Combining a Faculty Seminar Series and Online Learning Teaches Research Skills

Stephanie Preston teaches a course that gives undergraduate students the opportunity to be exposed to and critically analyze faculty research presentations. This unique course format combines online learning and face-to-face discussion sections with a departmental faculty research seminar titled "Storing, Spending, and Saving: The Evolution of the Psychology of Decision-Making About Resources."

Students benefit from seeing faculty presentations and dialogues in an authentic departmental research seminar context. Following the faculty presentations, the initial question and answer period is reserved for undergraduate students. During a second Q&A period, the faculty join the dialogue.

Discussion sections prepare students for the research material that will be covered in upcoming faculty presentations and provide additional opportunities to reflect on previous presentations.

Assignments include weekly online submissions of "critical questions" for discussion with seminar presenters. Students receive feedback on and repeatedly revise their questions prior to the faculty seminar. Through CTools, students also submit and receive feedback on reflection papers that draw on peer-reviewed literature to assess the arguments and methods of the faculty presenters.

Teaching Strategy

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Faculty Perspectives

“I want my students to be able to think critically and evaluate their motives. I want them to realize that their emotions affect their decisions in ways that they might not realize. Once you realize these things, it's easier to reflect on them and create systems that work around the human inability to be consistent.”

“When we make our classes interactive, and when we make the tasks for the students specific to what they need to learn for their career development and academic growth, everyone learns more.”

“People from different disciplines come together to work on these issues, analyzing our own contributions to sustainability, not just how much oil we have left or how much energy we can get out of a battery, but our desire to consume and our ability to reduce consumption from the human side.”

Student Perspectives

“I had no idea how many interesting perspectives there were on sustainability. We learned to integrate perspectives from many different disciplines into our discussion of psychology.”

“I like to think of consumption in many ways. It's hard to know which one is the most effective until you are exposed to it.”

“If you just read the literature, it’s hard to understand perspectives from different fields. Having it presented by experts and the opportunity to discuss it with them gives you the tools to be able to research the literature in many different fields.”

Examples of Teaching and/or Student Artifacts

Assignment Instructions:

Read and submit the background reading for the session. Write a question for the seminar that is pertinent to the problem addressed in the reading. Aim to be concise in your phrasing, specific, and address the problem at a deep level. You will be graded on 0-3 scale (0-1 not to do it, 1-minimal effort, 2-reasonable question, 3-shows insight and consideration). Type your question into CTools and hit submit. Note: You cannot just ask one repeat question e.g., "What do you think about X?" or "Maybe you should test Y." You need to write a very specific "critical question" that examines one aspect of the research. To help you better think of this point:

1. Note the aspect that interests you
2. Make references to where this aspect appears in their work
3. Prepare your alternative hypothesis in the form of an "If/then" or "I hypothesized" not "Could be that..." or "Do you think that..."
4. Suggest it was that your hypothesis would be tested in the seminar, and incorporate your take into future research.

There is a sample "before" and "after" in the resources section to help you see what I mean.

Next Step:

CTools Screenshot: Preparatory Assignment

Consumption Research Webpage

http://consumption.umich.edu