ONLINE CL@SSROOM

IDEAS FOR EFFECTIVE ONLINE INSTRUCTION

NOVEMBER 2015 VOLUME 15, NUMBER 11

Capturing Global Perspectives During

By Kevin Oliver

Study Abroad

A large percentage of today's college students spend a semester or year studying abroad. The purpose of these experiences is to give students a global perspective by learning about other cultures, but often they huddle around their peers without truly immersing themselves in culture.

One way to combat this problem is with reflection activities that prompt the student to engage with their environment. Activities can include personal journals kept by the student, but online tools provide additional ways for students to record and publicize their experience to those back home. Many students already post about their study abroad experiences on Facebook, so it makes sense to capitalize on this interest in sharing in a formalized online context to prompt reflection on culture. Certain online tools also create legacy products or repositories of student understandings that can prompt synthesis or reflection during or after study abroad.

We have piloted several activities to capture global perspectives during study abroad as part of a teacher training program. Between 2011 and 2014, we took three teacher cohorts to the University of Surrey in England to learn about writing, technology, and culture. As a target for writing activities, participants created digital artifacts to capture what they were learning about the culture. Artifacts took different forms, but all provided a creative way for students to reflect on their experience and what they were learning about the culture.

Mapped Culture

One exercise is for students to contribute to shared Google Maps on different global themes. For example, students might contribute to a map their instructor creates on a theme like the "Victorian era" that is readily identifiable in London. Students use their mobile devices to capture photos representative of the theme in architecture, art, or museum exhibits. Students then add placemarks to the map that include their photos and textual annotations elaborating on the theme using one of the modes of writing taught in the course—expressive, poetic, or expository.

As students add to the shared

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TIPS FROM THE PROS

Five Captivating Assignments for the Online Classroom

By Amy Nemmetz

Traditional academic papers often undermine motivation by failing to show students the real-life applications of their subject. But with a little thought, you can craft assignments that add pizzazz across multiple areas of study. These activities provide students with opportunities to think more critically, analyze cases, recognize the impact of technology on their field, engage in ethical issues, and get more excited about the subject.

Sell It

It is not just kids who continually ask "Why?" It is essential to let others know why they should be concerned about a field of study to generate motivation. The "Sell It" activity has students inform others about the relevance of an area. Students create a poster, brochure, flier, or some other visual to teach others something important related to the field following a 3/3/3 protocol. The visual should include a minimum of three statistics, three graphics, and three credible scholarly source citations. They then use a free

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ONLINE CL@SSROOM
IDEAS FOR EFFECTIVE ONLINE INSTRUCTION

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Online Classroom (ISSN 1546-2625) is published monthly by Magna Publications Inc., 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Phone 800-433-0499; Fax: 608-246-3597. Email: support@magnapubs.com. Website: www.magnapubs.com. One-year subscription: $197 (Multiple print subscriptions and Group Online Subscriptions are available. Call Customer Service at 800-433-0499.) Photocopying or other reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. POSTMASTER: Send change of address to Online Classroom, 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704.

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Improve Students' Reading Skills with Interactive Assignments

By John Orlando

As faculty, it is easy for us to fall into the trap of "The Expert's Blind Spot." This is the well-established tendency of experts to not be able to understand the troubles of novices because the expert either never encountered the problem or has long gotten past it. Reading academic work is a good example. We all too often chalk up a student's misunderstanding of course material to laziness or lack of intelligence. But in reality the student may not know how to read an academic article. We have no problem reading academic articles because we were the better students in school, and have honed the skill through years of practice in our work.

Jan Miernowski, professor of French at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, addressed the problem by creating an interactive module that teaches students how to read difficult texts. The module uses a sample text and a series of exercises to walk students through the process of critically reading difficult work. It begins with a podcast overview of the lesson, and then takes the students through a series of screens divided into two parts. On the left side is a section of the reading, while on the right are exercises that teach critical reading. Students move through the text section by section, doing exercises that both ensure they understand the text and learn lifelong critical reading skills.

The general format is the same for each section. The student is first asked to carefully read the text. Words that may be new to the student are in red, and when the student runs his or her cursor over the word, a definition appears. The student then clicks a button that highlights parts of the text in different colors according to the concepts covered. The student clicks on the highlighted text to get further information on it. That information might include images, podcasts, or videos that examine the passage in depth. This teaches the student that they should be reading for underlying themes, rather than just surface facts.

