Mock Interviews

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Context: In-class, Foundations of Engineering Design Project I & II, Use-Inspired Design Project I & II
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Student Activity Time: 15-20 minutes

At the end of a design course, students participated in mock interviews.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

In first and second-year design courses, engineering undergraduate students participated in mock interviews at the end of the semester with the teaching team. The purpose of this reflection activity was to support students in understanding how their engineering coursework was preparing them to be an engineering professional.

In preparation for the interview, students completed a self-reflection in response to specific questions that related to the technical and professional outcomes of the course (e.g., communication, teamwork, etc.). Before the interview, the educators, who were interviewing the students, read the students' reflections. In the individual interview, the educators asked questions based on the self-reflection. Depending on the student and the self-reflection submitted, the educators asked a variety of follow-up questions, such as:

1. Elaborate on specific parts of your self-reflection.
2. Connect your self-reflection to future engineering.
3. Describe what you learned and how whatever you learned worked.

The purpose of the mock interviews was for students to reflect on their learning, think about what they need to learn in the future, and connect their learning to their future in engineering. It was also an opportunity for students to engage in a mock interview, which can be seen as good preparation for future job interviews. As well, it was an opportunity for the educators to check-in with students. The educators graded the interview, which counted as a significant part of the students' grade. For each of the competencies that the course covered, the teaching team would assess the student in terms of a level and compare that level to where they thought the students should be at the end of the course. For example, freshmen would be considered to be on-track and adequate at a level one. The self-reflection that students submitted was graded primarily for effort. However, the teaching team made an effort to also weight grades based on the level of thought in the students' answers, as they corresponded to the expected levels. Students, whose answers did not accurately reflect the expected grade level, generally received a lower grade.

In terms of outcomes, by students engaging in mock interviews there was potential for them to solidify what they've learned, help them understand what they still need

to learn, and articulate their engineering knowledge. As well, students could use the mock interview as good practice for future interviewing. Additionally, the interview had the potential to be a valuable tool for the educators to learn about the students. The interviews were a way to contextualize students' behavior that didn't make sense—seeing students' behavior through their perspective and experience.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Assign students to write a self-reflection prior to a sit down interview. Provide students with a template of questions.
2	Interview individual students for 15-20 minutes, following the written self-reflection provided by the student.
3	Use formative and summative assessment to assess students' skills related to the program learning outcomes, ranging from technical to professional skills.

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

Scaling up the reflection activity can be challenging. When the class sizes grew, the interview times decreased. Then as classes continued to grow, the interviews became group interviews. Eventually, the school did not have enough capacity to support this reflection effort. As I am reflecting back on the effort, I am thinking we could explore alternative approaches to the activity—spread the work out over time and put the interviews in the middle of the semester. This would also give students the opportunity to act on the feedback they received.

Be open to the information provided in the interviews. In these interviews, students provided insightful information about their educational experience and how it connects to their future in engineering. Based on this information, we thought about changes to future offerings of the course. On occasion, we would learn valuable information about a student (e.g., why they were behaving in a way that seemed "wrong"). This knowledge would help us be more empathetic to the student's situation.

Give students a template to fill out. To help students prepare for the interviews, we provided them with a template to fill out. This template helped guide their reflections in preparation for their interviews. Their responses helped guide the educators through the interviewing.

Grade the reflections. We graded students on the level they've achieved according to a particular competency. We used a formative and summative approach to assessment.

Design reflection into the structure of the class. If you want to add reflection activities to your class in a way that is actually going to work, you really need to think about it before the semester begins—when you're designing the class. When we were

doing mock interviews in the project classes, it was built into the schedule and into the assignments. So, it was clear from the beginning of the semester that this reflection activity was going to happen. We kind of worked our way through the semester to get to the point where they were hopefully okay doing the interview.

Think about the details and transferability of an activity. When we visited Alverno, we left there excited about so many activities and we tried to implement them all. I would advise educators to think deeply about the details of the activity and how the activity translates to your context.

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? This reflection idea came from a site visit to Alverno College and a summer workshops focused on outcomes-based assessment. Several of the initial faculty at Poly came away from the workshops impressed and interested in implementing the same activities. One activity at Alverno was having a student interview with 3-4 people (faculty & alumni) and went through some outcomes. We were impressed with how well the students articulated their responses. In implementing the activity, we initially had success, but as Poly grew and student to faculty ratios increased, the activity became less sustainable.