

2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators Paper Submission

Virtual Teams Are Virtually Everywhere! Maximizing Online Course Team Performance through Tools and Technology

The necessity for virtual teaming has increased dramatically for working professionals. As students transition to the work environment, understanding how to successfully use online synchronous and asynchronous communication tools to communicate and collaborate effectively in an online business community will be imperative. This interactive session will share tools and techniques used in our Professional Business Practices course designed to enable student mastery of skills critical to successful, high-functioning teams in a virtual environment. Discussion will include the use of various technologies to enhance student learning and the overall group project experience.

Keywords: Virtual Teams, Technology, Project Management, Student Development, High Performance

1) Teaching Implications:

Learning Objectives:

- Leveraging technology to minimize time spent in the Forming and Storming segments of Tuckman's Stages of Group Development, allowing teams to get to Norming and Performing more expediently
- Increasing student awareness to the problems experienced by virtual teams and ways to overcome them
- Student skill development:
 - Using synchronous and asynchronous communication channels
 - Building Trust and Forming a Good Working Relationship
 - Delegating roles and responsibilities
 - Holding one another accountable
 - Developing new approaches to resolving conflicts
- Establishing best practices that can be applied to other coursework as well as the workplace; concepts are repeatable and customizable to allow for various scenarios

2) Session Description and Plan:

3) Application to Conference theme:

Over the past decade, our university, like at most other institutions of higher education, has seen an increase in the number and type of online course offerings. This migration to online learning, for our institution, was in response to two separate but related phenomena – the ability for us to attract students from a wider geographic area and to be able to provide more flexibility for a greater number of our students who were “learning while earning.” These changing currents have required us to look differently at our delivery model but has also introduced challenges in finding ways to promote student interaction and collaboration with our online offerings.

For the last several years we have offered a professional presentation course focused on helping students develop effective group and individual presentation skills. Originally developed for classroom-style presentation, there was a heavy influence on face-to-face presentation, evaluation and feedback; providing allotted class time for team building and other activities associated with group projects. Nearly two years ago, when we migrated the course to a web-based offering, we were forced to reconsider the types of pedagogies used in this course. One specific pedagogy included the required group and team activities that culminated in a group presentation.

In the online course, students no longer have the opportunity for face-to-face interactions without scheduling in-person meetings which proves challenging with student availability hampered and complicated by conflicting work schedules and geographical separation. This experience became increasingly frustrating for the students, because it increased their time commitment to class responsibilities, potentially detracting from their learning and inadvertently supported an isolationist mentality in regards to student work ethic. It was tempting to redesign the course to a blended learning delivery model however, the better solution was to adequately prepare these students to work more effectively in a virtual teaming environment by introducing tools and techniques that would enhance the development of these skills.

4) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

The work presented in this proposal has not been presented to OBTC and is not under current review by an outside source. This is the culmination of several semester’s work to move the content and course activity heavily reliant on a classroom-based approach to an online version that enable to students to achieve the same results.