



Yellowdig Pilot Assessment Report

December 2020

2/4/2021

Introduction

Crises forces and also creates opportunity for change! The COVID-19 pandemic compelled campus classes online, but many faculty simply moved their lectures to online platforms. They did not understand that teaching online is a totally different educational paradigm! The result is many classes are judged as unengaging and the content difficult to learn by students.

While online education is an established and growing trend, the pandemic has changed education forever, resulting in what could become a permanent shift away from classroom instruction in favor of virtual learning platforms. If this change is to be successful, however, classes need to be designed using a blended model. This topic is discussed in an article written for the Project Management World Journal in September 2020¹ “Blended Learning Classroom Guidance” which focuses on increasing student engagement in online courses through active learning.

“Research has demonstrated that engaging students in the learning process increases their attention and focus, motivates them to practice higher-level critical thinking skills, and promotes meaningful learning experiences. Instructors who adopt a student-centered approach to instruction increase opportunities for student engagement, which then helps everyone more successfully achieve the course’s learning objectives”.²

For those questioning whether the continued adoption of virtual learning platforms can deliver the same educational value to students as in-person learning, the University of Maryland Center for Project Management launched a beta test of Yellowdig in the fall 2020 semester, to establish whether the platform could be used to promote the creation of engaged learning communities in our online courses. Our Yellowdig beta testing

¹ Cable, J. H. (2020). Converting to Online Teaching: A series of short guidance articles for educators and institutions – Blended Learning Classroom Guidance, *PM World Journal*, Vol. IX, Issue IX, September.

² University of Washington Center for Teaching and Learning, see <https://teaching.washington.edu/topics/engaging-students-in-learning/#:~:text=Research%20has%20demonstrated%20that%20engaging,and%20promotes%20meaningful%20learning%20experiences>

experiment included six faculty; three each teaching undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as their 241 combined students.

What is Yellowdig

Yellowdig is a conversation platform that connects learners and educators. The goal is to create student learning communities and facilitate conversations which, hopefully, enhance the learner experience and result in engaged students. Yellowdig Communities are private networks where learners interact, allowing discussion and sharing to foster the relationships, skills, and knowledge that allow people to thrive. It can be as dynamic and as engaging as the other social media platforms students use in their personal lives.

Essentially, Yellowdig is a discussion board where students are incentivized for their participation by receiving points based on the quality of their posted content. Interaction, both in and out of class time, is encouraged through Yellowdig's community-building tools. The goal of the point system is to encourage participation.

Participation improves learning through engagement, retention and satisfaction. Students earn points in three ways: 1) initiation of content, 2) other students commenting on their post, and 3) replying to other student posts. The "gamified" point system results in an increased level of student engagement with the topics through worthwhile peer-to-peer interactions. From the professor's perspective, the Yellowdig platform allows them to track student engagement, share content themselves and also monitor posts to make sure they are relevant to class content.

Beta Test

The six courses that participated in the Yellowdig Beta test are shown in the Table below.

Course	Students
ENCE 320 – Introduction to Project Management	70
ENCE 422 – Project Cost Accounting and Economics	59
ENCE 424 – Communication for Project Managers	38
ENCE 662 – Fundamentals of Project Management	24
ENCE 665 – Managing Teams: Improving Individual and Team Performance	29
ENCE 666 – Cost Engineering and Control	21

Zoom calls with the faculty were held every three weeks so the professors could share Yellowdig experiences in their courses. Information shared included: how Yellowdig was being utilized, how the students were engaged with the platform, and any problems they had encountered. Sharing their experiences helped them learn from each other what was working and what wasn't plus aided in any modifications that might have been needed for student engagement to be most effective.

Lessons Learned

At the end of the fall 2020 semester, a survey was sent to all 241 students that participated in the Yellowdig beta test, and those results were shared with all six professors. A Zoom call was held to discuss the evaluation results and together the group formulated the following lessons learned.

- Success is a function of how the professor embraces Yellowdig as part of the learning paradigm.
 - The Professor should think of their role as a senior member of the learning community.
 - Model the behavior you want students to emulate. Discussions are student led but professor presence is an integral component of building and maintaining a thriving community.
- Instructor needs to set constraints at the beginning as to what is appropriate content to post.
- Instructor needs to explain the effective use of Yellowdig and set a clear understanding of how to use it.
- Start on a Friday - make the weekend the beginning of the period, not the end.
- Devote a few minutes during the weekly Zoom sessions for students to discuss postings that resonate for them.
- Yellowdig and Zoom in combination seem to ignite a higher level of self-directed learning among the class with everyone participating.
- Whatever is posted in Yellowdig, should not be available in any other location.
- Assess, improvise, and adjust. Professors need to be open to making changes throughout the semester to stimulate discussions.
 - Adjust participation points accordingly throughout the semester.
 - Read all postings and award accolades or deduct points as necessary.
- Keep a keen eye out for students who try to game the point system, as some students post irrelevant or nonsensical information.
- Yellowdig should be integrated in the course LMS, not function as a standalone system.
- There seems to be a strong correlation between Yellowdig participation and final

grade in course.

