Discussing How to Create a "Sense of Place" and Real World Connections in the Online Classroom through Alumni Videos and Other Methods

Abstract

This roundtable discussion will look to create lively discussion about how to create a "sense of place" and real world applications of class concepts for undergraduate and graduate online courses. The facilitator will give an example of one class method to help both of these factors- alumni of the class providing videos engaging with class concepts and showing how the concepts are important in real world working settings. This acts as way for students to see real world applications of concepts and envision these concepts in their own future career path. Different ways to use such videos to help course goals will be discussed. The session hopes to spark discussion of other methods to help these potential issues in the online classroom so that attendees discover multiple new ideas to bring back to their online classrooms.

Keywords: online classes; alumni; application; video clips; careers

Roundtable discussion

A common struggle of students is understanding how concepts taught in the classroom apply to their future careers. While students may have work experiences, they often do not have work experiences directly in the environments they will work in post-graduation. This means that material that might be very relevant future job relevant is not recognized by students in the classroom. Students need to learn relevant management skills and to do so need to see why they are relevant (Paglis, 2013).

Online classes have this struggle but also an additional one: that students can lack a feeling of "sense of place" for the class as the instructor and fellow students are often just words on a computer screen. In such a situation not only can material seem abstract but so can the class environment itself. Students have been found to see the online environment to be lacking in interaction with others (Platt, Raile, & Yu, 2014). Students feel disconnected from each other and how class material fits with the real world.

This roundtable discussion will focus on discussing these issues and drawing on the collective wisdom of attendees for exercises and activities that help with these issues in online classes. I will also share one way I've dealt with these issues in my own class, which attendees will be able to discuss and figure out different ways the activity might be used in their own classes. My example comes from a master's level course on employee relations but the session will look to highlight how this could be applied in a wide range of classes at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The way I've found to potentially help with both is to have class alumni videos build into the class. In an online class most weeks I had video from an alumni of that class talk about how the weekly topic connected with their real work experiences. Alumni help illustrate to students that course topics do matter in the real world workplace and to fill a guest speaker like role found in face-to-face classes. The alumni also are models to students of potential career paths. The alumni were previously in this class and their participation and examples show how the class material has helped them to succeed. I will also discuss how the videos can be tied in to case studies and discussion board questions to connect learning and the alumni real life experiences.

Videos in classes have been found to help students be engaged in class concepts and material (Billsbury, 2013; Fee & Budde-Sung, 2014). Berk (2009) discusses major learning outcomes that video clips can provide in the classroom. The alumni videos fit several of these learning outcomes. The videos can inspire and motivate students as they see possibilities for their own future careers. They can also help the course content fit in student's own world as they see alumni as similar to them. Finally, they help to show that element of real-world application. (Berk, 2009). Fee and Bunde-Sung (2014) found that when students described videos as having a positive impact the most common reason was providing a real-world example, something that is a good fit with alumni videos.

Thus, in this session we will all discuss the issues of "sense of place" and real world application in the online classroom and I will share this particular methods I am using to combat these problems. With a lively discussion I plan for attendees to offer their own exercises and methods so everyone can leave with new ideas for the online classroom.

Expected Learning Objectives from Discussion:

Appreciate challenge of sense of place in online classes

Appreciate difficulty of students applying concepts

Consider different ways alumni videos help students

Reflect on other methods that might help to create a sense of place

Discuss other challenges and methods in online courses

Session Description

5 minutes: Brainstorm with group on some of the issues of online classes: I will have 5 minutes where attendees come up with issues they have with online classes. I will have these written on a white board or on a word document projected on a screen. This will help people to begin thinking about their online class environment.

10 minutes: Discuss sense of place and issues in students applying concepts: I will briefly discuss the issue in online class of what I call lack of "sense of place," where students don't feel connected to the instructor or others. Without the face-to-face environment students can feel they are doing the class alone. I will then discuss the issue found across classes related to students feeling that course concepts connect to their own real world. I will give time here for quick questions by attendees on both topics.

15 minutes: Present alumni video idea and structure around it in class: I will discuss how I came up with this idea of alumni videos and the role I feel they play in helping both of the two issues previously discussed. I will discuss some examples of how the alumni videos are used

connected to pedagogy in my own online class. I will discuss briefly the process by which I talked to alumni to get them involved.

5 minutes: Group brainstorm of other ways to use alumni videos or similar content: I will have attendees share ideas of how alumni videos or similar content might be tweaked for different roles or fill different functions in an online course. I want my own use to serve as a springboard for attendees to share and come up with ways that will be useful in their own classrooms.

15 minutes: Discuss other ways that can be helpful in online courses: I will leave this part open for attendees to share their own exercises and experiences. I will push attendees to tie their examples with one of the problems I outline above and/or one brought up in the initial brainstorm of issues with online classes.

10 minutes: Time for other questions and debrief on what we learned: At the end of the presentation I want people to have time to share other related ideas on online courses and ask questions that did not fit neatly in previous sections. I will also over a brief summing up of what we have talked about in the session.

References

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