

Developing and Implementing a "Flipped Classroom" for Business Communication

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I will explain the development and implementation of my flipped classroom specifically for Business Communication. From experience teaching both in-person and fully web-based courses, I knew the flipped classroom needed to incorporate aspects from both formats. When structuring the course, I wanted to allow students multiple means of assessment for grading. I also knew I wanted a more fluid assessment piece in regards to timing, and I wanted to focus on organizing and structuring content both in written and spoken formats. Based upon my experience, Survey Monkey evaluation results, and the Department of Business Communication's course evaluations, the flipped classroom evaluations were the highest both quantitatively and qualitatively that I have received. Students from the flipped course section had positive feedback specifically in regards to the lecture videos, guest speakers, and in-class activities.

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Three major changes we have seen in higher education are teaching solely web-based, flipped classrooms, and hybrid classrooms. According to the Center for Teaching + Learning at the University of Texas at Austin, “A flipped class is one that inverts the typical cycle of content acquisition and application so that 1) students gain necessary knowledge before class, and 2) instructors guide students to actively and interactively clarify and apply that knowledge during class. The flipped classroom allows the student to watch or listen to a video lecture or podcast anywhere before attending class. This format allows more time for in-class activities, group work, and application of materials. According to (Fitzpatrick, 2012) in the *New York Times* article titled “Classroom Lectures Go Digital”, “Thanks to digital media like video-on-demand broadcasts, or VOD casts, lectures that students would normally receive in the classroom are migrating outside of brick and mortar schools.” The flipped classroom requires more preparation on the student’s end but allows for more engaging in-class time.

Along with the classroom structure, the student population has also evolved. With changing technology and the incorporation of higher technological capabilities into the classroom, pedagogical practices have followed suit. The traditional college students we currently see in the classrooms grew up utilizing technology. They are viewed as living in an instant gratification culture and are plugged in the majority of the time. The use of technology clearly has a strong impact on the student population.

Students from the Lindner College of Business must take Business Communication through the Department of Communication within McMicken College of Arts and Sciences. Business Communication is designed to give students a basic understanding of how communication effectively functions in the business world. Students are challenged to not only develop knowledge about business communication, but to also think critically and apply core business communication concepts and principles. This course encourages students to develop and utilize skills in professional writing and speaking as well as leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal communication. Business Communication is both a content & performance oriented course.

Business Communication courses were previously all taught in person. Within the past two years (2013 – present), online versions of the course have been crafted. I have created both an online version and a flipped classroom version. Authors Freeman Herreid and Schiller (2013) explain, “The flipped classroom, with its use of videos that engage and focus student learning, offers us a new model for case study teaching, combining active, student-centered learning with content mastery that can be applied to solving real-world problems. It’s a win-win” (p. 65). The authors also believe that the flipped classroom will be incorporated more and more into higher education pedagogy in the years to come. I agree with their opinions and also believe flipped classrooms will boom in the future.

Solutions Attempted

From experience teaching both in-person and fully web-based, I knew the flipped classroom needed to incorporate aspects from both formats. When structuring the course, I wanted to allow students multiple means of assessment for grading. I also knew I wanted a more fluid assessment piece in regards to timing, and I wanted to focus on organizing and structuring content both in written and spoken formats. From this, I opened the online resource through Cengage at the beginning of the semester all the way until the end of the semester. This allowed students flexibility and fluidity to complete the homework for each chapter when they saw best fit. I also included two exams through the online resource where students could use their notes, book, and resources. These two assignments had established due dates and times for completion, but allowed students access to their course resources. The two writing assignments and speeches were submitted via email so we had more time in class to do hands on activities and have guest speakers. The structure of the course allowed for students to feel in control, have autonomy, learn time management skills, engage with peers, instructors, and professionals, and practically apply content covered.

Web-based components

The students have a Business Communication YouTube channel. Included in the channel, are a welcome video for the first day outlining the syllabus, video lectures for each chapter, and instructional videos for online homework, writing assignments, speeches, and exams. They have a video for everything covered in the course. They also receive a PowerPoint crafted to coincide with the video lecture per chapter as well. These are all organized on Blackboard in an individual tab called Lecture Videos and PowerPoints. Students can refer directly to the YouTube channel or can access the individual videos through Blackboard.

In-class components

The in-class components consist of activities and professional/in-the-field guest speakers. In-class activities are created and utilized to engage students, encourage group work, and practically apply the content for the week. For examples, students watch a movie clip and discuss the scenario, or guest speakers from different fields and at different places in their careers visit the class.

