

Singing opera underwater: Engaging students in the practical components of an applied course

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What is it about?

INFO102 is a large, required course for all Information Systems (IS) and Electronic Commerce (ELCM) majors at Victoria University. It introduces students to key technical competencies and skills, and until recently was taught using traditional methods such as lecturing, self-paced and supervised workshops, and one big end-of-term project. Poor student attendance and performance in assessment motivated the course teaching team to introduce some key teaching and assessment interventions. Over five iterations of the course, several innovations and interventions have been introduced which have transformed staff and student motivation, and led to improved attendance and performance. This session will describe the interventions and report on improvements in student attendance, higher and deeper student engagement in class activities, improved performance in assessment, and greater retention of students in the second year of the degree.

Why is it important?

Many university courses contain practical as well as theoretical components: geography, business, and medicine, for example. The discipline of Information Systems (IS) relies on students having an understanding of the fundamentals of Information Technology (IT) as well as practical and applicable appreciation of business concepts. In effect, the discipline of IS teaches students about the nexus between people, organisations and technology. While IT is not the core component of an IS degree, it is integral to students' understanding of the discipline and they require core technical competencies in order to advance through an IS degree. However, not all students are keen on, interested in, or motivated to be involved with such elements of core courses in IS. It is too easy to be satisfied that the course worked at all (as in singing opera under water) without taking the time to ask ourselves if there is a better way.

How the session will be run

The session will begin with a presentation of the background to the case, the motivation and techniques for instructor-led workshops, and the assessment methods adopted. This workshop will report primarily on the interventions and their perceived impact (from the teaching team's perspective) and will include some data from course and teaching evaluations. Participants will be asked to share similar experiences of major course re-design in their own contexts, and will be encouraged to compare and contrast the various interventions described. This will be followed by a group discussion of the theoretical basis for the research, and a consideration of the possible ways forward for the research team.