

Canvas Became My Facebook!

Context

How do you get 50 or so undergraduate students spending an 11-week academic quarter working full time at Journalism Residency sites across the world to feel like a community? I wanted to figure out how they could share their stories (both published ones and anecdotes about life on the job) with each other. Journalism Residency is designed to be a hands-on, meaningful learning experience. This way they could all learn a lot from each other, getting an insider's view of media jobs at TV and radio stations, documentary sites like CNN, magazines like Sports Illustrated, and marketing communications agencies like Edelman and Weber Shandwick.

Project

I wanted to get all students to participate—no mean feat! The first quarter, when answering the "question of the week" was optional, some students ignored it. The second quarter, when it was a required assignment, they all participated! But then I wanted to figure out how to get them to share their photos and links to their stories. For a few quarters, I ended up doing most of the sharing myself on a discussion thread. The posts didn't look very fancy, and the students felt shy about commenting on them (though I know from their evaluations and from Canvas metrics that most of them did read them). So I'm supplementing the successful "question of the week" with the more attractive, user-friendly Yellowdig.

Objectives & Outcomes

Most students now rate their Journalism Residency experience as "excellent"! Here is a typical comment from an evaluation: "Canvas became my Facebook! I really enjoyed learning about what my peers were doing and it made me feel like I was part of a bigger community of JR students."

Results

I expect to continue to add new features each quarter that will get students to interact even more. Until Winter 2015, Journalism Residency students did not communicate with each other at all! Canvas has made it possible for them to learn from each other, not just from their faculty members and their workplaces.

Lessons Learned

Visit the great Canvas specialists in the library! And be open to trying new things each quarter! What will be next? Sharing short videos? Trying a Facebook Live-type of experiment on Canvas? Something else?