Yellowdig Social Media Learning Platform: Pilot 2019

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Introduction

Effective online instruction requires meaningful interaction (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Traditionally, discussion boards have been an essential tool to provide opportunities such opportunities in online and hybrid courses. The Blackboard discussion board tool is based on a "bulletin board" format, which was a common way to interact online in the 1980s and 1990s and is now seen as out-of-date and unfriendly by both faculty and students.

Yellowdig provides a way to engage learners differently. Yellowdig is a social media style discussion platform with the look and feel of Facebook, and it can be integrated with the Blackboard Learning Management System. Rather than offering a post and reply bulletin board structure for discussion within lessons, Yellowdig can be used to engage students throughout a course. With a single feed and posts tagged with topics, students continue to access and interact with the material even after a lesson has finished. The social media style interface and interactive tools offer significant advantages for discussions in online and hybrid courses.

BACKGROUND

A review of the literature suggests that social media style online discussions could enhance student engagement and student learning.
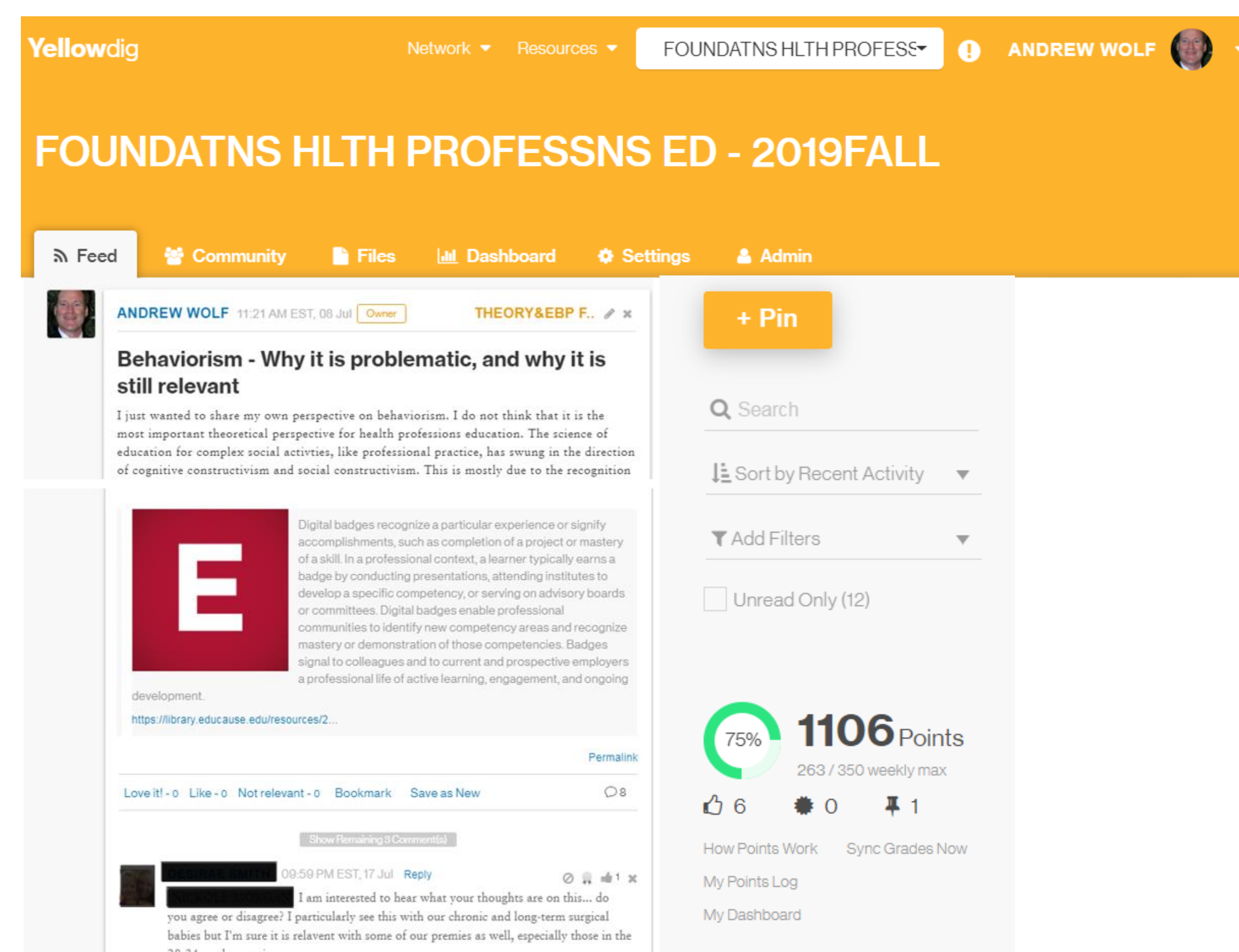- More active online discussion increases student engagement and satisfaction (Shea, et al, 2000; Drouin, 2008).
- Facebook, when offered as an alternative to an LMS discussion board for students, had four times the number of posts from only 41% of the student population (Schroeder, J. & Greeenbowe, 2009).
- These benefits depend on active and meaningful interaction between instructors and students.
- Features of Yellowdig are designed to encourage meaningful interaction and prompt feedback, including:
  - Gamification with point system & badging
  - Social media style feed
  - Tagging people in posts
- Schools that have implemented Yellowdig have found significant benefits to student engagement & learning (Yellowdig, 2018).
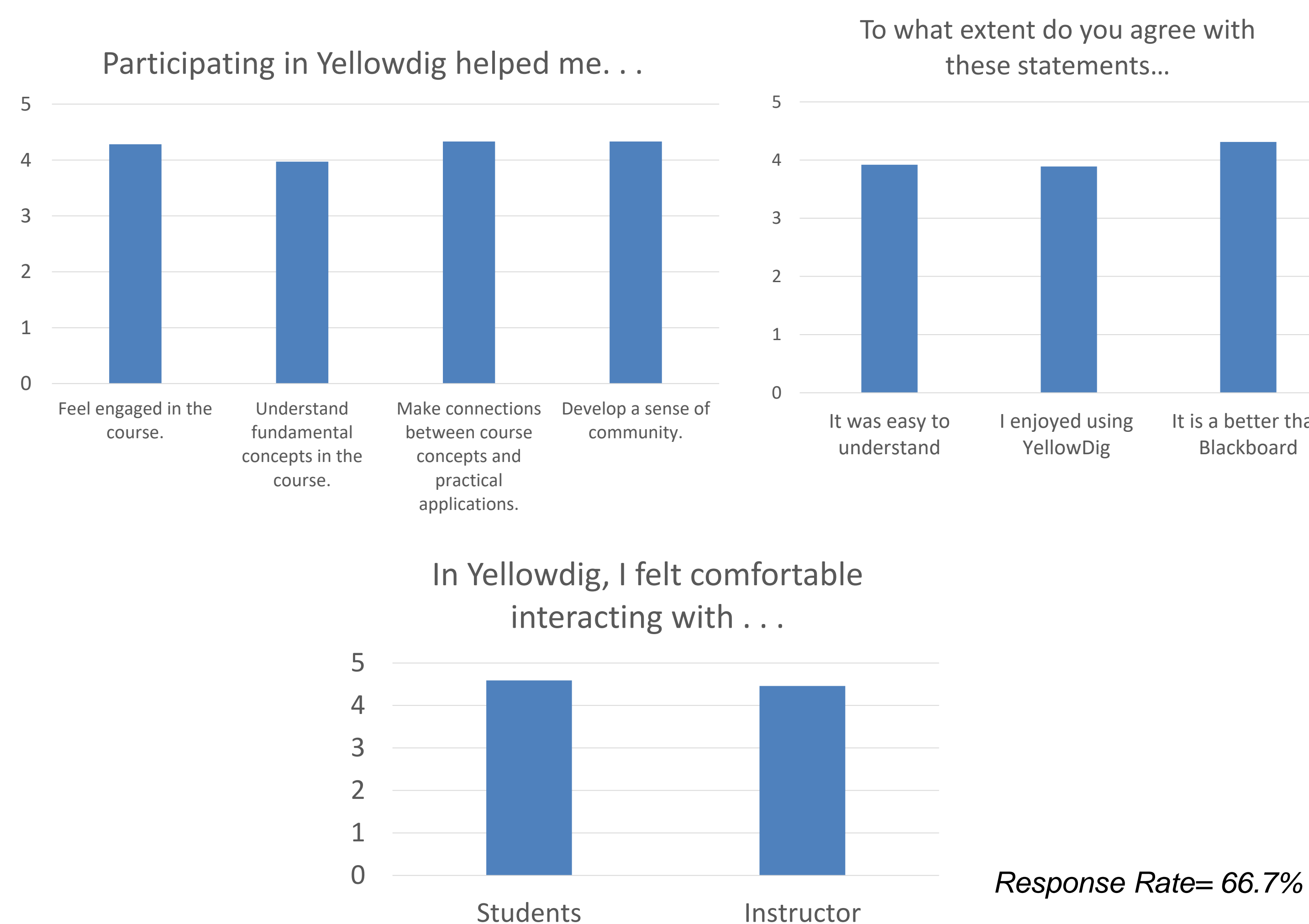
METHODS

