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Case Study: Hearing the Collective Student Voice in Online Courses

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Abstract

This paper argues for gathering the collective student voice in the online classroom. Combined with the observations of an impartial student (one not working for a grade), this non-evaluative formative assessment could be used to improve online teaching and learning. With the continued growth of online education, including entire programs, student voice programs should also be used in online classrooms. This paper outlines a two-part methodology for gathering the collective student voice in face-to-face classrooms and how it was modified for use in online classrooms. The online methodology includes a checklist (included in the appendix) and an individual electronic questionnaire. Results of a beta test of an inactive course and a pilot test of an active course show promise that combining the checklist with the new observation methodology creates a non-evaluative formative assessment of the online classroom.

Keywords

Student voice, formative assessment, classroom observation, online learning, faculty development

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Introduction

To learn what does and doesn't work for teaching online courses, higher education faculty members have attended seminars and symposiums, visited faculty development centers, and they have turned to peers, mentors and experts for guidance. At some institutions, faculty members also turn to student consultant observation programs to hear the collective student voice about what is and isn't working for their specific courses—but this is only for their face-to-face classroom environment. Legon and Garrett write that the evolution to online learning in higher education continues with a median growth rate of nine percent in spring of 2016 for year-over-year headcounts of students enrolled online (2017). With the continued growth in online education, how can this face-to-face student consultant observation program be modified to fit online courses?

Student consultant programs have been around at least since the 1970s (Knapper and Piccinin 1999; Cook-Sather 2008; Oldfather 1995; Cox and Sorenson 2000; Sorenson 1994; Hodges 2013, Hagstrom, Olson, and Cross 2014; Abbot, Cook-Sather, and Hein 2014). Often managed through faculty development centers, these programs vary by institution to provide the learner perspective garnered through a classroom observation (Cox and Sorenson 2000). Student consultants gather information about classroom teaching and learning interactions and report their findings confidentially to the faculty member who made the request. The goal is to improve the teaching and learning by using the impartial student voice – the voice of a student not working for a grade. Recent literature advocates for these programs and students as change agents with the liminal positions providing critical mid-course feedback (Cook-Sather and Alter 2011; Healey 2012).

The experience of observing classroom interactions provides both faculty members and student consultants a new perspective about each other's role (Cook-Sather 2002, 2008, 2014; Cook-Sather and Motz-Storey 2016). As a student who has observed many classrooms, I can attest to this experience leading me to see my learning experiences from a new angle. In a special issue of New Directions in Teaching focused on instructional consultation, Knapper and Piccinin (1999) write that the collective student voice (enrolled student voice combined with impartial student voice) is important, and I heartily agree, yet there is no further discussion beyond a mere mention. An article about the future of online teaching and learning in higher education muses that students may indicate different technologies to be important, but the students are not surveyed (Kim and Bonk 2006).

A 2016 report, which states that colleges and universities need to invest in quality teaching, mentions student classroom observations as part of the positive impact of faculty development centers (Gyurik, MacCormack, Bless and Jodl 2016). However, when I searched for student consultant programs to create a resource list (Appendix A), I found more institutions offer only faculty peer reviews — not student consultant programs. Bennet and Barp (2008) advocate for faculty peer reviews of online courses, this paper is campaigning for student consultations of online courses.

The purpose of this paper is to share a method of hearing the collective student voice in the online learning environment. In the fall semester of 2017, this method was beta tested on an inactive course before conducting a pilot test on a live course; the results of both were positive. This model doesn't include evaluation meant for faculty member assessment; it provides impartial student voice for faculty to understand what is happening in their online course.

In this paper, I will present both historical and recent literature on student voice in the classroom. I'll define common terms, discuss why my university felt the need to develop an online student consultant observation method, and I'll share how we developed and implemented our process. This will include a step-by-step guide of our most popular classroom observation process and details of our online observation beta and pilot tests. I'll summarize the test outcomes, discuss the findings and explain the limitations of the tests. I will conclude that a procedure for classroom observations can modified to fit online courses and it can be done successfully.

Literature Review

Formative assessment occurs throughout the learning process, that is, while changes may be made to improve teaching and learning. Gikandi, Wangui, Morrow, and Davis (2011) offer an extensive review of formative assessment in higher education – including methods in blended and online learning situations. As a graduate student in a program which can be taken entirely online, I was personally interested in the findings from Gikandi et al. Imagine my disappointment in discovering the impartial student voice is left out of their entire formative assessment discussion.

