important because they provide a basis for mutual understanding about what is needed. The International Standards Organization (2020) identifies standards as the distilled wisdom of the people with expertise in their subject matter and who know the needs of the organizations they represent.

With respect to the practical how to do it, a good starting place for the website design is to storyboard out the site before actually creating it. The storyboard will show what the site will contain and how it will be organized. A storyboard visually demonstrates the website product. It shows the flow of people's interactions over time and what's really important for users. Often, designers seek input from stakeholders to ensure the results are optimized. With a compelling storyboard showing how the solution addresses the goals, it is more likely to be compelling to the target audience (Babich, 2020). The purpose for the storyboard is to serve as an outline for the design, reminding the designer/ developer of what elements to include on each page while showing the navigation structure. This will save a great deal of time reworking it later on, for instance, not everything needs to be a main page navigation link. Think about the major categories for your main navigation. Information fitting within those categories can be your sub-topics, which should work well for drop-down navigation menu items. My recommendation is to keep the navigation text names to just one word in length. The reasoning is to reduce the cognitive load and speed up the time it takes to get to the needed information. For example, About Me could be changed to About or Instructor. The site navigation should be identical on all pages and in the same order for consistency and ease of use. Many students find it helpful to look at other sites for ideas and inspiration for their own website design.

Having students create a website is a good way to connect authentic learning to the real world while setting the scene for life-long learning. Authentic learning experiences help students understand the relevance of what they're learning so they can put their skills and knowledge to practical use in their community or professional settings (Stenger, 2020). As a result, learners will acquire the knowledge to be able to conduct their own research on any topic of interest. Designing learning opportunities by integrating authentic problems to solve is a tremendous way to foster learner engagement. Additionally, it assists in preparing the students for future independent research efforts using guided supports to build on success and confidence. One example is having learners create a service-based site as an authentic, real-world

challenge, especially when it fits within their areas of interest. Allowing learners to select the topic and direction for their sites within the instructors learning parameters allows for site personalization and increases personal investment in time and effort.

By taking advantage of project-based learning, students create their own website. Through the website design and development, students gain useful knowledge and skills. Through problem-based processes, learners examine the issues, research solutions, conduct analysis, synthesize, then present their findings (Delisle, 1997). The problem-solving process encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and self-management. The project proposal drives students to make their own decisions, conduct their own research, and review their own and classmates' processes/projects. In addition to finding resources, developing project timelines, and learning to overcome obstacles, their work will be displayed on the Internet. Displaying their completed projects in a public setting then gives students the opportunity and the motivation to improve their presentation skills (Educators of America, 2020). Creating a personalized website can be transformative through the process of active investigation when paired with the goal of creating a website of value.

Having students work collaboratively on creating a website taps into social learning. Many students like the benefits of teamwork, where two or more heads together are better than one alone. The social interactions can facilitate the sharing of ideas and the creation of new information. The literature cites many examples of the benefits of social interactivity on learning, retention, and satisfaction (Joosten, 2012). The literature also cites many benefits of well-defined collaborative learning for improving student achievement (Slavin, 2011). Benefits cited include: increased long-term retention, frequent high-level reasoning, increased accuracy, creative problem solving, and persisting in difficult tasks to goal achievement (Johnson et al., 2007). Clearly identified roles and responsibilities along with quality checklists or rubrics build a strong starting point for collaborative social learning projects like designing and developing a website. Collaborative projects can be simply executed by creating a single website account with a shared username and password, allowing individuals' contributions from any location.

When working with minor students, it is recommended to provide guidelines, so students' personal identities are not shared on their sites to protect their privacy. No photos of themselves, no personal address, no phone numbers, no email, no social media links, etc., should be included connecting back to them since it is on the open Internet where anyone can access it.

Methods

After teaching web design and development to graduate students for over a decade, my experiences are shared to help you to begin your journey in a simple, quick, easy to master approach. A literature review and informal qualitative experiential ethnographic study was used to improve teaching web design and development for graduate students ranging in age from 22 through senior adults. The settings have been both synchronous and asynchronous at a Midwest university in Education, specifically Instructional Design & Technology.

The recent interest in online learning has sparked the need to share simple, easy workable basic web design and development processes to help teachers to get started

with the creation of their own sites, or ones their learners will design, develop, and create. My graduate students have really enjoyed working with Wix, a free Internet based website authoring program. The site is stored on the Wix storage space, a huge benefit with cost savings during tight economic times. Often, when student storage space is used, it is routinely deleted by the university when students graduate. By using Wix storage space students avoid the issue of losing their work by staying online and active. The students like how easy it is to learn to use. This allows more time to be spent on the content offered to meet the learning objectives.

A site has been created and is accessible to you at <https://jholla71.wixsite.com/holland2> with many video tutorials, including text caption demonstrations, so you can learn at your own level, pace, based on your own interests. On the multimedia page, you will find near the top, under the left column, an introductory video covering the basics. On the multimedia page you will find additional useful Wix tutorials for features built within the program itself. On the multimedia page, on the right column, you will find external resources one can add to Wix to make the site more interactive. During the summer of 2020, Wix made some updates, including renaming and relocating some of their tools.

It is strongly recommended to set up a folder to hold your website media, such as; .png images (better quality and maintains transparent areas) or .jpg images (compressed, faster, keeps transparent areas), video .mp4, audio .mp3 (faster download times); other file formats are accepted by Wix. The media should all be copyright free and relate to your site objectives. Additional resources can be found on the supplemental website mentioned earlier.

Keep in mind the content provided on the site is the reason the visitor is there. Everything else added to the site is the backdrop to enhance the experience (Nielsen, 2000). The effective organization of the site design content makes it easier to understand and consume, all of which is critical to a quality site.