- Designate a few weeks during the semester for students to discuss case studies in the Yellowdig Community.
- Yellowdig is successful if used in an appropriate course paradigm.

Summary

Three of the six professors surveyed said that they had integrated Yellowdig into how they taught their classes, and they believed it had a direct, positive impact on student success. They all agreed that if Yellowdig's capabilities aren't integrated into the course paradigm, then it's just another platform and the benefits are few.

Our Yellowdig beta testing experiment has demonstrated that overall, the platform was a useful and enriching teaching and learning tool if the professor embraces it as part of the learning paradigm. In a virtual learning environment where promoting interaction and engagement is a real challenge, this platform can provide the "missing link" that restores the sharing and collaborative elements that were present in the in-person classroom as long as you heed the lessons learned (shown above) to ensure the success of the implementation.

Specific Course Data and Student Feedback

Below is information about each course that participated in the Yellowdig beta test. Information for each course includes: how Yellowdig was used, survey results from their students and how the professor planned to modify the use of Yellowdig for the spring 2021 semester. It should be noted that student feedback per course was selected to be a representation of all feedback received (these was quite a bit of repetitive feedback). If you are interested in all the feedback received, please contact us for more information.

ENCE 320 Introduction to Engineering Project Management

70 STUDENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course presents the principles and techniques of managing engineering projects from the initiation, through planning, execution, monitoring and control, then finally closeout using the American National Standard Institute (ANSI) standards. This course used a flipped classroom approach, so students reviewed materials before each class and face-to-face time via Zoom was used for discussions.

HOW YELLOWDIG WAS USED IN THE COURSE

The Yellowdig participation started after the 2nd week of the course and continued for 13 weeks. Students had a goal of earning 1,000-pts with a weekly maximum of 1,250 pts. Yellowdig was utilized to start discussions on the weekly cases, project management artifacts, or weekly reading topics. For example, a student noted on Yellowdig, “I really enjoyed completing case 10 ... my favorite one was ... where they were able to reduce their project cycle time by 22%.” Other students noted, “I also was intrigued that some huge companies I know are successful having been using the content we’ve been learning to improve their business.” These exchanges on Yellowdig not only indicated student involvement but were very useful to the professor in understanding student learning, which can then be reinforced during the weekly virtual session.

Students also utilized Yellowdig for general discussion about University life under COVID and the general stress of engineering school. One exchange noted how a group of students used the concepts of project management to plan out their weekly meals. Other discussion centered around past and upcoming internships. Again, these exchanges on Yellowdig gave the professor insight to student’s thinking and allowed use of this information within the virtual session to improve relevance to the students. Other students created polls on both class content and just general topics.

Overall, sixty of the seventy students (85.7%) gained the 13,000-pts maximum score, with the nine of the ten-remaining scoring over 10,000. One student did not participate, and one had technical challenges. The body of information discussed, and learning enhancement achieved over the 13 weeks was substantial. The Yellowdig system helped the large 70-student class create a community in a virtual environment in which none of them physically met with each other.

The ongoing Yellowdig discussions extended class discussion on Zoom or, in many cases, preceded them as the students prepared for class discussion. Through those discussions, the professor gained insights on student understanding and concern, which allowed for tailoring of discussions during the once-a-week virtual classroom period. This course also used surveys each week to drive discussions. Some of those survey results were posted on Yellowdig, again to drive discussions.

CHANGES TO THE COURSE FOR SPRING 2021

The professor is decreasing the Yellowdig percentage of the students’ final grade from 15% down to 10%. He plans to utilize the platform for 13 weeks like he did in fall 2020 and he plans to keep the points at 1250 as the top each week. The professor is planning to have a TA do a post once or twice a week on a quiz or exam question; a topic he wants to put an emphasis on. In order to keep the students engaged in Yellowdig, he does not plan to have this content anywhere else in the course; it will only be available on Yellowdig. He also plans to continue with case discussion and talk about the simulation project only on Yellowdig.

