

Pedagogic and Course Structure Adaptations in Communication and Criminal Justice Courses

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Abstract

This narrative illustrates some of the steps utilized in the implementation of course redesigning processes, following participation in a 4-week High Impact Teaching and Learning Practices (HIOTLP) class offered by the Gardner Institute in the summer of 2020. The course focused on opportunities to integrate techniques and technologies that would render the online learning process engaging and inspiring. Communications and criminal justice courses involve the acquisition and the refinement of critical, creative, and practical thinking abilities. The challenge in assisting students achieve a superior level of performance in these three areas was overcome by utilizing a framework of change that primarily covered pedagogic and course structural changes.

Course Information: CRIJ3317 Professional Development; CRIJ4311 Ethics and Criminal Justice, and COMM1315 Public Speaking

Narrative

In the Fall of 2020, I taught one public speaking course and two criminal justice courses with a total of 42 students in the Adult Education Program at Huston Tillotson University. Participation in the HIOTLP class in the summer of 2020 was pivotal for the resulting knowledge gained and the opportunity of powerful exchanges with colleagues. Furthermore, drawing from perspectives acquired in a variety of disciplines that I have taught contributed to increase the extent of ideas and strategies for course structural upgrades and the integration of initiatives that could lead to better student learning outcomes.

One fundamental improvement in the course structure was the inclusion of an additional module in the class portal in Canvas LMS. Students normally find out about the services available to them during the orientation session at the beginning of their academic journey and when they speak with an advisor. However, the centralization of information in their class portal would allow them to immediately see the same resources, and more, to meet their needs and, therefore, improve their opportunity for wellness and academic success. Furthermore, the additional module becomes the repository for extra accessible tools to address specific academic needs and to provide answers to frequent questions and possible solutions to challenges through the delivery of strategies for them to attain their personal and professional success.

Among the many services featured in this additional module, students could find information about the university library services, announcements, and the eReserve system for readings to be made available for consultation. The policy on medical conditions and disability is normally a separate document. However, the course and syllabus restructuring process allowed for the students to immediately locate information about the disability office and related procedures, along with the counseling and health center. In-person and SmartThinking online tutoring tools were also placed in this module. Moreover, there was also a referral to SOS Canvas sessions available to both instructors and students on a weekly basis. Finally, written guidelines and a video would be accessible on the topic of plagiarism, as well as a link to the most recent copy of the student handbook. The importance of these resources should not be underestimated when students are required to focus on the pursuit of academic excellence.

Aside from the positive impact of improved academic directives and innovative evidence-based teaching practices, students were able to directly consult other services that could be beneficial to their wellness and to their academic enrichment. Additional strategies would refer to time management, understanding the difference between fabrication and plagiarism, and methods to balance work and academic coursework demands.

An alternative to the eReserve system for readings, available through the university library services, was the weekly listing of electronic resources that covered discussion topics and additional sources for written projects. At first, this approach was intended to meet the needs of the students who could not afford to purchase the required textbook. Students would discreetly access the information without having to share their personal financial situation with others in class. Moreover, the selected resources covered the subject areas that were the focus of the course from a variety of perspectives. Ultimately, all the students benefited from the opportunity to integrate some of these sources with the rest of the information they were required to search, analyze, and synthesize for their projects.

To accommodate diverse styles of expression and incorporate a new pedagogical method to further the students' cognitive development, individual video assignments were introduced in the courses' curricula. For instance, a "personal brand" video assignment was included in the public speaking course and an "ideal profession and ethical dilemmas" video project was included in the ethics and criminal justice course. The plan was to provide students with a structure and guidelines in connection with the main points to incorporate in the realization and recording of the final projects. The next phase of these assignments' preparation was to promote the students' personal creativity and originality in managing the course related contents. Furthermore, these assignments gave the students an opportunity to control the choreography of the environment where they would produce the video and the chance to learn how to manage the contents within the time allotted and the resources available for these projects.

According to the Gardner Institute (2018), active and experiential learning is promoted through a variety of techniques that encompass case studies, collaborative understanding, and the use of supporting tools. Following this principle, group activities were transformed from the traditional in-person class session modality to a placement in virtual breakout rooms. The students were given concurrent and direct access to case studies. Critical thinking skills were applied to the study of cases and problem-solving strategies were also explored. Finally, the students reconvened in the main meeting room and discussed or debated the findings with the rest of the study body. In line with the experiential learning journey, apprenticeship was

included in the courses' curricula to transform the students' peripheral participation to a full form of involvement, therefore aligning the learning process in class with a comparable degree of input in an ideal context of practice (Fjellström & Kristmansson, 2019).

Other projects involved the compilation of information on a worksheet through real-time feedback for validation of ideas and concept development and/or to assist with the adequate and concurrent reworking of the proposed plan during group activities in class. This approach was particularly helpful, because it allowed students to build foundations in preparation for a team project that would later generate a developed structure for a written extended outline and a creatively executed final presentation to deliver in class. From preparation to self-actualization through developmental endeavors, the students were introduced to a variety of guided activities that allowed them to implement a process of metacognition expanding from the experience at hand and the necessary regulation practice. In fact, an optimal level of proficiency was achieved through raising awareness, a process of reflection, planning, and self-reflection. The elements of creating a vision, setting a goal, and achieving self-knowledge remain in line with some of the steps required to reach self-actualization (Dezbankhan et al., 2020).

Since this experience, further implementation of additional technology and strategies has entailed simulated investigative scenes that give the students an opportunity to apply what they have learned through lectures and class exchanges, particularly in the case of criminal justice courses. This has been an opportunity to put to the test the aspect of practical thinking that forensic investigators would need to acquire to function in an environment where the application of models and problem-solving are fundamental for the advancement in their careers and the successful resolution of cases.

The new strategies and tools have represented an advancement from a pedagogical method to an *andragogical* approach, which allows adult learners to use their experiences and knowledge to further their academic involvement and responsibly address the needs of specific contexts (El-Amin, 2020). In the case at hand, this approach consents students to apply previously acquired foundations and sustain a self-directed and learner-centered path, leading to effective organization and insight, as well as to an enhanced degree of collaboration and advancement (Pavone, 2022).

Another tool that has been proven useful refers to closed captioning (CC) and transcripts for recordings, as part of video accessibility strategies for the minimization of obstacles, due to students' possible hearing impairments or other disabilities, in the acquisition of knowledge and for the optimization of learning outcomes. According to Dello, Stritto, and Linder (2017), students reported being able to concentrate, retain more information, and capture more details when CC transcription was utilized. In August 2020, The University of Southern Mississippi (2020) held an event on editing CC transcripts and shared the three major platforms available for this process: Cisco WebEx, MicrosoftStream, and Yuja. Speech-to-text technologies have continued to evolve to allow for clarity and accuracy. From the creation of ClassTranscribe for video lecture contents to increase students' understanding and performance (Angrave et al., 2020) to automatic speech recognition (ASR) tools that eliminate surrounding noise and can complement speech enhancement (SE) channels (Eskimez et al., 2021), to closed captions in Echo360, it continues to be important for educators to become familiarized with the necessary techniques that can enhance students' equal access to education and successful outcomes.

I am satisfied with the opportunity I had when I joined the 4-week HIOTLP class in August 2020. I look forward to more exchanges with colleagues on tools and strategies geared to assist our students in achieving their potential and embracing new academic and professional ventures.



References

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