

Understanding what gets students to engage

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“ Strategic objectives for improvement of the student learning experience are informed by survey results and feedback from Staff-Student Liaison Committees and School Officers. This ensures we're always in touch with what students want and what they feel. The constant stream of feedback allows us to advocate better on behalf of our students. ”

The project

This project is currently in development. It aims to evaluate which features of different communication platforms best engage students and why. To improve how our students engage with our virtual learning environment (VLE), we are evaluating how they engage with three different communication platforms in three separate courses. Courses will run as normal but will fully integrate the platforms. The students will get an introduction presentation explaining the project, but no further prompting will be undertaken as the goal is to evaluate what features more naturally engage students. At the end of the semester, the students and staff involved will be surveyed to evaluate their engagement with and perceptions of the efficacy of the different platforms.

Benefits

We expect students and staff will benefit from better facilitation of interactions and increased opportunities for informal feedback resulting in both feeling more engaged with the feedback loop and a greater sense of community.

Challenges

The main difficulty has been securing buy-in from staff, though this is easier when you are able to demonstrate the potential benefits and impacts of the project. Another issue we have faced is working within GDPR and ethical approval restrictions but using anonymous surveys wherever possible, and keeping the topic of the surveys tightly focused makes these hurdles relatively simple to overcome.

Working with your institutional colleagues

This project requires the full support and ongoing collaboration of the course leader and teaching staff to implement, and requires approval from more senior staff, such as the Director of Learning and Teaching.

What impact has this had on the student experience?

We anticipate an increase in student engagement and interactions, visible in better engagement with the feedback loop and a greater sense of community, and observable by staff over the course of the year.

What advice/top tips would you give to others who might try something similar?

Always focus on the benefits of the project when experiencing difficulty with approval. Allow the students to engage with the platforms of their own volition, and don't be discouraged if engagement is poor. This is a result in itself. Always try to understand the results from the point of view of the students using the platforms.