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This study addressed student and faculty experiences in using a commercially available website to facilitate the delivery and evaluation of student presentations in the online business communication course. Of the students enrolled in online business communication, 75 students participated in the study by sharing their perceptions of the effectiveness of the oral presentation process. Additionally, their faculty members assessed the process from the instructor's perspective. The findings and conclusion revealed that the process provided useful student feedback and was more effective than pedagogical methods tried before.

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Introduction

Online business communication courses create unique challenges and opportunities for both students and faculty. Faculty members must adapt their pedagogy to provide meaningful opportunities for comparable instruction between online and face-to-face sections. One of the greatest challenges faced by business communication instructors is the provision for oral presentations. As enrollments accelerate in online business communication, the need for a manageable process for evaluating a student's oral competence is essential.

Background

A student's ability to use oral communication and presentation tools is a key requirement for many college courses. In a face-to-face class, students may give individual and/or team presentations to fellow class members. Providing a valuable oral communication experience for online business communication classes has long been both an issue and a challenge. Early efforts to provide an opportunity for online presentations included student use of video cameras to record presentations. This resulted in a variety of media formats leading to submission and incompatibility issues.

By 2008, websites such as YouTube were being used as a way to view individual student presentations (Green, 2008). In a class at Athens State University students were asked to develop a script, film a video, and edit the product to produce an advocacy video that was posted to YouTube. Then a URL was sent out to those who needed to critique the video, resulting in an enhanced experience for all (Rich, Cowan, & Herring, 2009).

While YouTube provided a way to eliminate a variety of media formats, there were issues with student privacy and difficulties in successfully uploading videos. An ancillary problem was the lack of skill development in presenting virtual presentations which did not have sufficient instructor feedback. In today's competitive environment, the ability to prepare a virtual presentation, as well as a face-to-face presentation, is a key skill required for those in management positions. Designing an engaging and natural presentation is critical in any presentation; however, virtual presentations require an additional skill set.   For example, online presentations may need to be more concise to keep the attention of the audience (Courville, 2011).

To meet the challenges of virtual student presentations, Jeff Lewis, business communication teacher at Colorado State University in Ft. Collins, Colorado, developed an interactive website, YouSeeU.com, to enable students to upload videos and to synchronize PowerPoint presentations with those videos. Through this technology, the instructor can then provide detailed feedback throughout the presentation and save it for student review. (Teaching communication one upload at a time, 2011).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore faculty and student perceptions of using a specific presentation website to prepare and produce oral presentations in online courses. The study will address student and faculty experiences in using YouSeeU, a commercially available website, to facilitate the delivery and evaluation of student presentations in the online business communication course.

Procedures

A pilot study using YouSeeU for oral presentations was conducted during Summer 2011 with students enrolled in four online sections of basic business communication. Four faculty members participated in this pilot study. Based on the success of that experience, YouSeeU was selected as the medium for submitting and evaluating oral presentations in all online business communication courses for Fall 2011. Although the initial experience was positive, additional assessment was needed to determine whether this approach was effective for students and faculty use.

Students were introduced to the oral presentation website early in the business communication course. The first presentation required of students was several minutes in length, accompanied by several slides. This assignment was worth a small percentage of the total course grade, and provided students the experience of using the presentation tool, receiving instructor feedback, and completing the assignment for fewer points than the second presentation. The second presentation was longer in terms of time requirement and number of slides. It was weighted with more points for the grade. Faculty members provided feedback for each presentation.

After the oral presentation assignments were completed and evaluated, the students were surveyed to determine their perceptions of their online oral presentation experience. Additionally, faculty members were asked to determine their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the oral assignments using this technology.

Findings

During the Fall 2011 semester 75 students enrolled in online sections of basic business communication at a AACSB-accredited university completed an electronic survey based on their experiences with the oral presentation in the course.