Since a great deal of the content on a site is text-based, creating an effective typographic hierarchy is very important. It begins with the header, sub-header, and body text. The hierarchy directs the eye to what is most important on the page. The design aspects that can be manipulated to achieve the desired results are; size, weight, color, contrast, upper case characters in headings or subheadings for emphasis, position, spacing, and alignment (Chapman, 2020). Some text tips include making the page title the largest in size, subtitles medium, and body text a normal paragraph size. Bold works well on titles and subtitles to make them stand out. Limit the number of fonts selected to two or three to keep the page simple and clear. Avoid difficult to read fonts as it can hinder content transfer for learning. Providing a consistent amount of space between text and media makes it easier to read. High contrast between the text and background color makes it easier for site visitors to read the content. The writing style used on a website should be very concise and directed toward the visitor. Think about the website users' needs and expectations regarding the content offered and how to best meet them. Write in an engaging manner to inform visitors of the site's purpose on the main page. Then, share any benefits offered to keep them on your site including, what they can expect to find. The Five Ws and How simply referred to as 5W1H, are questions used for information gathering or problem solving often used in journalism (Wikipedia, 2020).

The who, what, when, where, why, and how of good writing normally covers the basics needed regarding the content provided on the website.

Combining related graphics and multimedia to support the text content is a great way to make abstract concepts more concrete and acquire a deeper understanding. Everyone has different learning preferences and providing a variety of media better supports a wider group of learners. The Americans with Disabilities Act spells out the legal regulations mandating access for all (Nielsen, 2000). Learners with a variety of disabilities should be considered when media is selected for the site, like videos with closed caption text, images with alt tags, and audio with text transcripts. A significant amount of research literature cites evidence for learning gains as a result of combining media. Using words and related graphics are especially important for the novice with low knowledge of the domain (Clark & Mayer, 2011). This is where examples and even non-examples can clarify the content. In addition, there are many sources for copyright-free images or original images to add depth of understanding for site visitors. Be aware, seeking permission to use images or any other content or media owned by others requires proper citations.

Twelve basic design principles often mentioned in the literature include; contrast, balance, emphasis, proportion, hierarchy, repetition, rhythm, pattern, white space, movement, variety, and unity. The design principles can serve as a valuable tool for creating better site designs (Chapman, 2020). There are some additional basic design principles often used when developing a website. These include, Alignment is where elements on the page fall into line to each other both vertically and horizontally. Proximity is the distance and relationship between elements like having related images near the supporting text. Repetition or repeating design elements on all pages, exemplified by the use of similar types of images and color schemes, strongly recommended to be used. Contrast guides the viewer's attention to bold text, especially when using light against dark, so it is easy to see. White space gives the eye a resting place, so the page does not get too cluttered and busy, distracting from the content message. Consistency is highly recommended in the use of fonts, colors, design elements, etc., so visitors know they are still on the same site (Williams & Tollett, 2006).

A good way to think about web usability is striving to make all added elements intuitive or self-explanatory. The visitor wants to easily understand what they need to do and how to use the tools provided without expending a great deal of mental effort. Any questions causing the user to pause to consider the options increases the cognitive load and distracts attention from the task (Krug, 2000). This is where industry standards are helpful, such as recommending only links be underlined and typically blue in color, so the visitor knows how to respond without stopping to think about it. Additional, almost obvious but oftentimes overlooked, features should include a play button for an audio or video presentation and short, clear text directions on how to interact with multimedia elements; if they are not intuitive.

Since most learners are not good at self-assessment (Clark & Mayer, 2011), it makes sense to scaffold learners' website creations and content quality by providing guidelines, so expectations are clear. This is where quality checklists or rubrics can be valuable in guiding learner analysis and self-improvement of the sites created.

Post validation surveys are a great way to gain feedback for making future site improvements, whether it is for the instructors' website or those created by students.

The feedback gained on each sites' usability, or ease of use, quality, presentation of the content, and media offered, with open-ended suggestions allowing for comments not considered can provide opportunities for future improvements. This type of data can be placed into a table, so it is easy to see trends with the increasing number of times the same issue is mentioned. The higher the number of times it comes up, then the higher the priority to address in revisions to improve the site.

Results

One simple, easy to use design and development approach can be accomplished using the ADDIE model identified as; Analysis, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (Kurt, 2017); as was demonstrated within this paper. We began with the analysis of the target audience needs, goals, and objectives for the site. Next, used a storyboard to plan the site design. Then, created the site aligning all elements added to the objectives. Of course, at some point, it was put to use and implemented. And finally, post-evaluation was performed to get feedback on learner successes and failures, to make future site improvements.

Learner created websites fall within the product-oriented models of instructional design based on providing; a needed product, produced rather than selected or modified from existing materials, emphasis on tryout and revisions, and usable with learners as facilitators (Branch & Dousay, 2015). The Bates (1995) product-oriented instructional model begins with; an outline developed similar to the website storyboard plan, selection of the media used, development and production of the materials, evaluation, and delivery of the product. These concepts are easily incorporated as a part of the website design and development process.

Researchers indicate the interactive potential of the web is being under-utilized, and we need to move beyond mere storage, retrieval, and presentation of information (Alessi & Trollip, 2001). The goal is to move beyond reading, listening, and watching to add interactive depth. When considering these comments against the recommended web authoring program, it illuminates and emphasizes areas of potential future growth by increasing the interactive media options built into programs. Interactive learning could be increased through the use of text, audio, and video discussions. Sharing whiteboard space remotely could easily facilitate brainstorming and collaborative work. Creating shared learner group accounts available for multiple person access for building student-generated website design and development, as discussed earlier, is an obvious area for enhancing the learning processes. Including tracking technology to help identify who made specific contributions, like one would find on a blog site to track learners' efforts, will clearly allow for appropriate evaluation of individuals' contributions and detailed feedback.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of the study included conducting an informal qualitative approach without number data. The data collected included learning through authentic hands-on experiences using open-ended ethnographic observations to understand what is happening, interpret results, and make research-based improvements. It is experiential in nature through the completion of the website, which speaks to learner motivation to

complete it and the project quality. Numerous changes were made over time in multiple courses in an on-going attempt to continue to improve the quality of the site design and development process.

