

Discovering how students use online courses

The student experience under a microscope

Exploring Usability Testing: The Student's Experience

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Introduction

In online education teachers are not in the same physical space as students. They are unable to observe how students navigate and learn in an online course. It is good practice for online teachers to be aware of how their students navigate and progress through readings, learning activities, and assignments in their courses. Without knowledge of course usability, online teachers and those designing online courses are making assumptions about student learning processes. Having knowledge of how students use online courses and discerning what does or does not work effectively, will help with the creation and design of courses that enhance the online learning experience. This evidence will promote the best practices for user engagement, enhanced learning experiences and more meaningful student-teacher connections.

Goal

The overall goal of this project is to determine the usability of and to describe the learning experience of students in online undergraduate nursing courses.

Objectives

- To identify the strategies used by students as they navigate through online undergraduate nursing courses.
- To describe the learning experience of students as they navigate online undergraduate nursing courses.

Conclusion

This study is in progress. Our role as teacher researchers at Athabasca University fuels our curiosity about course usability, student engagement, and excellence in good practices informing online teaching and learning. Online course design involves a continuous cycle of development and refinement. Integration of usability testing as part of this cycle reinforces our commitment to the sustainability of this project.

Description of Initiative

- Usability testing is an excellent strategy to use when considering human-computer interactions such as determining the ease of use web-based applications (e.g. an online nursing theory course).
- In this project, the process of usability testing will involve asking a sample of 10 to 15 nursing students to complete certain tasks in an online course. Their process will be screen-recorded.
- Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with nursing students regarding their experience of navigating the course.

Our Partners for this Initiative

- Students who are licensed practical nurses or registered nurses, currently working in health care settings, and advancing their education by taking online courses at Athabasca University;
- Tutors/Instructors who are engaged with undergraduate nursing students in online courses.

Anticipated Outcomes

- To provide insight into how undergraduate nursing students approach and navigate online courses;
- To identify specific features in online courses that enhance the student learning experience;
- To provide evidence to inform development and design of innovative and accessible online courses.

Potential Impacts on Partners

- Students will be more actively engaged with the course content, their tutor/instructor, and their online classmates;
- Tutors/Instructors will have a clear sense of how students approach and navigate online courses.