Student Perceptions

The students used YouSeeU to prepare and upload one brief oral presentation and one longer presentation on designated topics. Both of these presentations were individual presentations. When asked how beneficial the first oral presentation was in preparing for the second presentation, 26.7% (20 students) felt it was extremely beneficial; 30.7% (23 students) felt it was very beneficial; 32.0% (24 students) felt it was beneficial. Four students (5.3%) in the last two categories rated the experience as somewhat beneficial or not beneficial. When asked how many students actually read the instructor's comments from the first oral presentation, 89.3% (67) of the students indicated that they read the comments. One might logically assume that based on the instructor's critique of the first oral presentation, the students who read the comments would work to improve presentation skills for the second presentation.

One concern of the faculty was the amount of time that students would be required to spend learning to use the website, creating the presentation, uploading the presentation, and syncing slides with the video. In the face-to-face sections of the course, most faculty have required team oral presentations where students speak to the other class members in a time span of 8-12 minutes using PowerPoint visuals to support the presentation. The majority of the instructors do not record the in-class presentations. Therefore, students were asked to report how many minutes they spent learning to use the YouSeeU website. Although 22.7% (17) of the students reported spending

21 or more minutes on the learning process, the highest reporting category was 28.0% (21) students who said they spent 11-15 minutes learning about the site. An additional 17.3% (13) students spent 16-20 minutes on the site.

The site requires students to record their presentation using a camera of their choice such as a video camera, a webcam, or a cell phone. The recording is saved and uploaded by the student to the YouSeeU website. The site processes the video so that PowerPoint slides created by the student can then be uploaded and connected or synced to the video. The instructor sees a window to the left with the student's video and a window to the right with the student's PowerPoint appropriately displayed during the presentation. When students were asked the amount of time they spent to sync the video to the PowerPoint, the highest percentage was 29.3% (22 students) who reported spending 11-15 minutes on the process. The next highest percentage was 21.3% (16 students) who indicated that they spent 1-5 minutes on this process. Some students took more time with 20% (15 students) indicating that they used 21 or more minutes.

Students were also asked to rate the similarity between their perception of the final presentation and that of the instructor. On this item 38.7% (29) felt that the ratings were somewhat similar; 33.3% (25) didn't know; 21.3% (16) thought the ratings were very similar; and 6.7% (5) students thought the ratings were somewhat dissimilar. No students marked the category very dissimilar.

Students were asked to provide helpful suggestions to future students about the oral presentation experience. They included the following:
- Don't wait until the last minute.
- Don't read the presentation because it sounds scripted.
- Don't over rehearse.
- Keep eye contact with the camera.
- Watch the website tutorials which help a lot.

When asked if YouSeeU should be used for oral presentations in future online business communication classes, 73.3% (55 students) said yes while 9.3% (7) said no. Additionally, 17.5% (13) said they were undecided.

Faculty Perceptions

Faculty was surveyed regarding their experience with the oral presentation website. One instructor felt that the responses of students surveyed may have been negatively affected by some unexpected difficulty with the website at the time one of the assignments was due. The other instructors had different due dates and did not experience that problem. Faculty felt that the quality of the presentations were better than those often seen in face-to-face classes. Faculty attributed this to the likelihood that students spent more time preparing and completing the online oral presentation.

The faculty also thought that instructor feedback for the students was much better than that offered in a face-to-face class. Basically, in the online feedback, instructor comments could be written at any point in the presentation and students could then replay their presentation and view suggested changes. Face-to-face presentations that are not recorded cannot be played back with the appropriate comments at relevant points. The faculty agreed that this product was a big improvement over other methods tried before such as YouTube, or submitted videos or video files. In fact, faculty would like to be able to use the product in other business communication classes offered by the department.

Conclusions

The majority of the online business communication students had positive experiences with the YouSeeU product. Almost three-fourths of the students suggested that the program should be used for future online business communication classes.

The faculty reported that the product was a significant improvement over other methods that had been tried for the oral presentation which is a required course component. In fact, the faculty would like to extend the use of the product to other upper level business communication courses, many of which are online.

Implications for Future Research

The use of various types of feedback could be a valuable future research study. For instance, with this product, instructors can key in comments or use those from a created list which appear as a student reviews the video. Another option is to use a grading rubric which is totaled at the end of the evaluation. In addition, faculty can create an audio critique or a visual and audio critique for students to see. With all of these options available, faculty may want to experiment to see which methods provide the best feedback for students.

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