

**NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY
ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET**

Learner: **Steven Diaz**

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Keep a Photocopy or Electronic Copy Of Your Assignments: You may need to re-submit assignments if your mentor has indicated that you may or must do so.

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ELT7003

Dr. Greg Bischoff

**Instructional design and Engaging E-
Learning Activities**

**Assignment 4: Introductory/Icebreaker
Activities**

Dr. Bischoff,

I enjoyed this assignment since it addressed an area that I was lacking in my teaching practice. I had always underestimated the importance of icebreaker activities to enhance the overall learning experience in my classroom. In this assignment, I also had the opportunity to integrate web 2.0 tools that I have been pondering how to use it in my teaching practice.

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Introductory/Icebreaker Activities

Steven Diaz

Northcentral University

Introductions/Icebreaker Activities

The first goal for the first week of UNI 101, *University Preparation* course, is to introduce course policies and expectations. The second goal is to create an atmosphere that allows students to feel comfortable with themselves and St. Thomas University's environment. The following introductory/icebreaker activities were design to achieve these two goals.

Virtual Poster

Using a web 2.0 tool called *Glogster*, students will create interactive online posters by inserting text, photos, graphics, videos, music, links, and other features to show who they are as a person. This activity was designed to meet the following objectives:

1. Students will create a virtual poster to introduce their interests and self-perceptions to classmates in a creative, expressive and fun manner.
2. Students will exhibit their virtual poster by embedding it in the discussion board of the course shell in Blackboard to help them become comfortable with fellow students.
3. Students will choose at least five classmates' posters in which they identified commonalities and/or differences that caught their attention or curiosity.
4. Students will comment about their classmates' posters to establish positive relationships among members of the class and build group cohesion.

The following preparation is required to implement this activity:

1. Create a discussion thread in the discussion board of the course shell in Blackboard with the subject line *Getting Acquainted: Virtual Poster*, in which students will embed their posters and will post comments about their classmates' posters.
2. Create a virtual poster in Glogster web site that describes the instructor as a person.

Glogster is a web 2.0 tool that allows users to create interactive online posters using

multimedia elements such as images, graphics, text, hyperlinks, audio clips, music and video.

3. Post the instructor's virtual poster (e.g. <http://kaferico.glogster.com/Me-Myself-and-My-Poster/>) in the discussion board, so students become acquainted with the instructor and use the poster as a model to create their posters.
4. Prepare a video tutorial with a screen capturing tool (e.g. Jing) to demonstrate students how to embed their virtual posters in the discussion board. Prepare another video tutorial to demonstrate students how to reply to posted messages in the discussion board.
5. Prepare an announcement that includes the objectives and detailed instructions of the activity, and the video tutorials for embedding and replying in the discussion board. This announcement will be posted in the *Assignment* page of the course shell in Blackboard.
6. Prepare an announcement about netiquette guidelines of online communication and post this announcement in the *Course Information* page of the course shell in Blackboard.

The following instructions must be included in the announcement for the *Assignment* page:

1. To create your virtual poster, you must visit Glogster web site (i.e. <http://www.glogster.com>) and create an account by clicking the *Register* button located on the home page.
2. Browse the virtual posters that are displayed in Glogster home page to familiarize with the web site and to get ideas of what can be included in your poster.
3. Watch the slide presentation *Glog on!* by Jan McGee (i.e. <http://www.slideshare.net/jmcgee/glog-on-presentation>) to learn how to create a virtual poster at Glogster web site.

4. Learn the basics of copyright laws at Cyberbee web site (i.e. http://www.cyberbee.com/cb_copyright.swf), which you must take into consideration when creating your virtual poster.
5. Create your virtual poster in Glogster web site with elements that describe you as a person in a positive, creative and fun manner. Your poster must contain at least the following elements: (a) a self-portrait picture or an icon that represents who you are; (b) your name or nickname; (c) your favorite quote; (d) three images that illustrate your interests, background and goals; (e) your favorite video; (f) a link to your favorite web site; and (g) your favorite song or music.
6. Watch the video tutorial on how to embed your virtual poster in the discussion board of the course shell in Blackboard. Embed your poster in the discussion thread *Getting Acquainted: Virtual Poster*. You have until day three of week one to post your virtual poster in the discussion thread.
7. Observe each of your classmates' posters and choose at least five posters that caught your attention or curiosity. Post a reply to each student's poster that you selected, commenting about the contents of their posters that could help you get to know them better. Your comments should follow the netiquette guidelines of online communication posted in the *Course Information* page in Blackboard. You have until day six of week one to post your comments about your classmates' posters.
8. Reply to those classmates who commented about your virtual poster by acknowledging their comments and engaging in further conversation to know each of them better. You have until day seven to reply to your classmates' comments about your poster.