Impartial students are those not working for a grade. They have the power to garner the enrolled student voice in part because fellow students can relate to them on a student-to-student basis. As classroom consultants, Cook-Sather (2011) writes that their training affords them a special liminal position where they can see both sides of the equation – a unique student view and the view of the teacher. Cook-Sather states that the "focus of the partnership is teaching rather than content; the student consultant explores with faculty members classroom dynamics, pedagogical approaches, and the learning experience of students enrolled in the course" (2016, 153). She is writing about the program of Students as Teachers and Learners (SaLT) at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania (2011, 2008). Both Cook-Sather and D. Lynn Sorenson (1994) manage and advocate for student consultant programs. Student consultants can be change agents in the learning process. They can be partners in course development using their unique view point. (Cook-Sather 2009).

Wasley published an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2007) that provides an overview of the student consultant program at Brigham Young University then managed by Sorenson. A student, one not working for a grade, assesses a classroom situation for information a teacher wants to know and discusses this information with the teacher from the student point of view. This and other options for student voice are expanded on by Sorenson writing with Milton Cox about collaboration programs between students and faculty.

The fall 1999 issue of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* was dedicated to the discussion of instructional consultation. This publication ended with a list of resources for instructional consultation by Knapper and Piccinin. To place this in a list of historical events, this list and the issue itself were published in 1999 as Blackboard (a learning management system) and eCollege were

introduced to the market – five years after the first completely online curriculum was introduced by CalCampus (Dumbauld 2014).

The commonality in all of this is the distinct lack of information about student consultants in the online environment. The future of higher education is in online learning yet there appears to be no collective student voice in this arena.

In 2015, Tobin, Mandernach, and Taylor describe strategies for student formative reviews of online courses. They suggest the muddiest point technique as well as minute papers, electronic surveys, and online suggestion boxes. However, they failed to include the impartial student voice for formative assessment.

Tobin et al. do include a discussion of peer faculty observation as do Bennet and Barp (2008). Bennet and Barp make a case for including peer faculty reviews in online courses, as they see the future of higher education moving in that direction and they intend to make improvements. This paper should be included in the conversation of working to make improvements to the online environment from the impartial student point of view.

Project description

The process of converting the student consultant model from face-to-face courses to online courses began with reviewing the most popular consultation model offered in the faculty development office, The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), where I worked at Minnesota State University, Mankato. My duties included training and managing the student consultants and managing the peer faculty review process. Beginning in 2009, the student consultant program provided classroom observation methods like those offered at Brigham Young University (Cox and Sorenson 2000): recorder/observer, faux student, videotaper, interviewer, primed student, and student consultant. Over time, a combination of the interviewer (impartial student consultant conducts a 15-minute confidential focus group with enrolled students) and the student consultant option (impartial student consultant observes classroom activities and notes particular learning issues) proved to be the most popular. We refer to this single model as a Student Consultant Observation.

This paper will share the purpose of the student consultant classroom observation and the process for classroom observations. I'll also outline the research for converting the classroom model for online environments. I'll share the test results from both an inactive beta test and an active pilot test to show the new methodology has promise, and I'll share some future research possibilities.

Purpose of Student Consultant Observation

The purpose of a Student Consultant Observation is to assess what is and isn't working in the teaching and learning and find suggestions for improvement from the enrolled students' point of view while there is time to make changes. Said another way, this is gathering and hearing the collective student voice as a formative course assessment. Since this typically takes place between weeks four and twelve of a sixteen-week semester, a consultation is a custom mid-semester formative assessment. If this was done as a summative assessment at the end of the semester there would be no opportunity for the faculty member to modify their teaching; and, the faculty member wouldn't know which part(s) of their teaching was working.

Faculty members retain student consultant services for many of the same reasons they may request a peer faculty consultation. They may be trying a new pedagogy, they may be looking for feedback on testing methods or homework assignments, or a faculty member could be looking for overall feedback on what is going well and what they should continue doing. Having a student consultant visit and observe a classroom can offer a wealth of knowledge in these areas from the student point of view, but the consultant must be invited. Additionally, faculty may want a map of classroom interactions to know which students participate, which students are called on, or even where the faculty member looks during a lecture. It is the job of the impartial consultant, in this case a student consultant versus a peer faculty consultant, to provide this information. Student consultants are trained on what to observe in the classroom, how to record observations, how to map interactions, how to handle confidential information, and how to write a synthesized report before they observe a live classroom situation.