The student is then given a series of exercises to test their understanding of the material. Those exercises might include completing a multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank question or picking the correct statement about the text from a list of statements. The student is told whether their answer is correct as soon as they submit it, and asked to go through the section again if they get it wrong. Students are expected to redo each exercise until they get it right, and so should have all correct answers by the end of the module. Their successful completion of the module is recorded.

The value of the module is that it addresses the underlying skills that can lead to poor performance, rather than just telling the student about their poor performance afterwards. It is a bit like the difference between telling a batter that he or she missed 10 balls versus teaching the batter how to swing correctly. Plus, it provides a way to teach critical reading skills at a distance.

A key to the success of the module is that students walk through the reading process one section at a time, with a reflective exercise after each section. Traditionally, we ask students to

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map, they come to realize the often wide-ranging diversity and complexity in a given theme. Seeing posts by others gives students additional insights into the theme, as well as ideas for more elements that they could add. This activity can also take the form of "selfie quests," with students capturing images of themselves in front of examples of the different themes. See an example at: http://bit.ly/1LXpENj.

Applied and Traded Memes

We have all seen those funny memes that come across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These are images of cultural icons with humorous text added to put words in the mouth of the subject. We admire them for their creativity in taking a new slant on an old icon.

This creativity can also be applied to cultural commentary. In our study abroad course, students create memes that combine familiar imagery from our American culture to help communicate an unfamiliar cultural lesson they have learned from immersion in the host culture. The result illustrates differences in cultural attitudes and practices. For instance, one student combined an image from *Game of Thrones* with the phrase, "One does not simply ask for separate checks when dining in an English restaurant," to illustrate different procedures. Another took a photo from *The Matrix* and added "What if I told you … you can't use your cell on the train" to illustrate different norms around public transportation.

Memes are easily created using free, online meme-generating tools. These tools allow you to choose between a library of prepopulated culture images or your own uploaded images. Memegenerator.net and Imgflip.com are two popular sites. Our students downloaded and reposted their memes to a shared Pinterest board or Padlet wall, allowing us to accumulate examples of cultural lessons learned over the course of a trip. See some examples at http://bit.ly/1oHSQeg.

A worthwhile addition to this activity is to invite locals from the host culture to review and comment on student memes, offering clarifications and pointing out misconceptions. Students can even create memes about their own country to share with distant partners, allowing students to learn about differences in each other's popular culture.

Represented Actual and Fictional Conversations

Students who travel with us meet and interact with persons from the host culture, and these people often reveal a story about their life or work that illustrates a cultural theme. We encourage students to capture their most meaningful cultural interaction with another person by writing a duologue script. Students then use our class GoAnimate account to import their script and create a short animation of their conversation within a representative setting. Students can view one another's animations in our group account and further reflect or comment on similar or different encounters. See examples at: http://bit.ly/1zUsTln.

Students in the program also research famous persons in the culture we are visiting and write short fictional scripts describing a comical conversation they might have with this person. Students choose not only the script, but a representative setting, such as Jane Austen in a coffee shop. For this activity students use the comic strip tool ToonDoo to visually represent these conversations. See one example at http://bit.ly/1QojreU.

Researched Places and People

To prepare our students for study abroad, each chooses a site to research that we will be visiting and prepares an online presentation to share with peers going on the trip. Some students create videos using tools such as iMovie, Apple's video editing software, and others have used Prezi for combining photos with audio narration. Students are quite creative in combining images with narration, and are obviously proud of their product. See one example at http://bit.ly/1K9BYuh.

During the trip, students are tasked with creating a multimedia timeline about some historic site or person using MyHistro. Students visit sites or museums with curated information, taking photographs as allowed and capturing notes on key dates and events. This information is then compiled into a timeline about place or person. See one example at http://bit.ly/1FxVrj0.

It only takes a small nudge and a little direction to get students to engage more with their host culture in study abroad programs. These examples can also be applied to any online course that draws together students from different cultures. Consider adding online activities to your own classes that prompt students to engage with different cultures.

Kevin Oliver is an associate professor of digital learning and teaching at North Carolina State University. @

Tips from the Pros
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digital poster creation service such as Canva to develop and display the work. Sample topics include sexual assault awareness on college campuses for a criminal justice course, creative healthy living strategies for a health and human performance course, the benefits of composting for an agriculture course, and smart investing for a finance course.

