

College of Arts
T&L Innovation case studies
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Lincoln School of English & Journalism

Campfires

The Campfire initiative emerged during the pandemic as a means of community building. Due to repeated periods of self-isolation, students were experiencing high levels of dislocation from their peers, modules, the programme and the university community. They were increasingly reporting high levels of anxiety and mental health issues which were impacting on attendance and engagement. Additionally, colleagues were experiencing problems encouraging students to switch on their cameras. Student attrition was also of concern.

These were voluntary, extra-curricular, non-hierarchical which took place online on Saturday evenings and devised around themes which included, 'Meet the Pets', 'Mini Come Dine with Me' and 'A Song for Covid.' Attendees must have cameras on throughout. This was encouraged by reinforcing the ethos of community building and by me positioning my camera next to a real campfire.

Campfires were organised using 'Blackboard Collaborate' and advertised via module sites. No 'end time' was set; it was important that students had control.

The Campfires attracted a good range of students with attendance reaching over 35 at two of the events. The average participation rate was 23. Some participants began to light their own campfires. Consequently, not only had we had created an online space whereby the illusion of a real-world gathering was taking place, but students felt more comfortable with cameras on.

Campfires transitioned into teaching and learning sessions during assessment periods and as Independent Study proposals were due. Thus, they became spaces where students could seek clarification, obtain feed-back, and discuss works in progress. Students reported that Campfires had increased their sense of community, belonging, helped them to feel less isolated, and offered a safe space during a frightening period in their university careers.