



Live with Judy Klimek: Using Group Exams as a Review Learning

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Judy Klimek

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today, we have Judy Klimek with us who has been teaching since 1988, first at Purdue University, and now at Kansas State, where she's an associate professor in the department of anatomy and physiology. So you're interested in group exams and kind of using that as a review for your exam. So kind of take us through, you know, the turning point of when you started using this and implementing this into your class.

Judy Klimek 00:45

Sure. So in 2006, over the summer, I read Maryellen Weimer's book, *Learner Centered Teaching*, and there were a lot of things in there that I adopted as a result of that, but one of them was using a group exam. And I didn't go the full route where the group takes the exam as the only exam, they take their exam individually and turn it in and they get an individual score. But then I use the groups that they're already in for anatomy and I give them another copy of the exam and have them discuss the questions. And they're instructed to come to a consensus on the answers and turn it in. And the way that I use it, they get extra credit for doing that. So that's their incentive to do it. But we found that there's lots more benefits besides just the extra credit. And I, at one point, I graded those group exams, and then I awarded the extra credit based on the improvement over the individual scores. But I found that I spent a lot of hours calculating and all the groups still got the maximum because the group's improved so much more over the individual. So I quit grading those, but I do ask the students to get an answer key after they do the group exam and grade their own exam and turn it in, because I want them to know, not only that they discussed the questions, and they hopefully understand the answers, but I want them to know that their group did much better. And so they get extra credit based on taking part in the activity. But I do have a contingency that if students didn't get at least 70% on the individual exam, they need to meet with me before they get that extra credit. So they'll still get the extra credit, but I want to have a conversation with them about how they prepared for the exam and study methods and time management and all that kind of stuff. And one of the benefits that I found is that in the past, a lot of students who needed to talk with me wouldn't come and talk to me. Either they wouldn't seek me out or even just outright ignore me if I said, "Let's meet and talk about your exam." But now that they know, they'll get those extra credit points, if they come and talk to me. And a lot of them tell me that that was really a turning point for them when they had that discussion.

Tierney King 03:00

So you use the group exam as a review of the actual individual exam, take us through if and when you think a group exam could work in replace of an individual exam. Or if you think it might only work as a review or even a precursor to an exam.

Judy Klimek 03:16

So I have used group exams in my courses in the past. I think there's positives and negatives. Because I feel like if the students know that the exam is going to be a group exam, there could be a tendency to just slide on the preparation, and you know, let the other group members do it. And so occasionally, I have a couple courses where we have quizzes in lab and every now and then I'll surprise them and say, "Okay, this will be a group quiz." And, you know, then they're all very happy, because usually when you've got four really intelligent people like veterinary students are, you know, the group can get 100% pretty easily. So we have accreditation standards, and we need to be able to certify that the students have individually learned all the material. So I don't use group exams for actual assessment that much. I use the group exam review as a way to extend the learning from the exam. So they've taken an exam, they're very motivated at that point to see what were the right answers, and why were they the right answers. And so I think it is way superior to the types of exam reviews that I had done in the past where, you know, the next class session the instructor puts the exam questions up and goes through, "Okay, this was..." - That's boring, but the group exam review is not boring at all, because the students are arguing with each other and they're calling us over to ask questions, and they want to know. What was the reasoning behind it? And it's very, when I'm in the room when they're doing it, it's very loud and energetic and it's like night and day compared to the typical exam review,

Tierney King 04:55

And how do you kind of, I guess, maintain and manage you know, that environment? To make sure that it's engaging, to make sure it doesn't get too heated and everything, and to kind of foster that learning experience for everyone?

Judy Klimek 05:07

Well, I haven't found that to be a big problem. I do have some anecdotal evidence from some surveys that, you know, group conflict can be a problem. But I personally haven't experienced any hostility, or observed any hostility in the groups. Although students have told me, you know, I had a group member who was really confident that she was right, and she wouldn't listen to anybody else. But that is a minor experience. Nobody can write a perfect exam. And there are some times when questions are bad. And I would say that's probably the most controversy. But that's good for us as instructors, because if there's five groups all asking us about the same question, and, you know, none of us got this right. Then we know that flags that question when we go back and look at the statistics of, "Oh, okay, that was that was a bad question. We need to throw that out." It also gives the students an opportunity to say why they thought it was a bad question. And we can just announce on the spot, "Question 12, we're going to be looking at that we'll discuss it as instructors," or we'll say, "Question 12, we're going to accept two answers for that one." And so that kind of quenches all the hostility that we used to feel, sometimes after exams, when you know, individual students would be emailing us and complaining about a question. And we'd have to explain that 12 times that there was a problem or that there wasn't a problem. And this is why the answer is what it is. And we can get that all done in that 30 to 40 minute

