Online Teamwork in Large Courses

Situation

Teamwork activities play a key role in developing essential graduate attributes in students. COVID 19 has triggered all courses to adapt to an online instruction. Designing teamwork activities in an online setting for large courses (150+ students) comes with many challenges. Smaller team size, requirement of teaching assistance, scheduling synchronous sessions, providing personalized feedback, maintaining fidelity among casual teaching assistants, assessing teamwork-leadership skills, and maintaining student engagement are some to name a few. A thorough literature review, structured plan and course design based on fundamentals of learning theories were key to addressing the above challenges.

Task

The primary motivation was to improve the quality of online learning to boost the professional attributes required by Engineers Australia stage 1 competencies, specifically 3.6 on "Effective team membership and team leadership". The task involved facilitation, management, and quality assurance of the techniques implemented.

Action

A Systematic and evidence-based approach was taken to design the course of 172 students. Six students that had previously finished the course with excellence were appointed as mentors. Mentors therefore, did not require extra training on the course content. Teams were formed as groups of five students, and each mentor was appointed to six different teams. Private MS Teams groups were created for team interaction and collaboration. Case study assessment (CSA), which has been a successful and popular team activity in the face-to-face offering was chosen to be the final team project. Every week teams had dedicated time for internal and mentor meetings lasting an hour and 45 minutes, respectively. The student-mentor meetings were structured to introduce basic teamwork concepts and ran short online team building exercises (simulating a corporate meeting, involving weekly milestones) to supplement the discussions for the CSA project. Roles and Responsibilities for team members were rotated every week. Mentors had their collaborating meetings among themselves at the start and end of the week to discuss issues, maintain fidelity in advice given and track student progress. Mentors provided students personalized feedback, group feedback and individual marks per week based on the VALUE teamwork marking rubric.

Result

The result indicated improvement in student's communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. Evaluations will be consolidated at the end of the term. Student feedback was positive in terms of course involvement, balanced workload, and staff support.

References

McConnell, K.D., Horan, E.M., Zimmerman, B., and Rhodes, T.L.: 'We Have a Rubric for That: The VALUE Approach to Assessment' (ERIC, 2019).

Al-Hammoud, R., Hurst, A., Prier, A., Mostafapour, M., Rennick, C., Hulls, C., Jobidon, E., Li, E., Grove, J., and Bedi, S.: 'Teamwork for engineering students: Improving skills through experiential teaching modules', Proceedings of the Canadian Engineering Education Association (CEEA), 2017.

To find out more about this resource, contact Jayashri Ravishankar: Jayashri.ravishankar@unsw.edu.au
Jayashri is a member of the Scaling Education Community of Practice (CoP). Click here to find out more about the CoP or contact the EF Team at EF@unsw.edu.au.