

10 Exam preparation for online students: A psycho-social perspective

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Prosjekt navn: Exam preparation for online students: A psycho-social perspective

Summary:

Previous research has indicated that stressful situations (i.e., taking a final examination) can subject individuals to feelings of acute stress, anxiety and self-doubt (Cassidy & Johnson, 2002). The project, a product of collaborative efforts between NKI Nettstudier and the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, was designed to aid and assist students in need of guidance in coping with stress and anxiety from a psycho-social perspective. Specifically, the primary goal of the project was to develop and provide a free, online course designed to help students cope with performance anxiety and stress prior to taking their final exams. In addition, the course was constructed utilizing a "nano-learning" format, thereby presenting the course content in an easy-to-access, manageable manner for students. In the spring of 2014, students taking courses at NKI Nettstudier were presented with the opportunity to participate in the course ("Eksamensmestring") approximately 2-6 weeks prior to their final examination dates.

Prosjekt hemsida: <http://www.nki.no>

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Summary:

NKI Nettstudier has approximately 10,000 online students. The project, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning (VOX), was specifically designed to reach the entire NKI Nettstudier online student population to provide an accessible online course to aid in coping with anxiety and stress attributed to final examination preparation. The course, as previously mentioned made available in the spring of 2014 to students preparing for their final exams, will soon be made available to all NKI Nettstudier students that are interested.

Argument for nomination:

We argue that the project is worthy of nomination for the Boldic Award for several reasons. First, the project was not only unique in terms of an online school investigating the effects of exam anxiety and stress among its students, but also developing a course specifically designed to proactively cope with such anxiety and stress. Second, the strategic collaboration between an online school and an accredited on-campus research institute is both mutually beneficial as well as enlightening for further psycho-social developments for the greater education population both nationally and internationally. Third, and perhaps most important, the project directly focused upon providing a cost-free approach for online students' psycho-social well-being by increasing both self-awareness and preparedness towards every student's ultimate goal, namely obtaining a sense of mastery in an achievement context.

The project was grounded in an informed behavioral-psychological approach to provide students a nano-course in order to cope with the acute symptoms of performance anxiety and stress associated with preparing for final exams. To our knowledge, no other online school currently provides such a course for the sole purpose of aiding students in dealing with their perceived behavioral and/or cognitive symptoms of anxiety and stress like the course developed in the present project.

The initial pilot phase of the project included four data gathering points. The first data point was to establish the degree of exam anxiety and stress (prior to taking the course) utilizing a standardized questionnaire (Westside Anxiety Scale, Driscoll, 2002). The second data point was designed to inquire about the course's effect midway through the course. The third data point was again taking the Westside Anxiety Scale in order to gather information about either positive or non-positive effects of the coping strategies introduced in the course. Lastly, the final data gathering point was designed to provide student feedback regarding course effectiveness after the students completed their final exams. These data points will be used to inform and guide the future developments of this educational resource for both online and traditional on-campus students alike.

Although we are still currently in the process of analyzing and assessing the overall effectiveness of the course, several student participants have provided us with informative verbal feedback. The majority of feedback has been supportive, and indicated a positive reception to such a unique course opportunity. Furthermore, many students expressed that the availability of a course which aided in identifying performance anxiety and stress for them personally as well as individualized techniques to handle these was helpful to them in the weeks leading up to taking the final exam.

In conclusion, the ultimate goal of the project was to provide an online self-realization and counseling strategy that students can utilize not only when their achievement goal is subject mastery, but also when they prepare for future performance situations and contexts that may be perceived as either worrying or stressful.

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