Discussion

Despite the limitations, this study adds to the knowledge base through qualitative experiential ethnographic information to improve teaching web design and development. In addition, the literature was reviewed to provide the basis for the techniques applied. The study spanned over a decade's timeframe with a large number of learners. This paper covers ways to overcome challenges and scaffold both novices and those with a great deal of prior knowledge. As the concepts were implemented, the quality of the websites and learner engagement continued to increase over time. Learner evaluations were used to measure the accomplishment of targeted goals and objectives, quality content, design aesthetics, technical mechanics, and effective multimedia communication mechanisms. The suggestions implemented and recommended in the paper are consistent with previous research studies of best practices based on proven instructional approaches and models.

One important insight from this study was the inclusion of pre-evaluations and post-evaluations to better act on the feedback provided. It's also a great way to add quantitative number data in the future to track finite details and any subsequent changes made.

This study was based on graduate students, so more testing is needed at all age/grade levels. Educators should consider infusing the concepts presented as and when they are age-appropriate to your target audience.

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It's the Experience Not the Format: Successful Techniques to Transition Social Justice Coursework To a Distance Delivery Format

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Abstract

“Research on multicultural learning has focused on formal and local settings, such as schools, but young people are interacting with, and therefore learning from, informal settings and nonlocal contexts, including online platforms.” (Kim, 2016, p. 1). The instructor must be vigilant in selecting online teaching pedagogy when offering sensitive topics of courses because face-to-face intimacy is usually a component of more traditional courses in diversity (Matloob Haghanikar, 2019). The purpose of this current paper is to align critical parts of an experiential race relations curriculum (Clarke, 2019; Kranz & Lund, 2004) in a face-to-face setting with digital technologies available for use in distance education, specifically synchronous and asynchronous online delivery. We outline the original course components and show how technology can be aligned.

Keywords: online teaching, race relations, course design

Successful Techniques to Transition Diversity Coursework to a Distance Delivery Format

The United States has a long history of disparate treatment of Blacks. From the first days of slavery to the most recent riots in Minnesota, Atlanta, and other places in the country rage has turned American against American. Riots occurred in New York City in 1906 (Hodes, 2011), 1917 (Bachelier, 2017), and 1921 (Teague, 2018). There continues to be a rage among many Black communities. The race riots peaked again in 1968 and 1969. Martin Luther King, a leader in the black activist community, was assassinated on April 4, 1968, and within five days, riots had erupted in 130 cities, caused 39 deaths, and 2,500 injuries (Juhnke, 1999). It is not within the scope of this

current paper to detail the history of all of the racial tensions in the United States. Instead, the earlier and current events give readers a sense of context and demonstrate the need for continued exploration of social justice and the relationships between Blacks (minority) and White, non-Hispanic (dominant) populations using educational technology.

With our country still struggling with race relations issues in 2020 (e.g., George Floyd murder), it is essential to examine both new and legacy interventions for developing positive race relations. We focus our paper on components designed in the early work of Peter L. Kranz, a first instructor of the race relations teaching curriculum. Already with a keen interest in race relations, Kranz fostered relationships with teens in the Brewster Douglas Housing Project in Detroit, Michigan, during his affiliation with the Merrill Palmer Institute. At the time of Dr. King's assassination, Kranz was a Ph.D. doctoral student at Utah State University contemporaneously with these events. Fortunately, he was able to attend race relations groups by Dr. Price Cobbs (Grier & Cobbs, 2000). He developed the experiential curriculum from 1972 to 1977 at the University of North Florida, where it received national media attention (Kranz & Lund, 2004; Thurbow, 1997). The result of the original experiential class is now available in book form *Arena of Truth: Conflict in Black and White* (Clarke, 2019).

While the face-to-face structure worked well in the 1970s and continues to work well when students can meet together, many courses today are taught *via* distance education in either an asynchronous (where students log in at any time) or synchronous fashion (interactions & instructions occur in real-time with all class members present on the distant delivery platform). We use the term older, more general “distance education” throughout the paper because many new technologies other than “online” are developing. Older techniques (e.g., email, phone conferences) can and are still being utilized to teach when students are not physically present with the instructor. Kim (2016, p. 1) writes, “Research on multicultural learning has focused on formal and local settings, such as schools, but young people are interacting with, and therefore learning from, informal settings and nonlocal contexts, including online platforms.” The term distance education is much more inclusive encompassing online, use of open social media platforms and materials.

Many new programs and courses are offered exclusively online to meet the needs of an increasingly geographically and economically diverse student body. While online education can serve to increase the diversity of any given course, the instructor must be vigilant in selecting distant teaching pedagogies. When offering sensitive topics, face-to-face intimacy is usually a component of more traditional teaching. Some have used technology while teaching diversity (Matloob Haghanikar, 2019). For example, Matloob Haghanika (2019) used avatars, videos, and gestural images through a program called Plotagon. In that qualitative report, he dealt with racial identity, dehumanization, and truth-seeking. He found that undergraduate students responded with higher-level questions and critical dialogue as they interacted with avatars in a controlled video interaction.

Several authors provide excellent discussions of how to be sensitive when designing courses that have students from many different cultures (Alalshaikh, 2015; Arbour et al., 2015; Kim, 2016; Sadykova & Meskill, 2019). Alalshaikh (2015) considered two factors concerning distance learning: globalization and its impact and types of distance learning. He argued that cultural learning styles and dimensions were

of paramount importance. World views significantly impacted the types of responses learners my present to different material. Perceptual learning styles, cognitive processing, social learning styles, and problem-based learning styles are different across cultures.

Kim (2016) used school-aged youth to analyze how they engaged with Korean produced media. Using ethnography, case study, and content analysis, Kim found that the use of distance technology was an effective medium. Student attitudes changed from uni-dimensional, self-identities to the ability to see themselves in a multi-dimensional capacity. Finally, in a case study describing the relationship between a Chinese graduate student and her US mentor, Sadykova and Meskill (2019) found that working together in a distant format could be made a positive experience through accommodations and language socialization.

Definitions and Overview

There can be many various definitions associated with teaching social justice and its fundamental premises in a University setting. We adopt the below descriptions, acknowledging that there are many alternative definitions described in the literature.

