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Learning Engagement Through A Virtual Research Showcase

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INTRODUCTION
COVID-19 has necessitated additional adaptations to the delivery of teaching and learning in higher education. At the University of the Pacific (UCP), A. Dugoni School of Dentistry, the school’s annual Spring research, clinical and community health showcase quickly transitioned from the traditional face-to-face format (Figure 1) to an online showcase with a website to reach local and the school community’s stakeholders. The virtual 2020 event utilized Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) to facilitate student submission of a variety of showcase award categories (Figure 2), and faculty-led judging was completed through Canvas Rubrics tool. As an online gallery website was created to share award-winning and noteworthy projects with a remote audience, and serve as an annual archive of the event’s associated works (Appendix 1). Prizes were awarded at the zoom-based ceremony and through virtual presentation announcements. This study’s goals were to explore how the dental academic community engaged with and learned from the online showcase experience, and the profession value of showcasing participation for students, research faculty, and teaching clinicians.

The rationale for this study was that by formulating measurement of participants’ access, engagement, and learning by application of a survey, future showcase best practices could be developed to benefit as many participating stakeholders – faculty and students – as possible.

OBJECTIVES
The purpose of the study was to measure student and faculty participants’ perceptions of a virtual online event that occurred from May 1, 2020 through May 30, 2020. The survey research attempted to answer the research question of: “Does a virtual showcase format provide personal benefits to access, learning, and engagement for faculty and student participants?”

METHODS
Participants
The study’s target population consisted of the showcase participants in 2020 (N = 198), which formed two groups: current students that submitted showcase work (n = 115), and school faculty that served as showcase judges (n = 47).

Instrumentation
Each group was invited to complete a post-showcase survey. Each survey was customized according to the group’s form of participation in the showcase, with participants asked to rate their personal experience across measures of: (a) ease of participant access, (b) learning gained from content, and (c) engagement with the showcase as a beneficial learning event. A visual method approach was taken by collecting responses from both Like scale questionnaires and free response questions. The surveys were administered using Qualtrics’ software, Version July/August 2020. Responses were anonymized and collected over a period of two-weeks.

Data Analysis
Quantitative data analysis was conducted in Microsoft Excel, and qualitative data was analyzed manually to identify common themes across responses.

RESULTS
Survey responses were collected from both the student group (n = 121) and faculty group (n = 23) (Figure 3 and 4).

All student respondents (100%) and most faculty respondents (79%) either strongly agreed or agreed that the showcase’s online format was convenient for them.

Most students (83%) either strongly agreed or agreed that they used critical thinking skills in developing an online showcase submission, whereas most faculty (87%) strongly agreed or agreed that they used peer knowledge and the practice of evaluating students’ or peer colleagues’ research and case work online.

A majority of students (83%) reported that showcase participation very much or somewhat benefited their dental knowledge, and an equal majority of faculty perceived such benefits to their teaching (76%) and scholarship (83%).

Showcase participation benefits to clinical care showed the majority of students (66%) found it very beneficial when compared to their clinical care, while the majority of faculty (67%) agreed it somewhat beneficial (48%).

DISCUSSION
Conducting an educational showcase in an online format provides overall benefits to faculty and student development of dental knowledge and critical thinking domains, with more variable benefits to informing clinical care.

The faculty response rate for this pilot survey was very good (99%), whereas a limitation to the study was the low student response rate (10%). Given that survey participation was optional and distribution was towards the end of the academic year, most graduating students were likely busy preparing for their post-graduation journeys.

A further limitation to the 2020 event was lack of a live component, where all submission material was submitted online and virtually graded over an extended review period. However, qualitative survey feedback from faculty noted that the extended virtual grading period was a welcome change from the scheduled, same-day grading format used in prior years.

Significantly, this pilot online showcase has expanded potential avenues of participation for members of the wider school community, as well as the ability to be viewed by anyone at any time. Participation of dental school alumni who can serve as judges is being explored as part of future showcase planning.

Authors are hopeful that this pilot survey of participant experiences will bring more opportunities to expand research into planning for future annual showcase improvements.

ADDITIONAL 1: Showcase Online Gallery

To promote the sharing of students’ research and clinical works despite lack of in-person event in 2020, an online gallery was created. The gallery now serves as an annual archive of academic and research achievements at the University of the Pacific’s Dugoni School Excellence Day community (Figure 5).

ADDITIONAL 2: Collaboration with University of the Pacific Scholarly Commons

All showcase research abstracts submitted were accepted by University of the Pacific’s Scholarly Commons website. A generous research reference is created in Scholarly Commons, so students can enhance their academic and professional profiles. The authors would like to acknowledge the School of Dentistry for their continued support of the annual OKU-Sutro Day excellence event.

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REFERENCES


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FIGURE 1: The traditional face-to-face format of DUGI-Sutro Excellence Day involved discussion between students and judging faculty, as well as displays that were accessible to other members of the campus community. Here, past showcase participants share their work on event day.

FIGURE 2: Weekly of showcase submissions in 2020, by category. A total of 155 submissions were made by students across Dental Hygiene, Dental Surgery and Graduate Residency programs.

FIGURE 3: Experience of showcase participation, as reported by students.

FIGURE 4: Experience of showcase participation, as reported by faculty.

FIGURE 5: DUGI-Sutro Excellence Day online gallery homepage.