Ethical Nightmare

As educators, we prepare our students to face tough ethical decisions within their professions. The "Ethical Nightmare" assignment has students locate an ethical case in their respective fields, provide a summary of what occurred, identify why the situation raises ethical concerns, rate the severity of those concerns, summarize the final outcomes, explain whether the final decision seems appropriate, and propose one additional solution or outcome that the participants might have chosen. Newspaper or other media outlets provide ample fodder for ethical conundrums in any profession. Sample topics include a social worker dating a client, an accountant overlooking suspicious ledger entries during an audit, a psychology researcher switching participants in an experiment to influence the outcomes, an engineer minimizing the scope of a structural problem to avoid construction delays, and a safety officer doctoring fire alarm testing records to ensure regulatory compliance. These investigations help students see why their profession has ethical principles and how they play out in practice.

Case Analysis

We cover theoretical principles in our courses because they apply to practice. Normally, we introduce the principle by covering it first, and then illustrating it with examples. But students will be doing the opposite in practice: encountering the example first and then identifying the theoretical constructs that apply to it. This can be the hardest move for students to make, and studies show that students often have trouble picking out the right theoretical principles for solving a problem. The "Case Analysis" assignment provides students with experience connecting theory and practice by giving them a situation and asking them to identify the right principles for addressing it. Students are also asked to list three unanswered questions or concerns related to the situation. This forces the student to ask what types of information are missing to properly address a situation. For example, a criminal justice instructor could provide a summary of a child sexual abuse case and ask students to apply theoretical perspectives to explain why the victim may have been a target and why the offender may have engaged in the acts. The description can be deliberately sketchy to force students to ask for more information, such as the backgrounds of both parties.

Letter to the Editor

The "Letter to the Editor" assignment helps students see the relevance of a topic by having them provide an argument to a layperson for devoting attention to it. The student jumps into the role of a concerned citizen, consumer, or customer by writing a letter to the editor to argue for action on an issue. Students can be asked to actually send their letter to a news source to see if it gets published, further generating enthusiasm for the assignment. Plus, students need to ask themselves what they have learned in class that goes against common belief in order to identify topics in need of public enlightenment. Examples include a criminal justice student writing to advocate for a change in a victim's rights law, a history student advocating for a memorial to recognize an important historical event in the area, and an agriculture student writing to clarify the effects that certain agricultural practices have on the food supply.

Technology Push

The "Technology Push" allows the student to promote a piece of technology that is new to the field or may be appearing in the near future. The student creates a visual to demonstrate the technology and explain its benefits, drawbacks, and feasibility. This visual can be a video hosted on YouTube, or a combination of text and imagery hosted on a website such as Google Sites or Padlet. Examples include new telemedicine techniques in criminal justice and new teaching devices in special education.

These simple assignments add practical application to online courses with technologies that are easily accessible to the student, and are a win-win for instructors and students alike!

Amy Nemmetz is an assistant professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville.
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Gameful Design in Online Education

By John Orlando

Gamification of learning has become a hot topic in education as of late. But instructors are understandably puzzled about how to gamify their courses. Should they just add a Jeopardy PowerPoint to one of their modules, or do something else?

Kevin Bell, executive director of Curriculum Development and Deployment at Northeastern University, believes that much of the confusion arises from the difference between adding games to a course and gamifying the course itself. The real benefit of gaming comes not from adding games to a preexisting course, but rather from incorporating "gameful design" into the fabric of the course itself.

"Gameful design is about applying the principles behind what makes games engaging. It is fundamentally about using hooks to keep students fixated and encouraged to persist. The rewards are intrinsic as part of the experience, not tacked on at the end." Ask kids to run up and down a soccer field to get healthy and they will quickly get bored. Throw a ball in the middle and ask them to try to kick it into a goal and they will run all day getting exercise without any prodding."

Bell suggests a number of principles for incorporating gameful design in your courses:

Short-term achievable goals. Much of what we assign students is delivered in the far-off future, such as a term paper due in 10 weeks. Students have a hard time working up the motivation to pursue such goals. By contrast, games provide the player with short-term achievable goals. The goal might be to get into the next room or climb the next building. Short-term achievable goals keep the player's interest because success is within reach.

Instructors can incorporate this principle into their courses by breaking up longer assignments or modules into shorter chunks that are completed in sequence. Instead of reading a long work and writing a paper on it, the student can be asked to write short pieces on each section of the work. This has the additional benefit of focusing their attention. A student may miss some points when asked to read a work on multiple points and report on all of them. Instead, the student could read a section on a single point, then be asked to do a reflection on that point before moving on. The student learns one thing at a time, sequentially, which improves both motivation and learning.

Level-up challenges. Games provide the user with a sense of moving up through different levels. A user might start the day at level 17 and end the day at level 21. Each time users play they see progress. By contrast, students often do not see their learning trajectory while in a course when the major measure of progress is the final grade.

