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Providing affective and supportive video feedback in a multidisciplinary unit during the pandemic

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The challenge

A new core unit of study in a Master of Commerce program brought together creative and analytical mindsets. With 70% of students enrolled remotely during the pandemic, our challenge became one of encouraging students to engage creatively during the first half of the unit. We identified the need to provide feedback that has both an emotional effect (i.e., is affective) and is supportive to increase engagement between socially isolated faculty and students. We needed to develop a way to provide feedback at scale (2000 students) that worked for students on- and off-campus. Video feedback offered us a means to achieve these ends.

This postgraduate unit was designed to challenge traditional views that we are either right-brained (creative) or left-brained (analytical) (Shmerling, 2017). To challenge this notion, we sought to create an authentic assessment schedule that was both interactive and supportive, where students engaged with creativity in the first half of the unit and analytics in the second. One way we addressed this challenge while supporting creative and analytic thinking was through innovative approaches to feedback. Our view of feedback in this paper can be understood as ‘feedforward’, which Hounsell et al. (2008, p.54) articulate as well-timed feedback designed to improve future assessments and student learning.

Additionally, Hattie and Timperley (2007) noted that providing feedback early and carefully capitalises on the effectiveness of the feedback.

We chose video feedback as it provides nonverbal cues and is more affective than text feedback (Kaplan-Rakowski, 2021). Video feedback also reduces the perceived distance between marker and student, involving speech that serves a social function rather than simply conveying information (Thomas, West and Borup, 2017), a trait crucial during the pandemic to connect students and foster a sense of supportiveness. In addition, Henderson and Phillips (2015) found that students perceive video feedback as clearer, more supportive, more constructive, and enabling more reflectiveness. Students also prefer video feedback over other feedback modes (Mahoney, Macfarlane and Ajjawi, 2019). Finally, asynchronous video can also increase engagement between socially isolated faculty and students (Lowenthal et al., 2020).

The response

Enrolled students developed a creative concept initially and, as a group, developed a business case at the end of the semester to bring together the creative and analytic concepts they learned throughout the unit. The 2000 students enrolled in the unit eventually formed 500 groups to work on the business case. In week five, comprehensive text feedback was provided to a creative question. In week seven, we decided to offer video feedforward (Hounsell et al., 2008) to support student groups in the crucial phase of choosing which data would support their creative question. This would have a significant impact on the success of their business case.

A collaboration between teams from the university library and the unit coordinator ensued. We based our collaboration in a creative ‘maker space’ in the library. The creative space consisted of 3D printing, modelling, and presentation tools (including a digital wall and a podcast studio). We aimed to ensure accessibility and offer affective feedback to students regardless of the mode of study. The Academic Liaison Librarian for Business, the assistant manager of this creative space, and the peer learning advisers (PLAs) who supported other students in the space, came together to provide a series of pre-recorded videos introducing the creative space in the library. This was embedded into the university’s Learning Management System (LMS).

Student groups were invited to submit questions in week six covering various areas, including research, data, referencing, 3D printing and modelling, presentations, podcasting, and other domains. In week seven, the liaison librarian, the assistant manager, and the unit coordinator used the video recording studio to record a series of videos answering the submitted questions. Student groups submitted over 400 questions in the areas noted above. Students benefited from our team's expertise and learned from the questions posed by other groups. We tailored our feedback specifically to help students improve the quality of the business case that they would put forward.

Recommendations

We created seven videos grouped into research, data, referencing, 3D printing and modelling, presentations, podcasting, and other domains. These videos consolidated and presented our feedback to the students. Each video averaged around 45 minutes in length. Students have, on average, watched each video feedback five times compared with an average of just once in other modules. Students enrolled remotely also viewed these videos comparatively more than those on campus.

Additionally, students overwhelmingly felt the video feedbacks were valuable. One student commented: 'It is a good opportunity to learn something about creativity in such a systematic way, and I think lots of things are very useful for my future. It is also quite interesting that we have group projects engaging students to think and talk altogether' (mid-year student survey).

Providing timely feedback to improve future assessments and student learning enabled a supportive environment for students to engage with the unit's content. Unlike written feedback, our experience with video feedback felt more like a conversation with our students. Video-based feedback further allowed us to personalise this feedback to better engage students enrolled in different study modes during the pandemic. Video feedback created a space for PLAs, liaison librarians, and course lecturers to speak about common questions. In addition, videos were accessible to both on and off-campus students, provided a consistent learning experience, and built credibility with the wider faculty. Drawing on our collective strengths in content, teaching and learning pedagogy and how

best to access and use resources, the partnership between unit staff and library staff provided a proactive platform to support students. Perhaps most significantly, it demonstrated the value and possibilities of a multidisciplinary collaboration between faculty and library staff.

While the videos involved a significant time contribution, we note that the content in the videos would also be relevant for future cohorts. By inviting students to submit questions in advance, our team gained an insight into the kinds of learning resources that might better prepare prospective students for these kinds of assessments, developing an expanded set of learning objects for all students, informed by the common queries that emerged with this cohort. Video feedback thus provided us a powerful tool to bridge individual feedback and make this relevant to a wider cohort. Hence, we will be making these available even earlier in subsequent semesters.

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