

Design of an Online Community

New Jersey City University

Terri Evans

<https://www.instagram.com/njcustom2success/>

INTRODUCTION

Students entering college are bombarded with new faces and experiences. They attend orientations and special events that are designed to provide positive first experiences, as well as, information and resources they might need as they get acclimated to a new academic environment. Supplemental Instruction is one of the resources available to students as they navigate new academic environments, rigorous courses and new ways of learning. Peer mediated review sessions improve student success with historically difficult courses. Many STEM students, including those who are underrepresented in STEM, struggle to assimilate, keep pace and continue success in STEM courses. Creating an online community of STEM students beginning in their freshman year that extends through their college experience, creates an opportunity for positive interactions over time in support of one another. It also allows peer leaders to emerge holistically and others to be developed. It is within the community that SI leaders can share learning events, invite community members to interactive learning games and provide resources for each of the specific disciplines including science, technology, engineering and math. Creating an online community is a method for gathering and targeting STEM students.

DESIGN

Instagram is the chosen technology for the online community. Second to Youtube, it is the second largest used social media platform among Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2015) (Smith, 2019). Use of images and short videos make it an ideal platform to share information regarding supplemental instruction, study tips, advice and notes. It is a platform young people already know how to use.

SI leaders, learning center staff or academic administrators may use knowledge and feedback to create a resource of frequently asked questions (“The Monumental Guide”). “People come for content

and stay for community” (DiMauro, 2014). These may be shared by discipline and easily navigated by adding a link within an Instagram post. These design considerations are made to provide content that is immediately useful to students and therefore is expected to attract new members. “To be successful, online communities need the people who participate in them to contribute the resources on which the group’s existence is built” (Kraut and Resnick, 2016).

Students will be actively recruited at orientation and other student events by peers who may or may not be SI/OSI leaders. SI/OSI leaders may actively share the advantages of a study connection and also discuss the opportunity that SI/OSI is to support collaboration and academic success. Increased participation expands the availability of knowledge sharing among community members and moderators and community members are encouraged to dialog. Advertising the opportunity for connection and identity-based attachment, including subgroups (Kraut and Resnick, 2016) are ways to encourage participation. Invitations to ask questions may be used to attract member contributions, in addition to polls and votes. Shared responsibility for content management is designed to keep the challenge for content updates from overwhelming SI leaders, learning center staff or academic administrators. Updated content is most important for keeping the community engaged.

Planning with SI leaders, learning center staff and or academic administrators, is key to identify the shared interests for the impact of the community and to identify measures of success. These may include the number of students attending SI sessions, the number of students asking questions or the number of students following the posts. Creating paths for success for STEM students is ultimately the goal. Creating a successful online community through which students may share paths to success may require adjustments as responses are analyzed (“The Monumental Guide”).

METHODOLOGY

The online community provides students with a new way to interact among their peers studying related disciplines and to establish “a meaningful sense of connection” (Douglas, 2016, p.4). Posts can be made by members and a team of managers would be in charge of making sure posts are kind and purposeful and that study tips and related SI/OSI content is updated often. The community is a target for the distribution SI/OSI information and for communication to support success in traditionally difficult courses. Photos and short videos may be used by SI/OSI to communicate information session details, student challenges and student successes.

SI/OSI’s may introduce themselves and send short video updates. Shared responsibility for activity monitoring allows SIs to be more responsive to the needs of STEM students as they watch for keywords and trending conversations (Douglas, 2016). Shared responsibility keeps the responsibility from being a burden to busy students to regulate behavior and redirect responses that do not maintain a positive profile (Kraut, 2016).

This site is constructed in an attempt to encourage an interactive community. Creating opportunities for feedback and interaction is the key to keeping community members active. Existing Instagram sites dedicated to supplemental instruction post announcements about meeting times and locations. These tend to be posts that are not updated often. Meeting times, and locations tend to remain the same. They are posted once and require no updates nor feedback. One of the sites posted an incentive take a selfie of with attendance at an SI session and post it, however, responses were few. It is possible the incentive was not successful. It is also possible the community was no longer engaged. A site with interactive features is expected to keep the community engaged. This site newly designed fosters an interactive approach by using Instagram stories and question stickers, poll and vote stickers,

using long captions for explanations and use of the Instagram schedule feature to make sure that posts are updated regularly.

Creating posts that encourage threaded discussion may be used to create and interactive presence in the community (Paloff and Pratt, 2007). Steps can be taken to set some of these posts or series of posts to be scheduled to ease maintenance, however, active monitoring is required to keep posts guided toward learning center goals. These interactions create the experiences that keep the online community connected.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the online community is to connect STEM students with other others of similar discipline and to give them a platform to engage in activities that are designed to strengthen learning outcomes that can be sustained throughout their college experience. It is a community that communicates opportunities for support for traditionally difficult courses. It is a platform that can be managed by an SI community management team, learning center personnel or academic administrators to post information related to SI/OSI sessions, encourage attendance and also to actively engage students with study tools and tips. Students can attend SI sessions to find out more, and/or to practice, in addition to refreshing or reviewing specific course content. The community may also be used to educate the community on what supplemental instruction is and is not while emphasizing opportunities for collaboration. Creating an online community for STEM students that reinforces shared interests, shared goals and shared experiences creates opportunities for student success.

REFERENCES

- Bacon, J. (2009). *The art of community*. CA: O'Reilly Media. Retrieved from <http://www.artofcommunityonline.org/downloads/jonobacon-theartofcommunity-1ed.pdf>
- DiMauro, V., Lawson, Lawson, Lawson, Shiao, & Feldman. (2014, August 18). 56 Lessons From 20 Years of Online Community Building. Retrieved from <http://www.leadernetworks.com/2014/05/56-lessons-from-20-years-of-online-community-building.html>
- The Enterprise Guide to Online Communities - Vision Critical. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://visioncritical.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Guide-to-Communities-ebook.pdf>
- The Truly Monumental Guide to Building Online Communities. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://genuinely.co/guide-to-building-online-communities/>
- Kraut and Resnick (2016 Reprint) *Building successful online communities: Evidence-based social design*. The MIT Press.
- Paloff, R.M. and Pratt, K. (2007). *Building online learning communities, Second edition*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Smith, A., Anderson, M., Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2019, April 17). Social Media Use 2018: Demographics and Statistics. Retrieved

from <https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>

Wenger, E, White, N. and Smith, J. (2012). *Digital habitats: stewarding technology for communities*. CPsquare. Retrieved from <http://technologyforcommunities.com/>