A Synchronous Exercise for Collective Syllabus Annotation

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INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND
Course: The innovation was used for an Advocacy course of first-year Master’s of Science in Social Work students of the Online Campus. The course was hosted weekly on a virtual platform, Adobe Connect. The teaching team included an instructor and classroom technological support from a Live Support Specialist.
Challenge: The length of a traditional syllabus lecture was disengaging for students who were attending class online and subject to distractions while using their technological devices.
Innovation: To stimulate interest and promote community amongst students, students interacted with the syllabus through collective annotation on the first day of class.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN GROUP ANNOTATION

Encourages critical discussion to determine the assignment’s significance.
Enables students to flag new concepts and process how the assignment applies to their respective contexts.
Advances students’ preparation and spotlights their value as teachers and learners.

TECHNOLOGY: LIVE NOTES POD
Assignment: Needs Assessment
Prompt:
Prepare a brief summary of the assignment
Based on perspective of persons you serve, explore strengths and weaknesses of:
their experiences within their community
the organization you met them at
US social policy systems that impact them
Apply PROP [critical] lens to clients and the circumstances that led to the relationship
Note your group’s questions about the assignment
What if clients are unable to communicate enough to utilize for this project?
What if clients are short-term/ have limited information available to student?
Can we use previous clients from different [field] placements?
Advise your peers on how to prepare for this assignment.
Identify a client that would be ideal to write about in this context
Take note as the semester continues as you work with client to keep track of what can be included in paper

GROUP ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
Notetaker: Records discussion.
Facilitator: Ensures all voices are heard.
Reporter: Presents group’s findings.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS
Collective syllabus annotation can inspire student cohesion, agency and curiosity through peer level teaching and learning.
1. Promoted clarity of course assignments to prompt student action.
   Students said the assignments were “very involved…so we’ll need to plan ahead.” Some planned to review the syllabus for the first time on their own prior to the next class, indicating that they had not reviewed the syllabus prior to the first class.
2. Facilitated community building and meaning-making of the course through collaboration.
   For several students, interacting with each other to think through the assignments was one of the highlights of the class.
3. Activated student interest in the course.
   There was also interest to learn more. “My takeaway from this class is that I have a lot to learn... Hopefully I will feel more confident about assignments as the class progresses.”

CONCLUSION
After the exercise, instructors may group students’ assignment questions that require a timely response and answer them through a class email, asynchronous lecture videos, and/or a large group discussion in the next session. Instructor feedback should also reflect the assignment advice students offered one another to validate and integrate their contributions.
The experience of this exercise stressed how even the most taken for granted aspects of a lesson, such as the syllabus lecture, can be opportunities to engage the curiosity and intellect of a learning community.

FURTHER INFORMATION

LITERATURE CITED

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Step 1: Instructor gives a brief lecture on the syllabus.
Step 2: Student groups annotate an assignment on the syllabus.
Step 3: Group reporters share back for class discussion.
Step 4: Student feedback is collected.

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PROMOTE STUDENT AGENCY, COMMUNITY AND MEANING-MAKING THROUGHOUT

“My takeaway from this class is that I have a lot to learn... Hopefully I will feel more confident about assignments as the class progresses.”
“I liked the group work…to go over all the assignments...this helps to have us all think together.”
“There is a lot of advocacy around us and using our strengths as social workers can assist those in need.”