SURVEY RESULTS

What did you like most about using Yellowdig and why?
Better feeling of community with classmates thanks to the discussions.
I liked being able to communicate with my classmates more effectively, having a place to ask questions where everyone in the class checks, and having a place to share opinions about class related topics, and class operations.
Easy way to get participation points and discuss random topics with classmates that I don't get to do with other classes because we are online. I also liked that we didn't just talk about course material, but rather all topics that friends would talk about!
I personally really liked how Yellowdig acted as the "class community" and gave students the opportunity to still interact with one another even with Covid. It also allowed me to learn a lot from other students and even take new perspectives on certain things.
I can see the participation points I'm earning and it's easier to use than discussions on Canvas.
I like using Yellowdig because it has a lot more interaction compared to something like Elms discussion boards. The reactions and the ease of replying to other comments is very straightforward.
I liked Yellowdig because it was a place for both class content as well as a general discussion board. I learned some helpful things through related posts that were not class material. It provided a place for open thought and discussion.
It has the aesthetic of more modern social media platforms (reacts, tags, etc.) and doesn't feel awkward like Canvas's Discussions section. Participation doesn't feel forced (you can still participate with comments/reactions, you don't have to make a unique post to participate).
What did you like least about Yellowdig and why?
If weekly points are too high, people may not have meaningful conversations.
The default sorting shows what has the most recent activity, making it easy for new posts to get overlooked if older ones are receiving attention.
I didn't like that it always felt like I needed to interact in order to get my weekly points and that it was due at 6 p.m. versus midnight.

How Often Did You Check Yellowdig?	
Daily	
Once per week	9 (18.7%)
2-3 Times per week	39 (81.3%)

How many hours per week do you spend Yellowdig?	
Less than 1 hour per week	9 (18.8%)
1-2 hours per week	37 (77.1%)
3-4 hours per week	2 (4.1%)

How did you use Yellowdig?	
Post new content	2 (4.2%)
Generally, just respond to other people's posts	10 (20.8%)
Post new content AND comment on other people's posts.	36 (75%)

How has (or has not) Yellowdig supported your learning this semester?
I thought it was a very unique and fun way to learn with others in your class.
Yellowdig was a really good way to see other peoples' thoughts on certain topics, more particularly case studies and personal projects. It was really interesting to see what other people were working on, or how other people interpreted certain case studies and its applications in regards to project management.
It helped me process class information better since I could see what my classmates were learning from it. It allowed my classmates to give me help and support when I needed it for school stuff. It gave a feeling of closure with that week's class material.
Keep up morale for a tough semester in the pandemic.
I liked how I was able to receive feedback and advice to better myself throughout the semester.
It created a sense of community and I was able to ask questions when confused.

It's helped maintain a sense of the typical university experience that online classes due to COVID have drastically taken away from students. While there is no virtual replacement that comes close to an in-person experience, this was nice to have.

In some cases it helped, for example if I had a question I could post for all to see and hopefully answer, but for the most part it was a lot of fluff.

It has allowed seeing how the context of the class can be applied to the real world. It has allowed for the outside class conversation to arise.

It has helped me gain insight on the class, and has answered question's I would have asked, as well as questions I haven't even thought of.

Would You Recommend Yellowdig to Your Peers?

Yes	44 (91.7%)
No	4 (8.3%)

Comments:

- I think it enhances student involvement in the course and allows people to learn from not only the professor but also other students.
- I think Yellowdig is a good way to get a participation grade in a class. It is also a good way to stay connected to the class.
- Better than forced participation, easy to learn format.
- I did not learn/benefit much from using Yellowdig.
- Yes and no, depends on the course and how much interaction is necessary.
- I know a lot of people who don't enjoy Elms discussion boards. Yellowdig is formatted more like "social media" because of the reactions included and it makes it more fun and easy to use.
- I think my peers are ok with elms and piazza for discussions.
- I would offer it as a replacement for ELMS discussion boards. I would also tell them it is useful for communicating with classmates and actively participating.

Do you think we should continue the use of Yellowdig as part of the course curriculum?	
Yes	46 (95.8%)
No	2 (4.2%)
Comments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If classes continue to be held virtually, Yellowdig really helps with class engagement.• I think it should be but maybe more as a place for students to communicate with each other and not as a graded assignment.• I did not see much benefit by using Yellowdig to help learn this course.• Especially if classes are online... It helps connect students who have similar interests. It also helps bounce ideas for projects off of one another who are working on similar things.• It provides students an outlet to talk to each other about the class and helps students to be more out there which is a skillset for careers in the future.• I think the point system might need adjusting but otherwise I think it improves the course.• Yellowdig is the most interactive platform I've used so far (especially in a purely virtual environment!). It also gives a really good opportunity for students to get a different perspective on certain topics.• It's a great interface, not difficult to learn, forces participation but not in an awkward way, similar to many social media platforms, and it allows us to process the information we learn in class more thoroughly.	