Student Consultant classroom observation model

The classroom model begins with a faculty member registering online to invite a Student Consulting on Teaching (SCOT) to observe their classroom. The registration questionnaire collects important information including their contact information and office hours, as well as the course information including title, number of students enrolled, location (building and room number), day/dates of the week, and the time of day. The faculty member is also prompted to enter up to three specific questions they want answered by their enrolled students. These questions are used in conjunction with three general questions: what helps you learn? what hinders your learning, and what suggestions do you have for the course?

The consultant coordinator presents all SCOTs with the observation opportunity. The SCOT who accepts the offer must be studying a discipline different from the course discipline to ensure impartiality and the SCOT must have a schedule that allows time to observe during the face-to-face class time. The SCOT meets with the faculty member to discuss what prompted the invitation. Throughout the discussion, the two get to know each other and they work together to draw up questionnaire of no more than six questions to be asked of the enrolled students. The meeting ends with the SCOT confirming the observation time, date, and location.

The classroom portion begins with the SCOT observing student-to-student interactions in the hallway prior to the faculty member being present. Taking notes, the SCOT watches how the dynamics change with the presence of the faculty member. The SCOT is introduced to the students – especially in smaller classroom settings where their presence is obvious. The faculty member explains that the SCOT is observing them – the instructor not the students – while working to improve the teaching and learning for the enrolled students. The faculty member announces that the class will end early with a confidential focus group facilitated by the SCOT.

The faculty member then proceeds with the unit(s) of instruction as planned with the SCOT noting key events and interactions. With 15-20 minutes remaining in the class time, the faculty member reintroduces the SCOT and then exits the room. The SCOT distributes the printed questionnaire to gather individual written student responses. This ensures each student can be heard. As the students finish the questionnaire, the SCOT facilitates a focus group with all the students to find a consensus for each question. The session ends with the SCOT collecting the questionnaires and being the last to leave as they observe students leaving the room.

The SCOT synthesizes their observation notes, the individual questionnaire responses, and the focus group findings into a single reflection report for the faculty member. The reflection report of the collective student voice includes anonymous direct quotes from individual questionnaires to support the overall findings. No demographic information is included since none is asked for on the questionnaire; this ensures anonymity in the student responses.

The SCOT and faculty member meet to review the reflection report and discuss the findings. The reflection report remains confidential between the SCOT and faculty member. The faculty member may choose to include the reflection report in their teaching portfolio (i.e. tenure and promotion documents) but that is at their discretion (Cox and Sorenson, 2000). The impartial student observer voice combined with the anonymous enrolled student voices creates the collective student voice shared in the reflection report.

Research and development work

Converting the classroom observation model to the online environment was not a 1:1 exchange. Since online learning may use synchronous and asynchronous communication structures, there may or may not be easily observable teacher and student interactions occurring at a predetermined time and place. In online learning the teacher and the student often interact with a single technology-mediated lesson from different geographic locations at different times. I turned to well-respected research of online learning to create a checklist of easily observable standards.

There is extensive research on the best practices in online teaching and learning. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), the faculty development center where I worked as a graduate assistant at Minnesota State University, Mankato, subscribes to both Quality Matters (QM) and the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) as guides of best practices for quality in online teaching. Quality Matters is an international organization which is recognized as a leader in quality assurance for online education. The Online Learning Consortium is a collaborative community of higher education leaders and innovators, dedicated to advancing quality digital teaching and learning.

A checklist was developed referencing both the QM rubric (fifth edition) and three of the OLC scorecards: Quality Course Teaching and Instructional Practice, Course Content, and Communication. The QM rubric and selected OLC scorecards were combined with the *Best Practices for Online Teaching* from the Hanover Research Council, and the *Instructors Guide to Course Development and Facilitation* from the University of Moorhead Online and Extended Learning (OEL) instructional technology services office. The checklist is divided into six categories of best practices: Welcome, Organization and Consistency, Student Resources and Support, Interactivity and Community, Communication, and Technology. Each section has a list of three to seven standards. (See Appendix B.)