Face-to-face

This method usually entails the physical presence of an instructor at the same location as the students. For this paper, face-to-face will also denote the curriculum and the techniques used by Kranz in the 1970s. We realize that many techniques that he originated have been modified and expanded upon in face-to-face settings and that contemporary face-to-face instruction often uses a variety of technologies. Finally, face-to-face instruction is synchronous.

Hybrid/Blended

For this article, a course is considered to be hybrid/blended if some student-student and student-teacher interaction are based in a classroom and some take place in an online (asynchronous or synchronous) environment. Hybrid courses can use a variety of tools available on the web, including discussion boards, videos, and other passive or active learning tools (Helms, 2014). Asynchronous in this context means that students can use the web-based portion of the course according to their schedule, and the instructor is not present at the same time as the student. Asynchronous interactions between students are not guided contemporaneously by the instructor but rather reviewed later after interactions occur.

Online

We define online to mean the asynchronous presentation of content with no face-to-face interaction required to complete the course. Online instruction can be instructor paced or designed so that student's self-pace throughout the course. Online is one form of distance education.

Diversity

When we use the term “diversity,” we mean racial diversity. Racial, used here, is the biological phenotype, self-identified by a given student. In this paper, focus on those who identify as Black and those who identify as white, non-Hispanic. Throughout the course, experiences related to current social justice movement are included. Cultural identity, sexual identity, and other identities are recognized as different social constructs that could easily be incorporated into our proposed structure but are not the focus of our work.

Techniques and Strategies

In this section, we describe the original experiential method used by Kranz, followed by a current use hybrid and/or online analog. The analogs will be useful in either asynchronous or synchronous courses (with all students online at the same time). It is important to note that although the growth in asynchronous online education has outpaced synchronous delivery, some of the techniques described will be useful only in online courses that are delivered synchronously. The authors will also reflect upon techniques in the context of current social justice precepts and cultural norms on university campuses versus the norms in the 1970s.

Course Composition

Experiential education outcomes can be enhanced by selecting course members. Here, optimally, the class membership composition should be as even as possible between races and genders. The original course was designed with an enrollment of 12 students, three students each by gender and race. Course prerequisites or permissions did not constrain course composition. Distribution naturally enrolled students more or less evenly. When the optimum balance did not occur naturally due to enrollment, the distribution difference in the original courses was minor. For example, in the original classes, there may have been an additional white or black student or an additional female or male. These minor differences were inconsequential in the quality of the course and the experiences of the students.

Hybrid courses can use the same enrollment strategies as initially proposed. However, given the overall push for higher enrollment in classes due to financial reasons, courses in the 2020 decade are likely more than 12. After registering for the course and beginning their participation, in the 1970’s class, they could drop the course without any penalty or difficulty. The option to drop the class without penalty is also available to students after some period of participation. The one caveat we note is that institutions sometimes limit the time frame to which a drop may occur without penalty. Also, institutions may limit the total number of withdrawals over the student’s academic career.

Most often, online courses with larger enrollments than face-to-face courses (Lowenthal et al., 2019). The distribution of students is likely to mirror the general student body population, and such an even cell size can be challenging to obtain. The

increased enrollment and uncontrolled racial/gender mix can be offset through the use of teaching assistants and/or the creation of small groups that are balanced by gender and race. If teaching assistants are used, they should represent the diversity of the course enrollments.

Language and Vernacular Awareness

In the original course, understanding the meaning of words in the context of race relations was a critical first step in communicating among class members. Students were instructed to speak in their own vernacular without hesitation or worry about how to say what they were feeling without fear of offending the other group. Political correctness was not required as this prevented honesty of expression of feelings and dialogue. Finally, students were asked to talk using the first person “I” instead of “we.” Students and instructors were required to take personal responsibility for their oral disclosure. The instructor of the race relations course made themselves available to students if they need to meet with over any particular personal issues from the class that caused any distress.

Like the face-to-face classes, the instructor of an asynchronous online course must also make themselves authentically transparent and establish each student’s responsibility for their written words. However, in the asynchronous class, responses to misspoken or offensive words cannot be queried immediately. Therefore, the delay may cause resentment and hostility towards the student who made a comment. While this also may occur in the face-to-face or synchronous online classes, immediate rectification of misspoken words can be clarified by the student who spoke. The delay of asynchronous responses to a written discussion board or posting can cause students to jump to conclusions without clarification and therefore escalate the tensions in the class.

Instructors must be vigilant, checking publicly disseminated work daily or more often. If needed, instructors and students have ready access face-to-face real-time interaction tools through most learning management systems. Additionally, third-party applications such as Skype™ or Zoom™ are readily available at no cost to the students. These technologies make “meeting” with the instructor easier than traveling to a physical location by one or both parties.

The use of a blended or hybrid delivery model brings both the best and worst of face-to-face and asynchronous classes. That is, during the face-to-face portion of the hybrid course, the discussion can be clarified and guided. This can help form the basis of mutual trust and understanding that facilitates the asynchronous part of the course. However, misunderstandings during the asynchronous portion can still arise.

Grouping and Discussion Techniques

Dyads

The use of dyads in early in the group process was an excellent way to have the students began opening up to each other on their racial feelings. One on one interaction

seems to enhance the student's initial level of comfort in the growth process in the original course. One on one communication was often more comfortable as an icebreaker than large group activities.

This technique is easily replicated in a fully online or hybrid class. Letters of introduction can be tailored either through emails, synchronous audio-only or video chats, or discussion boards. Synchronous audio or video chats are the preferred methods to execute this initial dialogue in non-face-to-face classes. Since only two people are involved, scheduling difficulties are minimized. Many students are already comfortable with this through Facetime™, WhatsApp™, and other video chat mechanisms.

Circle technique

In the original course, this technique used an inner and outer circle with the inner circle having one demographic characteristic and the outer circle having another. As the outer circle rotated, the inner circle expressed their feelings about race and the effects of their identity on their daily life. The outer circle only listened and then responded as to what they heard, their feelings, their perceptions, and behaviors that they had not heard before. The use of the circle technique enhanced listening to the other group. Often the two groups did not effectively listen to the other groups' concerns. By using the circle technique, those sitting in the outer circle have the opportunity to just listen to the other group without responding. The outer circle listening students had time to reflect and process what had been heard.

