

Google+ Gets an A+ in Distance Education

As technology changes the face of education, both faculty and students seek to meet the challenges of distance education by finding valuable alternatives to aid in the achievement of learning objectives and program outcomes. Collaborative learning is a powerful method for teaching and learning, even in the virtual classroom. To meet the objectives associated with collaborative learning projects in an online doctoral program, students identified Google+™ as an appropriate resource for effectively supplementing educational needs. The use of Google+, a cloud-based information and communication network, is an appropriate tool for facilitating the transfer of knowledge in the realm of teaching and learning. This social media platform allows for synchronous interaction of up to 10 users, allowing document sharing and uploading of files and videos (Google, n.d.).

Teaching and Learning Methodology

Nurse educators seek to foster the development and promotion of critical thinking and clinical reasoning in nursing education curricula. Collaborative learning promotes active, reflective learning, while encouraging teamwork among members of the group (Rowles & Russo, 2009). Interactive videoconferencing provides synchronous communication for groups to foster information sharing and collaborative learning (Ramsey & Clark, 2009).

Distance education students must overcome feelings of isolation. Google+ becomes a vital link among students. Students can connect with each other for group work or gather to socialize and discuss issues of common concern. According to Robley, Farnsworth, Flynn, and Horne (2004), “Being connected, rather than technological competence, was revealed as the important underlying

essentials to personal and professional growth” (p. 338).

Students enrolled in distance education should take the opportunity to try Google+ as a resource. Google+ can be used as a communication vehicle among students to work on group projects. This system provides effective and efficient mechanisms for communication, planning, and project implementation. Students working on group projects can participate in a Google Hangout and brainstorm without having to wait for each person to respond, resulting in time-effective project planning. The ability to share documents contributes to the efficient process as well. This social networking system also engages distance learners, creating connections and supportive networking, which is often minimal with online learners.

Both faculty and students prosper from the use of Google+. Faculty members can use Google+ as a pedagogical approach to supplement lecture, laboratory, and clinical experiences. Faculty can set up a time to participate in a Hangout and can invite students in the circle to join in. Such Hangouts could include test reviews, clarification of content, tutoring sessions, virtual classes, and clinical postconferences. Faculty and students can agree on a Hangout time prior to testing; students can use a shared Google document to upload questions that faculty can include and answer in the review session. Screen sharing is possible, and faculty can upload documents, manipulate the screen, and reinforce content. Clinical orientations and even debriefings are possible using Google+. At times, inclement weather limits educational experiences, but Google+ can provide a virtual medium to conduct class. In addition, faculty can hold virtual office hours via this platform. Also, academic advising appointments may be an additional consideration when face-to-face meetings

are not possible. A faculty member may also virtually attend a meeting when necessary. Google+ provides many opportunities that enable faculty and students to work smarter, not harder.

Although Google+ initially provided a mechanism for developing and implementing assigned group work, the platform fostered a community of support within the group.

As information technology continues to offer diverse learning experiences, it also provides new, creative teaching methods that can provide valuable support for learning outcomes.

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