INCREASING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PAIRED TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

The article highlights efficient ways to combine tech tools, such as Remind and video conferencing, to increase student engagement and faculty/student communication. Using Remind is a great way to provide information to students outside of LoudCloud, and video conferencing is a tool for having synchronous meetings and conferences with students. Video conferences can be used to provide students with important information about courses and assignments and give students an opportunity to see their instructor and fellow classmates face to face. Based on a study of 58 undergraduate courses with 1302 enrolled students, the authors found that by combining video conferencing and Remind, instructors can increase the number of students who attend their video conferences and therefore increase student achievement in their courses. The article provides strategies for implementing these technologies as well as best practices regarding when and where to use them in online classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

In the world of online education, instructors are beginning to look for ways to interact with students synchronously; however, student attendance to these events is often low. Synchronous instruction allows instructors to connect with students and allows students to be engaged in the learning process rather than passive (Rudd & Rudd, 2014). Instructors can increase participation for synchronous events, such as video conferences, by utilizing other Web 2.0 tools, such as Remind (formerly Remind101) to communicate the importance of attending the event.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Video Conferencing in Online Instruction

One of the most commonly used synchronous learning tools in online instruction is video conferencing. Video conferencing allows students and teachers to interact in real time, similar to the interactions that would occur in a traditional classroom. Having visual contact with the instructor gives students the opportunity to read facial expressions and hear tone of voice, two components that are missing or often misconstrued in an online environment (Rudd & Rudd, 2014). Past research shows that students who participated in video conferencing felt more motivated to participate, prepare, and use technology within their courses (Rudd & Rudd, 2014). Research also shows that synchronous elements in the classroom leads to higher levels of student engagement (Acosta-Tello, 2015). Video conferencing is also a form of increasing instructor presence in the online classroom, a vital step in online education (Rodriguez-Keyes, Schneider, & Keenan, 2013). Video conferencing also allows instructors to reach multiple students at once and more immediately than email or messaging in the online classroom.

Benefits of Video Conferencing for Students

Video conferencing benefits online students in a number of ways. Studies have shown that interacting with students is imperative to student success (Foronda & Lippincott, 2014). Students often seek a sense of community and instructor presence that is difficult to produce without a synchronous

component, such as video conferencing (Tunks, 2012). Video conferencing gives the instructor the opportunity create an environment where students can build relationships with the instructor and other students from anywhere in the world (Ellingson & Notbohm, 2012). Video conferencing allows students to be active in their education and learning by communicating and collaborating with others, rather than passive learning that often occurs in an online setting (Tunks, 2012). Additionally, video conferencing teaches the students a new technological tool that they can then use in future courses or throughout their careers (Ellingson & Notbohm, 2012; Rudd & Rudd, 2014). These numerous benefits for students show that video conferencing is an impactful tool to implement in online learning.

Benefits of Video Conferencing for Instructors

In addition to having numerous benefits for students, video conferencing also benefits instructors. This tool allows instructors to be creative in their instruction and actively engaged in the content with their students (Tunks, 2012). It also allows instructors to have personalized conversations with students to help them individually succeed in the course. This leads to students having a stronger perception of teacher presence in their education and increased instructor relevance, which is essential for students in online courses (Rodriguez-Keyes, et al., 2013). According to past research, the instructor is considered a critical factor for student success (Tunks, 2012); therefore, increasing instructor presence can lead to student success in the course. In addition to video conferencing, instructors can use other Web 2.0 tools to increase their presence in the online classroom.

Using Remind to Connect with Students

In order to have more connection with students, instructors can use other Web 2.0 tools, such as Remind, to communicate with students. Currently, the number one preferred form of communication for college students is text messaging (Bobbitt, Inman, & Bertrand, 2013). Remind allows instructors to communicate with students via text messaging or email, whichever format the student chooses. This allows teachers and students to be connected from multiple devices and therefore increases the speed in which messages are received (Bobbitt

et al., 2013; McCoy, 2016). Communicating with instructors on a regular basis and through multiple formats increases a sense of instructor presence for students (Tunks, 2012). Past research shows that students prefer Remind as a communication tool to other communication methods and would like to have it used in more classrooms. Students also noted that using Remind assisted them in getting assignments completed on time and was the quickest and most efficient form of communication from their instructors (Bobbitt et al., 2013; McCoy, 2016). Instructors can use Remind for multiple purposes, such as due date reminders, holiday announcements, and notifications of upcoming meetings, such as video conferences.