time period when the group exam review is happening. So because my point in the whole process is I want them to answer the questions individually, but then I want them to have an opportunity to go back and discuss those very same questions with their group and figure out what was right and what was wrong. Now, one of the really interesting things that I hadn't anticipated was students telling me on surveys, how beneficial it was for the questions that they got right, but they didn't really know why it was right. And that discussion helped clarify to them. So even they're even learning from things that they guessed about on the exam, or weren't quite sure about - this gives them an opportunity to solidify that. And the students tell me also that the ones that they missed, and then discussed with their group, that information sticks with them better in the long run than maybe even the ones that they got right because their brain is not engaged with it in the same way as if they if they got it wrong. Then they have, you know, they have a pony in the race to understand why it was wrong, and then they remember it better.

Tierney King 07:46

Very interesting. And I guess, you know, take me through, I know, you've done this for a while, and you've collected the responses of students and kind of the feedback. So what was their reaction to group exams? And from beginning to now has it changed? What is their feedback or any surprising statistics that you found?

Judy Klimek 08:07

No, they all love it. I would say it's 70 to 90% of the students tell me that it was beneficial. Don't change it. One survey, I asked, "What were the drawbacks?" So I asked what were the benefits and the drawbacks, and somebody said, "Honestly, there were no drawbacks. Please don't get rid of this." You know, and that's pretty much stayed constant. One of the problems is the whole group dynamic thing. And one year ago, I had the same students all year, and I teach them in various courses. If it's anatomy, I'm teaching it. And so there's an anatomy course in the fall and an anatomy course in the spring. And we used it in the fall, and I was getting some student comments just informally that there was some group conflict and some groups that didn't quite get along. And so I always change their groups in the spring, but this one year, I decided to change the group's for every exam. So they had one group of students for the whole fall. And then for four cycles in the spring, they had a new group. They did not like that even though there was some group conflict. They told me that it takes a couple of cycles for them to feel comfortable with each other and to feel vulnerable enough to say, "I got that one wrong" and to kind of expose themselves in that way. And then when they are thrown in with new people that they don't work with on a daily basis, and especially if you change it every time, they didn't have time to develop that trust. However, I still continue to change the students every spring semester. I put them in new groups for the spring and then I leave it that way for the whole semester because there's a small minority of groups that just have conflict. And if they know "Okay, in spring, I'm going to get a new group" then that gives them some thing to look forward to if they're in that group. You know, it's, I would say it's less than 10% of the groups that report that they have difficulty getting along, but at least they get to now work with some different people instead of the same people. That's I think group conflict is one of the potential drawbacks. And then there, you know, for most students, it decreases the exam stress. But there's a few students who say it increases the exam stress, it's minority, it's again, like 15, to 20%. And I think that might be the students that are the poor performers, and they're a little insecure about what they missed, and, you know, kind of comparing themselves to other people. So I

think it's important to keep that in mind that it might be a potential stressor. And I just continually tell the students, these are the benefits that you're going to get, you know, it'll help you remember, and for the most part, everybody agrees with that.

Tierney King 11:00

And then for people who are kind of interested in, you know, implementing group exams, whether it's for after they take the exam, if it's before they take the exam, or if it's actually a substitute for the exam, where should they start? Are there any suggestions you can offer to kind of kickstart implementing group exams into their class?

Judy Klimek 11:21

Well, I think one of the things that's important in the whole process, and it's kind of hard to get groups to buy into this, but the benefit is that they have to discuss it to the point that they reach consensus, not take a vote. They want to discuss it so that they come to an answer that everybody can live with. But I think the default is, let's take a vote on this. How many answer A? And they'll just pick A if most of them want to answer A and then that means that the person who wanted to pick C doesn't really still understand why A is better. And so I think that's one of the things to emphasize is that if you're going to use this process to coach the students to actually discuss the questions until everybody understands the questions. And then the way I use it, it takes 30 to 45 minutes for our questions, ours are usually 50 questions, you know, some questions they're not going to discuss. I mean, it's hard to get students to discuss a question when everybody picked B and that's the right answer. It's like, okay, let's move on to the next one. So it won't take quite as long as if they were working on it individually, I don't think but planning for how long it's going to take. It's going to depend on your situation and so I would advise people to plan a little more time than you think it's going to take and then you can adjust if necessary.

Tierney King 12:39

And then did you guys move online? And if so how did you kind of implement this into your online classes?

