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Instructional design takeaways from UPCEA 2018 [1]

October 9, 2018 by Lynée Sanute | Office of Digital Education [2]

 [3]

Central Region Conference in St. Louis, Sept. 2018

The University Professional & Continuing Education Association (UPCEA) held their Central Region Conference in St. Louis September 26-28, 2018. I was pleased to see that instructional designers held a steady presence throughout the conference. Our role is often misunderstood, so positive exposure on a regional and national level will expand local collaborations with faculty and programs.

I presented on my work designing and implementing asynchronous, instantaneous communications assessments with the Master of Science in Palliative Care program on the CU Anschutz campus. In my session, I focused on integrating soft skills with content, which was well received by attendees. It was interesting to hear the perspectives from those in attendance, who voiced the need to incorporate scalable soft skills assessment in their curriculums. Disciplines represented included pharmacy, veterinary medicine, mass communications, and autism outreach services.

Top takeaways from my session include:

Design high stakes, timed assessments that incorporate communication skills (written or oral) to disrupt the cycle of papers and week long discussion boards often seen in the online classroom.
Incorporate students' reflections on their performance in these assessments to promote a growth mindset.
Create and use rubrics that cover demonstration of content expertise and soft skills (eye contact, demonstration of empathy, use of jargon, etc.).

Dr. Kevin McDonald's keynote, "Toward Inclusive Excellence in Online, Professional, and Continuing Education" highlighted the inclusive excellence framework. The four cornerstones

of this framework are Access & Success, Organizational Environment & Intergroup Relations, Training & Education, and Organizational Infrastructure. I was most struck by his discussion of visible and invisible diversity traits, as the online learning environment can further erase signs of visible diversity (age, culture, gender, nationality, ethnicity/race, mental/physical status). Staff and faculty for online (and on campus!) programs must constantly evaluate their programs and services to ensure inclusion among all current and potential students.

My favorite session of the conference discussed assessment alternatives to spice up self paced courses. University of Missouri-Columbia instructional designer Amanda Stafford's recommendations were applicable to all courses, regardless of delivery mode. Some of her examples included:

Differentiated Instruction (students can submit a paper, presentation, podcast, or infographic, etc. for an assignment).
Meaningful, Detailed Rubrics (assessing student skills and performance vs. page number, font size).
Authentic Assessments (encouraging online students to get out, interact, and drive change in the "real" world. Students can reflect on their experiences and process through these projects).

Her session positively reinforced the work we do here at CU Online with our amazing faculty. To shamelessly self plug, if you are looking to incorporate new types of delivery and assessment methods in your course, the instructional design and academic technology team offers a multitude of collaborative services to meet your needs.

The conference closed with Dr. Karen Pedersen's talk, "It's a New Day and Change is the New Normal." She likened all online programs to Galapagos' finches, due to our constant adaptation to change. She pushed us to shift from VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) to VUCA Prime (Vision, Understanding, Clarity/Courage, Agility/Adaptability) in order to survive and thrive in this environment of constant change.

UPCEA's Super Central & West Regional Conference is in Denver next year, so make sure to check it out if you are interested in professional, online, and continuing education! I hope to present with some colleagues on some up and coming initiatives in CU Online!

Conference [4], Professional Development [5]
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