AUTHORS' EXPERIENCES

Lack of Student Participation in Video Conferences

In early efforts to incorporate synchronous video conferencing into online courses, the authors found that attendance was often low. After using Zoom video conferences in a total of 20 undergraduate courses with a total of 453 students, the attendance rate for the conferences was only 18% of students enrolled in the classes. This made the meetings less effective as the purpose is to increase engagement between students as well as with the instructor. Lack of participation led to decreased motivation for instructors to continue attempting to use synchronous video conferencing in their online courses. Instructors identified the lack of student participation to be caused by limited communication of video conferencing dates and times. From the authors' experiences, students were not receiving the information regarding the importance of the conference in a timely manner and according to Acosta-Tello (2015) understanding the importance of spending their time at a synchronous event is crucial to student participation at the event. As students are moving away from using email and are choosing to use text messaging instead (Bobbitt et al., 2013), it was imperative that instructors found a more convenient and reliable way for communicating information regarding the video conference schedule. Instructors found Remind to be a useful tool for this communication.

Combining the use of Remind with Video Conferencing

Instructors found that using Remind to inform students of video conference dates and providing a

live link to the conference, in addition to posting the information in the online classroom, increased the student participation in the video conference. Before the implementation of Remind, only 18% of students from 20 undergraduate courses attended the Zoom video courses. Based on this data, the authors implemented the use of Remind and kept track of the student attendance rates at the Zoom conferences.

Both authors implemented Remind as a messaging system for providing text message reminders to students throughout their undergraduate courses. The Remind system was set up before the course started so that students would have access to the sign up information on the first day of the course and throughout the first week. Within the first week of each course, messages were sent in Remind telling students about the upcoming Zoom conference that would take place during the second week of the course. No other changes were made to the course materials, announcements, curriculum, or discussion forum messages in regard to the Zoom conference in an effort to isolate the variable of adding Remind to the classroom as a notification system for the Zoom conference.

The authors implemented the combination of Remind and Zoom in 38 undergraduate courses with 849 students enrolled. During this time, the percentage of students attending the Zoom conference rose to 34%. Additionally, the majority of video conferences attendees were the same students who chose to participate in the Remind program. This shows that students using Remind are more aware of the video conferences and choose to attend them rather than the students who did not use Remind.

In addition, there appears to be a correlation between student success rate and students who participated in the video conference; 92% of students who attend the initial course video conference passed the course. As the rate of attendance at the video conference increased with the implementation of Remind as a notification system, this may show that combining the two technologies leads to higher student engagement and, potentially, higher levels of student success. More research needs to be conducted in this area; however, this early data reflects the importance of promoting high levels of participation at synchronous events such as video conferencing.

Best Practices for Combining Video Conferencing with Remind

1. Set up Remind. Visit www.remind.com and create an account. Once a class is created in Remind, schedule announcements, including reminders about the video conference, right away. Remind announcements should be saved in a Word document to use again in the next class.

2. Schedule a video conference. A suggested service is Zoom at www.zoom.us. The conference should not be during the first week of class so students have time to get started with Remind.

3. Get the word out. Create announcements and discussion forum posts to let students know about both Remind and the video conference. Remember, once students sign up for Remind, they will also get extra messages about the video conference, so advertise both technologies. Create these posts and announcements when the online classroom is set up to prevent having to look up codes, dates and times later on. This also allows students to have access to the information as early as the first day of class.

4. Spark interest. Be sure to include some type of incentive or motivator for students to attend the video conference. This incentive can be participation credit, statistics about how students' grades tend to be higher when they participate, or even a pass for a late assignment Acosta-Tello (2015). Giving students credit of some kind for signing up for Remind and then again for attending the video conference will double their motivation.

5. Share the video conference results. Even if students could not make the live conference, it is always great to share the video with the class so that the information can be shared and student learning can be increased Acosta-Tello (2015). If the video is shared in the discussion forum, it can also be used as a CAT (classroom assessment technique) in some cases. Additionally, sharing a video of the first conference can be very motivational for students to attend a second conference if one will be offered

CONCLUSION

For online educators, it is important to create a sense of presence in the classroom and one way to accomplish this is through the use of synchronous events, such as video conferencing. For these

events to be successful, educators must find creative ways of communicating the event details and the importance of attending the event to students. As text messaging is a common avenue of communication for many people today, the authors of the study implanted the Remind text messaging system to increase communication regarding upcoming video conferences with students. By implementing this system, the attendance at the Zoom meetings rose from 18% to 34%, in the authors' experiences. This data shows that using Remind as a communication tool to inform students of upcoming video conferences increases student participation at those conferences.

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