

OMG! Leading and Learning to Create Faculty and Student Engagement Opportunities

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Abstract

This roundtable shared best practices and tools for leading and learning to foster engagement. This presentation showcased how to develop a learning community that integrates technological tools and strategies to promote collaboration, communication, and personal growth. In the context of institutional budgetary constraints that limited formal professional development opportunities, the Technology Integration Learning Community (TILC) emerged to link geographically dispersed faculty with the purpose of integrating technology to engage online students.

Introduction

Our Online Motivational Group (OMG) shared and discussed with the audience their ideas for creating faculty and student engagement opportunities. In this presentation, our Technology Integration Learning Community (TILC) discussed our journey and presented a brief outline about some of the tools we use to increase engagement in our courses, including tools for communication, collaboration, and productivity.

We provided participants with effective practices to promote collaboration and problem solving within a learning community and led a discussion on enhancing engagement in the classroom by discussing the technology tools, experiences, and outcomes from our TILC. By sharing the lessons we have learned, participants learned about our successes and roadblocks to implementing technology enriched learning environments to create engagement opportunities.

Creating Faculty and Student Engagement Opportunities

Many educators and learners are technologically competent using multiple digital and media devices and applications simultaneously. The connection between theory and application is bridged simply by sharing with colleagues, and reflecting about our own practices while referencing what the literature stated in a very real-life fashion. The goals of our TILC are to promote change, foster collaboration, and lead the way for integrating technology among a group of faculty.

Tools and Strategies for Enhancing Engagement

The following technological tools and strategies were briefly introduced to create engagement opportunities. These were organized under three main categories: communication, collaboration, and productivity.

Various communication tools were introduced including some for communicating more effectively (Remind and Google Voice), sharing information freely through the use of Blogs (e.g., Blogger) and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), staying in touch with family and friends via social media (e.g., Facebook), and streaming live video (e.g., Periscope and Facebook). We briefly described each of these tools below. Remind is a website that provides users a way to text message or email students and parents “where they are.” This application divides courses into separate sections and can be utilized to send specific messages as needed to specific groups. Students and parents join the class using a code. Neither teachers nor student see other users’ phone number. Google Voice is a free

communication tool that allows communication using all of your electronic resources including: telephones, mobile devices and a computer. This allows the users to gain access to needed information using any tool that is available at the time. Blogs and Microblogs are online diaries of thoughts published by an individual or a company. Blogs and microblogs have many educational applications and can be used to foster discussion in lieu of a traditional discussion forum. Blogger and Twitter seem to be the standard or most utilized blog and microblog; however, there are numerous social media blogs available to users from a variety of website or application. Acquiring good information quickly and easily seems to be everyone's goal today, and these tools respond to this perceived need.

Keeping in close contact with today's learners, colleagues, or stakeholders is paramount and simple with a variety of asynchronous or synchronous social media websites. Options with this tool include public and private websites. In emergency situations, social media is already the first communication method utilized to notify people of event cancellations, changes in plans, or simply an update about any topic. We provided examples of how to integrate social media into our courses, including live streaming, which enables you to transmit live video and audio coverage of any event over the Internet. Various software application such as Facebook or Periscope make this activity easy and simple to complete. These can be used for courses where an activity must be documented or for spontaneous instruction from the classroom, home, or relevant locations. These tools can provide a level of interest to a lecture that might otherwise lack quality interaction.

Collaborating in today's digital world is essential. Google products lead the way for collaboration. Google docs allows users to work together to complete activities online in real-time creating a true collaboration experience with other users. Other Google products were introduced, as well various collaboration tools from the roundtable members. Google slides was a favorite tool to create presentations collaboratively, Google forms allows colleagues to create together surveys, quizzes, and questionnaires. Google sheets is the Google collaborative version of Excel.

Finally, productivity tools are at the top of any educator's list. One of our favorites is Pinterest, which is an online repository for storing information. We shared a number of great and innovative ways to integrate Pinterest into the curriculum to enhance engagement.

Another must have in any educator's toolbox is Flipped Learning. A Flipped Classroom is a model of blended learning in which students learn content usually at home, and work is done in class with teachers and students discussing questions and solving problems applying the knowledge they acquired at home. There are a variety of tools and applications that enable this process to flow smoothly and effectively. Video Multimedia Tools are paramount to the flipped classroom. Leading the pack is YouTube which is a video sharing service that allows people to watch videos posted by other people and upload videos of their own. Students whose professors embedded YouTube links reported the "videos were exceptionally helpful" in increasing their understanding of the course material, allowing them "to grasp an understanding of many issues that were abstract or complicated."

In conclusion, this presentation targeted K-12 educators and higher education professors and administrators who want to create faculty and student engagement opportunities. The discussion highlighted various tools and applications used to engage students and colleagues. The members of our TILC reflected on best practices for evaluating, integrating, and sharing technology tools to enhance engagement in teaching and learning. We shared lessons learned from integration and briefly showcased various tools and strategies that had been used by our TILC and have been compiled in several products, including an online user manual, a social media blog, and a website. Finally, we were excited to learn that other educators in the US and abroad use similar tools to enhance engagement in their classrooms.