
CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS OF BUILDING ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES WITH STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE DISCIPLINES AND BACKGROUNDS

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PROBLEM

Fully online general education courses can be challenging to teach due to their asynchronous nature. The students have different expectations, and it can be difficult to feel part of a learning community and be engaged and motivated without synchronous class activities.

PLAN

Group-based activities can help students form connections with each other and be a good foundation for fostering ongoing online learning communities.

ACTION

Big Fat Myths is offered by the Faculty of Science at University of New South Wales, with enrolments over 400 students. This course is offered to students from all year levels and faculties and consists of a large cohort of international students. In 2021, a group project was introduced and conducted via Microsoft Teams to provide students with peer learning opportunities and teach them how to effectively work in a group.

REFLECTION

The weekly group activities have helped students form connections and have increased awareness of diversity present in the course. Group-based learning can be highly effective as students achieve better results when they master a skill together than individually. An anonymous survey was conducted where students had to rate their experience using a five tiered Likert scale. Out of 80 responses, 78% of students agreed that they learned how to work effectively in a group and 64% of students agreed that they learned new skills from their group members.

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