The assessment of this activity consist on students earning five completion points for creating and posting their virtual posters in the discussion thread with all the required elements that describes them as a person. They will also earn five completion points for posting comments to at least five of their classmates' virtual posters. If students post comments to more than five of their classmates' posters then they will earn two extra-credit points. Finally, students will earn two extra-credit points for replying to all classmates who posted a comment about their virtual poster.

Provocative Questions

The purpose of this activity is to promote an interactive learning environment where students do not hesitate to ask questions. Using a web 2.0 tool called *Voicethread*, students will post a provocative (or wonderment) question for their classmates, which will be answered using text, audio, or video. Provocative questions are open-ended questions that elicit reflection or deep thinking and encourage stimulating discussions to construct knowledge. This activity was designed to meet the following objectives:

1. Students will reflect on the instructor's provocative questions about the purpose of pursuing a college degree and college expectations, and will post a thoughtful response for each question in Voicethread.
2. Students will post a provocative question in Voicethread to know more about their classmates and build a community of active learners.
3. Students will post a thoughtful response to their own provocative question to help classmates know more about them.
4. Students will choose at least two classmates' provocative questions to reflect and post a thoughtful response for each question.

The following preparation is required to implement this activity:

1. Create a slide show in Voicethread web site for the activity. Voicethread is a multimedia slide presentation that allows visitors to navigate the pages of the presentation and post comments on each slide in text, audio, or video format.
2. Create the title page for the slide show using *Wordle* (<http://www.wordle.net>), which is a web application that generates word cloud images of text that the user provides. The word cloud for the title page consists of topics that will be covered in UNI 101 course.
3. Search images in *Flickr* that are under the *Creative Commons* (CC) license to create four additional slides for the presentation in Voicethread. Flickr is a web 2.0 tool that allows users to store photos and videos online, and share these with family, friends, and/or visitors. A CC license gives educators more freedom to use creative works for educational purposes. The search engine *flickrCC* (<http://flickrcc.bluemountains.net/>) will be used to facilitate the search of images under CC license.
4. Using a web cam, create a video comment that introduces and explain the icebreaker activity. This video comment will be inserted in the title page of the slide presentation in Voicethread.
5. Copy the embed code of the Voicethread slide presentation to embed it in Blackboard.
6. Prepare a video tutorial using a screen capturing tool (e.g. Jing) to demonstrate students how to register in Voicethread.
7. Prepare an announcement that includes the objectives and detailed instructions of the activity, the video tutorial for registering in Voicethread and the embedded slide show. This announcement will be posted in the *Assignment* page of the course shell in Blackboard.

The following instructions must be included in the announcement for the *Assignment* page:

1. Watch the video tutorial on how to register in Voicethread. Create an account to participate in this activity.
2. Watch the tutorial *What is a VoiceThread anyway?* (i.e. <http://voicethread.com/share/409/>) to learn how to comment during the activity.
3. Access the *Provocative Question* Voicethread (i.e. <http://voicethread.com/share/541191/>) to start participating in the activity. Watch and listen carefully the instructor's video comment on page one of the presentation, which introduces the purpose of the activity.
4. On page two of the presentation, post a thoughtful response for the question *Why are you pursuing a college degree?* You have until day five of week one to post your response in Voicethread.
5. On page three of the presentation, post a thoughtful response for the question *What are your expectations about college?* You have until day five of week one to post your response in Voicethread.
6. Think of a provocative question you want to ask your classmates that could help you know them better. Post this question on page four of the presentation. Do not ask questions that could disrespect your classmates. Follow the netiquette guidelines of online communication posted in the *Course Information* page in Blackboard. The following questions are examples of provocative questions: If you win the lotto today, what would you do with the money? What is your dream job? How could you help St. Thomas University become the best university in South Florida? You have until day five of week one to post your provocative question in Voicethread.

7. Post a thoughtful response to your own question on page five of the presentation. In addition, select two provocative questions from your classmates and post a thoughtful response to each question on the page five of the presentation. In your responses, state the questions you selected and its authors before answering the questions. You have until day seven of week one to post your response in Voicethread.
8. Reply to those classmates who answered your provocative by acknowledging their comments and engaging in further conversation to know each of them better. You have until day seven to reply to your classmates' answers about your provocative question.

