How Miami Law generated a surge in student online engagement

Using
- Interactive Study Materials
- Feedback tools

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Background

About the institution
University of Miami School of Law offers a global perspective that is the perfect springboard for a successful career in a profession that becomes more international every day.

About the instructor
Sean Paul Monnar is an Academic Educational Technologist at University of Miami School of Law.

Course objectives

Students improve on their discourse and analysis skills, memorizing and applying case law and case studies.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

The learning activities, according to Bloom’s Taxonomy, were mainly at the level of:

- Understanding legal principles as presented in case law
- Applying procedures and practices to case studies
- Analyzing and interpreting case studies
The challenge

When the pandemic struck, the University of Miami School of Law had to move everything online. Such abrupt transition presents a huge challenge to the faculty members: getting to use and integrate technology into their teaching. Most of the instructors were not really "tech savvy", according to Sean. Prior to COVID, classes were taught in a traditional lecture format – teachers talking while students listening and answering questions.

In online settings, this face-to-face teaching style can no longer be applied. Innovation and change are then needed to maintain quality, meaningful learning experiences for the students. That’s why the Faculty of the School of Law at the University of Miami has been experimenting with new teaching practices and technologies.

Furthermore, the faculty members wanted to find digital tools that can effectively address the challenge of maintaining student engagement and retention in hybrid/online classrooms. FeedbackFruits tools, eventually, were considered suitable for adoption at Miami Law.

The solution

A number of courses and workshops within the school now use FeedbackFruits tools, integrated into their native Blackboard environment:

- Interactive Study Materials let instructors embed questions and discussions in case files and videos;
- Peer Review facilitates the exchange of feedback on work within groups;
- Assignment Review streamlines instructor-to-peer feedback.

Sean is among the pioneers in implementing FeedbackFruits tools. For his class on country contracts, he incorporated Assignment Review, Peer Review, Interactive Document and Interactive Video to encourage engagement with course content, understanding of legal discourse, and capacity to deliver meaningful feedback.

This is how each tool was used throughout the course:

> And then the more that I got to explore and play with it [FeedbackFruits tools], the more I really really liked it, because the tool aligns so perfectly with the core learning objective of legal education.”

Sean Paul Monnar
Academic Educational Technologist, University of Miami School of Law
### The set-up

**Assignment Review tool**
A workshop geared toward first year students was issued, where students would hand in weekly assignments in the tool and receive feedback according to a rubric.

**Peer Review**
groups of 6 - 8 work on a case analysis together, handing in a document and commenting with reference to specific parts of text.

**Interactive Document**
The instructor highlighted and clarified the misunderstandings, miscommunication, and knowledge gaps as shown in the quiz’ performance.

**Interactive Video**
Question breaks and multiple choice questions were used to ‘chunk’ longer videos into more engaging and stimulating content.

### The outcomes

After using Feedback Fruits tools to allow questions on study material online, the professors noted “higher levels of engagement and preparedness” as students came to class with deep understanding of the topic.

In the workshop using Assignment Review, participation for the workshop rose from around 10 to around 40 participants, a significant increase. This is likely attributed to the new learning design, particularly the transparent assessment, in the workshop.

Using Interactive Study Materials, instructors could follow along students’ progress and identify if particular questions or topics were causing confusion. These could then be addressed in class.

In student surveys conducted by the faculty on the use of feedback activities and particularly FeedbackFruits, respondents indicated that they would look forward to using the tools again.

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"In previous iterations, feedback was handled in Blackboard Learn in a way which was super confusing. Having a more intuitive workflow, Assignment Review has been really helpful."

Sean Paul Monnar
Academic Educational Technologist, University of Miami School of Law