



Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Small team assignments to help students reflect on learning and build support systems with peers during the stressful and uncertain times that cost them their jobs in the industry and job offers

Vicki Lavendol

Associate Instructor, Hospitality Services

Rationale:

COVID-19 decimated the hospitality industry in Spring 2020. Students lost jobs and internships overnight. Students were distressed, and facing an always stressful summer term with the unanticipated result that the course would be in Zoom; once a week instead of twice as scheduled.

My intention was to build a support system for students. I offer 5 office hours a week, but that feels different since now they are hosted in Zoom. Because the course is intense, especially during opening ‘Boot Camp,’ I wanted them to have other students they could reach out to for support.

That is why I created weekly low-stakes assignments for students to meet and share their questions about upcoming assignments, provide peer reviews to one another, and to share what they learned from the assignments. This required reflection shows them what others learned also.

Description:

I realized that students may be feeling isolated at this time. I wanted to provide them a support system, so I created teams of 3. I assigned them low-stakes assignments weekly this summer.

At the end of the semester, I candidly shared with students that this was the first semester we used teams in this way, and I asked for their feedback. It was overwhelmingly positive, and in fact, their feedback could be used to ‘market’ this strategy of creating working support teams for students.

I host 5 office hours weekly; my graduate assistant has completed this course, and I scheduled office hours with our Career Services representative. Yet, the most helpful support for students was their team. They were required to meet in Zoom weekly, discuss learning, and submit assignments.

This course went from meeting 4 days a week in summer; to Mixed Mode in Summer 2019 that dropped to 2 days a week. This summer that dropped again to one Zoom class each week. I lost time I value, which is time to ‘debrief’ learning and reflect on lessons students learned.

The weekly team assignments allow students to ask clarification questions about assignment to their colleagues. They also help students see that each student had a different learning experience from the assignments. Most importantly, together they reflect on what they learned that week.

I kept the teams of 3 as described in my Fall 2020 Communications course. While my Leadership Course always had teams of 4 for high-impact projects, I added low stakes team assignments for this course as well. I do not envision a class in the future without the small team support strategies.

Appraisal:

Student comment: I really liked the team assignment because I was able to ask for help if I had a question or needed advice. I was able to make some new friends at Rosen and now I have connections. Having a team also made me a little more comfortable when presenting. I knew I was

speaking to people that I know and they know me. This made me feel like I was just talking to my friends rather than presenting to a class filled with strangers.

Student feedback: I love having that support from a team. So truthfully, the real thing I liked most about the team assignments was that support I received. My team was amazing, and they helped me out with any questions I had. I really felt like strong group of people had my back during these 6 weeks, because it was definitely challenging at times.

Link or explanation: I have multiple assignments I can share.