ENCE 422 Project Cost Accounting & Economics

59 STUDENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course reviews the fundamentals of accounting and engineering economics and examines project cost accounting principles as they apply to project management. Included are: reading and analyzing financial statements; cash flow analysis; depreciation and taxes; the principles of activity-based costing; net present value analysis; internal rate of return; and project capital structure and determination of discount rates.

HOW YELLOWDIG WAS USED IN THE COURSE

The use of Yellowdig in this course was set up as a bonus activity making up 5% of the final grade. Approximately 50% of the students participated in this activity, with 20% that had intensive participation. The Professor noticed that the Yellowdig participation was highly correlated to the student's final grade before adding this bonus. Among the 16 students who received the bonus, 12 of the students were in the top half of the class before bonus, compared to only 4 students in the latter half.

The theme and format of the topics discussed can be divided into three major categories. The most common was to share articles, videos, and other materials that helped to understand the methods in the course, such as visualizing how different depreciation methods work. Second, the students were interested in applying what they learned in real-life issues. Apart from the above two types of topics, Yellowdig also provided students with a platform where they can get to know each other and share their thoughts and feelings. For example, they were able to introduce themselves, ask and answer questions about this course, and discuss their online learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the professor, the pros of using Yellowdig were obvious. The collective endeavor enriches the materials students can learn. The platform broadens the students' horizons and enhances their understanding of the course, regardless of whether the student creates a new post or comments on others. The major con of using Yellowdig is that some of the posts may not be quite relevant to the course. Since it was a grade-driven activity that was graded on frequency of participation, it was difficult to ensure the quality of the posts.

CHANGES TO THE COURSE FOR SPRING 2021

The professor has opted not to utilize Yellowdig in his course for spring 2021.

SURVEY RESULTS

What did you like most about using Yellowdig and why?
It kept me up to date on some cool topics and world issues.
It gives you an opportunity to interact with students and have discussions since we aren't meeting in person anymore.
I like that so many people share interesting real-world applications of things we're learning in class. It also feels a bit like a community space for the class where students share useful study resources.

What did you like least about Yellowdig and why?
Sometimes it was easily forgettable. I wouldn't always receive notifications if someone responded to me.
No negatives!

How Often Did You Check Yellowdig?	
Daily	1 (33.3%)
Once per week	
2-3 Times per week	2 (66.7%)

How many hours per week do you spend Yellowdig?	
Less than 1 hour per week	
1-2 hours per week	3 (100%)
3-4 hours per week	

How did you use Yellowdig?	
Post new content	
Generally just respond to other people's posts	1 (33.3%)

Post new content AND comment on other people's posts.	2 (66.7%)
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How has (or has not) Yellowdig supported your learning this semester?
It gave me articles to look into which was helpful.
I don't think it has had an effect on other classes but it has made this class more interesting. It allows me to see what other ideas people had about our weekly readings.
Students sharing study resources and current events/applications of what we're learning in class.

Would You Recommend Yellowdig to Your Peers?	
Yes	2 (66.7%)
No	1 (33.3%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was helpful to talk to other students while being online. • Not exactly sure how it would help them unless a whole class was using it. • I think it's a good resource for sharing and learning from other students and is a nice space for interaction while virtual learning remains the norm. 	

Do you think we should continue the use of Yellowdig as part of the course curriculum?	
Yes	3 (100%)
No	
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think its a good opportunity to ensure students interact with each other and it isn't too difficult so long as you get regular updates and notifications about it. • I think it's a really great space for students to share useful resources and interact with each other in this online learning environment. • It was helpful to talk to other students while being online. 	

ENCE 424 Communications for Project Managers

38 STUDENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course stresses interactive exercises and self-reflection to afford students opportunities to assess and understand their communication, conflict management, negotiation, and leadership styles. Students learn invaluable lessons in business civility; running in-person and virtual meetings; addressing conflict; establishing credibility; inspiring trust; and networking to help build effective teams, successfully engage stakeholders, and establish themselves as a project manager with integrity.

The course itself follows a flipped classroom model, that uses workshops to reinforce key lessons of the class.

HOW YELLOWDIG WAS USED IN THE COURSE

The Yellowdig Learning Community provided students with a student-led, gamified learning, multi-media experience wherein students lead weekly discussion topics and earned points for posting, replying, and reacting to each other's postings.

Yellowdig provided students with a forum to get to know each other, share ideas, and engage with the course content. Students shared reflections on the course readings and examples of how they were applying the concepts and techniques they learned in the course. They shared their successes, like when the use of crucial conversation skills helped them resolve an issue at work. Some even shared examples of failed attempts at negotiating for a higher salary and what they could have done to increase their bargaining edge. By getting to know each other in Yellowdig, students developed a sense of community and felt safe stepping out of their comfort zone during the weekly zoom sessions.

