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ASSETT-CTL Fellow Final Report
LALSC

Title: Increase student engagement and success in LAMS 1000 course

Description: Student engagement in class is directly connected to student success. I believe that when students are engaged, they participate more—and in different ways. I wanted to explore how students can participate not just by speaking in class, but through other forms of engagement, so they have more opportunities for active learning, better grades, and overall success.

The question, then, is: how can we design a course that is engaging and works for everyone? Of course, it depends on the instructor, the course content, the materials presented and assigned and of course the students themselves.

We can all agree that students want to succeed in class, and as instructors, we want that too. I want my courses to continue attracting students because I believe the subject is both important and highly relevant to humanities studies, especially because it focuses on Indigenous peoples in Latin America. I wanted to experiment with new ways of making the course more engaging, approaches that could also help me improve my future teaching and that I could share with others.

Challenges Addressed: I'm the only faculty in the Latin American and Latinx Studies Center, and there are no opportunities to receive feedback from other faculty or to have conversation about different teaching pedagogies and approaches as is done in other departments. There is also no single way to teach the class. This project has been my way to try new strategies to increase student engagement. The big challenge is how can I make a class with a lot of content more active and interesting, while working independently within a small program?

Desired Result: The main goal of this project was to increase student engagement in class—more participation, better attendance, and better performance on assignments and exams and in the class, as I outline this in the challenges addressed section. A second goal was to improve my own teaching skills, adapt my methods to match my strengths and background, and continue growing as an instructor. Another goal, not in the original proposal, was that more students will become interested in continuing with the LAMS Certificate. I will not know this result until next semester when we see how many students enroll in the certificate program.

Project: My goal for this project was to create more interactive learning opportunities to encourage students to use their reasoning abilities, stay motivated, and better understand the

course materials and diverse perspectives. To achieve this, I included a variety of materials such as films, videos, podcasts, guest speakers, and different options for presentations.

I invited guest speakers to class from a variety of backgrounds, including scholars, artists, writers, filmmakers, and community organizers, matching them for each module. I wanted students to hear diverse voices and points of view on Latin America, and on the different topics that were covered during the semester. I hoped these talks would inspire students to choose meaningful topics for their oral presentations. Each guest speaker was carefully selected to be a good real-world example or expert on the topics discussed in class.

I also continued using media like films, podcasts, and short videos to make the class more interesting. Some films were especially powerful—students often made reference to them in their assignments and class discussions.

I gave students a variety of options for their presentations, such as making short videos or audio presentations, as well as individual or group presentations, so they could choose what felt best for them and make use of their creativity and technology. Most importantly, this assignment was the best way I could interact one to one with them, as we discussed materials, ideas, and guidance for oral presentations.

Finally, I requested two classroom observations during the semester and received reports focused on student attention and engagement. These reports were very helpful, confirming that the activities I used in class were valuable, and offered recommendations for more active learning activities, including suggestions for using technology, improving slide presentations, and incorporating more work in pairs. I plan to request additional classroom observations next semester.

Outcome: One thing that worked well was giving students different options for their presentations, like recording their presentation or making a podcast. Many students were excited to work on their topics and showed interest in each other's presentations. This was also pointed out in the classroom observation report.

The guest speakers also helped. More students felt inspired to choose a certain topic for their presentations, especially when guest speakers shared personal stories and community experiences. This helped increase engagement by the end of the semester.

The number of students who passed was a little better than last semester, although not by much. I want to continue improving class participation and help more students stay more focused throughout the semester. I learned that even small changes, like adding guest speakers or giving students more options for assignments, can make a difference.

I think the class still has too much content, and students can only retain so much. So I am thinking more about how to revise the content.

Faculty Fellows Experience: I'm truly thankful for the Faculty Fellows program where I had the opportunity to meet people from different programs and learn about our shared challenges. It was really useful to cover different topics about active learning, student engagement and faculty resources. It was also inspiring to learn about other projects that bring diversity and teaching strategies into their courses, programs and departments.

This program has opened the door for me to keep working with the CTL and continue participating in workshops and other services. I've learned that teaching strategies need to be regularly reviewed to accomplish our goals in the classroom. Working on my own project was a good starting point. Each new group of students brings new challenges, but I shared what I learned with several colleagues who found it interesting. I hope it inspires them to apply for the program too.