The checklist focuses on course elements, also known as standards, which can be easily observed by student consultants without evaluating the content; the SCOTs are looking for the existence of these items. It is important to note that a SCOTs may not find an item that is included in the course. This could suggest an area for improvement as it may indicate the instruction of where to find the item was not clear, the item may be in a location that is illogical to the SCOT, or a link may be broken. If the item is missing altogether, the faculty member may consider adding it and the SCOT could suggest a location.

The idea for the checklist is two-fold: the SCOT uses it when temporarily enrolled in a course to see if they can find the information listed while the faculty member uses it as a best practice guide for their course design. The checklist is not meant to be an exhaustive list detailing every best practice for online teaching – online teaching and learning is far more nuanced than this short list. The checklist is intended to cover best practices the university regards as most important which are easily quantifiable by a SCOT; i.e. the checklist doesn't cover if instructions are clearly written, but it does cover if instructions are present.

Student Consultant online observation model

The online consultation registration begins in the same manner as the classroom model with an online registration. Additional information is collected during the online registration about the course format (face-to-face, hybrid, online synchronous or asynchronous), synchronous meeting times (if used), and any additional technology beyond the standard use of D2L Brightspace, the university supported learning management system.

SCOTs who accept online observations are required to have personal learning experience as a student in online courses; ideally they would have experience in both synchronous and asynchronous courses. Additionally, their schedule must allow for any synchronous meeting times the observation entails.

Just like the classroom model the SCOT and the faculty member meet; however, the meeting may be computer mediated — that is, the two may be in different geographic locations. In this meeting, the faculty member receives a copy of the six-category checklist (see Appendix B). This informs the faculty member what the consultant is looking for and the faculty member can self-check their course. Together, the faculty member and the SCOT write up a questionnaire of no more than six questions. The meeting ends with the SCOT confirming the student questionnaire and the observation dates. The observation dates include when and how long the SCOT will be temporarily enrolled at the student level in the online course (a single learning unit or at maximum, a week), the date the SCOT introductory video will be announced and posted, and specific dates for email communication with enrolled students. The SCOT provides their personal information to the faculty member for temporary course enrollment.

In place of the classroom focus group, the SCOT records a video for the enrolled students following a script (see Appendix C) in which they express the reason for the observation: they are working for the faculty member on behalf of the students to improve the learning experience. Closed captions are included not only for accessibility but also to help with the spelling of names and departments. The faculty member can choose to post the script with the video. Enrolled students are asked to watch for an email from the SCOT which contains a link to an electronic questionnaire; this replaces the classroom written individual questionnaire. With approval from the faculty member, an interactive focus group could be held in courses with synchronous meeting times.

At the onset of the learning unit or week, the faculty member notifies the enrolled students about the presence of the SCOT. The SCOT introductory video is posted in a manner appropriate for the course; this could be a link in an email, a discussion thread, an announcement or any combination of notification methods that follow the communication structure of the course.

The course proceeds as usual while the SCOT observes the course structure using the checklist. The SCOT work can take place at any time night or day throughout the agreed upon timeframe. Using the course list, the SCOT emails the enrolled students a link to the electronic questionnaire accessible only once from the email. Using email ensures the faculty member cannot complete the questionnaire and skew the results. The faculty member can choose to remind and encourage enrolled students to look for the email and complete the questionnaire. Near the end of the observation timeframe, the SCOT sends a reminder email to the enrolled students. The faculty member removes the SCOT from the course on the agreed upon date.

In courses with a synchronous component, the SCOT may or may not observe the synchronous time at the faculty member's discretion. If the SCOT does observe the interactive time, they may or may not conduct a confidential focus group.

Just like the classroom model, the SCOT synthesizes their observations along with the electronic questionnaire responses into a single report. The faculty member receives both the reflection report and the checklist during the debrief discussion with the SCOT. Like the classroom model, the impartial student observer voice combined with the anonymous enrolled student voices creates the collective student voice shared in the reflection report.

Implementation

The online observation model was beta tested on an inactive course and pilot tested on an active course in fall semester 2017. The beta test indicated the checklist worked; it also acted as a training situation for the student consultant team. Because the beta test course was inactive, the enrolled student questionnaire component could not be tested. The pilot test employed both the checklist and the questionnaire with promising results.