There were 14 earning periods for the course with a semester target goal of 14,000 points. Students had weekly target points of 1,000 and could earn an additional 250 bonus points bringing their total weekly earnings to 1,250 points. Yellowdig participation counted for 10% of the grade. As shown in the table below, of the 38 students enrolled in ENCE424, 31(81%) achieved or exceeded the semester target of 14,000 points and all but two of the remaining students earned at least 90% of the semester target goal.

Student Participation Points Breakdown

Number of Students	Points	Yellowdig Grade
31	14,000 – 17,500	100%
5	12,635 – 13,999	90 – 99%
2	8,220 – 9,230	58 – 66%

Student Sentiments from Course Evaluation

“I just wanted to take my last post to thank you all for making this difficult semester better than it would have been without this class! It was great meeting all of you and working with all of you throughout this semester! And, a HUGE shoutout to the professor for making this class so engaging and so inspirational!”

“This was definitely my favorite class of the semester! I normally dread participating in group activities but, I really enjoyed participating in them for this class. I had a fun time getting to know everyone. Good luck with finals, and have a great winter break!”

“This was one of my favorite courses because it honestly did feel like a safe zone to speak and everyone in the course was very knowledgeable, and I was able to learn from everyone. I personally enjoyed the debate a lot because it brought out everyone's personality and we could see how passionate everyone was when speaking. I really enjoyed the professor's teaching because it was very engaging and for an afternoon course I was really active, which didn't happen in other courses. Great course and professor!”

CHANGES TO THE COURSE FOR SPRING 2021

The professor is decreasing the Yellowdig percentage of the students' final grade from 10% down to 5%. Other than that one change, everything else will remain the same.

SURVEY RESULTS

What did you like most about using Yellowdig and why?
It's an open platform to discuss anything in any related topic that is relevant to the course. I think that it helped all of us get to know each other a little bit better in one way or another. Specifically because our course was on zoom all semester so personally it helped me communicate better since I didn't know anyone prior.
I enjoy reading my peer's posts because they can be informative and beneficial to my learning in the class. I also enjoy the option to create polls and use emojis as reactions to a post.
I like that I can stay connected with my classmates even though this semester has been a predominantly online setting. It allows for interesting topics of conversations, and I also think of new ways to apply the class topics to my life because of the posts. It also has alot of interesting features to figure out.
I liked being able to build a sense of community even though the course was online. I really liked the way Yellowdig tracked your word counts and your points for the week and for the whole semester.

A way students can freely express what they want to without there being many constraints.

I like how it has created a place where anyone can go and share their thoughts. Especially now with zoom, some might feel a bit uncomfortable with turning on their cameras or asking questions. Yellowdig provides a place where someone can go and ask the question as well as get any input from another student.

What did you like least about Yellowdig and why?

I think I don't like that the points don't carry over per week. Some weeks I can connect to the content that we're discussing more than others. So, I might have a lot to say about a topic one week and the posts come natural. Rather other weeks I feel like I am repeating myself just to reach the requirement. Also, I hated that everything was due by Saturday at 11 pm. I think if it was a Sunday at midnight, that would be a better option for most people.

The overall layout is a bit dull. It gives the impression that this is more of a discussion board on a school platform rather than a social media one. It would look better with more colors or at least changes in website design.

I do not like that yellow dig is not connected to elms. It is sometimes hard to remember to do the yellow dig assignments when there is no reminder of it on elms.

Having to get points, because I end up just leaving bland responses. It is such a small portion of the course that it is easy to do but also easy to forget about

Sometimes it became a bit too much work when I had other assignments due that week.

I don't like how posts and comments are valued in a quantity over quality situation since you get the same amount of points for a comment that's one sentence as a comment that's 8 sentences. This allows for people to get credit for "engaging" while other people don't get rewarded for truly engaging.

Felt like I was making comments just to make comments and receive points instead of fueling the conversations further I felt like I would stop typing after I hit the word limit to receive points, any additional wording was just kind of a waste of time in regards to my actual grade.

1. I felt it was a chore each week 2. Too many things to keep track of, between Yellowdig announcements, class, and canvas announcements.

