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A Report on Online Courses Delivered During the COVID-19 Pandemic (A Case Study of an Online Course Delivered to Shenzhen Polytechnic by City University of Seattle)

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Abstract		Review Article

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost all courses of joint programs in China are delivered online as a customized online mode. Shenzhen Polytechnic (SZPT) and City University of Seattle (City U) launched a BAM (Bachelor of Arts in Management) joint program of logistics management in 2012. In April of 2020, SZPT BAM students had their first online City U course, BSM 405, Operations Management with City U instructor. Since this is the first time we are offering a course this way, we are concluding the sustainment and improvements of this course with our observation and students' feedback for better preparing for the coming courses amid the pandemic crisis.
Keywords: COVID-19, online course, SZPT, City U.

INTRODUCTION

Since mid-February of 2020 when the U.S. government restricted the air travel from/to China, the program team of SZPT and City U had come up with the plan in order to deliver the course to students in China. First, we had instructors record their teaching videos by modules as the main deliver mode along with real-time video chat to answer questions, and discussion boards. Besides the instructors' problems, we experienced communication difficulties. The Blackboard connectivity in China was not reliable that took students minutes to log in and lost connectivity very frequently. Same as when hosting a meeting on Zoom or Blackboard Collaborate, several students could not get on it before it ended. Videos that instructors recorded for the class material are fairly large that also took several days to transmit in the network. In addition, the students and the instructor had to overcome the different time zones to connect. Second, we began recruiting faculties who are currently in China to teach the classes to avoid the difficulties. Craig Campbell's BSM 405 was the first class that instructors and students were synchronized in time and communication [1-7].

Course Description

In this course, students will explore operations management in manufacturing and service environments. Topics include cost accounting information for improving efficiency, product and service quality, total quality management, project management, materials resource planning, value creation, supply chain management, and economic value. Students will focus on how to apply these concepts to real-world operation functions of both manufacturing and services.

OBSERVATION

BSM 405 was rescheduled to June 1st to June 12th after negotiation with SZPT. Even though the Covid-19 situation in China has been controlled, students still stay at home and take online classes and wait for the school to be opened in September. Craig starts to get to know the students by asking their name, their interest in this class, and their expectation of the outcome from this class. All these interactions happen on WeChat. Using WeChat is beneficial to SZPT students, but the massive flows of messages can get overwhelmed with near 30 students in one channel.

BSM 405 is a two-week long course. There are four components of this class: lecture, group work, teaching videos, and everyday discussion. Four lecture classes are scheduled in the morning, and the afternoon classes are designed for group activity and discussion. Each lecture is 45 minutes long and hosted on the Voov

meeting, a Chinese online meeting software that is published by Tencent as the same company owns WeChat. Voov has similar features with Zoom, but the instructor Craig does not enable the video camera when teaching. At first, Craig usually teaches 45 minutes straight, and the class lacks interactions. However, Craig is good at referencing both Chinese and American companies as an example to make the class interesting and relevant to the Chinese students. After the morning classes, Craig gives an essay question for students to develop critical thinking and practice what is covered in the lecture. Students post their answers on the WeChat group channel and Craig responses to each one of them.

BAM Students' Positive Feedback

- The instructor is very nice. He keeps asking us if his progress is too fast and if we understand his lecture, and reminding us if we have questions he will be very glad to answer them. In all, it is a good experience. Even it is an online class, the instructor wants to make sure we engage in this class as more as possible.

- After the first class, the instructor actively asks us what can make his class improved and more interesting for us to understand and adapt to his tempo. Mr. Campbell makes changes to his class mode and content for us to understand the key points. With his guideline, he encourages us to think deeper and asks questions. He is good at incorporating examples to discuss the points, and leave spaces for us to discuss, analyze, and interact. I think it is a very interesting way to study this class.

- I like the way the class is delivered. Every day, the instructor brings a question for us to discuss and develop our thinking. We have teamwork every other day, in which we discuss questions altogether and practice our teamwork skills. Our answers get very detailed feedback.

- Mr. Campbell's class draws my attention with his humor. I like the activity in week 2, in which we watch videos, participate in discussions, and exchange ideas for us to practice what we have learned.

BAM Students' Feedback for class improvement

- Some students' English is not good and cannot understand most of the lectures. During the discussion session, it is always those students being active.

- This class has too much to absorb. Sometimes, I get bored and feel to lose my focus.

- Because there are too many critical points in this class, we cannot understand them all. I think the instructor should extend the lecture time.

RECOMMENDATION

The online class has its limits. Students can join the class without actually focus on the lecture. In the end, they do not learn anything and may blame it on the class mode or the instructor. In addition, Chinese students whose English is not good have the tendency not to participate in the discussion. We recommend the instructor add participation as one of the grading criteria and randomly point out students to answer questions for encouraging class participation. On the other hand, WeChat is designed for social media and real-time messaging but might not be the optimal platform for discussion. It is recommended to use a platform that has the same features of Blackboard discussion board. Students in China do not use Blackboard because connectivity is a big problem.

CONCLUSION

Craig Campbell has done a good job teaching BSM 405. Hiring faculties who are currently in China is the best option to solve the connectivity and communication problems for the online mode courses. For faculties in the United States, we recommend them to use the Voov meeting when teaching China program courses as a way to ensure good connectivity and quality.

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