

“Integration of small stakes assignments in pivot to hybrid learning: A success story”

When faced with the challenge of transitioning a Careers Preparation class, charged heavily with teaching soft skills or interpersonal abilities to a hybrid online format, a strategy was needed to promote student interaction with course material. In the traditional face to face model, in-class interaction and assignments are used with students to practice application of skills and test mastery of concepts before moving on to large assignments.

In the absence of immediate in person feedback for students, integration of regular but purposeful small stakes assignments provided “check points” for progress toward course learning outcomes. From the perspective of instructor, assignments also highlighted areas in which students failed to demonstrate mastery and needed to be re-addressed in class promptly.

Assignment examples:

In order to replace in-classroom active learning techniques which previously allowed for engagement with material and application of soft skills before progressing to larger tasks, structured 10 point online assignments were provided as replacement exercises.

Lecture material	Added small stakes online debrief activity steps for students	Corresponding high stakes application assignment (if applicable)
Public speaking & the elevator pitch	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit elevator pitch “script” to LMS discussion board. 2. Provide peer review on 2 classmate’s scripts with positive & constructive points. 	Final project to film complete elevator pitch video for larger points
Professional attire	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submit pictures of chosen outfit for two different professional dress categories as part of class-wide Virtual Fashion Show. 2. Find 2 classmate’s photos and suggest an example of a specific event their outfit would be appropriate for. 	Professional attire knowledge applied through two larger mock interview assignments
Professional meal etiquette – the interview meal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student choice of creating either 30 second “tik tok” style video or infographic to teach others about a topic of your choice. 2. Comment on one other classmate’s content with one thing you learned from them. 	
Modern networking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create and build out a personal linkedin profile. 2. Find class partner to exchange social media information with, review partner’s pages & google results, provide constructive feedback (submit proof of exchange thru LMS). 	Networking and communication skills applied through work on larger end of semester group project requiring students to interview industry professionals over perspectives and possible solutions to industry “issues” topics.
Professional communication etiquette	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review lecture material outline provided by instructor. 2. In small groups prepare to present virtually over assigned professional communication topic (email, phone, offices, text or other messaging, etc). 	

Tips for increased effectiveness evidenced by end of course survey & student responses:

1. Frequent but brief communication of clear assignment instructions and deadlines through multiple platforms (email, LMS messaging, posted timeline on course home page). Student feedback excerpts indicated usefulness of this approach, particularly in a semester filled with many online housed courses:
 - a. “Having a timeline of assignments and due dates on the front page of canvas helped me tremendously in keeping track of what I needed to do and when I needed to turn it in.”
 - b. “Clear deadlines and reminders helped me more than anything. It gets really difficult to balance everything so reminders and a clear Calendar was very helpful”

2. Integration of assignments in course modules on LMS provided transparency of how assignments tie to greater course learning objectives as stepping stones to larger application based assignments. Students remarked:
 - a. "Having clear deadlines and modules in canvas helped"
 - b. "The 10 point assignments really helped me stay on top of things."
3. Instructor use of assignment grading as opportunity to engage with students through feedback. Provided constructive guiding advice to promote sticking of learning points, but also gave positive encouragement. Capitalizing on quick, easy responses in LMS paid dividends in sustaining motivation:
 - a. "I enjoyed the interactive responses the most."
 - b. "I could tell that she really cared about her students learning in her class. I liked how she would praise her class on assignments that impressed her as she was grading."

Anecdotal assessment of benefit to student learning:

A direct correlation was observed between student completion of small stakes assignments throughout semester and completion of larger assignments which led to overall course success as measured by final grade performance. No student that completed all 10 point assignments failed to earn an A in the class.

As measured by student feedback on informal end of semester survey, assignments promoted active conversation and reflective learning as students progressed through learning objectives. The statement "Small 10 point 'debrief' assignments encouraged me to apply the knowledge I gained in class, or at least stay on track with class lectures" received an average student response strength of 9.22 on a scale of 1 (strong disagree) to 10 (strong agree).

Through regular small stakes assignments, students experienced heightened ownership of lecture material and active pursuit of greater course learning objectives, presumably achieving lasting knowledge of subject matter and ability to apply skills in the real world.

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