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Improving Chat in an Online Graduate Class

Irmgard U. Willcockson PhD
UT School of Health Information Sciences at Houston

Pamela Bozzo MD
UT School of Health Information Sciences at Houston

Jorge R. Herskovic MD
UT School of Health Information Sciences at Houston

Elmer V. Bernstam MS, MD, MSE
UT School of Health Information Sciences at Houston

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Improving Chat in an Online Graduate Class, Irmgard U Willcockson, PhD. UTHSC-H School of Health Information Sciences, Pamela Bozzo, MDChile, Jorge R Herskovic, MD. UTHSC-H School of Health Information Sciences, Elmer V Bernstam, MS, MD, MSE

Introduction: Foundations of Health Information Sciences I is the first class many students take to introduce them to the field of health informatics. It is completely online, and uses optional weekly text-only chats to provide real time interaction between faculty and students. Chat sessions were very disorganized and difficult to follow, both real time and on the transcript. Research suggests that the disorganization contributes to cognitive load.

Purpose: To examine the impact of chat etiquette guidelines on student interaction.

Methods: After the first three weeks of class, we posted instructions to the students on appropriate chat behavior, following the example of Smith C (2006). We examined two chat sessions before and after the implementation of the instructions to determine changes in conversation overlap and interruptions.

Current Status: Students generally follow the suggested behavior, especially the use of “?” to ask for a turn. The number of interruptions within conversations dropped greatly, and the number of simultaneous conversations also decreased. Seventy two percent of students thought that chat sessions had improved after the implementation (Response rate 69%)

Conclusion: Chat guidelines are fairly easy to implement and have positive effects on the flow of chat sessions.