Replacing Attendance Points: Reflection Assignments to Promote Metacognition and Career Readiness

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Rationale:

Moving the class from face-to-face to remote online instruction, I needed to replace 5% of the points for the class that would normally be attendance. I made three reflection assignments spread throughout the course to focus on study techniques, a course climate survey, and writing a cover letter for an internship using NACE skills. These assignments kept students engaged in the course, while providing flexibility, and focused on metacognition, transferrable skills, and an opportunity to give feedback on the course.

Description:

I am currently teaching ZOO3744-0M01 Neurobiology in fall 2020. The class had 275 students and met remotely for the semester. This course only has biology as a prerequisite, so the course is diverse, containing freshmen and first semester transfer students all the way through to seniors. I have taught the mixed mode class face-to-face 2-3 days per week in the past. This semester we were fully remote, so all of the exams had to move online, and I had to decide what to do with the 5% attendance points that I would normally have in a face-to-face class. Due to COVID-19, I wanted to provide flexibility to my students and also help them prepare for their future. Instead of attendance, I created 3 reflection assignments spread throughout the course. The first assignment focused on effective study techniques. The next assignment was a course climate survey to get feedback on how the class was doing and if there was anything they needed. The last assignment (idea borrowed from a colleague) was to find an internship and write a cover letter for that application.

The first assignment is a mix of metacognition, education, and planning for the future. I asked students to reflect on what study techniques they typically use or have used already for the upcoming exam. I shared tables adapted from Dunlosky et al. (2013) and information from FCTL at the Summer 2020 Faculty Conference. Techniques were graded based on their utility: high, medium, or low. After reviewing the tables, students reported what study strategies they originally planned on using for that exam and the utility of those techniques (low/moderate/high). Students also reported how long they planned to spend preparing and what surprised them about the tables. Referencing the tables, they had to state what they could change about their study habits to enhance their preparation for the exam and they choose those techniques. Finally, students needed to design a study schedule for the next exam. This reflection was designed to help especially those first semester students to realize what effective study techniques looked like and more time should be spent in active learning.

The next assignment was an anonymous survey that asked students to rate the class 1 through 5. They then needed to write in what they liked most about the course. The last question asked them to write in what would improve the course. This assignment was due about the mid-point in the class to check in with students that might not be participating in the live Zoom sessions and to give students a chance to voice concerns or report things that might help them.

The last reflection assignment was geared toward the end of the class. Reflection 3 provided students information on the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) skills that employers are looking for. Students had to find an internship that they were interested in and write a cover letter for the internship application. I posted links to several summer research opportunities. I allowed a broad interpretation of what an internship is, so that students could use any opportunity that appealed to them. Students also had to explain the reasons they selected this program and what NACE skill(s) they would gain from the program. The cover letter had to include at least 2 NACE skills. I received quite a few emails from excited students that are going to apply for summer internships. Many of the students did not know about these opportunities before this assignment. I am participating in the NACE Champions program with Career Services during the fall 2020 semester for another class I am teaching and wanted to apply the NACE skills to this class as well.

All in all, these three assignments provided metacognition, supplied students with information about how to effectively study in the class and how to succeed in their future, and provided students with an opportunity to provide feedback. This keeps the students engaged in the course and invested in their skills and their future opportunities.

Appraisal:
I do not have a formal assessment of the tools yet, as I am currently teaching the course. I will ask questions on effectiveness or outcomes from the reflections in the final course survey. The questions about Reflection 1 focused on doing the assignment correctly. The second reflection did not provide any surprises about the course. Mostly students had figured things out and were happy with the flexibility of the course. I liked the timing of the survey and that it did not take a lot of time for the students, as midterm is a busy time. For Reflection 3 I did receive a lot of comments. Many students' eyes were opened by the availability of summer research programs. Some students are excited about the opportunities and will apply. I even had a student send me an email with "WOW" as a response. I highly recommend a job skills assignment.

References:
Dunlosky, J., Rawson, K. A., Marsh, E. J., Nathan, M. J., & Willingham, D. T. (2013). Improving students' learning with effective learning techniques promising directions from cognitive and educational psychology. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 14(1), 4-58.

https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/

Link or explanation: https://ucf-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/al535265_ucf_edu/EegFMS4eMSxH05BGiIWk6M0B-PfNDL7tyd_GvdOd58VLwg?e=QkkUf0