

SHIFTing Perceptions Strategies for Developing Adaptable and Engaging Arts Curriculum Online

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Abstract:

Research confirms that student engagement in gateway courses is critical to academic success. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an unexpected shift to online learning and highlighted the difficulty of keeping students engaged in the virtual environment. This challenge is especially relevant to arts courses, which serve a wide range of constituents across the university. Recent changes designed to increase student engagement in Samford University's School of the Arts General Education course, SOA 200 - The Arts in Society, were beneficial during this crisis. Moreover, they proved adaptable to online learning. In moving away from the general survey model found in typical appreciation classes, this course brings students into an interdisciplinary environment focused on exploring the connection of the arts to themes in society. Using proven high impact practices and a variety of methods to engage students, we invite probing questions and examine the influence of the arts in a manner that is both engaging and personal. This paper discusses this course as a model for increased student engagement both in the classroom and online. We will argue that our shift away from the popular survey model to theme-based content focused on cultural identity and societal concerns is more effective in engaging student learners. We will also share strategies for doing this within a virtual environment. Through the employment of these strategies' universities have the potential to help productively navigate present challenges while rewarding students through more meaningful engagement with the arts.

Keywords: Curriculum, Online Learning, General Education, Student Engagement, Arts

SHIFT ~ The Creation of a Life Long Lesson:

At the age of eighteen, the age of a traditional college freshman at Samford University, I was gifted a car. It was a white, Datsun B-210. The car was everything I had hoped for, freedom to come and go, a way to get to work without having to beg for a ride or walking five miles each day, with one exception, it was a stick shift. I had no idea how to drive a stick shift, but I was about to learn, the only way my father knew to teach me, trial by fire, otherwise known as Interstate 65 during rush hour. In that moment, after the initial shock, I began to shift my way through traffic and to this day I employ the lessons learned shifting that day. Shifting my way through new, and often frightening, adventures has become a way of life. SHIFT, has become an acronym applied to every aspect of my personal and