Flipped R&R: Using technology to add rigor and relevance in a religious studies course

Compelled by recent cognitive neuroscience research, a religious studies professor at a liberal arts institution flipped his classroom to increase rigor and relevance. This session demonstrates how flipping a classroom can expand the amount of material covered, elevate classroom discourse, and enhance student satisfaction.

Specifically, the professor used the power of technology to increase rigor by covering more course material in an introductory course on Christian theology. He filmed and edited his lectures into video podcasts, covering more material than he was able to cover in his previous live lectures. In preparation for each class, students are assigned podcasts to view; students can add rigor by voluntarily watching additional lectures beyond the minimum required. This flipped approach exposed students to between 40% and 100% more lecture material than with traditional live lectures. The logistics of creating podcasts with supporting lecture outlines, and subsequently posting these for easy student access will be explained.

Most importantly, the professor was motivated to create the podcasts so that class time could be devoted to verbal processing of course material. According to cognitive neuroscience research, verbal processing would enhance students’ comprehension, increase students’ ability to articulate course concepts, and improve retention. Because students viewed the lecture outside of class, class time was devoted to pedagogical exercises to extend, apply, and synthesize learning (e.g., Q&A, think/pair/share, and brief student presentations). These pedagogical innovations connected lectures and readings to students’ backgrounds, other academic disciplines, and the wider world. By so doing, the professor was able to increase the rigor and relevance of class discussions.

A professor of education will comment on her observations of student engagement and analysis of instructional strategies. Qualitative and quantitative data will highlight the student perspective on the flipped classroom experience, examining both strengths and areas of concerns. In sum, 70% of the students thought the format made the course more educationally effective, while only 17% thought it made the course less effective.

Participants will leave with a solid grasp of how a religious studies professor at a liberal arts college used emerging technologies of a flipped classroom to increase rigor and relevance.