

Using podcasts to create an online community

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Presentation abstract

In this poster, I outlined how an existing podcast within the Health and Social Work (HSK) School at the University of Hertfordshire was developed to include a segment that the Student Success and Academic Support (SSAS) team used to share content relevant to the needs of its students. Given the nature of the courses within the School, students are often unable to attend workshops and one-to-one appointments and drop-ins due to their busy timetables, which consist of back-to-back lectures, practicals and long-hour placements. Consequently, not all students were able to access the support available to them via the SSAS team. As a result, a segment called 'Just a Moment with SASS' was developed in the HSK podcast.

The aim was to create an online community for students within the School where they can tune in once per month to listen to tutors from the SASS team share advice and tips on common student queries, listen to interviews of staff and students from the School and find out what is happening in the School. This creates a sense of belonging for students who are unable to attend support sessions and/or networking events but still want to feel part of the School.

The poster offers guidance on how to get started using podcasts and some of its limitations.

Keywords: podcast; pedagogy; student belonging.

Community response

Higher education is 'an embodied and communal experience' (Eringfeld, 2021, p.147) that, thanks to technological advancements and increasing confidence in digital literacies in both staff and students, is no longer the preserve of the physical campus. Podcasts have endured since the term was coined in 2004, with their use documented and studied in an array of disciplines (Heilesen, 2010), possibly because of the affordances they offer for the embodiment of learning in a shared learning community. Through the personal connection of voice, and the flexibility and choice they offer to students in terms of time and place, the integration of podcasts into a learning programme can support learner motivation (Bolliger et al, 2010) and students' sense of social presence within a social learning space (Kreijns et al, 2014).

The driver for supporting student belonging that sat behind the creation of the HSK podcast was identified by participants, one of whom recognised and appreciated that one of the goals of the podcast was not just to give information for its own sake, but to help students feel more connected to the School. This participant felt that hearing a person speaking can help achieve that so much more effectively than simply having that information in an email. Being able to continue the conversations of the classroom in a more informal and less prescriptive setting helps us to build 'a relational, more humane, educational ecosystem' (Syska and Mesley, 2021, p.3).

The value of podcasting as a pedagogy was reflected in the interest generated by the challenges of creating a regular podcast, particularly for those who have thought of running something similar in their own institutions, such as finding and scheduling relevant contributors and ensuring students are aware of the podcast in order to benefit from it. It was heartening for participants, after learning about the many highs and lows of this process, to read the positive feedback the author received for this initiative, even if the process itself was, at times, challenging and time consuming. The tips provided on how to get started will be invaluable for anyone considering implementing something similar themselves.

Author's reflection

Upon reflection, I am truly heartened by the positive reception the HSK Podcast received at the conference. It is pleasing to witness how the participants recognise and appreciate the podcast's evolution since its inception.

Looking ahead, this experience of presenting at the conference and receiving constructive feedback has bestowed upon me a newfound sense of confidence to take the podcast to even greater heights. Inspired by the insights gained from the conference, I intend to make the podcast a more dynamic and interactive platform. To achieve this, I plan to incorporate regular student interviews and engaging competitions. By doing so, I aim to foster a stronger sense of connection among our students and the school community as a whole, ultimately enhancing the podcast's impact.

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