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BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH A STUDENT-CURATED PLAYLIST

Purpose

A student-curated playlist is an effective instructional strategy to foster a collaborative, open, and inclusive learning environment. It also serves as a community building activity that gives students a chance to construct something meaningful and expressive, according to their own personal tastes. Students are keen to share their own favourites and appreciate having some creative license over a part of the course.

Overview

In the first week of term, students are required to complete introductory discussion board posts on the course's Blackboard site. Students are asked to recommend up to two songs to add to a course playlist on Spotify (other music sharing platforms can be used as well). As Matt responds to the introductory posts, he adds songs to the course playlist and provides students with the link to the playlist. Matt streams the playlist to weekly course drop-in sessions fifteen minutes before the scheduled start time as a way of encouraging students to show up early and get prepared. In drop-in sessions, students show up early to hear the playlist in hopes of hearing their suggested song while also appreciating other songs from various parts of the world in the process.

Context

Matt was inspired to create the student-curated playlist from a suggestion from students during the first week of a class. Matt asked students what they wanted from an online drop-in session and some mentioned they would like music to wake up before the informal lesson begins. The idea for a collaborative playlist evolved naturally from the students' suggestion and students were involved from the very beginning of its inception.

Impact

The student-generated playlist not only generates conversation, but it also creates a musical representation of where students are coming from in the course - geographically, culturally, socially, and more. In an asynchronous learning environment, the playlist helps build community and familiarity early on. In all of this, different languages, regional music styles, and culturally expressions are on display. The playlist helps give texture and energy to an asynchronous learning experience that can sometimes risk being disengaged and isolating.