Dr Mala Raghavan – UTAS – 17th June 2021

COVID-19 the catalyst for paradigm shift in economics and learning

Purpose and context of the presentation

The presentation focuses on a first-year statistics and economics class taught online. Educators harnessed pre-existing technologies and online platforms that the students were used to operating to deliver teaching to reduce how much the students needed to adapt. Students did not have to rapidly adapt to how they accessed their learning materials. Teachers used multimedia authoring software and created short, engaging videos with relevant, topical examples.

Challenges in this discipline include the need to communicate complex ideas, provide hand drawn examples of graphs and equations and to avoid lengthy and boring lectures. A variety of software and apps are available including WhatsApp, WeChat, Facebook, TikTok, Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, Doceri and PowerPoint.

High quality content delivery

To ensure content delivery is high quality, the following recommendations were presented:

- Create five to six short videos per week, of around 15 to 20 minutes. This ensures videos are not too long to become boring and students can revise concepts by watching individual videos rather than having to wade through a single long lecture.
- Use multimedia authoring software:
    - PowerPoint slides can be converted into short videos using narration and images or cartoons for interest.
    - Doceri offers an interactive whiteboard. The Khan Academy (YouTube) include examples of how to use this program and how to structure classes and learning around it.
    - A document camera is an option, although it is expensive and not widely appropriate across contexts.
- Keep weekly content consistent in structure so that students know what to expect. You can begin each week's content with a short introductory video which explains the learning objectives, a summary of each video, reasons why you are drawing attention to certain examples, overview and justification of any readings and key concepts for that week. You can also include a weekly wrap-up video.

Increasing student engagement

Suggestions for how to encourage student participation, foster class discussions, and sustain interest on the online platform (first listed are suggestions from attendees at this presentation):

- Treasure hunt (via Google) where students anonymously add 'findings' to Google Docs/Google Sheets (Jess, Singapore). This would be good for shy students.

- Offering a return for an activity such as giving immediate feedback to a task (Participant, Philippines).
- Continuous communication is essential and ensuring students are not left in the dark. Use checklists.
- Give clear, measurable activities. Students must understand the value and reasons of the task.
- Connect topics to the current context (topical and relevant).
- Create virtual group engagement activities using Zoom, but take note that connectivity can be a problem for some.
- Use teaching templates with set sequencing of material, to assist with planning and manage student expectations.
- Have weekly workshops with interactive activities such as comparing data, simulation scenarios and games.
- Keep most readings short, relevant, topical and interesting, and make sure they relate to the real world application of the subject.
- Stay personable and accessible – tell students if your work is published or in the news.
- Use LMS to check student engagement and follow up with disengaged students.

Assessment

Students are overwhelmed with online assessments and it's important to consider this perspective when developing online materials. It is difficult to conduct an online invigilated exam and to ensure students are not copying and pasting information found online. It is therefore essential to rethink how the questions are designed. They cannot be definition-based questions, they need to be conceptual or critical thinking questions or open ended questions.

Assessments should include formative and summative tasks. They should include objective tasks like quizzes (e.g. a weekly quiz submission with 20 questions in 20 minutes) or critical thinking tasks like discussions or essays. Ensure clear connectivity between assessments and the real world. For student instruction, include a video outlining the task and, within workshops, have interactive activities that connect to the assessment tasks.

Attendees at this presentation offered the following suggestions:

- Give students unique forms of assessment that engage with their lived experience (i.e. reflections) (Michael – unknown country).
- Focus on skills and competencies (Irish Mae, Philippines).

Future considerations/Conclusion

- Communication: Keep communicating with students regardless of their response.
- Consistency: Make sure weekly content is consistent to avoid student confusion.
- Continuity: Ensure there is connectivity between all the assessment pieces i.e. scaffold the learning.
- Connectivity: Ensure learning is connected with students' external life, provide real world examples so students feel like what they are doing is relevant.