This technique is easily replicated in online courses. Students are directed to begin a conversation about race on one discussion board that aligns most closely with their self-identified demographic. For example, one discussion board may be for individuals of color, and the other discussion board may be for non-Hispanic whites. The “closed” groups engage in a discussion about the other race going back and forth for an allotted time, such as two days or up to a week. Their conversation is initially only available to participants on that particular board, and comments are not shared outside of the “closed” groups. At the end of the initial discussion period, all comments are made available to the whole class, and the individuals who did not initially participate in the “closed” discussion are allowed to comment on what they have observed in the other demographic group’s dialogue. Again, these discussion boards need to be monitored closely by the instructor.

Role reversal

Another beneficial technique in the original course was having students participate in role reversal. This was a valuable technique for the majority group to understand the minority group perspective better. Most white students had never been in a minority situation. In the original course, students were instructed to sit on the floor and close their eyes and listen to the instructor providing visual imagery. Then the students opened their eyes and imagined that the only difference in their lives was now the color of their skin. Black students became white, and white students became black. Even with just a change in skin color, many emotions came forth and how their lives

would now be. For example, would they still have the same girl or boyfriend, or could they go home without facing a possible lack of acceptance?

This technique is can also be accomplished in online settings. Students initially listen to a guided imagery audio recording and then respond through a reflection paper to the prompts in that recording. For example, they would reflect upon the questions asked above. After each student has reflected on how their life would be changed with only a change of color of skin, a round-robin dialogue using a discussion board is conducted.

Experiential Learning

A second, and critical, role reversal technique in the original course was spending the weekend at a college/university within which the student represents a minority presence. This role reversal gives each group the opportunity and experience of being placed in a minority situation and is very helpful in sensitizing them to being a minority. Likewise, a technique that was very meaningful for the students' race relations growth was the requirement that they live for a week with the family of the other race. This requirement gave the students an intensive experience in examining their race-related feelings, perceptions, and beliefs toward the other group. Students were encouraged to spend time with other students from the class in developing relationships and discuss the race issue. The most common result was the awareness that we have more in common than different, and many of the preconceived assumptions were challenged and discarded. It appeared that the time spent together was very instrumental in the student's growth related to diversity.

Students in a hybrid or online setting can also be required to engage in the experiential activities listed above. As they complete those experiences, they write a reflection paper on their feelings and emotions related to being a minority in a setting. In essence, the personal growth-related to this experience is described in their reflection papers. Optionally, students from different demographic groups may review the original reflection papers and make their comments to their classmates. It should be noted that in the 1970s, safety in visiting relative stranger's homes and campuses was not as much of a concern as it is today. Unfortunately, there continue to be press reports of black students being stopped on predominately white campuses. In the authors' opinion, the converse is not as probable. In any case, how far race relations have advanced is a topic for additional dialogue.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to discuss how specific historical, face to face techniques used in a sensitive topic area, race relations, could be accomplished in contemporary distance education settings. We have directed our comments more toward neophytes in distance technology rather than those who are technically experienced. We hoped to present practical examples of a conversion process to lessen fear and skepticism regarding the online presentation of this sensitive topic. Readers

are also encouraged to review articles listed in the introduction for information on the technical design of courses for intercultural audiences.

Respected psychologist Albert Bandura wrote in 2002, “Technology influences, and is influenced by, the sociostructural nature of societies. The codetermining socio-structural [*sic*]factors affect whether electronic technologies and globalization serve as positive forces that benefit all or divisive ones in human lives” (Bandura, 2002, p. 1). We believe the forces to be mostly positive after almost two decades of experience. Second, many universities advocate “trigger warnings,” politically correct discourse, and other requirements that students feel emotionally “safe.” The experience of learning, we must remember, is ‘enmeshed with ethical relations’ and fundamentally rooted in the nature of human relationships that come to define any particular learning environment (Vakil & Ayers, 2019). Instructors should be aware that some of the techniques advocated above create unsettling emotions in students for the purpose of learning more about themselves and others. Don’t be afraid, but do be careful based on your campus norms, expectations, and policies. An excellent corollary article entitled *Professors, Are You Hiding Your Politics? Bad Idea* speaks to creating unsettled emotions (Journell, 2019).

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Civic engagement: Exploring student peer discussions online

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Introduction

Research consistently demonstrates that deliberations are a process where students listen to each other, reflect upon ideas exchanged, and ask for clarification of a peer's perspective while providing their own. This egalitarian process allows for critical reflection, depth of insight, and perspective as students interact and challenge each other for clarity of thought while explaining their own (Caspi et al., 2008; Chadha, 2019a; Kiesler et al., 1984). Researchers find that of the three types of interactive deliberations that occur online, student-student, student-instructor, and student-content, student-peer interaction is the strongest predictor of student performance (Chejlyk, 2006; Keeler, 2006; Kuo et al., 2014).

The importance of peer-discussion-based learning has been emphasized for many years by numerous theorists who underscored the idea that deliberative engagement is beneficial for those in academia and for those outside academia such as practitioners (Andriessen et al., 2013; Astin, 1993; Bender, 2012; Hurtado, 2003). In academia, for instance, students deliberate over theoretical notions such as the idea of citizenship, each reflecting and deliberating on the concept while increasing their knowledge, often leading to higher grades (Bode et al., 2014; Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Chadha, 2019a; Chadha, 2019b). Moreover, researchers find that courses that engage students online with deliberative strategies reported higher levels of satisfaction and learning than courses without engagement strategies (Chadha, 2019b; Swan, 2002). While outside academia, deliberations over microchips on cars or social media platforms provide the multicultural perspective /interpretations leading to greater productivity among peers (Luca, 2015; Soltes, 2014; Baumöl et al., 2016; Chadha, 2019a, 2019d; Englund, 2006; Grönlund et al., 2014; Mandernach, 2018).