Beta test of an inactive course

The inactive course used for the beta test was developed by Maretta (not her real name), a faculty member who has been teaching online for 11 years in Technical Communication; the first fully online program at the university. Maretta has been through the QM course certification process but this specific course is not QM certified.

As the SCOT coordinator and the developer of the checklist, I did not observe the beta course. This made me impartial to the feedback from the student consultants about the course and their experience with the checklist.

Three SCOTs completed the checklist for the inactive course. They were instructed to find the items on the checklist and indicate whether they were present. The SCOT could add notes if they felt they experienced something noteworthy such as proposing a different location for a piece of information. Maretta received copies of the three checklists but did not receive a written report. In this situation, only the impartial student voice was heard.

In debriefing, each SCOT expressed an initial "wow" about the organization of the course; each stated their online courses were as organized as the beta test course. They enjoyed and noted the flexibility in scheduling their time for completing the checklist once they were enrolled. The SCOTs were not instructed to keep tight track of the amount of time it took to complete the checklist, however each of them reported the time exceeded the proposed one-hour allotment due to the

length of the list. Knowing each course they will review will be new and different, the one-hour estimate has been increased for the time being. The university allows faculty members to customize all parts of their course (they are not required to use specific templates).

It is interesting to note that the three SCOTs had slightly different results in their checklist findings. This is not to say that something was missing from the course or that changes were required. Each SCOT having different results reinforces that all students in a course will have a different experience.

All the SCOTs expressed gratitude for the beta test experience. One part of the gratitude was the experience of going through the checklist in a situation that was not live. The experience gave them confidence in the process; they felt they could ask any question about the checklist or the process and not feel like it was a stupid question. The SCOTs second part of gratitude was seeing their own learning from a new angle; SCOTs gained insight on their own learning as Cook-Sather discussed (2011, 2013). The SCOTs understanding of online pedagogy deepened when they saw another way information could be presented which was different from their prior online learning experience. After debriefing, the SCOTs were excited to observe an active course.

Pilot test of an active course

The active course used for the pilot test was developed by Duncan (not his real name). This was his first fully online course; therefore he does not have any certified online courses. Duncan has not taken any formal courses for online teaching although he has completed a certificate about the best practices for online teaching through the faculty development center (The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) at the university. Duncan has been with the university's Communication Studies department less than two years.

Duncan's course required sharing personal viewpoints of identity related to controversial topics in current news. With these sensitive topics, Duncan wanted to emulate the face-to-face discussion experience as much as possible in the online environment. In addition to the three standard questions (What is helping you learn in this course? What is hindering your learning in this course? What suggestions do you have for this course?) Duncan wanted to know:

> Course organization: Does the organization make sense? Is everything laid out clearly? Is it easy to find everything students need? Do students know what is expected of them?
>
> Web cam video discussions: Are they going well? Are they enhancing the discussions? Is it making it easier for students to feel connected to one another? Or should text-based discussions be used?

Duncan's questions were a great test for the online individual student questionnaire because they were specific to his course and the technology he used. I was interested to see if the respondents would answer all the questions.

Pilot test outcome

Twenty-eight students were enrolled in the active course and there were fourteen responses to the electronic questionnaire; half of the enrolled students responded. All fourteen responses provided answers to the first five questions. The final question, "What suggestions do you have for the course?" had eight responses. Although it is not consistently tracked, this is a lower response rate

than seen in face-to-face classrooms. The response rate in face-to-face classrooms is nearly one hundred percent response from the students who attend class on the day of the observation.

The content of questionnaire responses was similar to written questionnaire responses seen in face-to-face courses. Some students are more verbose than others. Some responses inadvertently contained information that could be self-identifying to the faculty member, i.e. mentioning a medical situation that interfered with course work and registering for text message reminders. All self-identifying information is synthesized in the reflection report.

Writing the reflection report was easier; transcription of a respondent's handwriting was not required. Additionally sorting and viewing questionnaire responses by each question made it quick to identify common themes. Inserting a student quote in the report was a simple copy and paste from the electronic survey. Duncan was presented with a completed checklist and a report that included both the synthesized questionnaire answers from enrolled students and the student consultant observations. The impartial student voice combined with the enrolled student voice meant the collective student voice was heard.

