



Increasing Collegiality and Social-Emotional Competencies in a Virtual Learning Environment

Robyn Bratica, Ph.D., NCSP
Assistant Professor, School Psychology

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to online instruction has made a profound impact on the learning environments within colleges and universities. For returning students, moving to a remote or hybrid format consisted of a vast array of challenges, including access to instructional materials and opportunities for social connections. For incoming students, the challenges of remote learning were intensified with the removal of the on-campus experience, and concerns regarding student attrition became paramount. Therefore, course instructors began to take a greater role in facilitating the cohesion of cohorts of first-year students that would typically occur naturally on campus. This poster describes the actions taken in a first-year graduate level course in school psychology to develop group cohesion and social-emotional competencies among the students in the first-year cohort.



Image and information in table from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021); Adapted from CASEL (2020)

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING COMPETENCIES

TEAM-BASED LEARNING

Students were assigned to groups of four which they would work with for the entire semester on application activities.

1. Application activities were completed in-class (with teams submitting final product to class Canvas page for grading).
2. Grading was simply completed/not completed with each activity worth 2 points. All members of the team received the same grade.
3. Application activities required prior reading and engagement with the material before coming to class.
4. A total of 5 application activities were completed by each team.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

Each class period, students engaged in Breakout Room conversations with randomly assigned peers.

By engaging in projects with pre-assigned groups throughout the semester, as well as engaging within random groupings each week, students were required to demonstrate the five CASEL competencies to achieve success within the course.

COMPETENCIES AND DEFINITIONS (CASEL, 2020)

Competency	Definition
Self-Awareness	The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
Self-Management	The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations
Social Awareness	The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts
Relationship Skills	The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups
Responsible Decision Making	The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations

ACTIVITIES FOR COLLEGIALITY

ICEBREAKER ACTIVITIES

These activities were simple points of discussion at the beginning of class. As students from the first-year cohort had only sporadically met in person, these activities were designed to solidify the students as a united group, discuss the importance of self-care, and help alleviate concerns related to imposter syndrome.

Sample Prompts:

1. What is one of your favorite childhood memories?
2. What is the closest you have had to a celebrity encounter?
3. What is one "boring" fact about you?
4. If you chose a field outside of school psychology, what would you choose?
5. What is something you are proud of?

STUDENT FEEDBACK

"...lessons are extremely organized and well planned out. She is very clear in her description of topics and provides helpful real-life examples to certain topics we are learning about. The breakout rooms she utilizes help facilitate discussion among students."

"I enjoyed having the breakout room discussions and the application activities".

"You made the material interesting and engaging, despite being on Zoom!"