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Course: Weinberg: Legal Field Studies (2 sections of 9 students); Law: Creating Change as a Lawyer (12 students); Law: Judicial Practicum (9 students)

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Empowering Students to Achieve Their Goals in Experiential Learning Courses

Context

In my experiential learning courses, students work with outside organizations for part of the week and also spend time in class. In the past, students have developed their own goals in the first week of class. But it was difficult for students to keep their goals in mind, measure their progress, and then determine whether they had met their goals. I wanted to build a better structure for students to organically develop and measure their goals and integrate what they learned into their broader training. I also wanted us to have a better sense of what they are gaining through these experiential learning courses. Giving students the ability to develop and evaluate their own goals, if done correctly, is an important formative assessment technique.

Project

I first tried using Canvas surveys for students to develop their goals. After that, I researched different platforms, which led me to using Trello this spring quarter. In Canvas and Trello, students entered three goals for their internship and three goals for their class time. Students also included at least three things they were going to do to achieve each goal and explained how they were going to measure their achievement. In Trello, students created their own board using a sample board I created. Then, students updated their boards and I gave them feedback. I also created more specific learning outcomes and rubrics, which integrated goal development specifically. Finally, I implemented mid-course and final evaluations using Poll Everywhere, inspired by Daniel Carmody's work, and had one-on-one meetings with the students to evaluate these new goal techniques and technologies.

Objectives & Outcomes

These goal development techniques are giving the students a visual, intuitive approach for achieving their goals and a distinct metric for tracking their progress.

Overall results I expect going forward:

- Students will more fully develop their goals. We can now really measure what students are actually doing because all activity is listed for each student's board and cannot be erased.
- Feedback will support them to achieve more and teach them how to take it into their future work.
- We will be able to capture better what students are achieving in the class and internship.

Results

I am still in the process of implementing the project. Nevertheless, I have included here a qualitative summary of some of the results so far.

We first tried to use Canvas surveys to enter and keep track of goals. However, it was difficult to enter and evaluate the information and many students had to enter it a few times before it was actually recorded. Canvas did not lend itself to an easy check-in process or a good way to measure how they developed their goals. Trello, which I just started to use in the spring quarter, seems promising, since it is a much more visual, easy-to-use, and versatile platform. But we are still learning and refining these goal techniques for Trello.

Lessons Learned

- **Surprise! Students are not technology experts.** I expected students to have an easier time using online platforms. I learned that I have to spend more classroom time and develop even clearer instructions on this assignment from the beginning through the end of the term.
- **Patience you must have, my young Padawan.** Being resilient and willing to adjust is an important part of using technology and formative assessment techniques. You need to try different things. You may get frustrated, but you can learn from that experience too. It is important to always remember that instructors are also learning. We feel pressure to find the perfect technique or platform, but I came to understand that this would be an evolving process.
- **These techniques are broadly applicable.** The formative assessment techniques relating to goal development that I developed worked well with different types of classes and students (both undergraduate and law), so the opportunity exists to expand these to other courses and types of students.

Going forward, I hope to continue improving upon my evaluation methods and determining how to best gather and analyze data. It is difficult to collect information on these topics, but that should not stop us from developing new techniques and figuring out ways to better gather data. Likewise, it is hard to start using a new technique or platform without some initial testing and adjustment. You have to get a sense first for how it will work and how you can best fully implement it. I am in the early stages now of testing and refinement, so here are some of the things I will do in the future: use a sample board from this quarter; focus on goals and how to achieve them, being as specific as possible; refine rubric and grading mechanisms to make goals an even stronger part of the course and make it even clearer to students how they benefit; give students still more instructions and guidance; better formalize the overall structure of the assignment; spend more classroom time on goals; and develop methods to increase collaboration on goals between students.