Assignments submitted via email and YouTube

Students complete two writing assignments and three speech assignments. The writing assignments are correcting and re-writing a 1) good news and a 2) bad news message. This allows students to see a poorly written example of each and to use their creativity to craft their own. They also complete a self-narrative, my Dream Company, and sales pitch speeches. The self-narrative speech is a brief introduction speech where they talk about themselves. This speech allows me to get to know personal details about each student, and academically prepares them to deliver and record speeches electronically and upload to YouTube as their sharing platform. The dream company speech is where they select a company or organization they are passionate about. They share the

history/background of the company or organization, why they are passionate about this particular company or organization, and how they could obtain an internship, co-op, or full-time job upon graduation. This allows students to research their field and particular places where they would obtain employment. It also teaches them how to create a proper outline for a speech. The sales pitch utilizes persuasive tactics, verbal and nonverbal delivery, and structuring/organizing content. The student has to select a product or service that currently exists. They have to pitch the product to distributors to sell. This allows students to practice and learn about target audiences, framing content, organizing content, non-verbal and verbal delivery, and persuasive speaking.

Upon converting the course into a flipped-classroom, I did adjust assessment of student speeches. Since the speeches are recorded and uploaded, I weigh assessment heavily on proper outline structure, content, and verbal delivery, more than nonverbal delivery. Nonverbal delivery is tricky to assess due to the environment in which the speech is recorded and difficulty detecting things such as eye contact, movement, and posture.

Assignments submitted via online resource Mindtap/Aplia through publisher Cengage

As our textbook publisher for Business Communication at UC, Cengage provides online resources. Students complete online homework assignments for each chapter covered. They also take two exams through Aplia as well. They utilize this online resource for a total of 11 assignments including homework and exams.

Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Solutions

Quantitative Analysis – Course Evaluations from “Flipped Classroom” Section

In the flipped classroom vs. the overall mean of the department, students overall rated the flipped classroom as highly or more highly than the department mean. In the comparison of my flipped classroom with my face to face classroom, students overwhelmingly rated the flipped classroom experience more highly than the face to face experience. In a comparison of my flipped section and my fully online section, students in the flipped section reported higher satisfaction than those in the fully online version. In summary, students generally rated the flipped classroom experience more highly or equally to the other formats available.

Qualitative Analysis – Course Evaluations from “Flipped Classroom” Section

From the student course evaluations, students felt most connected to and had the most positive feedback about the video lectures/YouTube channel, professional guest speakers, and in-class application activities.

Based upon 75 written comments randomly selected from the course evaluations from the flipped course section of Business Communication the following were some examples of student perceptions of the course.

- I enjoyed all the guest speakers she brought in, and always kept things interesting for a 3 hour long night class.
- Great lecture videos and online coursework.

- I liked the weekly videos and Mindtap

The most often used expressions students used were “excellent”, “awesome”, and “great.” All feedback was positive and many students talked about the strong lecture videos, organization of the course, presentations by guest speakers, and relevancy of the content to the real world.

Reflection on the implications

Based upon my experience, Survey Monkey evaluation results, and the Department of Communication’s course evaluations, the flipped classroom evaluations were the highest both quantitatively and qualitatively. Students from the flipped course section had positive feedback specifically in regards to the lecture videos, guest speakers, and in-class activities. From teaching in the different structures, I can say from student feedback and engagement in the classroom, this format has worked the most effectively. The flipped classroom structure has been highly effective with students from the Lindner College of Business on main campus at the University of Cincinnati. Having the students prep beforehand, allows for the incorporation of hands on activities, relationship building, and exposure to the professional world outside of academia. The flipped classroom structure also allows for more fluidity on both the student and instructor side.

Possible generalization to other settings or populations

Overall, the flipped classroom structure is beneficial to learning and creating an engaging and stimulating classroom for Business Communication. Since we all learn in different ways, the flipped classroom allows the instructor to incorporate different teaching strategies and tactics in comparison to the traditional lecture. This structure appeals to students from many different backgrounds, both traditional and non-traditional students. Allowing students to prep before the class on their own time gives them autonomy and practice of time management. It allows more time for in-person activities and relationship building between peers and instructor. Not only does the flipped classroom structure prove to benefit the student, it also brings benefits to the instructor. Flipping a classroom also works well with non-traditional students such as adults working full-time and taking courses part-time. It is also an effective way to conduct trainings and development outside of academia.

References

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