Judy Klimek 12:45

Yeah, that was challenging. So we use Zoom sessions. So we actually, we've done it two different ways. So in in one of my courses in the fall, last year, I just randomly assigned them to Zoom breakout rooms. And so I have them just open a Word document and make a summary of the questions that they debated on and if there were any that they were confused about, and submit that document. Instead of taking the exam again, another person had the students do the group exam, several of us do this now that I've kind of converted a few other faculty members, but another faculty member had the students do it as an outside of class time assignment. So whenever was convenient for their group, they would get together. So I think it could work either way. I didn't have anybody complaining about the random Zoom breakout rooms and it was nice from the standpoint that it was during class time. So I wasn't expecting them to do it on their own time, which I think could be difficult. Our situation is all unique, because all of our students are together all day long for, you know, for four years. And so if you're doing it in a main campus class where students are, you know, like this class is the only time they're together, it might be a little more difficult to expect the students to do it outside of class time.

Tierney King 14:05

And then for you, personally, I mean, I'm sure that you would rather implement this in person for a group exam, but you know, did you think it was still just as effective or maybe slightly, not as effective? Or anything that you would change, you know, moving forward for this next semester?

Judy Klimek 14:21

I don't think I would change anything other than that I do prefer it to be in person. But I've never sat in in a Zoom session and observed how the students are doing it, and I just see the end result, which is, you know, a summary of their discussion. So they obviously discuss the questions but I can't really say whether it was as good as in person. All I know is that it was very impressive and it is very impressive when they're all together. And they're all discussing and you know, they they obviously get really into it.

Tierney King 14:53

And then kind of lastly, I guess moving into the the next semester there's you know, a lot of hybrid and HyFlex talk going on for in person and online? Do you think it's possible to implement, you know, these group exams in a way that's conducive for for both online and in person kind of at the same time? or How would you do that?

Judy Klimek 15:13

My preference would be to still try to do it during some scheduled class time if you have to do it online. And then Zoom worked really well for us because the breakout rooms could be scheduled. But we weren't able to find a way to put specific people into specific breakout rooms. And so we just did it randomly. And I think it works. But I think you could, you know, some students might be logged in and Zoom in, some people might be in the classroom, the ones that are in the classroom can discuss it together, the ones that are in zoom could just be randomly assigned.

Tierney King 15:44

And then I guess the very last thing, anything else about group exams that people should know if they're curious about it? Or if they're interested about it? Or just something that has stuck with you for group exams?

Judy Klimek 15:57

Well, the biggest thing for me is that, you know, students obviously learn a lot from the process. And then I didn't go into it with the expectation of benefits to the instructors. But it really has been beneficial to hear students discussing the questions that I wrote and discussing, you know, maybe they're misinterpretation, or they just look at it a different way. And another thing that students told me, I was just reviewing some things that I've written about it, but students say that they get more benefit from talking to peers about the questions than from talking to instructors, because peers have their same viewpoint and instructors who wrote the question, you know, they have kind of a fixed viewpoint. And so they get more benefit from the peers discussing it. And I didn't anticipate how much it would decrease students arguing with me about the exams, but it really does because their classmates argue with them about the exams, they get all that disagreement about the questions worked out during this exam group exam process, even if they have to call me over. And I can explain to all four of them. But it really takes away some of that animosity that used to come to me in email. And I would have to address it five

times, you know, the same question five times - it gets rid of that. So I think I didn't really think about all those benefits on the instructor side, but it definitely is beneficial on the student side. And the biggest suggestion that the students have is to get everybody to do this, because they experienced instructors in the program who don't know about it and don't do it. And I had one of my colleagues, I've coordinated a course, and I had a colleague who does not return his exams. And I did want to make sure I address that because I give my exams back and I let I post them all, I let students use them for studying. But there are instructors who have question banks, and they don't want their questions out. And he made it work in my course by giving the students a transcription page so that they could write down what letter they chose for each question. They had to turn their exam back in, but they could keep that sheet - it was an answer sheet with blanks. And for question one, they answered C and questions two, they answer D. They could keep that and he gave them new copies of the group exam. And then they had to turn everything back in with their names on it, including their their scratch paper. He didn't allow electronics, so no phones to take pictures of the questions. And he only gave the points to them if he got everything back. And he got everything back. And he looked at the items statistics for a couple years and there was no evidence that any of his questions had gotten out there. The statistics were stable. And so it can work even if you don't want students to have your questions. I don't care about that. But other people feel strongly that they don't want their questions to get out.

Tierney King 18:54

Very cool. Thank you so much for being on our podcast today and kind of digging into the group exams. Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.