Discussion

Developing the observation method for the online environment was like modifying instruction for the online environment. Some things translated well, almost on a 1:1 exchange. Meetings were computer mediated versus face-to-face. Instead of a student consultant presenting in front of the room, they presented through a recorded video. The short questionnaire converted easily from paper to electronic format. Somethings things translate differently, but still well. When temporarily enrolled in the online course, the student consultants are not readily noticed by the enrolled students. Communication from the student consultant to the enrolled students was computer mediated through video and email. Instead of a single observation date at a specific time, there is a date range for student consultants to work anytime day or night. Finally, some things are entirely different in the online environment. Courses with no synchronous component cannot have a synchronous focus group facilitated.

The collective student voice can be heard by using this online observation model. The impartial student consultant voice synthesized with the enrolled student voices is recorded in the final reflection report. However, there were some limitations in the beta and pilot tests.

Limitations

The beta and pilot test situations each had some limitations. D2L Brightspace, like many learning management systems, tracks student progress. Tracked statistics reviewable by a faculty member include both content and discussion thread views and login history. On a positive note, these statistics could indicate how much time and effort the student consultant put into observing the course and it could clearly show specific modules they may have missed. However, this may also negatively reflect on the student consultant if the expectations of the faculty member are out of reach.

Both the beta and pilot tests occurred in asynchronous courses. It is not clear if a focus group would work or how it would work during an online synchronous meeting. Additionally, each of these

courses had enrollments of less than thirty students. It is not clear if the online observation method would work in courses with larger enrollments.

The pilot test occurred during week fifteen — not between the planned weeks four and twelve of the semester. This may have contributed to the low response rate to the electronic questionnaire despite two email requests from the SCOT and a reminder from the faculty member. The pilot test occurred during the American Thanksgiving holiday week and just prior to final exams for the semester. Additionally, the late date in the semester meant the pilot test was more of a summative assessment than a formative assessment. However, it was an assessment and the pilot test did provide the collective student voice; therefore, if the test occurred between weeks four and twelve of the semester it would be a formative assessment as intended.

Quality teaching includes both quantitative and qualitative standards, i.e. the presence of assignment instructions and instructions that are clearly written. The checklist contains only items that are easily quantifiable by a student consultant. A comprehensive formative assessment of a course should include both qualitative and quantitative standards of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated one promising method for student consultants to observe online learning environments as a formative assessment to garner the collective student voice. Converting the face-to-face classroom observation method to an online course observation method required defining a specific checklist of standards that student consultants can easily observe. The checklist was created through researching well-respected standards of best practices for online learning. The beta test confirmed the checklist worked and the pilot test confirmed the observation process has promise.

There is further research to be done. The observation methodology defined in this paper should be conducted in online courses with enrollments of more than 30 students and a focus group should be tested in an asynchronous course. A checklist of qualitative standards such as clearly written instructions should be developed; this checklist could be employed in peer faculty reviews. Future formative assessments of online courses could include both a student consultant observation and a peer faculty review before a course is submitted for quality course certification.

I noted at the beginning of this paper that courses and entire programs are being converted to the online environment. Competition for online students is increasing and quality teaching could be a defining factor in attracting future students. Formative assessments have the potential to increase the quality of teaching and learning. As a student in a program that can be taken entirely online, I echo the literature that already advocates for hearing the student voice. This paper presented a promising methodology for hearing the student voice where the future is – online.

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Appendix A

Student Consultant Programs

Student consultant programs have a wide variety of monikers and offer a wide variety of services. However, they have a common theme of the impartial student (one not taking the course for credit) providing the student voice (collective, individual or both) as a non-evaluative formative assessment; this is in response to an invitation from a teacher to observe a learning situation. Student consultant face-to-face course observations may be for a single class session or for an entire semester.

Examples of student consultant programs located February 19, 2018, include:

Teaching Assessment by Students (TABS) at the University of Omaha[1]

Students as Teachers and Learners (SaLT) at Bryn Mawr College[2]

Course Representatives at Carnegie Mellon[3]

Student Observer Program at Carleton College[4]

Student Consultant Program at Ursinus College, PA[5]

Student Evaluation of Teaching at Vanderbilt University and Iowa State University[6]

Students Consulting on Teaching (SCOT) at Brigham Young University, Utah Valley University, Academy for Excellence in Engineering at Illinois , and Minnesota State University, Mankato[7]

These student consultant programs are all managed in faculty development offices. This is not to say programs of this nature are only managed from these offices, just that the programs found all have this similarity. While some programs and services are intended to be evaluative, the program presented in this paper is meant to be reflective – not evaluative.

