

Teaching Tips/Notes



Using a Video Response Tool for Course Assignments

Introduction

Educational practices theory suggests that student engagement and learning impacts increase when teachers “meet students where they are.” Educators have recently applied this theory to technology by incorporating social media and other technologies used by students into the classroom. For several years, I’ve questioned whether and how to “meet students” in their technology spaces and most importantly, whether this “meeting up” could generate positive impacts on student learning. My research led me to the use of video recording, a technology students increasingly employ in their social lives. Video recording tools offer a simple step toward meeting students in their technology spaces with the potential of increasing student engagement and learning through familiar technology practices.

Flipgrid is a tool that generates video recordings. Through the Flipgrid application, a teacher poses a question on his or her Flipgrid account and invites students to respond verbally with a video recording. A student uses a device equipped with a camera, such as a smartphone, laptop or tablet, to record his or her video response to the question. The Flipgrid application compiles the video responses into a “grid” that contains videos of all student responses and the teacher and students may view the videos. A teacher must obtain a Flipgrid license, offered at different pricing levels, but there is no account, log-in, registration or fee required for students to record a video response.

Procedure

I incorporated Flipgrid video recordings into my Agribusiness Law course, an undergraduate course of sixty students. I created three graded assignments using the Flipgrid application, each with a different approach. For the first assignment of the semester, I required students to introduce themselves and provide information about their majors, academic interests, familiarity with agriculture and legal topics of personal interest. I designed the introduction assignment to accomplish several purposes: to create a visual record that could help me learn and recall student names, to gauge whether explanatory information might be necessary for students with little or no familiarity with agriculture, and to generate a list of topics students could select from for an independent study project later in the semester.

A second assignment required each student to explain a property rights conflict identified through research. My purposes for this assignment were to focus on current events and reinforce research and verbal presentation skills. For the third assignment, students viewed other students’ property rights conflict videos and completed a series of questions about the videos in writing. This assignment encouraged students to analyze current events and legal issues and reinforce writing skills.

Assessment

My first attempt to incorporate the video response tool into the curriculum was fairly successful based upon end-of-semester student evaluations and my observations during classroom discussions about the tool. Of the sixty students enrolled in the course, only one student did not have technological capability to complete the video assignments. No students raised questions or required my assistance with the Flipgrid application.

Students were most receptive to the first introduction assignment. They indicated that the assignment was enjoyable, demonstrated my interest in them and helped them meet other students. The introduction assignment proved very useful to me, as I referred to the videos many times throughout the semester to recall student names and used the videos to develop a

list of legal issues of interest to the class for a later assignment. Additionally, the videos were an efficient “icebreaker” mechanism that established a positive tone for beginning the semester.

The second video response assignment was less popular with students, who reported that it was more difficult and uncomfortable than the first assignment. Some were frustrated by the three-minute limit established by Flipgrid, which required a few to remake their videos to fit within the time allotment. Several students stated that they would prefer to respond in writing rather than making a video response. Despite these comments, the second assignment responses were of consistently medium-to-high quality. Students appeared adequately prepared for the assignment and only a few students showed signs of discomfort while making their video responses.

Reactions were favorable for the third assignment, which required students to view and comment in writing on one other student’s video. Data available on Flipgrid showed that students viewed an average of fifteen videos for this assignment, suggesting a high level of interest in other students’ videos. The quality of written responses ranged more widely than the quality of the videos, however. Some written responses were lacking in substantive content but others exhibited inquiry, analysis and insight. Students reported that they enjoyed viewing the videos, but some admitted that their interest was for social rather than academic reasons.

Generally, I observed that these students appeared more comfortable giving video responses compared to students in previous classes which required in-class verbal presentations. A majority of the students confirmed this observation in their evaluations, but a handful of students reported that they were comfortable with both in-class and video presentations.

A few adjustments may improve the impact of the video response tool on student engagement and learning. The documented interest in viewing other students’ videos suggests that I should explore more ways to use the video grid as a discussion board. Several students proposed employing the tool to stage a debate on a particular issue, an exercise that could challenge students to sharpen skills in organization, analysis and persuasion. I will also be prepared to provide the technology for students who do not have video recording capabilities, rather than allowing those students to replace the video response with a written response. Future plans include continued use, refinement and evaluation of the tool.

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