How Often Did You Check Yellowdig?	
Daily	3 (8.8%)
Once per week	11 (32.4%)
2-3 Times per week	20 (58.8%)

How many hours per week do you spend Yellowdig?	
Less than 1 hour per week	8 (23.5%)
1-2 hours per week	22 (64.7%)
3-4 hours per week	3 (8.8%)
5-6 hours per week	1 (3.0%)

How did you use Yellowdig?	
Post new content	1 (3.0 %)
Generally just respond to other people's posts	5 (14.7%)
Post new content AND comment on other people's posts.	28 (82.4%)s

How has (or has not) Yellowdig supported your learning this semester?
Sometimes it did by letting me look into other people's lives and how the course content applies to their situations. Other times it felt like it was just a tedious grind for credit.
I think Yellowdig was helpful to further discuss what we read in the assigned readings, which we didn't always get to discuss in class. I also think it was a good way to see what other students thought and to bounce ideas off each other.
I do not feel that Yellowdig personally increased my learning. I felt that most students were only responding to get the minimum points. Sometimes just agreeing with random comments. I also felt that it just recapped what we learned rather than teaching anything new.
I think its opened up my eyes to new ideas and perspectives that other students have.

I was able to read other students' work and know that sometimes I am not doing this alone. It was helpful when the professor posted announcements.

Allowed to engage with peers and grow based on sharing what we've all gained from the text and the lectures.

It has really allowed me to make connections from the class topics into real life. I look for ways I can interestingly relate content to the real world, allowing for applications to be made that I normally wouldn't think of. Additionally, it has helped in feeling a sense of class bond that wouldn't be there with simply a virtual classroom. This network has made me engage more during class.

Would You Recommend Yellowdig to Your Peers?	
Yes	24 (70.6%)
No	9 (26.5%)
No Answer	1 (2.9%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the course it allows you to engage and learn more about other people, possibly form connections. It also, let's you use course readings in an effective way rather than just a discussion board. • I like the community aspect to learning and it allows me to engage with students while still in a school environment. • Little to no additional learning value, adds to the list of things we have to do outside of class. • Helps to think about course material and it is interesting to see what peers think about different topics. • It has helped my learning in this class, and its features make it fun to use. • I would not recommend to my peers since I personally did not find it helpful. • Yellowdig is worth using because it makes keeping up with the topics of the class simpler by creating an environment where people post and comment about the readings and sorting all the posts by topic. • Things get lost in it. I would not use this unless it was for a class. 	

Do you think we should continue the use of Yellowdig as part of the course curriculum?	
Yes	31 (91.2%)
No	3 (8.8%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, but change it so that students are given suggestions weekly on what to post, blindly posting is sometimes difficult. It's good because it also makes us do the required readings. • It is by far the best replacement for discussion boards. Though it is still only so authentic and will still suffer to some degree from lack of honest communication. • I thought it was far superior to other discussion board assignments I have had in past classes and helped me connect with and engage with my peers. • It is an easy way to see class participation I will say you will need to create a better structure on how to combine the posts in canvas vs those in yellow dig. • As long as we are not in the classroom, this is beneficial, but if we go back in person I feel there would be no need. • Yes, but modify it. Make it more engaging with multiple thought-provoking questions a week to spur conversation. • Although it's an extra task to add on to our list of things to do, it is actually a very useful tool to learn things about the course, that you wouldn't in a normal class settings. It also gives students a little more freedom to speak on things that maybe they wouldn't feel comfortable saying in a classroom. • Required point total was difficult to reach some weeks due to other assignments, some posts were more popular than others simply because they showed up in everyone's feed first 	

ENCE 662 FUNDAMENTALS OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT





24 students

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This overview course introduces the students to concepts of project management (principles, body of knowledge, strategies); planning successful projects (defining, specifying, delivery options, scheduling, budgeting); implementing (organizing the team, work assignments, team building, effective leadership); executing (performance measurement, maintaining the schedule, adjustments/mid-course corrections, record keeping, status reporting, communications, managing conflict, time management); and closeout (performance measurement, maintaining the schedule, adjustments/mid-course corrections, record keeping, status reporting, communications, managing conflict, time management).

HOW YELLOWDIG WAS USED IN THE COURSE

Yellowdig was incorporated from the beginning of the semester as a required part of the course. The grade percentage was 10%, taking 10% away from HW that were previously worth 20%. The settings were the same as the default suggested for any course in Yellowdig – except that the point value was increased slightly from 1000 to 1500 per week.

- Writing a Post of at least 40 words (x 150 points)
- Writing a Comment of at least 20 words (x 80points)
- Receiving a Comment on your Post (x 55 points)
- Receiving an Accolade on your Post or Comment:
 -  [Helpful!] x 150 points
 -  [Interesting!] x 100 points
 -  [Insightful!] x 75 points
 -  [Verified Answer!]: x 50 points
- Receiving a Reaction on your Post or Comment earns 30 points

We introduced Yellowdig as a learning community and engagement site where students could help each other and ask questions outside of our workshops. This was the primary location for getting direct conversation and engagement with students that wasn't structured.

