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Using Microsoft Teams to Enhance Engagement and Learning with Any Class: It's Fun and Easy

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Using Microsoft Teams to Enhance Engagement and Learning with Any Class: It's Fun and Easy

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Microsoft Teams is a great tool for meeting virtually, collaborating and even recording class sessions. Acting as a hub for all Office 365 apps it allows for easy uploading of the videos to Stream (the organizations You Tube). MBA and graduate classes are often composed of working professionals who frequently miss class. Teams allows them to easily review class sessions so that they do not fall behind. This article discusses the experiences of one professor who collaborated with the Faculty Development Center at a small, private university to allow for a more blended, flexible classroom using Teams.

Introduction

Microsoft Teams (Teams) is a hub for all Microsoft apps: One Drive, Stream, etc. and allows for real-time interaction and collaboration regardless of where students are located. A video on what Microsoft Teams is and a general overview on how to see it appears [here](#) (Microsoft, 2016). This technology tool could work with the entire institution or with individual programs. In addition to business settings, Teams has been used with face-to-face, hybrid, and online courses. All online professors will be required to use it moving forward at Bellarmine University, and Teams has been integrated with Moodle, Bellarmine's Learning Management System (LMS). Once enabled for a Moodle course by a system administrator, a team will automatically be created to save the instructor setup time.

Overview of strategy, approach, or concept

Courses using Teams can be 100% online, hybrid, or face-to-face. This tool enables a wider range of instructor and student interactions and allows for regular, substantive interaction in online courses. Such interaction is not only best practice according to research but is required by the Quality Matters rubric—which all online courses must meet. The Community of Inquiry (COI) (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000) illustrates the importance of interaction between content, peers and instructor in courses.

Teams may be used to present course materials synchronously and/or asynchronously. For example: (1) Teams may be used in a face to face environment with class discussions recorded and automatically posted on Stream. Students who must miss classes for any reason may join the class meeting live or watch the class at a later time. (2) In a blended environment, students may attend face to face, join on-line, or watch the class later. (3) In an online course, students may attend real-time on-line or watch the class later. Scheduling review/study sessions with a class is greatly simplified because of students' ability to participate in any of the three modalities. Teams also allows for virtual office hours individually or in groups.

Analysis

Teams allows for meeting and collaborating anytime, anywhere. Students or the instructor may set up meetings. This capability will work very well with all three course delivery methods. Students have flexibility in when and how to attend classes, meet with other students, and meet with the instructor. Life circumstances, illnesses, and student athlete travel will not hinder student success. Using Teams teaches students real-world applications beyond the classroom, enabling them to learn a tool that will be used in the workplace.

Discussion and considerations

Benefits. Teams allows students and instructors to interact online in ways not usually seen on a traditional LMS. Teams can easily be integrated into a course management system thereby extending and enhancing interaction between all members, which is essential for online classes and can also impact classes being delivered as face-to-face and hybrid. Instructors using Teams can video chat with individual students or the entire class. Students can post images and notes from field research. Events can be created by students and teachers alike, and students can communicate with each other using Teams. Since students and teachers can post and share information and Microsoft files, Teams is an ideal tool for a wide range of situations: small classes, group work, working students, and student athletes can gather, share, and record information easily. Furthermore, the ability to record and post videos makes Teams ideal for students with special needs, learning differences, athletes, and students who travel frequently. Students can watch the videos repeatedly on their phones, tablets, or computers. Teams is also helpful when classes are canceled because of weather.

Potential Drawbacks. Using Teams may have an adverse impact on attendance and participation where students may watch recorded classes, reviews, and meetings. We have observed that some students miss sessions indicating that they will watch later, and then fail to follow through. Faculty can check viewing by individual students using the LMS reports, but it is also proposed that faculty include questions on the video within the video itself forcing interaction and accountability by students.

Many tools can be used to accomplish this task, but the one we have used is called H5P and is built into the LMS via a plug-in. Students not viewing the videos and/or interacting with them adversely affects learning. Also, one needs to consider that not all students will have access to technology; however, Teams can easily be accessed on mobile devices if one has the app, and most students will have a smartphone or tablet that can be used for access. It is worth noting that some features such as editing might be more robust in the desktop version using a laptop or desktop. Lastly, recording a meeting or presentation on Teams can be somewhat cumbersome at this time, although this will probably change as Microsoft is continuing to upgrade the product.

Features. Teams works across platforms and devices—Mac, PC, and mobile. If the institutions IT department has integrated Office 365 into a Learning Management System (LMS) then Teams can easily be integrated also. One can share the Team link on your LMS or add third-party applications and websites, such as Moodle and Canvas as tabs on Teams. This will allow one to go from the LMS to Teams or from Teams to the LMS. Recordings automatically upload to Stream if your campus has access to this Microsoft service (check with your campus IT department). Skype for Business 2016 is integrated with Teams by using the Meetings option and meetings can be scheduled or can occur without being scheduled ahead of time.

Using Teams. Just about any class can use teams: Hybrid, Online, and In-class delivery. Ultimately, an instructor can offer one class that can be 100% on-campus, 100% online, or any combination. Teams can record and store videos so students can review lectures. A flipped classroom could use teams to allow students to join the classroom via video or chat or both. Meetings can be recorded with some success, although some of Teams features are still in beta form. Teams can be embedded in an LMS or an instructor could provide access by simply posting a link to the class Teams page. Teams offers a private space just for the class. Instructors can use Teams to provide virtual office hours for online, blended, or face-to-face students.

Sample Class in Action. Teams was used with an Executive MBA accounting class which included extensive interaction and discussion as well as whiteboard use. Students occasionally missed class due to work obligations--eg., working professionals. In this seminar, the class met for 3-½ hour sessions on weekends. Teams/Stream allowed recording the entire session and captured discussion video and audio, PowerPoint, and white board fairly well. Set up for each session required about 15-30 minutes but saving the recording on Teams was automatic and quick.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the Executive MBA course at Bellarmine University

The instructor has tried several cameras - I-pad, Owl, Polycom. Polycom was used for the Executive MBA recording. An author has extensively used I-pad for recording undergraduate classes. The setup of equipment takes about 5 minutes and allows one to easily post to Stream with student access through Teams and/or Moodle.

Tips for Teams

- Start small, incremental use of Teams. For example, have students use Teams to complete group work. Have students write a collaborative paper or design a PowerPoint using Teams.
- It would be very helpful to have a dedicated classroom when recording video. Moving and setting up the recording equipment and interface with the classroom systems is currently time-consuming, inconsistent, and detracts from class presentations and interaction.
- Make sure students have some understanding of how Teams can and will be used with the course
- Realize that Team meetings and channels are not private so if privacy is a concern use Chat instead or schedule a meeting and invite only one person
- Work with others on campus such as IT, faculty development, instructional technology experts and review videos on how Teams is being used in education to gain greater knowledge
- Join the [Microsoft Innovative Educator program](#) and take free courses and earn badges (Microsoft, 2019).
- If recording sessions, be sure all students know this and agree to video recording.

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