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Using Screen Recording Tools to Increase Instructor Presence in Online Courses

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Introduction

Even with the volume of text-based communication that is common in online courses, students and instructors frequently report a feeling of isolation. This may be partly due to the lack of visual and audio cues that naturally occur in a traditional classroom. Screen recording technologies provide a way to increase presence as they can offer the opportunity to see and hear the instructor. Screen recording technologies are readily available, easy-to-use, web-based tools that can positively impact instructor-student connections, improve student satisfaction, and increase instructor presence. Instructor presence is indicated as a best practice for online teaching and learning. A six-semester study provides evidence of the effectiveness of using screen recordings to address these issues.

Screen Recording Tools-The New Frontier for Increasing Instructor Presence

Instructor presence refers to the engagement, quality, and frequency of instructor communication and interactions in an online course (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). For students, the primarily text-based environment in online courses may sometimes limit the development of a connection to the professor and to peers (Vai & Sosluski, 2011). In a review of literature of 76 studies related to online teaching and learning environments, Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, and Cooper (2006) found that instructor presence is a critical factor for creating a positive course environment and for effective online instruction. One way to increase instructor presence is through the use of emerging technologies such as screen recorders, which can capture any action taking place on the computer screen and allows the user to add voice or video narration.

Screen recordings are being used in a variety of ways in online and hybrid courses. Rose (2009) found that when students had access to instructor-made videos they reported a stronger connection to the instructor and to the course content. Further, Clark and Mayer (2008) propose that learning occurs most readily when words, printed or verbal, are linked to related visuals. This is supported by Pinder-Grover, Green, and Millunchick (2011) who observed that students in a Materials Science lecture course achieved better outcomes when they accessed instructor-provided screen recordings to explain step-by-step solutions to assignments and for clarification of difficult topics.

As an additional strategy to increase instructor presence in online courses, screen recordings can be used as an alternative to written feedback. Studies comparing student satisfaction of written and audio feedback in online courses found that students perceived audio feedback to be easier to understand, more constructive, and because of the ability to hear the instructor's intonations, more personal than written feedback (Lunt & Curran, 2010, Bourgault, Mundy, & Joshua, 2013).

These studies clearly point to the idea that audio and video technologies can be effectively used to provide feedback and direction to students. Using these tools, the professor increases the sense of presence, enhances instruction, and may improve student satisfaction in online courses.

Addressing the Need

Recognizing this, over six semesters the presenters have used screen recordings to personalize and improve the online experience for their students in the following evidence-based ways:

- to provide brief lectures as a supplement to written notes
- to clarify multi-step assignments
- to offer guidance regarding complex tasks
- to deliver visual cues to explain concepts related to course content
- to provide individual and group feedback

To understand the impact of screen recordings on the perceptions of graduate students in online courses, an informal, anonymous online survey was distributed to 243 students over six semesters. Each semester the survey was distributed to students in two different courses. The response rate was 74% (180 responses).

Students were asked to rate statements on a five-point Likert scale where they selected from strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree. Of the 180 total responses, Table 1 details the number of those who either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement indicated.

According to the responses students believed that screen recordings provided a personal connection to the instructor (92.7%). Additionally, the overall response was positive to the use of screen recordings for enhancing student understanding of course content (93.8%), had a significant impact on learning (73.3%), clarified directions (92.7%), and made the course more interactive (83.8%).

Table 1, *Student responses to statements regarding screen recordings*

| Screencasts | Number strongly agree/agree | Percentage strongly agree/agree |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Enhanced my understanding of course content | 169 | 93.8% |
| Had a significant impact on my learning | 132 | 73.3% |
| Provided a personal connection to the instructor | 167 | 92.7% |
| Made the course more interactive | 151 | 83.8% |
| Clarified directions | 167 | 92.7% |

Included in the survey were an additional three questions for students who had taken online courses previously. Students were asked to compare their experience in the current online course with previous online courses where the instructor did not use screen recordings. Table 2 provides the results of 150 student responses to statements that required a yes or no answer. The respondents indicated that instructor-made screen recordings increased satisfaction with their online course (90.6%), helped make the course environment more personal (93.3%), and that their learning may have been improved (82.0%).

Table 2, *Responses of students reporting previous experience with online courses*

| Screencasts | Positive responses (number) | Positive responses (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Increased my satisfaction with online courses | 136 | 90.6% |
| Personalized the online experience | 140 | 93.3% |
| Improved my learning | 123 | 82.0% |

Additionally, students were provided the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with screen recordings in their online course. These comments support the survey findings:

“I have found this method (screencasts) beneficial as it not only ‘personalizes’ the course and lets you get to know the professor better, but the information is better retained through the auditory/visual stimuli.”

“I really like the screencasts. I think they have been particularly useful not only for the content provided, but also as a means of putting a personality and voice to the professor.”

“Seeing a face makes the whole online thing a little bit easier. I find the screencasts to provide that extra information that we may need.”

“I believe that using the screencast in collaboration with the discussion board only brings another element of communication that is lacking when taking a course online I believe the screencast allows the student to make a human connection to the professor.”

As noted by the results, screen recordings have the potential to effectively increase the instructors’ presence and to increase student satisfaction. This can also lead to greater instructor satisfaction with teaching in an online environment.

Things to Consider for Screen Recordings

While there is great value in using screen recording technologies to increase instructor-student connections, break down isolation, and create presence, the tools should be used with a purpose. They should never be used to just make use of a technology. Based on our experience, consider the following when planning a screen recording:

- Do not over produce. You are not trying to win an Oscar. Be as natural as you would be in class.
- Break up lectures into cohesive chunks and keep recordings for any purpose to less than eight minutes. No one wants to sit at a computer and listen to an instructor drone on for 45 minutes.
- Try not to read from your notes. Come across as if you have command of the information.
- Remember, you might want to use the same screen recording next semester so do not refer to the date, current weather conditions, or who is playing in this year’s Super Bowl.
- Have fun with it.
- Lastly, think about how your students can use screen recordings to present their work to you or to the class instead of presenting their work only in written form.

Summary

As education becomes increasingly dependent on technology it is of great consequence to maintain the basic elements of human interaction that exist in a traditional classroom. Evidence of effective technology integration can be determined by whether “students respond positively to a technological personalization as well as when faculty are involved and pleased with the results of their endeavor” (Moke & Wright, 2016).

The appropriate use of screen recording technologies can assist the instructor in making a personal connection and increasing online presence. Research and experience supports the idea that online teaching should not be limited to only one method of delivery. Screen recordings appear to have the ability to improve instructor-student connections and to potentially improve the student experience in online courses.

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About the Presenters

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