Striving for Quality and Consistency

Research Project: Background

The research evaluation included a document analysis, definition, and gauging of student engagement, and a plan to measure student engagement across the courses. The OLC Research Center for Digital Learning & Leadership concluded the research project with an evaluation of the learning outcomes surrounding student engagement, as well as a report and virtual presentation.

The document analysis includes an analysis of current syllabi in the consortium. From this analysis, recommendations were made for the Spring 2017 semester. A definition of student engagement was constructed and implemented for 2017 spring semester. Following the spring semester, OLC will measure student engagement base in the definition and identified assignments that demonstrate engagement. At the conclusion of the spring semester, an evaluation and report will be conducted and provided to the consortium.

The Texas Learning Consortium (TLC, formerly “Texas Language Consortium”) is a cross-institutional collaboration among five private universities in Texas: Concordia University Texas, Lubbock Christian University, Schreiner University, Texas Lutheran University, and Texas Wesleyan University. Launched in 2012, TLC uses HD video-conferencing technology and other online tools to share a mix of world language courses in a blended learning environment, with incorporating distance learners into face-to-face classrooms. The program is awarded a three-year grant from TEAGLE Foundation.

The current TLC curriculum is focused on foreign language courses, including Portuguese, Chinese, German, French, and Spanish (see “Course Schedules” for current offerings). In 2017, Texas Learning Consortium brings more language courses, as well as courses in other disciplines, such as Engineering, Math, and Religion Studies.

Document Analysis

The Texas Learning Consortium provided 10 syllabi for document analysis review. The syllabi were from 6 institutions or course providers, including:

- Schreiner University (3 courses)
- Concordia University (1 course)
- Texas Learning Consortium (2 courses)
- Texas Lutheran University (1 course)
- Texas Wesleyan University (2 courses)
- Lubbock Christian University (1 course)

Student Engagement Statement

A statement that includes the seven suggested areas and would be measureable is:

The Texas Learning Consortium encourages learning spaces that provide the opportunity for student engagement. Student engagement not only includes participation, but also student-student and student-faculty interactions in order to expand students’ learning development. Student engagement should include forms of active and collaborative learning, student-student interactions and student-faculty interactions regarding coursework as well as day-to-day interactions, reading, writing, and speaking opportunities, higher-order thinking skills, and coursework that reflects diverse perspectives and ideas.

Student Engagement

It is evident that participation and engagement need to be defined in TLC courses. Participation can be a subset of engagement, however, engagement includes a variety of actions that collectively “enlarge students’ capacity for continuous learning and personal development” (Shulman, 2002).

Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006), conducted a study that included 11 student engagement areas and their descriptions. For the purpose of this study, it is suggested that seven are included in how TLC describes and measures student engagement including:

- Level of academic challenge
- Active and collaborative learning
- Student-faculty interaction
- Reading and Writing.
- Higher-order thinking
- Student-faculty interaction concerning coursework
- Integration of diversity into coursework.

The other four areas are: (1) enriching educational experiences, (2) supportive campus climate, (3) quality of relationships, (4) institutional emphases on good practices. TLC could suggest these as an outcome of this study for institutions to include in their practices on campus.

Cross-Syllabus Findings and Implications

In ten syllabi from seven institutions/organizations, there is one direct mention of engagement, however, it is not defined. All syllabi refer to participation and attendance but focus greatly on attendance and behavior in class, not how a student participates and/or engages. In addition to a clear student engagement definition, consistency among syllabi is suggested for the Texas Learning Consortium. In other words, what is deemed necessary for learners of TLC courses to know about the course at the start of course? Is there information about the consortium that should be included in the syllabus? Is there information about the modalities utilized in the course?