The deliberative back-and-forth dialogue is further enhanced due to the benefits online environments provide. One of these benefits provided to students online is having the time and space to respond, which allows time for reflection before responding. Another benefit online is that online venues provide anonymity in that each does not know their peers' race, religion, course level, or modes of instruction. Anonymity allows each to participate based on the content of the message rather than the identity. The benefits of being anonymous and free of time constraints allow for deeper critical reflection, response, visit and revisit of spaces as they ponder over varying ideas while being inquisitive about and asking each other for their perspectives (Herring, 1993; Chadha, 2019a).

Moreover, as students deliberate with peers who are not in a position of authority, they build personal connections with them, such as offering unique identifiers that only someone in their position would appreciate. Personalized connections make each participant comfortable, while anonymity and unconstrained time allow for free discussion of ideas and opinions. Moreover, with budding relationships, natural inquisitiveness takes root as they ask for clarity of perspectives while providing clarity of their own. These interactive processes build relationships amongst peers as they listen actively, respond with reflection, ask them for clarity while providing their own, thus building academically reflective deliberations (Hollenbeck et al., 2011; Evans & Cuffe, 2009).

Theorists underline that the interchange among student peers as they think critically, are inquisitive, and ask for peer perspectives furthers and lengthens their relationships (Bornstein & Brunner, 1989; Chadha, 2019b; Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1981). Undoubtedly, each visit and revisit of discussions create talkative yet reflective deliberations which build their academic knowledge as they welcome the exchange of multiple viewpoints and coproduce content, deliberating in a way that voting cannot. (Boud & Sampson, 2002). Likewise, much research finds that as students interact with their peers who have similar experiences and are in the same position as themselves, each making valuable contributions (Chu et al., 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Meanwhile, the relationship among peers lowers a sense of isolation (Kuo et al., 2014; Croxton, 2014) while increasing retention and promoting deeper and meaningful learning (Piaget, 1969; Vygotsky, 1981; Chadha, 2019c; Chadha, 2019d; Chejlyk, 2006; Keeler, 2006).

With the rapid growth of online education and the need for research ascertaining the benefits of this mode of education, this study examined a semester of student peer interaction online. Specifically, this research examined whether students interacted with each other with academic reflectivity on an online customized, subscription-based website accessible to only those students who signed human consent forms or obtained parental consent. Academic reflectivity meant that the students had reflected, deliberated, or reconsidered views responded to questions, or when they commented on peer-posts. In essence, students were thinking critically, developing informed perspectives across issues, learning from opposing views of others, and interacting in a civil manner.

Literature Review

Deliberation is defined by scholars as an interaction where each individual/student “takes a stand by listening, deliberating, seeking arguments, and evaluating . . . in a collective effort to find . . . (Dis) agreement” (Englund, 2006, p. 503). These deliberations are a process where each student reflects upon the content, asks open-ended questions that extend the discussion, responds with their own perspective (Dixson, 2012) while also proposing new concerns and questions (Stromer-Galley et al., 2015). The reciprocal process of reflection, adding information, asking for clarity of perspectives is one that is comparable to face-to-face courses (Botsch & Botsch, 2012; Delli & Keeter, 1996; Chadha, 2019a). While other research finds that due to the benefits of online spaces aiding in deliberative dialogue, retention rates on par between these online and face-to-face modes of instruction (Bolsen et al., 2016; Chadha, 2019a).

Benefits of Online Spaces

Online spaces provide several advantages that sustain and engage in deliberative communities. For one, as students do not know the race, ethnicity, religion, or modes of instruction of the others in online spaces, this buffer of anonymity allows the focus to be on the message rather than the identity of the student making for deliberative engagement on equal terms (Herring, 1993). Second, the asynchronous design of online spaces provide students with time for reflection before they respond. Moreover, asynchrony provides the sense that ‘someone is always listening’ (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 116), thereby narrowing the dialogue just between just those involved. The personalization of dialogue furthers rigorous deliberations despite differences in viewpoints, time differences, or geographic regions (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2009). In totality, the multiple benefits of online spaces provide time for students to ask each other insightful questions or to clarify their own perspectives (Caspi et al., 2008; Chadha, 2018; Kiesler et al., 1984).

Peer to Peer Engagement

Aside from the benefits of online spaces, peer deliberations are further strengthened by the fact that participants are in the same position as them. As peers, they add personal identifiers such as being a single parent or having served in the military, further building their relationships (Pollock et al., 2011). Peer-to-peer relationships further a sense of familiarity and connection amongst them as they seek clarity of peer perspective (Evans & Cuffe, 2009; Chadha, 2019c; Chu et al., 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In establishing comfort, they ask for clarity of academic content and peer perspectives while being inquisitive of said perspectives lengthening deliberations (Boud & Sampson, 2002; Evans & Cuffe, 2009; Chadha, 2019c; Stitzlein, 2014). They play devil’s advocate as they challenge a peer to account for their views (De Bono, 1985; Swan, 2002a). They seek clarification of ideas as they are genuinely curious about varied perspectives (Guzdial & Turns, 2000) and/or to flush out or clarify

positions (Chadha, 2018; Stitzlein & West, 2014). Each form of interaction lengthening the deliberation as they visit the site to read student peer perspectives.

Deliberative Benefits for Students or Practitioners

Deliberative research finds that interaction among students build academic reflectivity as they are continuously involved in thinking critically, applying the knowledge learned, asking for clarity while agreeing and or disagreeing in an attempt to gain greater knowledge (Evans & Cuffe, 2009; Chadha, 2019c). Moreover, the exposure to diverse viewpoints aids in developing skills to handle and resolve disagreements, which include the cognitive understanding of these differing viewpoints (Zuniga et al., 2002; Gurin et al., 2004; Guttman, 2000), a skill useful in both academic and or practitioner environments.

Calls for Research

With online education growing rapidly and educators seeking the viability of online education, a call for research on online educational collaborations is issued (Anderson, 2003; Hamann et al., 2009; Lou et al., 2001). Tangentially, non-academics/practitioners additionally seek research that would provide a basis for the growth in technologies that have become the norm of communication in business (Lou et al., 2001; Luca, 2015; Soltes, 2014).

