

TEACHx

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Course: Introduction to Health Measurement Science,
Master of Science in Clinical Investigation

Students: 13

bit.ly/tx16sch

Improving Discussion on Health Measurement with Yellowdig

Context

This class is given in the context of the Master of Science in Clinical Investigation (MSCI) and is cross-listed in the Health Sciences Integrated Ph.D. program. The class meets once a week for 2.5 to 3 hours and accommodates students who may be juggling classes and many clinical and career responsibilities. Class time is used mainly for outside speakers, in-class exercises, and "labs," such as light data analysis. Because the main goal of the class is to transmit a set of skills, it does not always lend itself to discussion. But discussion also fosters an integration of understanding. I wanted to find a way to encourage questions, discussion, and understanding by applying the class concepts to other research, real-world, and news contexts. I have previously found it difficult to encourage discussion, especially with students who may be shy.

Project

I added Yellowdig to the course curriculum. Yellowdig is a continuous discussion board that allows users to post articles and Internet links, which can then stimulate a discussion by means of comments and replies. I assigned students to take turns "moderating" the discussion for one week. I encouraged them to post frequently; for grading purposes, I set a low minimum number of required posts and comments. I also frequently posted questions, articles, and links myself, while also commenting on students' posts. In class, I took the time to continue discussion that was started online (or vice versa).

Objectives & Outcomes

Yellowdig provides all users with a point system to track activity; briefly, one comment earns 5 points and one post earns 10 points. The average point score for students was 52 (minimum 16, maximum 104). Most students (69%) earned at least 40 points, suggesting a fair amount of engagement. Preliminary results from a student survey suggested a variety of opinions on Yellowdig. Students were divided on how much they liked Yellowdig in general; they were more positive about the ability of this tool to aid their understanding of health measurement concepts. Students tended to say posting on Yellowdig was "too much" on top of other assignments.

Results

The Yellowdig project worked well in the sense that most students showed a fair amount of engagement. The online discussions were wide-ranging but within the health measurement concepts of the course. Students who said little in class participated more online. In addition, I was able to bring some of these online discussions into the classroom. Students appeared to differ in their opinion of the tool; some did think it added too much work given the many other assignments for this class. A few students expressed concern about how online discussion was evaluated.

Lessons Learned

Overall, Yellowdig worked well to engage students in discussion on health measurement concepts in a variety of contexts. Yellowdig encouraged students to learn more about fellow students' perspectives on these issues. The continuous discussion allowed me to transition from online to class discussion (and back), which is helpful when classes meet infrequently. Yellowdig did appear to add a sense that there were "too many little tasks" to do for this class. My recommendation is that teachers clarify the level of participation expected and how students will be evaluated.