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[1] https://www.unomaha.edu/faculty-support/teaching-excellence/tabs.php
[2] https://www.brynmawr.edu/tli/campus-participation-opportunities/faculty-student-partnerships-analyze-classroom-practice
[3] https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assessteaching/courserepresentatives.html
[4] https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/ltc/faculty-services/observers/
[5] https://www.ursinus.edu/offices/teaching-and-learning-institute/opportunities/student-consultant-program/
[6] https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/student-evaluations/
http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/assessment-and-evaluation/student-evaluation-of-teaching-set-guidelines-and-recommendations-for-effective-practice
[7] http://ctl.byu.edu/scot
http://ae3.engineering.illinois.edu/student-consultants-on-teaching/
https://www.uvu.edu/otl/faculty/scots.html
http://www.mnsu.edu/cetl/programs/SCOT.html

Appendix B

SCOT Review of Online Course Checklist

SCOTs objectively assess online courses from the student perspective. Online course reviews begin after week four and are completed before the end of week twelve.

1. Welcome

Students' first impression of a course and teacher occur with the "Welcome" message. The introductory message(s) sets the tone, states expectations, describes the pace, and helps students find the materials they need to be successful learners and to use the learning management system. Welcome messages may be emailed prior to the course start date but they must also be present in D2L Brightspace.

Item #	Best Practices
1.1	There is a welcome message of some type within D2L Brightspace from the teacher to the students that includes the course name and number. *Examples: Video from the instructor, email message to students, course announcement message, text file in content*
1.2	The purpose of the course or description from the bulletin is available.
1.3	The format of the course is defined. (See the formats listed below.)
1.4	Course materials are personalized for the student. *Examples: Student name appears in announcements (e.g. course welcome), assignment descriptions, quiz instructions, and learner support resources.*
1.5	Instructions are available on how to get started in the course and where to find the course components.
1.6	Course and/or instructional policies with which the learner is expected to comply are clearly stated or a link to current policies is provided. *Examples: Attendance, participation, workload ("A 3 credit course requires an average of 6 hours of work outside of the class meetings each week")*

Course structures/formats

Asynchronous self-paced: 100% of instruction is online with no in-person or synchronous online meetings and no proctored exams, and little or no interaction with the instructor.

Asynchronous instructor-led: 100% of instruction is online with no in-person or synchronous online meetings and no proctored exams, but with regular interaction with the instructor.

Synchronous: 100% of instruction is asynchronous online but some meetings and activities will be synchronous online.

Blended/Hybrid: 25%-75% of instruction is asynchronous online with regularly scheduled in-person meetings.

Face to Face (F2F): The main instructional component features meetings in person, either in a classroom or using videoconference technology like Telepresence. Learning management system may be used to organize course materials, submit assignments, and complement F2F instruction.

2. Organization and consistency

Organization of the online course and consistency in terms, deadlines, locations, and materials helps students locate material and stay on task.

Item #	Best Practices
2.1	The organization of materials in the LMS is described and consistently used. *Examples: Assignments, calendar, chat, blog, FAQ, quizzes, etc.*
2.2	Deadlines for assignments, discussions, quizzes, and exams are listed in easy to find locations. If listed in multiple locations, dates are consistent. *Examples: Calendar widget, syllabus or semester schedule, assignment folder* *Course announcement*
2.3	Deadlines follow a consistent pattern. *Examples: Assignments are due on X day of week by X time. Quizzes will be Y day of week at Y time.*
2.4	Office hours and teacher contact methods provided. *Examples: Use email subject line BIOL 101. Skype username, phone number,* *email address, expected response time*
2.5	In discussion fora, the most recent discussion topic appears at the top. *Example: Week 2 appears above Week 1 so students don't have to scroll past old material to get to current material.*
2.6	Course grading policy is available and defines standards for each letter grade.
2.7	Rubrics are visible to students.

3. Student Resources & Support

Students must know how to locate materials, resources, and support services.

