Case Study Template

Student podcasts as an assessment format
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Abstract

This case study outlines the use of student podcasts as an innovative form of assessment for undergraduates. Initially used as a replacement for in-person group presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic, this form of assessment has continued for a second year with further improvements in the quality of students' work. Within their 15-minute podcast episode which is published on Spotify or YouTube, students have the opportunity to explore and debate contemporary issues in sport such as the inclusion of gender diversity, systemic racism and the impact of the Paralympics on public perceptions of disability. Through this collaborative experience, students get the chance to develop communication skills to non-academic audiences and challenge each other's opinions about the most controversial issues at the intersection of sport and society.

1. Background

The assessment idea was initially introduced as a replacement for in-person group presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic because group work had to be online. The module (Conceptualising Sport, PSB753) primarily forms part of the sociology strand of the Bsc Sport Management programme at Part B. Because the second assessment point on the module is a written exam, there is an opportunity in the module structure to offer a different kind of task for the first assessment. Additionally, podcasts have experienced a dramatic growth in popularity in recent years (both for the general public and for academics) as a valid medium of discussion; a medium that avoids the problem of 'death by powerpoint'.

2. Methodology

In this assessment task, students were required to produce a 15-minute podcast episode in groups of three where they discussed a contemporary issue in sport. This was an opportunity for them to showcase their learning of concepts and theories related to gender, race, disability and nationalism by applying their knowledge to an issue that interested them. Students were given some guidance in terms of format and style which resulted in a diverse range of podcast submissions, many of which had their own jingles, graphics, logos and names in addition to the in-depth conversational content.

3. Issues

From the perspective of students, there were some minor technical issues to overcome (for example, how to record the podcast and what software to use) as well as concerns about how to maximise their grade within this novel format. Learning from the previous year, I was able to provide some recommendations for the technical issues and I explained, with examples, how to demonstrate being knowledgeable and well-read without having to rely on jargon or the frequent use of references to literature that they are accustomed to in written work.

4. Benefits

It was most pleasing to see obvious flourishing from students who would normally experience anxiety from in-person presentations (often female students) as well as those who are less competent with written communication (often those from less privileged backgrounds). There was

some discussion in seminars about how podcasts have a more informal feel than presentations which meant that students felt less pressure to hide their regional accent, for example.

5. Evidence of Success

Informal feedback this year was very positive with many students commenting that the novelty of the assessment was particularly important. While formal feedback has not been well engaged with, it is telling that some students engage with the task with impressive enthusiasm as is evident in these excellent examples [here](#) and [here](#).

6. How Can Other Academics Reproduce This?

I would highly recommend this assessment format for modules where (a) students should be comparing and contrasting ideas, (b) topics are potentially interesting to lay audiences, (c) there is another point of assessment that covers a more traditional academic style, and (d) students have not done this on another part of the programme.

7. Reflections

An often neglected aspect of teaching and learning is the experience of the lecturer. In this case, I feel that my own affinity for and enjoyment of podcasts fed into the success of the assessment. I introduced the assessment with enthusiasm and was able to provide examples of good practice because I had plenty to hand. Indeed, when assessing the work it was enjoyable to listen and take some time away from the screen. Other lecturers may not feel the same way about podcasts which would likely impact on the success of the task from a student learning perspective.

A further point of reflection is around the inclusivity of this assessment format. Compared to written assignments, it might be argued that this format could disadvantage students who speak English as their second language and increase challenges for students who have reasonable adjustments around anxiety. However, if it is considered important to provide students with a varied diet of assessment formats then it is my view that the pre-recorded nature of the podcast makes it less problematic than giving a live presentation. There are also interesting inclusivity questions arising from how the podcast is shared. This year, the podcasts were uploaded to public platforms but privacy settings were used so that only the lecturer and one other group could listen to the podcast. Some students expressed interest in making the podcasts publicly available which, on the one hand, could be an exciting prospect for some but, on the other hand, could feel like a source of concern for others. In dealing with these issues, it is important to consult students and allow the voices of the minority to be heard in those consultations.