One method of creating level up challenges is through accumulation of incremental points or credits towards a larger task. In games this is often represented with progress bars or meters where amount of work needed to clear a bar or reach a level is visually represented. In order to keep student interest, the LMS can be designed to send serendipitous "well done" messages and a "congratulations" message to the student when they level up. Some instructors experiment by correlating levels to final grades, which can provide interesting incentives so long as students and instructors are very clear on what levels map to which grades.

One principle of gaming is that the difficulty increases at each level, and instructors might do the same in their courses. Whereas students often see the next assignment in their course as just new work, a gamified course can make each new assignment more difficult than the former. One benefit of this method is that students at higher levels are often more motivated to justify their level and thus apply greater effort as they move through the course.

Low fear of failure. What happens when you get killed in a game? You respawn and do it again, learning from what got you killed to try a new method. What happens when you get a bad grade on an exam? Normally, it gets carried through the course and factored into the final grade. Traditional grading methods preserve student error, whereas games allow students to use errors as learning devices to improve without fear.

Here, online education is ideal for gamification. Assessments such as quizzes can be set to allow multiple attempts, though there should be a limit to eliminate guessing. Instructors can also set a minimum threshold for passing, requiring students to score above a certain level in order to receive full credit. By allowing students to keep trying until they demonstrate mastery, instructors lower the fear of failure and allow the students to focus on learning.

Immediate feedback. Games keep a running tally of the player's score. Each hit or obstacle cleared immediately registers in the player's score. Similarly, failure might lead to a quick death and respawning. Students immediately learn when they have done something right or wrong, and can adjust accordingly. By contrast, students often need to wait days or weeks before getting

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❑ Other (please specify)_____

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4. How important to you is coverage of the following topics? Please rate each item.

	Not important important	Somewhat important	Neutral/Unsure	Moderately important	Very important
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Assessment and analytics	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Curriculum	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Different ways to deliver class content	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Teaching methods	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Classroom management	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Flipped/Hybrid teaching	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Managing discussion					

5. Which types of articles are you most interested in reading? Please rate each item.

	Not important important	Somewhat important	Neutral/Unsure	Moderately important	Very important
Opinion and commentary	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Analyses of current issues	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Practical, how-to articles	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Case studies demonstrating a particular teaching technique	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Question-and-answer interviews	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Discussion of general themes	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Other topics? _____

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12. If you answered yes to question 11, please provide your contact information: _____

_____

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read through a text all at once, and then address any comprehension problems at the end. This module teaches critical reading skills by focusing on specific passages in a text, and so shows them the actual steps that they need to use to understand and take notes on difficult text.

The system works well for both online and flipped education. Instead of just putting reading assignments online, a teacher can provide students with the tools needed to better understand the readings. Plus, as a self-contained system, it provides a systematic and coherent journey through a reading assignment, with the exercises directly connected to each passage. This works better than having student do a reading and then take a quiz afterwards.

The University of Wisconsin uses the system for a variety of subjects. The Law School uses it to put the student in the middle of a court case, with the student playing a role, such as lawyer or prosecutor. The student is given information about the case in the text on the left, and must make decisions about how to react by completing exercises on the right. In this way the student moves through a case and must make decisions at various junctures according to new information, just as they would do in a real case.

The School of Medicine and Public Health uses it to put the student in the midst of a medical emergency, requiring them to make important decisions on care. The Department of Biology uses it to present a hypothetical disease outbreak in Bangladesh. The student picks a role at the beginning and is then given a journey based on that role to address the outbreak. They might choose to be an epidemiologist and so be required to track down the source of the outbreak. This module also makes use of outside content to provide more information, including a YouTube video describing Bangladesh.

The software package, Case Scenario/Critical Reader Builder, makes it easy to build modules. You can request a free copy, as well as see examples, at http://engage.doit.wisc.edu/software/cscr. You simply pick the type of content you want to import into each page, such as text, videos, and exercises, and follow a menu to load it. The result is a stand-alone presentation that can be hosted on a server, put into an LMS, or even cut to a disk and mailed to students. As always, it's a good idea to include transcripts of any audio so that you are not left scrambling at the last minute to make them in response to an ADA accommodation request.

If you are interested in building even more complex content, you can try Articulate Storyline, a tool that allows you to construct simulations and reading exercises. It has drawn a loyal following of users due to its power, ease of use, and active support community. You can also download free templates from a growing shared library that provides a head start on module design.

Take a look at the examples on the website, and consider how you can improve student learning through guided tutorials and case studies. @

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feedback on their class performance, and by the time they get it they have forgotten the performance itself.

