Quality Enhancement Plan

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER ON
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Challenging Times: Personal Thoughts on EL Experiences for our Students

By Katia Maxwell

We have all had to make some extreme changes to our daily work schedules, and some of us had to do 180° on our classes and the way that we teach them. As we prepare to come back to campus we may still find students that are concerned about being here even though there are the appropriate guidelines and procedures being followed for everyone to remain safe.

As educators we need to be prepared to work with our students, as some may face anxiety due to the uncertainty of what is happening, and others may choose to only take online courses for the time being because they prefer to remain in isolation from others.

So what do we do? What can we do? How can we still encourage students to enroll in face-to-face classes while having possible fears associated to their health? Unfortunately, I don't have the answers, but I would like to make some suggestions about how Experiential Learning can be incorporated into the classroom during these challenging times. Some of what I will suggest may be things that you are already doing, but some may be different.

One discussion that I have had with another professor is to incorporate more **research** as a classroom activity. Allow students to conduct individual research and assess them based on submission of a ready-to-publish research paper, or in a field lab notebook. Another option is to incorporate more **projects** in the class, possibly even removing exams and giving students more hands-on activities. Other individual activities can also be conducted that might require the student to write a reflection piece or provide a presentation of their experience. This could be **interviewing** someone in the career area they want to pursue, maybe a **field trip** or **tour** taken (even if **virtual tour**). Even attending a **professional meeting**, **workshop**, or **webinar**.

Another option that faculty members could take into consideration is the concept of a **flipped classroom**. This is where classes still meet in a traditional format, however students are asked to prepare prior to class by watching lectures online and then participating in hands-on cognitive activities (whether their homework or something else) while in class with the faculty member. Vanderbilt's Center for Teaching has a good article on the flipped classroom and can be found here:

https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/flipping-the-classroom/

A personal example to accommodate this summer was changing my blended Database course to online. Students in my Database course learn about creating appropriate database design documentation, creating databases, and applications that work with a back-end database. The first Phase of the project is for the student to understand a company's policies and requirements and design the database. Phase Two is for them to normalize it and be sure that it will not hold reduntant information, and Phase Three requires them to make the database functional with a front-end application. Students complete these phases and submit a report each time that is amended to the previous report, therefore creating a comprehensive design and development report.

For a different class that involved hands-on activities associated to web applications, a student had the following to say about it:

Also, in my final reflection of the class I stated that I doubt I would pursue web development in my career, but this week I prototyped an application using bootstrap with php and MySQL, which led to them deciding to adopt it and put me in charge of the development. This class was amazing, it was so immediately actionable, giving us a skill set we could instantly make use of. Thank you!

- Wilder Queen (Spring 2020)