This study answers this call by academics and, by extension, by non-academics /practitioners for evidentiary research using an e-collaboration that has been successfully used for the past twelve years. In doing so, this research is significant for several reasons. First, it responds to the need by educators seeking the viability for online education. Second, it responds to viability of online spaces for non-academics/practitioners.

Methods

This study provided a space for interactive discussions for students across two different yet identical courses taught by the same instructor, during the same semester and at the same university. This research, therefore, studied the reflective peer interactions of these students in the collaborative spaceⁱ and used a mixed-methods approach. First, it employed content analysis, a commonly used technique to code discussion boards (Chadha, 2019a; Hamann et al., 2009), followed by statistical testing through ANOVAs. As all coding was done by the instructor, no intercoder issues existed. While pre-and post-test surveys provided the student perspective.

Academic Comparability in the Collaboration

The instructor added the collaboration to her two “Introduction to American Politics” courses, which were freshman-level courses offered in parallel during the same semester. The instructor distributed a common set of standardized instructions in her syllabi to her classes, class X and, class Y with three requirements for collaboration. 1) First, students had to post eight (8) times and respond (8) eight times to the same minimum number of questions, for a total of sixteen times over the semester. The weekly post and response to discussion questions would build and maintain a discussion-based online community. 2) Second, were required to post and respond using a minimum length of 75 words. 3) Third, the professor assigned a course grade, 10% to this collaborative activity, as shown in the comparability, of course, e-collaboration in table 1. Students could not gain access to the collaboration unless they had signed human consent forms.

<i>Table 1</i>		
<i>Comparability of course e-collaboration</i>		
	Class X	Class Y
Course Name	Survey to American Government	Survey to American Government
Course Level	Lower (Freshman) level	Lower (Freshman) level
Collaboration requirement in Syllabus	8 posts and 8 responses 75 word minimum length 10%	

Note. The collaboration linked the identical course taught at the same level during the same semester and had three identical collaborative requirements. The course itself would cover the same content using the same schedule throughout the semester.

All students had to sign a consent form for the collaboration and an alternative project provided if they chose not to consent. Students then had to request permission to join the site, and after the instructor verified their signed consent, they were allowed to join the site. Any student 18 years or under had to have parental consent to join. With the intent of the collaboration to be an academic deliberative space, the dependent variable tested for student academic reflectivity.

Variables coded

The dependent variable, academic reflectivity, based on past deliberative research, meant that students had reflected, deliberated, or reconsidered views when they responded to questions and or asked for clarity. In being academically reflective, a student thought critically, developed informed perspectives across issues, learned from opposing views of others, and interacted in a civil manner.

Operationalizing the dependent variable:

1. Reflectivity meant that the student thought critically and involved themselves in a dialogue seeking alternative perspectives (Stitzlein, 2014). Such discussion, however, was not just talk for the sake of talking; it involved critically reflecting on one's own beliefs while simultaneously being open to learning other ideas or perspectives from peers (Stitzlein, 2014; Chadha, 2019a).
2. Civic application meant that the students were thoughtful citizens discussing civic issues such as the First Amendment, citizenship, voting issues and more rather than just mentioning them.
3. Posing an honest question meant that students asked thought provoking questions that furthered discussions, rather than rhetorical ones that assumed answers.
4. The academic text measured references to the academic text and/or class discussions in student posts and responses.
5. Media materials or outside links were measured by students' posting or citing media-related sources to external sites, such as a reference to court cases that would further student learning.
6. Length of post and response. This variable measured length in terms of time and effort on explaining/expressing perspectives. Therefore a 75 words or less response, a short response coded as a 1. A response between four to 9 lines, a medium response, coded as a 2 while a post/response longer than ten lines coded as a 3.

Operationalizing the independent/study variables:

1. Posts and responses. A student's academically reflective reply to the instructors' question equaled a post, while an academically reflective reply to a student peer, a response.
2. Talkative. The variable did not measure length yet measured whether the students were chatty or loquacious in a friendly manner, one that pushed the deliberations further academically.
3. Inquisitive. This variable measured students being curious, inquiring or asking about peer perspectives (with civility) furthering the deliberations.
4. Clarification of perspectives. The variable measured students asking for clarification of peer perspective while providing their own.

The Hypotheses

The hypotheses would measure for academic reflective interactions across the two classes. The first hypothesis (H1) students' posts and responses would be academically reflective. The second hypothesis (H2) students would be talkative with each other with academic reflectivity. (H3) Students would be inquisitive with each other with academic reflectivity. And H4, Students would clarify their perspectives with academic reflectivity. These four hypotheses would test for academically reflective interactions among peers on an online space specifically created for interactivity.

Findings and Discussion

A mixed-methods approach provided evidentiary results. First, content analysis of the thirty-three student posts and responses was performed across the variables outlined in the methods. These were followed by ANOVA testing the content analysis. Table 2 lists the mean and standard deviation scores of reflectivity across the two classes.

Institutions	Mean	N	Std. deviation
Class X	3.2158	278	1.51175
Class Y	1.5385	247	.77927
Total	2.4267	525	1.48171

Note. The mean and standard deviation scores of reflectivity were approximately equivalent across the two institutions. ANOVA followed revealing statistical significance of reflectivity scores across the four hypotheses. Students posted and responded with academic reflectivity across the classes ($p < .000$) supporting the first hypothesis (H1) that students' posts and responses would be academically reflective. Students were talkative about the issues with each other with academic reflectivity ($p < .000$), supporting the second hypothesis (H2) that students would be talkative with each other with academic reflectivity.

