Teaching Reflection on MIS 373

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I taught an on-campus undergraduate course MIS 373: Basic Operations Management in Summer II 2018. Operations management is concerned with designing, controlling and improving the processes used to produce goods and /or provide services. This course serving as an introduction to this field covers a variety of topics, including product and service design, forecasting, capacity planning, process selection, facility layout, quality management, inventory management, supply chain management, scheduling, project management and waiting-line management, and briefly introduces Just-In-Time, lean operations, Material Requirements Planning and Enterprise Resource Planning. The course provides students with an understanding of decision making in different operations activities and quantitative tools used to facilitate the decision-making process.

This course is usually open to junior or senior students in full-time undergraduate program, but my session is for the evening undergraduate program. I have 16 students with various backgrounds and goals in my class. Most of them have daytime jobs and take classes in the evening. My classes are scheduled at 5pm-9:45 on Tuesday and Thursday and we have nine meetings in total. My students told me they had a marketing course on Monday and Wednesday and they took five courses from Pre-Summer to Summer II. Besides, I have a disabled student in class, who requests accommodations including e-text access, note taking and test time extension. Therefore, my teaching improvement goals are to design learning activities to maximally benefit students with various backgrounds and achieve universal design for learning to give all students equal opportunity to succeed.

I chose to design my classes in a learner-centered way. The course is mainly discussion-based and involves frequent group activities and presentations. The general process is as follows. First, the students are required to read assigned textbook sections before class to know the general ideas and basic concepts. Then the students should actively join in-class discussions and activities. Because the students are in the same program and have taken several classes together, they are familiar with each other and easy to get involved with discussions and teamwork. Their diversified experience also adds value to the in-class discussions. After discussions, the students share their discussion results in various ways. After class, the students are required to finish the reflection journals to review, summarize, and reflect the class content. The students access to the knowledge for three times (before class, in class, and after class) in this process, so they can build long-term memories in spaced learning. Moreover, in reflection journals, I always ask them “what is your takeaway from this class”, then the students may think about their growth and build the growth mindset.

I adopted several methods to achieve collaborative learning. First, as I said, discussion is a major part of my classes. I usually assigned the students to groups of two or three. Sometimes I assigned the students sitting nearby to be one group; sometimes I purposely shuffled the student grouping for the flow of diversified ideas. The discussion might involve one or more topics, but each group has only one specific question, which is usually to explain the assigned topic/idea/concept/model with examples. After discussion, the students share their answers in different ways, among which the most common is that one or two in each group orally share their answers posted on D2L forum to the other groups. We also used short presentations and jigsaws to share the answers. These collaborative learning approaches encouraged the students to think and learn from each other, and made the students more engaged in learning activities. After answer sharing, I made some comments on the answers. Actually, this is one of the most difficult parts. It is easy to judge the answers right or wrong, but very difficult to build on the answers and lead to high-level comprehension.

Universal design for learning is one of the challenge in my course design, because my students have different backgrounds and health conditions. As my class is discussion-based, the first thing I did is to provide all students with sufficient discussion time. In this way, everyone had a chance to articulate the ideas and the diversified ideas flowed sufficiently in group discussions. Besides, the time for presentations (including presentations for in-class discussions and the group project) was extended to make sure everyone has sufficient time. I included presentation rubrics in the syllabus and told the students the presentation time was not one of the grading criteria. Therefore, the students don’t worry whether they have to fully utilize the presentation time. In addition, Dr. Erin Dokter gave me valuable advice on accommodating disabled students. First, honest communication is essential and we should rely on communication. Most disabled students are used to talk about accommodation, so the instructor’s duty is to listen to the accommodation requests, discuss accommodations with them and arrange proper accommodations. Second, the instructor may choose alternatives for accommodation. For example, I had two in-class quizzes in the early version of course design, but later I made the quizzes take-home to provide sufficient quiz time for everyone; also, I made the agenda available two days before each class and invited all the students to think about the in-class discussion topics and write a draft before class.

I got lots of valuable feedbacks from both the observers and the students. Most the feedbacks are positive. The content expertise observer Hongyi Zhu claims that my covering of the learning content was well-prepared and the content was delivered via numerous instructional practices. The peer observer Karthik Srinivasan considers both the content and the activities of my class well-organized and universally designed. Both Zhu and Srinivasan agree that we had a pleasant environment for in-class discussions and the students actively participated in the activities. Dr. Dokter and Srinivasan both pointed out that the font size is too small. Srinivasan also gave me an important feedback on connecting learning topics and improving the structure of class content. I also learned from Srinivasan’s teaching session that we should emphasize the relations between different learning topics to weave them together. At the time I wrote this reflection, I haven’t got the TCE report, but the mid-term survey shows that most students enjoy this discussion-based schema though a few want more lectures in class. Many students comment that I am a responsive and friendly instructor and made a relaxing classroom where they freely share their ideas and opinions.