The assessment of this activity consists on students earning two completion points per response for answering the two instructor's questions, two classmates' questions and their own question. If students post thoughtful responses to more than two of their classmates' provocative questions, they will earn two extra-credit points. Students will also earn two extra-credit points for replying to all classmates who answered their provocative question.

Syllabus Quiz

This introductory activity was designed to help students become aware of the course expectations and policies. Students must read the course syllabus and announcements in Blackboard before taking an online quiz that consist of 10 True-or-False questions. This activity was designed to meet the following objectives:

1. Students will read the course syllabus and announcements in Blackboard to become aware of the course policies and expectations.
2. Students will demonstrate awareness of the course policies and expectations by earning at least 80% after taking the *Syllabus Quiz*.

The following preparation is required to implement this activity:

1. Create an online quiz using the *Test Manager* available in Blackboard under *Control Panel: Assessment* option. The quiz consists of 10 True-or-False items that cover the course policies and expectations stated in the course syllabus and announcements.
2. Prepare an announcement that includes the objectives and detailed instructions of the online quiz. This announcement will be posted in the *Assignment* page of the course shell in Blackboard.

The following instructions must be included in the announcement for the *Assignment* page:

1. Read carefully the course syllabus located in the *Syllabus* page of the course shell in Blackboard.
2. Read carefully the instructors' announcements posted in the *Course Information* page of the course shell in Blackboard.
3. Go to the *Assignment* page of the course shell in Blackboard to access the *Syllabus Quiz*. You have multiple attempts to complete successfully this quiz. The attempt with the highest score will be your final grade.
4. You have until day two of week one to submit this quiz.

Reflection

The use of icebreaker or introductory activities is an area that I have been lacking in my teaching practice. Unfortunately, I have been one of those instructors that Conrad and Donaldson (2004) identified as having the tendency to rush through the course introductions to immediately get into the heart of the course – the content. At the educational institution in which I currently facilitate online math courses, students and instructors are asked to post a short biography as a way to become acquainted with each other. However, I have questioned the practical value of this icebreaker activity since I have yet perceived any benefits in the learning environment of my

online courses. From my experience, most of my students prefer working in isolation instead of working in collaboration. I am often perplexed by their preference to struggle learning the course content on their own before seeking the assistance of their classmates or instructor. Many students demonstrate to be unreceptive to constructive criticism from peers or the instructor during the course activities. These students often decide not to participate in discussions because they allege feeling intimidated or disrespected when classmates and instructor disagree with their point of views or correct them.

Due to my skepticism about the effectiveness of icebreaker activities, I had a difficult time to come up with three introductory or icebreaker activities for this assignment. Based on my experiences, I was not convinced these activities could make a difference in the learning environment. How can I design these activities when I question its pedagogical value? For such reason, I decided to research more information about introductory/icebreaker activities that could change my perception about the usefulness of these activities in the learning environment. Avoiding to design meaningless activities, I needed more information that could help me create effective introductory/icebreaker activities that meet its intended purposes, “to establish the presence of individuals and open the lines of communication for the learning community in a nonthreatening manner” (Conrad and Donaldson, 2004, p. 46).

My research produced interesting results that help me realized the pedagogical value of icebreaker/introductory activities. I learned about the importance of first building trust and support among learners before asking them to take risks participating in any course activities, including icebreakers (Dahmer, 1992). Conrad and Donaldson (2004) emphasized the importance of icebreakers to humanize the technology-mediated learning that takes place in online courses. Icebreakers should create a sense of camaraderie without barriers, such as the

natural interactions that occur when people mingle before or after social events (Dahmer, 1992). Icebreaker activities also serve the purpose of gaining students' attention to induce curiosity and motivation to learn, which Dooley, Lindner and Dooley (2005) viewed these activities as an *IOU*, the acronym for *Icebreaker and Openers increase Understanding*. Dixon, Crooks and Henry (2006) found that traditional introductions, such as posting a brief biography, do not develop deeper connections, sense of belonging and comfort among students. Icebreakers can also be used to other purposes than facilitating introductions (Varvel, 2002), such as (a) to assess students' prior knowledge on course content; (b) as topic segues; (c) to prepare students for class routines or delivery; and (d) to foster group unity by breaking down any pre-existent barriers among students such as status, race, gender, etc.