Students were inquisitive about the issues while furthering academically reflective discussions ($p < .000$), supporting the third hypothesis (H3) that students would be interested with each other's reflectivity. And students clarified their positions and issues with each other with academic reflectivity ($p < .000$) supporting the fourth hypothesis (H4) that students would clarify their perspectives with academic reflectivity, each result providing evidence for the four hypotheses as provided in Table 3.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	875.027 ^a	23	38.045	69.210	.000	.761
Intercept	191.207	1	191.207	347.838	.000	.410
Post/response	44.998	1	44.998	81.860	.000	.140
Talkative	29.491	1	29.491	53.649	.000	.097
Inquisitive	15.370	1	15.370	27.962	.000	.053
Clarify	7.980	1	7.980	14.516	.000	.028

Error	275.400	501	.550			
Total	4242.000	525				
Corrected Total	1150.427	524				

With the significance of these hypothesis, LSD post-hoc comparisons followed and are reported in table 4 with significant results ($p < .000$).

<i>Table 4</i>							
<i>LSD post-hoc significance of test differences in mean scores for reflectivity</i>							
	(I) Interact	(J) Interact	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
LSD	0		-.6288*	.13615	.000	-.8963	-.3613
			-.5683*	.14510	.000	-.8534	-.2832
			-.5951*	.13935	.000	-.8689	-.3213
			-1.1993*	.15243	.000	-1.4988	-.8998

With the significance in ANOVA and post hoc tests, this study provides statistically significant proof that an online collaboration is an academically viable strategy for students to discuss and deliberate current and controversial academic issues with each other while building relationships with peers. What's is that online peer interactions encourage critical thinking and are the ingredients for knowledge construction and cognitive development, promoting learning in distance learning environments.

Conclusions

The research provides significant evidentiary proof that online student peer interactions engage students with academic reflectivity. In fact, online deliberation has a democratizing effect that by extension is beneficial to practitioners as well.

Academically

Academically this collaboration has been used in the past twelve years across six different universities in the U.S. and used in a collaboration internationally as well. The

viability of the collaboration has persisted despite diverse student characteristics such as their race, gender, religion, ethnic profile, course level, or mode of instruction and among students of varying political beliefs with statistically significant results each time. These online collaborative efforts have increased academic achievement while providing an environment that mirrors the real-world.

Instructors involved in the collaboration have benefitted as their students engaged with peers outside of class participating as citizens (Chadha, 2019b). Universities benefitted as students enrolled without the need for physical classes on campuses. Meanwhile, students benefitted as they learnt from differing perspectives from peers across the country who were struggling with and debating similarly.

In fact, in semester-end surveys, students appreciated having a space to interact with peers outside the class. In a closed ended question students were asked if they were comfortable discussing politically controversial issues with peers online, 81% said they were satisfied, 4% said no, while 8% said maybe, and 8% said they were not sure.

Likewise, in response to an open-ended question that were asked what they liked or disliked about the collaboration. A wide variety of comments on their likes and dislikes of the collaboration ensued as shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Semester end survey, "what did you like or dislike about the collaboration"
<p style="text-align: center;">Comments that 'disliked' the collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ nothing to like until you have to turn it in late ➤ Disliked when only a few people participated. ➤ What I dislike was that the number of personal post (8) and about peers' posts (8) is too much. <p style="text-align: center;">Comments that 'liked' the collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ I liked the topics ➤ What I liked about the collaboration is that we had enough time to post our discussions. We were able to retrieve the questions, formulate our thoughts and then post the results to the page. ➤ Opportunity to see viewpoints from others not within my peer group, race, and culture ➤ I like that people react to your comments ➤ The different point of views and gaining a better understanding as to why my peers feel the way they do about certain things. ➤ I did not have any negative things about the collaboration ➤ I like that it makes me think critically.

- I liked how we can see other people posting on what we have to do also and not only turn it in to the teacher but to the class helped the classmates see what everyone thought.
- the topics were the best
- Loved it
- I liked how it was weekly and kept you engaged throughout the week
- I enjoyed the group discussions very much.

Non-academic or Practitioners

The research findings in this study are as imperative to practitioners as online deliberations are used to communicate and engage amongst their peers across national and international boundaries. For example, the discussion and deliberation of surgeries of conjoined twins among various medical practitioners ranging from doctors, nurses, and support staff from Iraq to Indonesia and beyond. Likewise, the discussion of applications and other constructs in car technologies and components used by engineers from the U.S., Germany to Japan.

To conclude, an e-collaboration is an effective deliberative tool as it enhances peer engagement across both academia and non-academia/practitioners. Moreover, peer deliberation is considered to be a best practice for an online environment as compared to Chickering & Gamson’s (1987) Seven Principles of online best practices in Table 6. As shown in the table online deliberation encourage cooperation, provide prompt feedback, emphasize time on task and respects diversity in talents.

Table 6		
<i>Comparing Chickering & Gamson’s (1987) Seven Principles of Online Best Practices</i>		
Chickering & Gamson’s best practices	Academia	Practitioners
Encourages student-peer contact	Contact inside and out the classroom increases student motivation and involvement. It enhances their intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own learning and future plans.	Encourages and develops personal and professional relationships. Encourages them to think and rethink
Encourages cooperation	Learning is more of a team/collaborative effort than being solo. Sharing ideas and responding to others' reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding.	Sharing ideas and responding to others' improves critical thought/deepens understanding in decisions ranging from restaurants to

		voting behavior.
Encourages active learning	Learning is enhanced as active learning is a continuous dialogue students continually learn. In writing about it, relating it to their experiences, and applying it to their daily lives, active learning is continuously encouraged.	Continuous dialogue encourages time on task or changes to task actively.
Gives prompt feedback Emphasizes time on task	They have greater chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and with an emphasis on the task at hand assess themselves from multiple perspectives.	Time on tasks across app development, marketing and third-party support keeps the focus on task.
Communicates expectations Respects diverse talents	Deliberations provide communication day or night. They provide for diversity of opinions. While allowing for relatability with others.	Interaction keeps communication on task while respecting diversity in accomplishment of task.

Undoubtedly much more research is needed and anticipated on online education such that they extend pedagogical engagement. What is clear is that this research provides significant proof that online peer interaction results in thoughtful critical deliberation of the topic at hand. The future of collaborative strategies is indeed bright for both students and practitioners alike.

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