Finding the right balance: Hybrid learning and professional graduate students

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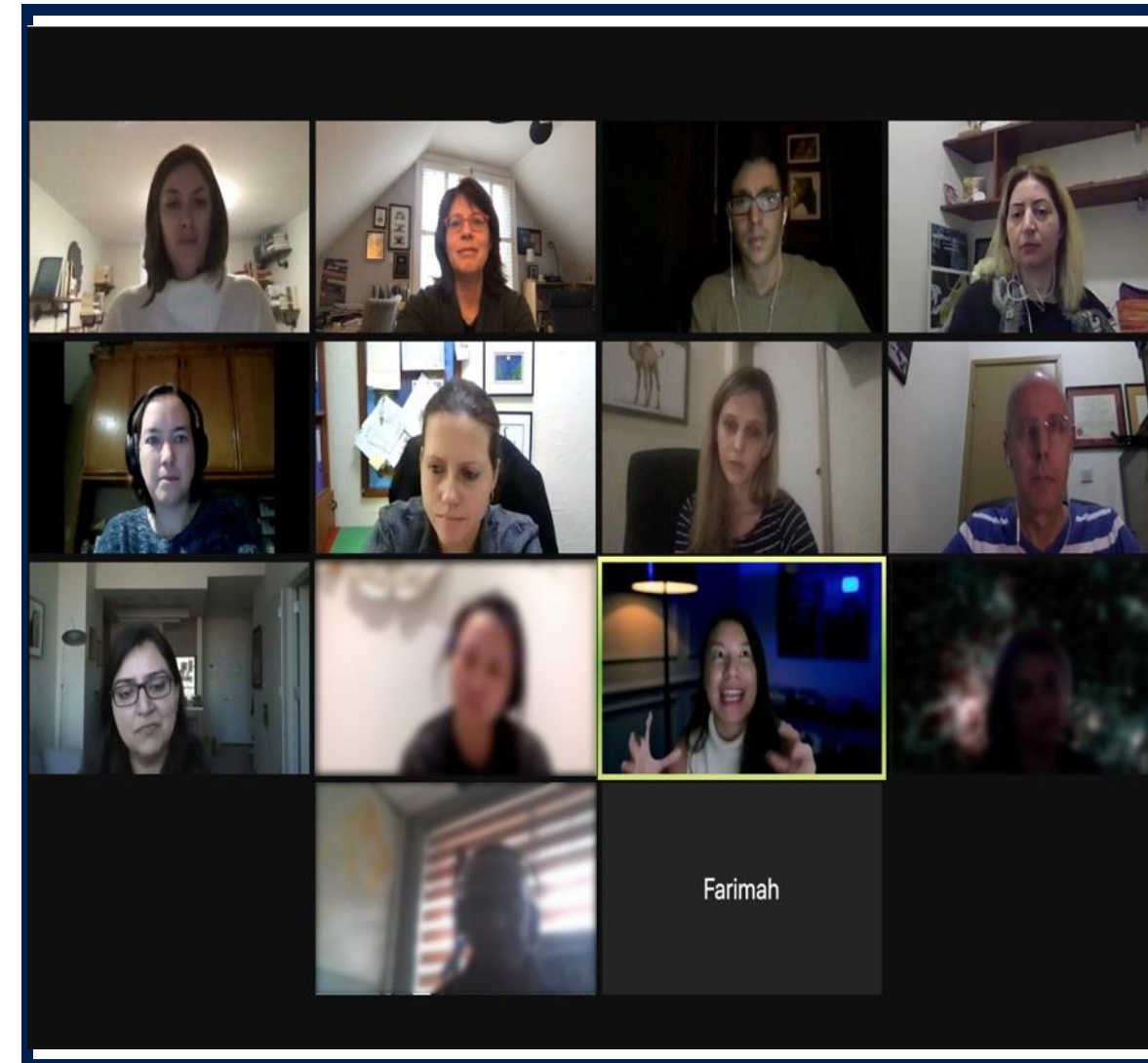
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Introduction

- This project explored the use of Quercus and other online learning modalities to support adaptation and iteration of instructional practices in a new online doctoral degree program in international education policy and leadership.

- We introduced different asynchronous and synchronous components across three courses and evaluated their uptake and acceptability.

Methods

- We administered an intake survey to evaluate students' learning preferences and technical competencies; and 4 mid-term course evaluations including ratings of course components along with open-ended questions.

- Use of Quercus' Learning Analytics was limited to monitoring uptake of course components and connecting with students who seemed to be having trouble participating in specific online modules.

Results

- Students identified asynchronous group work (discussion boards, group spaces on Quercus, meeting outside of class time) as the least favored modality across courses.

- When synchronous "live" sessions were offered for students in different time zones, students reported very high satisfaction, especially when used for group work and discussion.

Figure 1. Screen shot of a synchronous simulation exercise.

- Pre-recorded lectures by the professor were perceived as highly useful since they provided an anchor to course readings; students could pause or watch them later and, in some cases, they could search transcripts to find the part they needed to re-watch.

- Although small group interactions were welcome, students also reiterated the need to connect with the entire cohort to see others' work and share experiences.

- Students found the Quercus platform easy to use and intuitive, but its use was mainly as a warehouse for course materials and a grading tool.

Discussion

- Students in this professional degree valued asynchronous, self-directed learning. They were satisfied with the use of Quercus as a learning management software.

- However, while Quercus provided structure to the course, it did not provide adequate opportunity for learning and group exchange.

- Surveys showed that students highly rated frequent "live" interactions with instructors and classmates. They also requested more frequent individualized feedback from the instructor and informal opportunities to connect with their peers (e.g., via WhatsApp).

- Quercus analytics were not sufficient to allow for detailed understanding of student preferences and their engagement with course components.

- Establishing a standard survey tool for evaluating student uptake and satisfaction with different online learning components can help programs to adapt and iterate to meet student needs.