

IS GRADING ACTIVE MODULE PARTICIPATION AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO IMPROVE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT?

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KEYWORDS

Interaction, active participation, Attendance, engagement, improved learning.

SUMMARY

Active module participation is key to improved engagement, learning and understanding of the content. One way to promote engagement is to incentivise it. Rewarding students for their level of interaction. An additional benefit is increased attendance.

This alternative assessment benefits the students and module leader by encouraging interaction and improving student knowledge and provides the module leaders with information on progress.

CONTEXT

Supporting and encouraging student engagement can be difficult but better engagement leads to improved understanding and enjoyment of the topic and overall performance in the module. Tutorials are a great way to obtain a deeper understanding of a topic and promote further discussion. However, tutorials often require self-directed pre-reading which is time consuming and has no associated grade. To address this, based on module feedback, graded active module participation was introduced into the 3rd year Marine Biogeochemical Cycling module to facilitate improved interaction, attendance, and learning. Student interaction is marked (10% of the overall module mark) and feedback given.

WHAT, WHERE?

Tutorials, often considered an essential part of a module, are designed to encourage deeper thinking and discussion on key topics and develop key skills such as group learning and debating. Students who actively participate in tutorials have a better knowledge base, ability to think critically and problem solve and tend to perform better overall. However, to achieve an engaging discussion in tutorial sessions pre-reading of a topic is often required. This is in addition to work required for completing summative assessments. Therefore, to promote active participation and engagement within tutorials a nominal interaction grade (10%) was included. The grade is designed to reward interaction and discussion but is a small enough component of the overall mark so as not to inflate the mark. A mark and feedback are given based on a student's level of interaction in the module. The active module participation (AMP) component has been refined over the last few years to give all students a voice including those that don't feel comfortable speaking out in class and to not disadvantage students with mitigating circumstances. Students who are uncomfortable speaking out in class research the topic and provide the lecturer with their argument and discussion points to be brought up in class.

Alternatively, the student can provide discussion points in the online Brightspace forums associated with the tutorial. Mitigating circumstances can impact any student at any time. So as not to disadvantage those students who may not be able to attend the tutorials, they are given an average active module participation mark for sessions missed.

WHY?

This change was instigated by student feedback within the module survey questionnaire. The students enjoyed the formative tutorials however felt that they should have a mark associated due to the time commitment of the required self-directed pre reading. Prior to the introduction of grading, the tutorials did not achieve the required goal of student led (from all students) interactive discussion of the topic. Attendance was not great and dropped off over the semester, few to no student would do the pre-reading, there was little interaction and discussions were led by the lecturer.

DID IT WORK?

Following the inclusion of “active module participation”, there has been a marked improvement in student interaction and discussion across the module, in addition student feedback has been very positive. The tutorials are now student led guided only by open questions from the lecturer. The students are also more willing to ask questions outside the tutorials such as during lectures and lab/field work. It is difficult to tell whether there has been any increase in grades due to small class sizes, mitigating circumstances and the “covid years” but the discussion in class is much richer and the students enjoy the tutorials.

WAS IT WORTH IT?

The tutorials now require less preparation as they are student led, prompted only by the lecturer. Graded AMP requires a bit more work and time to document and provide feedback on student interaction however it does allow the lecturer to monitor student progress and identify knowledge gaps across the semester providing supplementary material as required. It rewards students who actively engage and their reward is improved understanding of the subject and hopefully better associated grades. The module leaders reward is improved student attendance and engagement and more enjoyable discussions.

WHAT LEARNING AND TEACHING ENHANCEMENT STRATEGY VALUE(S) DOES THIS ALIGN WITH?

Authentic assessment and meaning feedback

Engaging students in reflection and research