In Review- Team Building Goes Virtual

Peggy C. Holzweiss, Ph.D.
Sam Houston State University


Those of us who work in higher education tend to love icebreakers and team building activities. They help us build connections and community that enhance our working relationships with each other and our students. However, our face-to-face interactions are decreasing as our use of technology increases. Many members of our campus community can’t seem to live without e-mail, smartphones, Facebook, and Twitter. Even our daily business tasks seem to occur online. We answer questions, share information, and even “meet” via e-mail or some other electronic media.

If you lead your student or work groups in a virtual environment or you need to establish an online presence for your group, there are two resources used by the distance education world that can help you build community without leaving your computer. In Engaging the Online Learner (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011) and its follow-up companion Continuing to Engage the Online Learner (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012), the authors share a variety of activities that can be conducted in an online environment to help enhance relationships. The activities range from icebreakers to brainstorming to group activities that can be adapted to any topic.

For instance, one icebreaker recommended by the authors is a “Bucket List Word Cloud.” Every member of the group creates a bucket list of things they would like to do in their lives. The group leader would then combine all of the lists and enter them into a free online tool such as Wordle or Tagxedo. The website would then provide a word cloud image that could be placed on a group webpage for all members to view.

Another icebreaker the authors highlight is called “This Is Your Life” and allows members to link to a song snippet, movie or TV clip, or a book website to represent their lives. These resources can be created on free sites such as Wikispaces or PBworks where all group members can enter their information and review what other members provided.

Student Affairs On Campus
The Journal for the Texas Association of College & University Student Personnel Administrators (TACUSPA)
While the main purpose of these books and similar ones in the distance education field is to promote online learning activities for virtual classrooms, the vast majority of these activities can be easily adapted for use by higher education administrators in their daily work with students and colleagues. So, if you find yourself needing to create virtual relationships for a group you are working with, tap into the wealth of knowledge being gathered by the distance education experts.