The findings of my research helped me get a better sense or guidance to design the three introductory/icebreaker activities required in this assignment. I found necessary to know more about introductory/icebreaker activities before I could plan them carefully and not leaving anything to chance, as suggested by Conrad and Donaldson (2004). Another reason for knowing more about introductory/icebreaker activities was my interest in using web 2.0 tools in these activities. I deduced that it was ideal to use social and networking concepts of web 2.0 tools to complement and augment the purpose of introductory/icebreaker activities.

The activity *Virtual Poster* was the first introductory/icebreaker activity I designed, which I developed the idea from two activities suggested by Watkins (2005), *Worth a Thousand Words* and *Website About Myself*. I wanted to move away from the traditional introductions of posting short biographies since my goal was to facilitate introductions in a fun, creative and expressive manner as suggested by Conrad and Donaldson (2004). Varvel (2002) recommended that instructors should consider their audience when choosing icebreaker activities. Taking into

consideration my students' predilection and savviness of using social networking sites as a form of self-expression, I decided using Glogster.com to blend Watkins' icebreaker activities into a new one. Glogster is a web 2.0 tool in which users can create interactive virtual posters as a form of self expression by inserting multimedia elements easily on a web page. I am convinced students will be more expressive and creative introducing themselves with the use of multimedia and hyperlinks than using only text.

One of my concerns, as an online instructor, is students' hesitance of asking questions to enhance their learning experiences. In several instances, many of my students have expressed lacking the ability to ask good questions that would make sense to everyone in the class. From my point of view, asking any question is a good question since it motivates others to follow-up with the reasoning of those who asked the questions. According to Zigmond (2008), asking questions build a community of active learners and it promotes problem-solving and critical thinking skills in a student-centered learning environment. To prepare and encourage students to ask questions throughout the course duration of UNI 101, I decided using the icebreaker activity *Provocative Question* suggested by Zigmond (2008).

However, I needed to make changes to fit this activity into the online setting since it was designed to take place in the physical classroom. The *Provocative Question* activity seemed ideal to be implemented using asynchronous communication tools to take advantage of the additional reflective time that students have with this type of communication to produce far more thoughtful responses (Conrad and Donaldson, 2004). In addition, I wanted to avoid using the text-based threaded discussions in Blackboard, which I believed it would have taken away the fun part of the activity. For such reasons, I decided to use Voicethread which is a web 2.0 tool that allows users to post comments in text, audio and video format into a slide presentation. My

goal was to capture students' attention using visuals and multimedia to loosen them up and increase their interaction and participation in the activity.

Students' indifference of becoming consciously aware of course policies and expectations is another concern that I have as an online instructor. In my current online courses, I request students to acknowledge that they have read the course syllabus and instructor's announcements. Unfortunately, not all students follow-up with this request, and those who do, many acknowledge for the sake of complying with my request instead of being thoroughly informed about what to expect in the course. Students' chances to succeed in a course depend on their awareness of what to expect in the course, so their focus, time and effort is used efficiently and effectively throughout the duration of the course. From my experience as an educator, the best motivation students have to complete a task is to receive a grade for completing the task. For such reason, I adapted the skill-building activity *Syllabus Quiz* suggested by Conrad and Donaldson (2004) as my third introductory/icebreaker activity of this assignment. To eliminate students' anxiety for taking a quiz during the first week of the course, I decided to create the quiz using *Blackboard Test Manager* tools and grant students multiple attempts to successfully complete the quiz.

Overall, I am confident the three activities I designed in this assignment will meet the goals for the first week of UNI 101 course. The icebreaker activities *Virtual Poster* and *Provocative Questions* meet each guideline that Conrad and Donaldson (2004) specified in their *Checklist for an Effective Icebreaker*: (a) fun and nonthreatening; (b) person-focused; (c) learners read one another's entries; (d) learners must find something in common with at least 10% of the learning community; (e) learners are required to be creative and expressive; and (f) learners are required to respond to one another. The introductory activity *Syllabus quiz* provides the opportunity for my students to familiarize with course tools (i.e. online quizzes) and process (i.e.

policies and expectations) in a nonthreatening manner, as suggested by Conrad and Donaldson (2004). Now, I just need to wait until the upcoming fall term (when students take UNI 101) to see if these activities will unfold as I carefully planned it. Regardless of the outcome these activities, I can definitely affirm that my teaching practice has been enhanced with this assignment. I improved an area that I was lacking.

References

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