The course itself follows a flipped classroom model, that uses workshops to reinforce key lessons of the class. Lectures are recorded voice over PowerPoint with the video sectioned into 30-minute modules or less. The students greatly preferred recorded voice over PowerPoint to watching a pre-recorded lecture. They also preferred smaller module videos of 30 minutes long, and for those videos to be broken up into little mini-lessons so they could watch in bite size chunks. Nothing spectacularly new, but it was surprising that voice of PPT was so much more preferred to watching a live lecture. Detailed analysis of that is for another write-up.

Students would then take a quiz on the lecture before a workshop virtual conference. Workshop virtual conferences had challenges that were team-based. There would be a 5-to-10-minute intro, then a team challenge with regular checkpoints throughout the hour, and a report out.

Here's a breakdown of the assignments for the class and their grade percentages:

- (10%) 10 Lecture Quizzes
- (10%) 5 Homework Assignments (2 weeks long, about 5 hours to do)
- (30%) 2 Group Projects
 - o Project 1 – 200 pts, 2 months, teams of teams project
 - o Project 2 – 100 pts, 6 weeks long, team case study
- (10%) Yellowdig Learning Community participation
- (20%) Midterm – 200 pts
- (20%) Final – 200 pots

What went well was that at the beginning of the semester there was a good exchange. I seeded topics and the students posted and worked well inside the platform. There was some complaining, but disbelievers became believers or just quieted down as there were good discussions and exchanges. I regularly used accolades to encourage good behavior.

During the end of the first half of the semester, I allowed teams to post on Yellowdig about their projects. That was a mistake. The teams ended up using Yellowdig to gather points by making pointless comments on posts about team meetings. It was a way to achieve “transparency” but almost all teams had two or three other channels they were really using. So, this didn't poorly impact the project, it just encouraged misuse of Yellowdig.

After the Midterm, which also followed the first project, the use of Yellowdig picked up again as a discussion point and not just a place to discuss the project and ask questions of the instructor. However, by this time the students were trained to bring in outside material by ENCE665, which was also regularly using Yellowdig. I don't blame Joce or her approach to teaching ENCE665, but this resulted in a lot of extra work for me reviewing materials that were in large part terrible online advertisements with half-truths. Some

required disclaimers of misinformation from me as the instructor because these students are so new and there is so much convincing half-baked stuff on the internet about project management basics. It was a real problem.

I tried to get students to stop hunting for bad articles online to throw-up mindlessly and instead just engage with the material in class, reflect, and think about their own experiences. This was done with a few online and in VC announcements. I also continued to monitor the feed for fake news. I said if they had outside materials, they wanted to reference they should be mindful of the source and its intent (to sell vs to inform). This got discussions going in the right direction again, but the volume also died down as point hunting is harder when you must post something of value.

This is when I began to get real feedback on the trouble that most students were having with learning. Many were experiencing overload. Too many responsibilities and too much to learn. Especially those in both ENCE665 and ENCE662. Some had a third class. The students started to open up about what they didn't know as opposed to posting valueless or misleading articles. So we all helped each other learn and learn how to learn as a community. I also realized that taking the textbook out of my class left many of the students anchorless without my direct involvement when the lecture and slide materials weren't working for them.

Seeing the struggle that many were having, and wanting to reinvigorate the class, I started creating challenges with Yellowdig point awards. That added some extra energy to class and got people focused and quickly looking for the Workshop materials to get a head start. It was a fun game to create the workshop challenges and play around with teams and question types. But it also further helped me see that students struggle to keep up with materials, generally.

In the end, Yellowdig has been very useful as a diagnostic of the course. As an engagement tool it was okay, but quickly turned into point hunting. The workload for me and for the students was much greater than the 10% course grade value, and yet I cannot imagine giving it any more value in the class. Overall, I think using this properly and at the right level is a balancing act and there are new skills needed when bringing social media into the classroom for teachers and students. Society hasn't caught up to Social Media and neither has the classroom, but there is good and bad to including a tool like this – and I'm willing to give it another try.

CHANGES TO THE COURSE FOR SPRING 2021

The professor reducing the total number of posts and comments, and the points to align with the classroom points. He is hopeful that by lowering the requirement for total posts and comments students will post more authentic content. By reducing the relative weight of giving a comment vs receiving one (now receiving a comment is worth more!), he is hoping to encourage only meaningful comments to each post. Professor John is also planning an orientation and explanation of what's allowed and intended on Yellowdig.

