



UAMS Teaching with Technology Symposium

Engaging Our Students: Technology & Active Learning

Increasing Student Engagement in the Synchronous (Webinar) Online Classroom

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Introduction

- How Did We Get Here?
- A Little Scholarly Research
- Webinars: The Same Only Different
- Practical Skills: Show and Tell



How Did We Get Here?

- Our Backgrounds
- How We Taught Our Classes Pre-Webinar

A Little Scholarly Research



- More and more institutions of higher learning are providing online learning opportunities for their students.
- These courses may be in the form of synchronous or asynchronous environments, may be a blended combination of both, all of which may supplement traditional face-to-face courses.

A Little Scholarly Research



- In a study conducted in 2008, researchers (Shi, Bonk, Tan & Mirshra) found that while there are differing forms of synchronous instruction tools available to educators, the fast growth of online learning has “outpaced” our knowledge of it, thus there is a paucity of empirical research examining the world of synchronous learning.

A Little Scholarly Research



- Constructivism: A Theory of How Students Produce and Process Information
 - Dewey (1916)
 - Piaget (1973)
 - Vygotsky (1978)

A Little Scholarly Research

- Informal Research of our Paralegal Students:

Comparing Online Synchronous Instruction (“Webinars”) to Traditional Face-to-Face Courses (“On Campus”) or Self-Directed, Asynchronous Courses (“Online”):

- What are the successes?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the types instruction are used to engage student learning? Of those types, which ones foster increased student engagement?

A Little Scholarly Research



Successes

- Overall, each student felt the webinar format was conducive to their learning and fostered a positive learning environment.
- Specifically, one student noted that, “It’s just like being in a regular class only I’m not sitting right next to someone and I don’t see my teacher walking around the front of the classroom. The teaching is the same I think as it would be if we were all in a real classroom together on campus.”

A Little Scholarly Research

- Increased participation. Some students felt there was more participation in the webinar course than in a face-to-face course. For example, one student suggested that the instructor has to find more ways to get students involved in a webinar class. Specifically, she noted:
 - *“I think in a webinar type class, the teacher has to find more ways to get us involved. I think maybe to make sure we're really paying attention and not surfing the internet or something, but also because that teacher can't really see all of us as they might in a regular classroom.”*

A Little Scholarly Research

- **Convenience:** Convenience was the most noted success of taking a webinar format course. One student felt that she has more time to devote to work in other classes because of the convenience of the webinar format compared to the face-to-face classes.
 - Specifically, *“[I]t actually saves a lot of time that I can put towards other work time for other classes. Where I don't have to travel to campus in traffic and travel back late at night going home.”*
 - Another student followed-up with a comment that, “I think we're still getting everything we would have gotten from a regular classroom. So I agree. I like the convenience. It is a time saver, too.”

A Little Scholarly Research



Challenges

- Although all of the students felt there were few challenges to the webinar format, there were expressions of disruptions that contributed to distractions during the webinar classes.
- In particular, one student shared her observation that,
 - *“Well, sometimes a couple of people forget to mute their microphones after they talk or answer a question, and we can hear background noise or their kids or something.”*

A Little Scholarly Research



Engagement

- All of the students found the webinar course to be an effective teaching tool as it allowed them to engage with their instructor as well as their classmates and to leverage their own particular learning style, whether visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.
- During one of the participant observations, I particularly noted that the level of engagement between the instructor and all students was very positive. Specifically, without exception, all students engaged in the process using this method of instruction.

A Little Scholarly Research



Comparisons to Online Courses

- Students also liked the self-directed asynchronous courses, but seemed to like the webinar, online synchronous courses better because of the increased engagement
- *“I like the online classes, too, because I can go at my own pace. I think online classes are good for those classes that aren’t skills classes. For the skills classes, I think those are better taught through WebEx classroom. But if I’m just learning family law or contract law, I can learn those at my own pace in an online classroom setting.”*

A Little Scholarly Research



Teaching Tools

- When the instructor utilized more than a mere PowerPoint presentation, such as using other methods of instruction such as the use of Word to type out examples, a document camera to show an example from a legal research book, and showing all of those methods in the webinar classroom, the students' learning seemed to increase.
- *"I liked those lectures a lot. It's as though we are in the law library right there with her but without actually being in the library. It's better too because we can see the Word document and the example and we can work through it together. When one student doesn't get it exactly right, then the next student can help. I was able to look at the citation and try to figure it out. When we did it together, it was really helpful to work through it one by one. I think I got more from that than I might have if we had just been in the law library."*

A Little Scholarly Research



Teaching Tools

- Conversely, when an instructor lectures strictly from a lecture using only PowerPoint, some of the students expressed concern.
- Specifically, one student noted, *“If it's just straight lecture, where the instructor is reading word-for-word from the PowerPoint, I feel like I could have just pulled up the PowerPoint and read it myself. But if [the instructor] is expanding on it with different instructions or stories to enhance what we're being told, it helps kind of bring the point home more.”*

A Little Scholarly Research



Conclusions

- There is a commonality and over-arching theme to our informal research:
 - Convenience and increased engagement
 - Our paralegal students are more likely to engage with their instructor and classmates –
 - The synchronous method of communication appears to promote interaction removing them from a physical proximity to one another, therefore appearing to de-emphasize feeling of self-consciousness those students might otherwise feel in the traditional face-to-face classroom setting that may often inhibit interaction.
 - Seems to promote higher student engagement and increased collaborative learning.



Webinars: The Same Only Different

- Tips & Tricks to Setup Your Webinar Classroom
- Best Practices



Practical Skills: Show & Tell



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