Online Tutoring & Learning for Technology-Related Business Courses

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Outline

- The Business and Information Systems Department at the Bronx Community College (BCC)/The City University of New York (CUNY), offered online tutoring service for 7 technology-related courses with 20 sections.

- Asynchronous (the Announcements, the Discussion Forum, and Journals in Blackboard, and Email) and synchronous tools using an interactive whiteboard and instant message capabilities in real time (Blackboard Collaborate Ultra).

- Summarizes the procedures and findings in online tutoring/learning in the Fall semester of 2018 and recommendations for the future.

Intro

- Many studies show that the ideal solution for online learning is a blended learning model with asynchronous (the Announcements, the Discussion Forum, and Journals in Blackboard, and Email) and synchronous interaction using an interactive whiteboard and instant message capabilities in real time (Blackboard Collaborate Ultra).

- Blackboard Collaborate Ultra is now browser-based, which ensures ease in entering a session with the synchronous virtual classroom tool. It also has features such as text and voice chat, PowerPoint slideshow delivery, and desktop sharing.

Getting Started: Online Tutor for the First Course (BIS 13 – Web Development)

- In Fall, 2018, the Department enlisted a former student, who has the knowledge and skills to help students, to be an online data tutor.

- TA (Teaching Assistant) Blackboard access to BIS 13: Web Development course and was able to interact with students in the course.

- Pedagogical issues related to online learning and collaboration were discussed.

Extending Online Tutor to Other Technology-related Courses for the Department

- Using BIS 13 course as a model for on-line tutoring, the instructor developed the framework to coordinate 6 more technology-related courses with 20 sections.

- The tutor access to each class had been created by BCC IT Department and then each of instructors was encouraged to communicate new tutoring services in class and on their Blackboard pages. Different Web tools and types of online help were recommended based on technical levels and needs of students for each course as follows:

Courses	Web Tools	Type of Online Help	Online Tutoring Hours
BIS 13	Blackboard Collaborate (synchronous)	Students join a drop-in virtual whiteboard session for chatting with a live tutor (presenter) and an instructor (moderator).	Fridays 4 -5 for BIS 13 Day; and Fridays 5 – 6 for BIS 13 Eve
BIS 13 DAT 10 DAT 30 DAT 33 DAT 35 DAT 36 DAT 38	Blackboard: Discussion Forum (asynchronous)	Students post their questions or problems for tutoring help.	Tue 9 - 2 Wed 4 - 6 Th 9 - 2
BIS 13	Blackboard: Journals (asynchronous)	Students communicate with a tutor privately.	
BIS 13 DAT 10 DAT 30 DAT 33 DAT 35 DAT 36 DAT 38	Email (asynchronous)	1. Answer any follow-up questions of chatting. 2. Drop off questions and get a tutor's response within 24 hours. 3. Schedule an appointment to meet with a live tutor.	

Connecting Online Tutor to Students

- The online tutor was introduced in the class and in Blackboard. Online tutoring date/time were announced at least one week in advance, in the Announcement section of Blackboard. It was also sent to everyone in the class by email.

- Tutorial on how to use Bb Collaborate Ultra was also post in Blackboard and covered in the class including how to join session; how to modify session settings; and how to leave session.

- In addition to Bb Collaborate session for an hour once a week, the tutor answered any follow-up questions asynchronously in his tutoring hours on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays by using emails, discussion forum, and journals.

Results

- A survey questionnaire was used in BIS 13 class to get some feedback from students as well as from the tutor at the end of the semester. The survey indicates that majority of students who used it, will go back to this service in the future. However, with all the classes listed, less than a dozen used the service over the semester.

Results - Tutor's Comments

- Teaching online obviously presents a unique set of logistical challenges
- Lack of a personal connection with the student
- Technical issues such as unreliable connection and a bad audio connection
- Technical problems in recording the live session in Bb Collaborate Ultra
- The ineffectiveness of teaching online - Certain tools like an online text editor for writing and running HTML and CSS code were limited on Blackboard Collaborate Ultra. This made it difficult to explain and demonstrate visually how HTML and CSS work together in BIS classes.

Results - Students' Comments

- Need to increase more sessions for virtual whiteboard sessions with audio chat

- Prefer to have in-person tutoring

- Difficult to adopt Blackboard Collaborate Ultra

Conclusion

- It was the first-time for most students using Blackboard Collaborate as a resource for tutoring which was difficult for them to adopt since they are used to in-person tutoring. In addition to it, it was too much for one tutor, who is new in online tutoring, to deal with 7 courses with 20 sections this semester. As the semester goes on, the tutor got busier and his schedules got harder to coordinate.

- Overall, finding success in this environment of online tutoring can sometimes be challenges. This is because of lack of physical contact to see how students react to what they are tutored on. This makes it difficult for the tutor to gauge if students understood what they thought.

Recommendations

- If the department could set up a tutorial training on how to use Blackboard Collaborate at the beginning of the semester, it will be beneficial.

- The adoption of an online text editor for writing and running HTML and CSS code will help improve online tutoring for BIS students. An example of such editor is codeinterview.io. It is a powerful text editor that allows pair programming. It also has a feature that allows us to invite students to join the platform to see what they are coding.

- Instructors should play more active roles between the online tutor and his/her students by giving the tutor specific assignments or target students for assistance. Besides, the tutor should be aware of assignments and tests that require a tutoring session as early as possible. Most of instructors expected the same way in-person tutor used to help students.

Recommendations (2)

- A question guide can be used when students submit their questions so that the online tutor will have a better understanding of what they are having trouble with.

- New ways and detailed strategies to require students to use the service or other motivational innovation need to be planned prior to any implementation.