Instructors can also create challenges for students that provide immediate feedback. Online quizzes can be set to provide scores and information on why each answer is right or wrong immediately upon submission. You have the student's attention right now, and his or her mind focused on the question, so now is the time to clarify the answer, not days or weeks from now. Plus, students can be encouraged to offer simple "likes" of particularly good postings from other students on discussion boards.

Narrative. All games revolve around a story. Stories grab our attention, and a course can be similarly set up around a story. Bell says that "while instructor narrative can be engaging," quoting the example of a Dungeons and Discourse class that he reviewed, "there is value in allowing students themselves to create mnemonic narratives that allow them to recall knowledge aspects of the course by setting them in their own context. There are precedents for this in studies of memory experts who align elements with visual cues to help them memorize hundreds of discrete items."

Peer collaboration. Games today are fundamentally social. Many will put players into groups to collaborate in reaching a goal. These players will help one another by sharing strategies or advice during the game.

Online instructors can facilitate the same collaboration using discussion boards or wikis. Students can help one another succeed by creating webcam videos that explain difficult concepts. Groups might also be in competition with one another to reach a goal first. This feeling of being part of a team not only increases engagement and motivation, but also reduces the isolation that can come with online education.

Try applying gameful design principles to your courses to see how they increase student engagement and learning. @

Facilitating Small Group Activities with Google Drive

By Matthew P. Winslow

Group work using Google Drive

Online faculty are always on the lookout for a good system for facilitating group work. You want a system that separates student contributions and allows the instructor to view the progression of student work. Google Drive, a cloud-based, shared document editing website, is ideal for this purpose. Its power lies in the ability of collaborators to edit the exact same document in real time. There are no more problems with multiple versions floating around in email attachments. You can even watch edits being made by different collaborators at once with different-colored cursors moving across the screen making edits.

Another nice feature of Drive is that work is saved without hitting any save button. As soon as you enter a keystroke on the computer, the work is saved. Because it is cloud-based, work does not need to be submitted to another location for the instructor to see it. The instructor is just given access to work as a shared collaborator, and can add his or her feedback directly to that work.

Drive comes with the myriad of features you are offered when creating a Google account, including email, word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, blogging, website hosting, a YouTube page, audio- and videoconferences through Google+ Hangouts, and a variety of other services, all for free. You need not use them all and can activate only those you want. Google also has the very powerful Google Classroom available free for any institution. It requires an institutional account to activate, but it is well worth asking your institution to pursue.

You can create files on Drive by either uploading files made on other systems, such as Word, Excel, or PowerPoint, or creating them from scratch on the Drive site. The person who creates or uploads the file is designated as its "owner" and can then share access to it with other users via their Gmail accounts. The owner can also designate the access privileges of each user, with some given the ability to only view the work, others given the ability to edit it, and others given the ability to delete it as a co-owner.

Drive's word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation features are similar to those on PC or Mac systems, so there is almost no learning curve for most users. What is new to most students is simultaneous editing. Students may at first feel nervous about directly editing someone else's work, and so instead they make suggestions using the comments feature. This is fine, but the ideal group collaboration is when there is enough trust and comfort for people to directly add to the shared document.

Another helpful feature of Google Drive is revision history. This allows instructors to look back at the history of the file and see individuals' contributions. Different users' contributions show up in different colors.

Step-by-step guide to using Google Drive for a group project:

1. Instruct students to create a Google account and send you a Gmail from that account in order to get their address.
2. Save each incoming student's email as a contact in order to make it easier to share files with them in Drive.
3. Create a contact group within your Google account for each group of students. This will make it easier to contact all group members at once by email. Take a look at this tutorial on how to create Google groups: bit.ly/1icfoqk.
4. If you want to give each group a template to scaffold their work, or perhaps questions to answer, then upload that to Drive.
5. Save a copy of that template for each group with a different name (group 1, group 2, etc.).
6. Give each group access to its own version by adding group members as editors through the sharing feature.
7. Check each group's progress periodically, using the revision history to assess individual contributions, and make comments when needed.
8. Once the assignment is due, add feedback on the Drive version itself, or download it to your learning management system.

Google Drive is a simple, powerful system for facilitating online group work. Use it for group assignments in your courses.

Dr. Matthew Winslow is a professor of psychology at Eastern Kentucky University. @

Next Month's Topics

Online Learning Trends in 2015

Ways to Add Engagement to Videos

Using VoiceThread to Support

Close Reading from a Distance

Synchronous Activities for an Online Class

Using Airsketch in Hybrid and Online Courses