Plan Your SoTL Project

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| **Research Question**  **How do educators effectively engage students in fully online courses?**  Many in-person and hybrid courses are shifting to fully online delivery. This means students would complete coursework and evaluations asynchronously, with no scheduled class times. Although it has benefits, it carries potential challenges for students who learn better by engaging with others, answering questions in class, etc.  My research project would examine how educators can engage students in fully online courses, similarly to traditional courses. It would identify the concerns and needs of students taking online courses and provide insight on how educators can implement their input. |
| **Identify challenge/outcome related to learning that is related to your question.**  **Challenges**   * Although online learning would solve some students’ challenges with commuting from faraway places, especially during the winter semesters, it would pose challenges for students used to face-to-face or hybrid learning and who relied on interactions with their peers and professors. * Online courses are self-paced; some students may find it difficult to manage their time in completing assessments or feel overwhelmed. * Access to technology (a digital divide) may cause a problem for students living in rural environments.   **Outcomes**   * Determine students’ expectations and preferences when taking online courses. * Implement resources for students to learn time management skills and complete assessments within deadlines. |
| **Describe the instructional activity, assignment, or teaching strategy that will promote student learning on the outcome you identified.**  Although several courses will transition to online teaching, elements of Universal Design for Learning will be implemented, so all students would learn in an inclusive environment where they’re listened to, and gain flexibility in completing assessments. An assignment, for example, would ask students to answer a prompt using a format that interests them the most (e.g., writing a short paper, producing a video, etc.). The professor would publish regular videos of themselves and engage in forums and discussion boards. |
| **Describe the evidence that would persuade an external audience that the new or modified teaching strategy improves student learning on the targeted learning outcome.**  Students’ alpha grades would be as high as they were in face-to-face or hybrid courses. They would exhibit interest in interacting with their peers in online forums and discussion boards, by contributing their own ideas to threads pertaining to coursework and life outside school. In feedback surveys, students would score their professor high marks in preparedness, timeliness in grading assessments, and creating an online community. |
| **How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?**  The findings and results of this research project would be made available to the Chair, Executive Dean, and Vice-President of Academic Administration and Student Affairs. |
| **Ethical Considerations**:  One consideration with research is guaranteeing anonymity to subjects involved. I would ensure personal (and confidential) information about research subjects (in this case, students). With online learning, some may share mental health issues or socioeconomic statuses, which, under Ontario Human Rights, are prohibited grounds of discrimination. This may cause a problem when conducting the research and presenting findings to third parties. A second consideration is openness: essentially, communicating with research subjects the goal of this study for the benefit of students. Some students may be reluctant to share their true feelings or challenges, which means the project would have inaccurate findings. |
| **Dissemination Strategy**:   * Publish in higher education journals and scholarly websites, such as Canada Journal of Higher Education, Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology and The Review of Higher Education. * Based on findings, develop training materials for new and current educators teaching online courses. * Summarize findings in mass communication with educators at post-secondary institutions. * Present findings at a national (online) conference on post-secondary teaching practices. * Publish, journalistically, a how-to article in Inside Higher Ed or the Chronicle of Higher Education. |
| **Reflection**:  When I started the “Scholar” module, I was excited to learn more about planning a research project and reflecting on how a course or professional development activity can be enhanced in future deliveries. This module has encouraged me to look beyond creating lesson materials, and analyze how they can be changed, altogether, depending on shifting and emerging trends among students. Like education itself, students’ expectations always change, so educators should engage in regular research projects (on any scale) so they can be prepared to serve learners using a variety of methods. If this research project came to fruition, I feel confident it would succeed based on the guidance of the activities completed in the “Scholar” module.  Two people are using a computer and engaging in an online course. Together, they are working through assessments and contributing to an online community, the main goal of my research project.  Photo by John Schnobrich on Unsplash |

Adapted from: C. J. Stanny, E. M. El-Sheikh, & H-M. Chung (2009) ***Getting Started with a SoTL Project***

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