

## NACTA 2022 Experiential Learning Workshop Activity Virtual Pivot: Lessons Learned

### Introduction

The NACTA 2022 annual conference needed to rapidly pivot to a virtual format due to a Derecho that impacted Ohio. In this ongoing period of uncertainty and rapid change, virtual pivots are likely to become a more common occurrence. Since 2020's mass virtual pivot, we have discovered that conferences and classrooms could adapt to online presentations on short notice. Most conferences offering online or hybrid sessions have limited opportunities for active participation due to complexities with synchronous online presentations. For example, the NACTA 2022 conference schedule originally planned for workshop sessions to be in-person only. We wanted to share how the Experiential Learning (E.L.) Committee pivoted from an in-person workshop to fully online with limited notice. Further, the goal of this teaching tip is to aid those planning an in-person activity faced with an unexpected virtual pivot, and to share the struggles that we faced while trying to retain as much active participation as possible with the hope of inspiring them to have better success than we did.

### Procedure

The in-person workshop was planned to start with a one-hour panel discussion and then the remaining hour devoted to a small group case study activity. The discussion prior to the activity shared examples of E.L. activities utilized by panelists at their institutions as well as the challenges they faced while establishing them (see Teaching Tip #126 Insight on using student farms and facilities for experiential learning from the NACTA 2022 Experiential Learning Workshop). The case study tasked participants to plan an E.L. activity for students at a hypothetical institution utilizing a series of provided resources. We hoped the discussion and case study activity would provide a scaffold for participants to independently plan their own E.L. activity. The discussion panel provided initial inspiration and inspired participants to think about their own opportunities while the case study activity allowed them to practice developing their own E.L. activity. The goals of the workshop were for participants to leave with ideas to take back to their institution to initiate new experiential learning programs, as well as the opportunity to develop a professional network to reach out to for support.

Participants would be split into four small groups with each group getting a different case (Scenario Document). Each case presented a basic scenario at a made-up institution with varying resources. The facilitators guided each group through brainstorming possible experiential learning activities. One idea would be selected and the group would be tasked with planning out their activity. While the group was planning, facilitators would introduce surprise changes, reminiscent of real challenges faced in planning (Facilitator Guide). The result of the workshop is

four planned activities and additional ideas available for participants to utilize at their own institutions.

Unfortunately, the virtual pivot meant the planned workshop needed to be shifted to Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, San Jose, CA). We were notified of the need to pivot to virtual delivery six days before the scheduled presentation, but only received updated registration numbers a few hours before. Our group met virtually prior to the conference and re-designed our activities to be compatible with Zoom (Pivot Document). We utilized breakout rooms to split into groups and designed a Padlet (San Francisco, CA) virtual board that contained links to Google Documents (Google, Menlo Park, CA) with scenario information and reporting forms for each group. Groups were asked to fill out the Google Document Reporting Form (Reporting Form) with their ideas and planned activities. Almost half of the participants left the workshop following the panel discussion, possibly because they did not want to engage in the activity. Then there was high variability between the groups in terms of participation levels. Some groups had productive conversations and came up with vibrant E.L. activities while others struggled to get conversations started let alone utilize the reporting form.

## **Assessment**

While the workshop was quickly pivoted to Zoom and not what we had originally planned, we had strong attendance and a positive response from the participants. Through the pivoting process, we realized the importance of communication between the conference organizers and workshop planners. The original workshop plan was for 25 participants, but the conference organizers reopened enrollment and we were told a few hours before our workshop that approximately 60 people had registered. We had to expand our case studies to accommodate double the original number and recruit more facilitators on short notice.

Despite the high enrollment and positive response, our team was disappointed in the level of engagement we observed during the activity. It appeared as though participants were not prepared to engage in the activity, despite being aware of the virtual environment and the description of the workshop. Participants may have been exhausted from three days of virtual presentations, and/or habituated to passive engagement by that point. Feelings of exhaustion, as well as frustration about the virtual environment were present amongst the facilitators. Additionally, the newly recruited facilitators felt unprepared for leading participants through the case activity which may have contributed to the varying participation levels.

Overall, we are unsure if we accomplished our goals for the workshop. We wanted participants to leave with ideas for their own E.L. activities and prepared to start planning their own. Upon reflection we wish that we had gathered contact information of participants to be able to share the Padlet afterwards, as intended originally. In hindsight, we could have worked with the conference organizers to ensure receipt of the attendee list as well or incorporated a check-in application into the Padlet. We have tried to work with the NACTA meeting organizers after the fact but have been unable to obtain our attendee list. We also think that a recording, especially of the panel discussion, would have been beneficial to provide a persistent resource beyond the end of the conference. We hope that by following up with this teaching tip as well as our other tip about the highlights of the discussion, we can provide persistent resources to both participants and organizers to continue to learn from the experience.

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