

Flipping Discussions: Using Flipgrid Discussions in Online Learning

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Introduction / Need for Innovation

A sense of community is crucial for learning for college students in both face-to-face or online classrooms (Eyler, 2018; Holbeck & Hartman, 2018). In online courses, discussion boards are often utilized to stimulate higher-order thinking but lack personal connection for students (Green & Green, 2018). A deficiency of connection may lead to the isolation from peers and instructors online students report feeling (Bartlett, 2018). To encourage connectedness and community through online discussions, many educators have implemented Flipgrid, a video discussion platform (Bartlett, 2018; Green & Green, 2018; Holbeck & Hartman, 2018).

Flipgrid allows students to record short discussions (under five minutes) and share with other classmates (Flipgrid, 2020; Green & Green, 2018). The video discussion posts provide an opportunity for online students to see each others' faces and body language (Bartlett, 2018; Green & Green, 2018; Holbeck & Hartman, 2018). With these ideas in mind, Flipgrid discussion prompts were implemented in an online agricultural safety undergraduate course at Oregon State University in the spring of 2020 to forge a sense of connection and build community.

How it Works

Flipgrid is a user-friendly, online video recording platform that allows instructors to create and organize discussion topics into "grids" that resemble a message board (Flipgrid, 2020). Students are able to record their responses to discussion prompts and can respond to classmates' contributions seamlessly through the application. Instructors are able to provide video or written feedback to students among other options (e.g. feature a response, "spark" a discussion from a response, or compile multiple responses into a "mixtape"). Flipgrid can be integrated with a learning management system (LMS) to help students gain easy access to the grids. Unique links to weekly prompts or QR codes could be utilized if an LMS is not used or does not support Flipgrid integration. Instructors and students can access Flipgrid through any laptop, desktop computer, or mobile device that is connected to the internet and has the ability to record both audio and video. The instructor is required to sign up for a free account to create grids and view student responses, however, students have the option to sign up for a free account using their school-provided email address, or they can access the discussion grid without an account.

Results to Date

Flipgrid technology was incorporated into an asynchronous undergraduate agricultural safety course at Oregon State University during the spring 2020 term to create a greater sense of community and connection during the COVID-19 crisis. Approximately 19 students participated in weekly Flipgrid video discussion posts in lieu of traditional written discussion posts through Canvas, an LMS, to improve ease of usability.

Discussion prompts were posted weekly by the instructor. Students responded to the prompts and replied to two of their classmates' posts through a series of three-minute video recordings. At the end of the term, nine students, with no previous experience with Flipgrid, anonymously provided feedback regarding using Flipgrid to complete their weekly discussion posts. Selected quotes from the students are provided below:

- "I really liked it. Canvas [written] discussions start feeling redundant pretty quickly."
- "I think that using Flipgrid allows for more of a classroom community to be built. Another positive associated with Flipgrid is that you can see and use emotions in your discussions."
- "I think it was a wonderful choice, especially for this term [of remote learning], and I wish more of my classes had implemented the Flipgrid discussions over regular written posts."
- "Using Flipgrid was a wonderful move because discussions felt more alive and easier to engage in because we were speaking our thoughts rather than writing them."

Overall, students had a positive experience with using Flipgrid to facilitate weekly discussion posts instead of written posts.

Future Plans / Advice to Others

It is anticipated that the instructor will continue to use Flipgrid in the online undergraduate agricultural safety course; it will also be introduced to other online undergraduate courses within the department. By integrating Flipgrid as a method of assigning discussion prompts in online courses, it facilitates a move away from the redundancy of written discussion posts and builds a sense of community that is generally absent in the online classroom. Additionally, it allows students to connect with each other in ways that are not possible through traditional written discussion posts. The videos enable students to connect names with faces, observe body language, and hear the emotion in their classmates' voices. Beyond using Flipgrid for discussion posts, it can be implemented as a tool to facilitate course introductions, reflective practice, or as a question and answer forum with invited guest speakers, with many other additional applications.

Costs / Resources Needed

Flipgrid is free for both instructors and students. However, instructors and students will need a computer or mobile device with audio and video recording capabilities and internet access. Beyond initially learning to use Flipgrid, the time commitment required to manage Flipgrid video discussions is similar to a traditional written discussion board.

References

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