Student-Generated Public Service Announcements: A Case Study of the Need for Careful Assessment of Learning Outcomes

BENJAMIN MOTZ
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES, INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON

INTRODUCTION
Searching the literature on teaching practices, instructors would find good reason to incorporate a public service announcement (PSA) project into their curriculum. Scholars of teaching and learning have reported\(^1,2,3,4\) that video production activities:

- Are enjoyable and engaging for the students
- Impel students to make substantive connections between class material and their own experiences
- In turn, help students gain a better understanding of course material

These conclusions are supported by evaluations of student sentiment regarding the project, and the instructors’ own assessments of their students’ videos. Accordingly I developed a PSA project for P335 Cognitive Psychology, attempting to both (1) incorporate a unique, enjoyable, and impactful active learning project, and also (2) measure the activity’s effectiveness in comparison with other projects in the course.

CLASS ORGANIZATION
Cognitive Psychology is the scientific study of mental processes, from sensory perception to problem solving. The course was organized into 5 content modules, each exploring a different aspect of cognition over 3 weeks. The final module on Decision Making was chosen for implementation of the PSA project.

Assignment: In 4-person groups, students created 60 second PSAs that would illustrate a particular decision making fallacy, with the goal of helping people make better decisions.

METHOD
The project was measured in 3 sections over 2 semesters: Fall 2009 (n=164, two sections) and Spring 2010 (n=97). During Spring 2010, the PSA project was complemented by a multiple choice quiz on course material.

Between each of the five P335 content modules, students were asked (in class) to respond to survey questions using Likert scales of agreement (5pt) and Scantron sheets. Students’ enjoyment of the content modules were quantified as the difference between the following two survey items:
1. I am eager to attend my classes, in general.
2. I am eager to attend P335 classes, specifically.

This measure is preferable to absolute measures of student sentiment, because it controls for seasonal changes over the course of the semester.

STUDENTS LIKED THE PROJECT
Student ratings of eagerness to attend P335 compared with other courses was highest following the PSA module (p = 0.0001).

CONCLUSION
As observed in previous studies, students enjoyed the PSA project, and both myself and my colleagues found their work to be insightful and creative. However, prior claims that PSA projects would improve general understanding of course material were not supported. On the contrary, the PSA was unpredictable of performance on a traditional quiz that covered the same general material. Moreover, PSA performance was not correlated with improved performance on another active learning project, suggesting that the PSA project assessed a more unique form of active learning.

These findings suggest that work on a specific active learning project does not necessarily facilitate transfer to general course concepts. In the case of PSAs, students may be demonstrating a type of learning that is independent from traditional measures of learning outcomes.

REFERENCES