REDESIGNING FOR INCREASED SOCIAL SUPPORT IN ONLINE COURSES

INTRODUCTION

The communication curriculum at UC Davis includes a required introductory course meant to introduce students to the different communication areas of inquiry. Initially designed as a hybrid course, it has transitioned to fully online.

In addition to content updates and new faculty introductions, the redesign includes efforts to increase social support in the e-learning environment. Specifically, a universal design (a set of principles for equitable curriculum development) was instituted to better serve a dynamic student population.

These design features are suggested to better engage students, increase instructor presence, assist in building student-to-student networks, increase course usability and student success.

BACKGROUND

Students vary in their technology literacy, personal learning goals, and self-maintenance skills.

Also, students often find online courses lacking in satisfying interaction and intuitive design leading students to be less motivated and involved in the process of their education.

Work on the course redesign began in winter 2019 and the fully redesigned course is to be offered during the fall 2020 quarter.

It is anticipated that the course redesign elements will increase student engagement in both lecture and discussion forums and also the number of students who demonstrate enhanced achievement of course outcomes.

MAIN FINDINGS

Specific universal design elements provide students with increased social support.

Increased social support has been shown to increase student motivation and engagement.

Increased student motivation and engagement should foster better student course outcomes and student satisfaction.

FEATURES

The following design features are planned for the implementation:

- limiting entry points to course materials to “best options” rather than all options
- ample explanation about intended learning goals for assignments
- flexibility for acceptable modes of expression for interaction assignments
- assignment scaffolding for successful learner participation
- increased and varied options for student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions.

RELEVANCE

This work details efforts to increase social support in the online learning environment through universal design features.

These features create a structure where student engagement and student success are maximized for all learners.

We hope this work will lead other online instructors to consider the needs of a more diverse and dynamic student population to create a more equitable learning environment for all online learners.

Take a picture to download the full poster