

**Integrating Infographics in the Classroom: Student Perceptions of Using Infographics to Disseminate Agricultural Science Information**

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### **Introduction/Need for Innovation**

Individuals are taking it upon themselves to disseminate information and answer questions to an online audience through social media and other online platforms (Agriculture Proud, 2015; Blythe, 2015). Previous research indicates that agriculturalists struggle to communicate with a variety of audiences (Ruth, Gay, Rumble, & Rodriguez, 2015). As agricultural scientists there is a need to disseminate information that educates the public about agricultural science. To better equip this agricultural sciences students with the abilities to communicate with an online audience, which continues to become more visual in their learning styles, infographics were chosen to teach these skills (McCue, 2015). An infographic is a type of picture that combines data with visual design, which helps individuals and organizations concisely communicate their messages to a targeted audience (Smiciklas, 2012). In this innovative assignment, students used creativity and problem solving skills to condense their research reports into a visual representation of their report.

### **How it Works/Methods/Steps**

Earlier in the semester, students enrolled in [course], a writing intensive course for students in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Texas Tech University, chose a controversial topic related to agriculture and natural resources. Once a topic was chosen, students were assigned to write a non-biased research report on the topic using both scholarly and popular sources. After completion of the research report, students were assigned the task of picking a side of the controversial topic to develop a communications plans to communicate their topic to an online audience. Infographics were chosen as a delivery method for this communication. Canva, Piktochart, Venngage, Infogr.am, Ease.ly, and Visual.ly are graphic design programs that allow for the creation of infographics online. These programs were chosen for the students to use to complete this task, as the programs are available free-of-charge.

A lecture on what an infographics are, what role infographics serve, and how they are used was conducted before students received the assignment. An in-class design tutorial was conducted with one of the design programs to make students more comfortable with the process; however, students were given the option as to which program they wanted to use but tutorials over each platform were not conducted. Students were provided links to resources and tutorials for the other design programs. To complete the assignment, the students designed their infographics at home and submitted the infographics as an assignment. As part of the assignment, students were asked to reflect upon their experiences when working on the project. Students explained the following aspects: 1) what they liked and disliked about the experience, 2) what challenges they faced during the experience, and 3) what changes should be made to the assignment.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

Student reflections provided the results to understand the student's perceptions of this innovative assignment. While the majority of the students used the infographic design tool Canva, other students chose Piktochart, Infogram, Easel.ly, and Engage. The following themes emerged from the self-reflection:

## **Innovative Idea**

Students expressed this project helped them gain knowledge of how agricultural communications tools could be used to educate people about agriculture. One student explained, “I didn’t even know what an infographic was, let alone how to make one. This project helped me learn how and what [an infographic] was. My research was easier to understand, and I know it could help others to learn about agriculture.”

Students suggested the experience made them aware of the time and effort it took to design easy to understand material. For example, one student suggested, “I learned how much time and effort is put into thinking about what is most appealing and eye-popping to the reader.”

Students reflected on the pride or satisfaction they had when completing the project. One student wrote, “The best part of this experience was finishing the project, because I was satisfied and even proud of what I accomplished.”

Students explained the infographics helped to engage audience. One student explained, “I learned there are many ways to create a social media post that are outside-the-box. I think everyone should learn how to create an infographic because it can be very useful in spreading the word about any topic.”

Students explained narrowing down information was difficult. One student said, “The best part and the most challenging part of this experience was figuring out which information was important enough to be included within the infographic. Narrowing down a broad range of information proved to be quite difficult.”

Students explained how the tools were easy to use. One student said, “I was not really interested in the idea of creating this project because I am not really focused on the [communications] portion of the agricultural industry; however, I found myself beginning to enjoy it. In the end, I think this was an applicable and pertinent project for the agricultural field. With consumers trying to become more aware of the origins of their food, I feel that it is imperative for the industry to make sure that correct and accessible information is available.”

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

The infographic development assignment will continue to be used in the course in following semesters. By only introducing Canva or one specific design program as the design platform option, the assignment can be more streamlined as the instructor will not be faced with aiding in trouble shooting several different programs that students have to choose from. Further, the minimum word count will be decreased from 150 to 50 words.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Canva, as well as other online design programs, can be used with a free subscription. Today, most students have a personal laptop or computer to use, as they need; without this resource students have the option of using computers available to them in their university computer labs. When incorporating infographics into a course, instructors should consider the time associated with teaching a new skill as well as the time associated with grading and self reflection upon assignment completion.

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