Yellowdig was implemented in 3 classes in Spring, 2019:
- EDE 484: Online Teaching & Learning (n=12)
- EDU 581: Clinical Teaching in Health Professions (n=24)
- NUR 354: Nursing Leadership & Management of Care (n=6)

Either a replacement for, or supplement to, Blackboard Discussion Boards.

OUTCOMES

Participating in Yellowdig helped me. . .
(Feel engaged in the course. / Understand fundamental concepts in the course. / Make connections between course concepts and practical applications. / Develop a sense of community.)

To what extent do you agree with these statements...
(It was easy to understand / I enjoyed using YellowDig / It is a better than Blackboard)

In Yellowdig, I felt comfortable interacting with . . .
(Students / Instructor)
Response Rate= 66.7%

OUTCOMES (Cont.)

Qualitative Survey Responses

Enhanced conversations:
- It felt like FB and the discussions were much more fluid.
- It made it interaction with classmates better and made it easy to keep track of your posts and the comments you receive.
- I liked that it encouraged more frequent posting and interaction than Blackboard did.

Easy to Use & Navigate:
- It was easy to navigate, I could easily search for my posts and those of my classmates, the notifications were appropriate and kept me current, and I liked how the posts could be organized by topics.
- More organized than Blackboard discussions, it was easier to follow up topics and main ideas.

Points were difficult to understand and seemed unfair or subjective:
- I think it would be much better if you come up with objective criteria regarding crediting good pins (badge). This will help to minimize subjectivity of the instructor.
- Sometimes you end up writing anything just for the points, even if there is no real value to the comment because you are forced to be compliant with the points.
- The points system was so stressful and completely unrealistic,

Not intuitive:
- The forum is not intuitive. Better instructions are needed.
- It was tough for me to get up to speed on how to use it. The hash tags and dashboard didn't work out for me until the end of the course.
- It's hard keeping track of all of the previous posts and going to a specific post in the forums.

Better than Blackboard:
- I think that it keeps students engaged. I highly recommend the use of Yellowdig.
- So far, Yellowdig offers much more interaction with students and instructor than blackboard's discussion forum, but it is a little harder to navigate.
- I wish we could use this forum for all classes that require discussion board post
- I would like other courses to use it!

CONCLUSIONS

- Yellowdig was successfully implemented in 4 classes.
- Students felt comfortable interacting in Yellowdig, with both fellow students and with faculty.
- The majority of students enjoyed key features of Yellowdig, like points, tagging, and liking posts.
- Most students prefer Yellowdig over Blackboard discussion boards.
- The majority of students believed that Yellowdig improved engagement, enhanced community, and increased understanding.
- Yellowdig was easy to use and navigate.
- Some students felt like it was hard to use, and "get up to speed" when getting started with Yellowdig.
- Some students complained noted the Yellowdig point system seemed unfair, arbitrary, or confusing.

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