Peer review as a valuable assessment: Using the Workshop tool
Faculty of Theology | Department of Practical Theology and Missiology

Module: Module 10: Gender, Culture and Religion
Lecturer: Prof Julie Claassens jclaassens@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Ms Magriet de Villiers mdev@sun.ac.za

Learning activity:
Peer assessment

Learning technology:
SUNLearn workshop tool

Context
Background
The Master of Divinity in Church Ministry and Church Leadership is a full-year, multi-module programme in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology that focuses on training theology students for various facets of ministry. The programme provides students with a comprehensive knowledge integration of their previous theological Bachelors in Divinity (BDiv) content, with specific focus on equipping them to use this responsibly and professionally as ministers, clergy, pastors, lay workers, pastoral caregivers and pastoral therapists for the ministry.

In 2015, the programme had 17 full-time students and 3 part-time international students. Primarily and administratively situated in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, the programme incorporates all the departments of the Faculty of Theology, namely Practical Theology and Missiology, Old and New Testament Studies, and Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology. In order to incorporate all these different foci, the programme is divided into 34 modules.

Subject area
Module 10, entitled Gender, Culture and Religion, investigates the often complex interrelationship between gender (male and female constructs and experiences) and the diverse cultural contexts in which we find ourselves.

Intended learning outcomes and established practice
The module aims to develop skills to assist students to read the Bible in such a way that resists harmful interpretations that uphold the patriarchal values inherent in the biblical text and that propagates biblical interpretation that moves towards an understanding of the full humanity of both men and women as created in the image of God. The aim is to strive for a community in which gender justice is the norm and in which injustice is actively countered. This topic is addressed over the course of only one week (five working days and a weekend for assignment completion) and time must therefore be optimally used to immerse the students in the academic theory and provide them with the opportunity for critical reflection and interpretation.

The challenge
The challenge lies in finding ways to combine academic theory and critical reflection in an active way to produce the aims and outcomes of the module within the allocated timeframe of one week (five working days and a weekend for assignment completion). In order to address this challenge, the module incorporated full-day lectures, classroom and group discussions, and a peer-review assignment as a learning and assessment tool. The peer-review assignment made use of the Workshop tool on SUNLearn. This tool provided the students the opportunity to submit any digital content (files), such as word-processed documents or spreadsheets, or text typed directly into a field using the text editor. The students obtained two grades in a workshop activity: a grade for their submission and a grade for their assessment of their peers' submissions. Both grades were recorded in the gradebook and were weighted to calculate a combined total mark.

For this module, the students were required to find an example on the internet of how men/women are depicted in commercials and do a critical gender analysis that used their reading and class discussions to evaluate the particular commercial's treatment of gender. As part of the peer-review process, each student was allocated two to three other students, whose work they had to review and assess according to established criteria. This constituted the assessed student's submission grade and the assessor's assessment grade. In order to assure objective submission grades, the lecturer monitored each assessor group and could influence the final mark where appropriate.

Advantages associated with the integration of technology
The Workshop tool made it possible for the students to assess their peers simultaneously, therefore saving valuable time. The marks were automatically captured and weighted according to the settings chosen by the lecturer, which made the calculation and distribution of the grades instantaneous. As mentioned, it was also possible for the lecturer to override a grade partially or completely where deemed appropriate, although this should be done only in extreme circumstances in order not to obstruct the peer-review process. The allocation of the peers for the assessment process could be done either automatically and randomly or by the lecturer. As this was a small class of only 20 students, the lecturer

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allocated the peers herself, aiming at the even distribution of gender and academic capacity to further support the learning process.

Student overview
The module consisted of 20 students: 17 full-time and 3 part-time international Master's in Divinity students. All the students had completed BDiv or equivalent undergraduate studies. Sixteen of these students had experience with SUNLearn due to their undergraduate studies at the Faculty and were comfortable with the learning management system. A short demonstration of the submission and assessment phases was presented to all the students and they could continuously ask for assistance from the Blended Learning Coordinator.

Learning and assessment activities
Educational approach
As stipulated by the University's graduate attributes, students are expected to be enquiring of mind and capable of critical reflection and of active use of their academic theory in everyday society for the betterment of the broader community. This module, through its focus on questions of gender, culture, community, inclusion and religion, provides an excellent academic framework to help shape such enquiring minds and critical citizens. The

pedagogical aim of the lecturer is not only to make the students aware of the themes but also to open the classroom and the SUNLearn platform as spaces where cognitive (critical thinking, investigation and analysis), meta-cognitive (self-reflection and self-evaluation) and social (conversation and persuasion) competencies are fostered. The use of the Workshop tool and the peer-review process, in conjunction with the reading material, lectures and classroom discussions, aims to help form these competencies and shape critical and engaged ministerial students.