Item #	Best Practices
3.1	Required course materials are clearly identified.
3.2	Optional course materials are clearly identified.
3.3	Updates on status of grades or feedback on assignments is available.
3.4	The course instructions articulate or link to the university accessibility policies and services.
3.5	Information about academic support services that can help learners succeed in the course are provided or linked. *Examples: Center for Academic Success, Memorial Library, college student relations coordinators*
3.6	Information about University student support services and resources that can help learners succeed are provided or linked. *Examples: Counseling Center, Title IX and Equal Opportunity Office, Career Development Center*

4. Interactivity & Community

The online learning experience can be lonely and isolating. Community-building activities and regular interaction with the teacher and other students can aid in retention, completion, and performance.

Item #	Best Practices
4.1	The first week includes interactive and/or community building activities. 1. Teacher-to-student 2. Student-to-student 3. Student-to-teacher *Examples: Videos, discussion threads, presentations, links to personal websites or blogs, or similar icebreakers.*
4.2	Expectations for student interaction in discussions are stated. *Examples: Respond to at least two students by 6:00 PM on Saturday.* *Answer questions raised by classmates about your post no later than Friday.*
4.3	If applicable, group work is explained and participation expectations are clearly defined. *Examples: Project management tasks, roles and responsibilities, team contract*
4.4	A discussion forum exists for students to ask general questions about the course.

4.5	A discussion forum exists for students to interact with each other informally and off-topic.

5. Communication

Regular communication helps students understand expectations and stay focused on the course.

Item #	Best Practices
5.1	Etiquette/netiquette expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of communication are stated in ways that guide student participation.
5.2	The instructor's plan for classroom response time and feedback on assignments is clearly stated.
5.3	The purpose of instructional materials and how the instructional materials will be used for the learning activities.

6. Technology

Technology is the heart of an online course. Students must know what technology will be used, how to gain access to it, and where to get help if they need it.

Item #	Best Practices
6.1	Minimum technology requirements are defined. *Examples: Internet connection, required software and/or hardware*
6.2	Instructions on how to use technology or links to training are provided.
6.3	Instructions for obtaining apps and other technologies is available.
6.4	Minimum technical skills expected of the learner are stated. *Example: Create, edit, and save text documents.*
6.5	A link to technical support is available and easy to find.
6.6	Information is provided about the accessibility of all required technologies.
6.7	Hyperlinks to external resources work.

Item #	Present?	Notes or Questions
1. Welcome		
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1.2		
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1.4		
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1.6		
2. Organization & Consistency		
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2.3		
2.4		
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2.7		
3. Student Resources & Support		
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3.6		
4. Interactivity & Community		
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4.4		
4.5		
5. Communication		
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6. Technology		
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Appendix C

SCOT Video Script for Online Observation

SCOTs will record a video message that introduces themselves, describes the SCOT program, and invites students to offer their comments in a confidential survey. You may record the video using any software application you wish, but the file must be stored in MediaSpace (https://mediaspace.mnscu.edu/ or https://mediaspace.minnstate.edu).

Email the URL of your video to the instructor to post in their online courses (e.g. in a weekly announcement or in a module within the Content section). This URL link is included in your follow-up email to the teacher.

Video Script

Hi, my name is ___(First and last name)___. I am a student here at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I am majoring in ___(your major area of study)___. I work for CETL, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, as a SCOT - that's a Student Consulting on Teaching.

The SCOT program provides faculty members with information that helps them have a better sense of what is happening in their classrooms. Your instructor has invited me to observe your online course this week. My job is to provide a confidential report with information that may help them improve the course. Some of the information I collect will come from observing your D2L course. The rest will come directly from you. Based on an interview with your instructor, I have created a survey in Qualtrics with 5 or 6 questions about your experience in this course.

I will send an email to your MavMAIL account with a link to an anonymous survey. You will know it's from me because the sender will be ___(first and last name)___ and the subject line will be the course ID and the words *Confidential Course Survey.* The survey can only be accessed from that email and it will be open for one week.

If you have any questions about the SCOT program, the confidentiality of survey or how your responses will be used, please contact Jennifer Veltsos, the Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Your instructor is trying improve their teaching and course design, and your feedback is an essential part of this project. Please take about 15 minutes to complete the survey.

Thanks for your help!