Learning activities
For the five-day working week, the students were expected to attend all the classroom lectures, participate in the classroom discussions and read the prescribed material for the lectures and assignment. They received the framework for the module on SUNLearn at the beginning of the year and were therefore aware of what to read and what the assignment entailed. The assignment and peer-review process were discussed and explained during class and the students had the opportunity to ask logistical, administrative and academic questions in preparation of the Workshop peer-review assignment.

Assessment activities
For this module, the students were required to find an example on the internet of how women and men are depicted in commercials and do a critical gender analysis that used their reading and class discussions to evaluate the particular commercial's treatment of gender. As part of the peer-review process, each student was allocated two to three other students, whose work they had to review and assess according to established criteria.

Feedback practices
The students received two-fold feedback due to the Workshop grading process. Firstly, they received comment feedback for their submissions from their allocated peers and from the lecturer. Secondly, they received a grade for their assessment of their allocated peers, which served as feedback of the entire learning activity and taught them to look for the criteria of both academically sound and academically problematic assignments. This can assist them with their own future assignments and assessments.

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3

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Learning environment
Learning setting
This was a full-time course and the students were required to attend all their classes at the Faculty. This provided the students with the opportunity to participate in the discussions with their lecturer and with their peers. SUNLearn served as their learning platform and was used as an in-class learning tool. The students could therefore continuously access the reading material provided, view the module's aims and outcomes and orientate themselves regarding the peer-review assignment.

Support challenges
Although the students received in-class guidance on the Workshop tool and the peer-review process, they could still continuously ask the lecturer and the Blended Learning Coordinator for assistance, be it via email or one-on-one. This was helpful for the first-time Workshop users, who found the learning curve slightly challenging. This group was generally quite technologically well informed, however, and they therefore did not experience any serious challenges with the tool.

General
Opportunities
The peer-review process worked well as a critical reflection and self-evaluation tool to embed the academic work of the module within the short period of time available. It allowed the students the opportunity to provide their own opinions through their own submissions but also to learn from each other's submissions and assessments. The Workshop tool, with its integration of a submission and an assessment grading structure, worked well to create a formal space for the peer-review process. Although other tools could be used for the same process, the built-in grading structure provided an easier and more convenient way to set up and calculate each student's grade. The fact that it also served as a double feedback structure (feedback for the submission and feedback for the learning activity of the assessment) provided a valuable pedagogical opportunity, which assisted the students with critical reflection and self-evaluation.

The online availability of this tool on SUNLearn saved valuable assessment time, as the assessors could work individually yet simultaneously. The lecturer could also immediately view the feedback and grades given by the students and could use this information in the classroom to further the discussions and answer any lingering topic uncertainties. The integrated grading structure furthermore saved valuable time and energy, as the students and the lecturer could immediately view the feedback and grading outcomes, either in the SUNLearn gradebook or in the Workshop tool itself.

Challenges
The Workshop tool is not as intuitive as many of the other resources in SUNLearn and it therefore has quite a steep learning curve. Special attention must be paid to the grading structure, as the differentiation between submission and assessment and their different weight allocations can initially be quite confusing. The tool also makes use of a phase system: the setup phase, submission phase, assessment phase and grading evaluation phase. These phases are not automatic – they have to be manually opened and closed – and the lecturer/creator must therefore take care to activate and deactivate each phase once completed in order to proceed through the Workshop to the final phase. For instance, once the workshop has been set up and the workshop description, instructions for submission and the assessment guidelines have been provided, the lecturer/creator must activate the submission phase in order for the students to be able to read the submission criteria and submit their submissions.

Advice
It is quite helpful to set aside 20 minutes to explain and show the Workshop and peer-review process in the classroom. This provides time for questions and queries and gives the students a first-hand account of the process.

Reference list
Birenbaum, M. 1996. Assessment 2000: Towards a pluralistic approach to assessment, in Birenbaum, M. & Dochy, F. (eds.). *Alternatives in assessment of achievement, learning processes and prior knowledge. Boston*, MA: Kluwer Academic.