Below is the spring 2020 point structure for the use of Yellowdig:

- Yellowdig percentage of course grade reduced from 10% to 6%
- Total points required per week is 4 points (x 15 weeks) for a total of 60 points.
 - E.g. a point in Yellowdig equals a point in the course
 - Only have to perform one post and one comment, or one post that gets a comment
 - Buffer is 50%
- Updated scoring structure:
 - Writing a Post of at least 80 words (x 3 points)
 - Writing a Comment of at least 40 words (x 1 point)
 - Receiving a Comment on your Post (x 2 points)
 - Receiving an Accolade on your Post or Comment:
 - [Helpful!] x 3 points
 - [Interesting!] x 2 points
 - [Insightful!] x 1 point
 - [Verified Answer!]: x 1 point
 - Receiving a Reaction on your Post or Comment earns 1 point

SURVEY RESULTS

What did you like most about using Yellowdig and why?
Generally, the content which was being published was useful and relevant to course materials. Professor did a good job on providing insight on some of the concepts published. This was a good place to post a question and get collaborative thinking on a topic.
I got to read a lot of my classmates' experience with what we have learned. It was great to associate what we have learned in class with real life examples. I read some very informative articles too.
Some topics required me to ask good questions with my more senior project manager coworkers in order to provide a good response. It encouraged asking questions when I didn't understand a concept from lecture and allowed collaboration with my peers.
It is a great community. Really good feedback on posts. Lots of new articles to read and learn from.
I think it was neat to be able to access the multitude of resources and links that students post by scrolling through a feed. This is cool because you can learn a little about what interests different individuals in class and also mutually benefit from participating in discussions by sharing your thoughts about their post or just reading through what others have replied and getting some insight from there.
It's a good way to collaborate with classmates, especially now that in-person classes are not offered. It is a good platform to ask questions that can benefit the class as a whole.

I liked the content provided by my classmates that provided other resources with a different perspective on a topic. I liked the on-going conversation that was developed from the posts.

Great internal university platform to share questions about content and homework to the whole class, including the professor. Sometimes it's hard or impossible to coordinate with fellow students outside of class so Yellowdig made this much easier.

It allows me to interact with my peers and make personal connections. It allows for me to gain a better understanding of specific topics, by asking questions and getting responses from both my peers and the professor. Sometimes my answers are answered by my peers sooner than the Professor. It makes me feel connected, and it feels like I am much more in a classroom setting.

It has a cool social media-forum style interface, from the emoji reactions to the chain-linked reply threads. I think that makes the UI fun and vibrant and engaging which is a refreshing change to the monotonous Canvas/ELMS discussion boards.

What did you like least about Yellowdig and why?

Point quota is too high. We get less meaningful posts in the feed.

Some posts do not read provide valuable information, sometime could be misleading. Too much information for people like me who is social media phobia.

The posts aren't organized as well as they could be. It should be easier to filter between posts based on the topic they focus on; for example, filtering posts concerning topics covered in lecture 5. The amount of points you get for a post or reply isn't based on substance, therefore the faster you create posts the better.

It's an every week burden. Point load is also too much. Socializing of any form shouldn't be part of grading. I'd rather it was an incentive to grading. Not mandated. like the top scorers will get extra points or something. No one should lose any grade points because of it. Just not fair for people who don't socialize actively anyway. Doesn't mean they'll make bad PMs.

Yellowdig became a chore. Earning a lot of points became tedious and less beneficial as the course went on. I think this course already has a lot of content, studying, hw, and projects and to add this on top of everything is a lot to balance. At the end of the day it is easy points to get on your grade, but for little benefit in the learning side of things.

It feels repetitive. I do not like the aspect of it affecting my final grade. It feels unfair at times as a person who researched and posts and a person who just comments without even reading the post can get the same points at the end of the day.

As the semester progressed, the social interface, while engaging and fun became very distracting as the number of posts increased. The feed could be difficult to navigate with the sheer number of individual posts. The point allocations and minimum weekly quota. I think the idea of Yellowdig is novel and a great alternative to ELMS discussion boards, but the internal organization of the site seems ill-suited to be integrated as a major source of participation.

Too much quantity over quality. If we were able to focus on one really good post, and 2 really good comments each week, it would make the whole thing way more useful. A 1500 pts just elicits a lot of weak posts and comments.

Didn't connect to class in a substantive way. Seemed like it was this activity we did on the side to check a box that we are still participating in class, but didn't bring any notable value in understanding project management on a deeper level.

I hated the high point requirement for one of my classes, time spent on Yellowdig to meet the requirement took away from other course requirements. I thought that there was not a fair distribution of how points were assessed. For example some of my answers took thought and work to explain something. Some of my classmates contributed nothing and always said "thank you for the article....." and still recieved the credit. Points should be reflective of the content/idea.

How Often Did You Check Yellowdig?

Daily	5 (21.7%)
Once per week	3 (13%)
2-3 Times per week	11 (47.8%)
Other	4 (17.4%)

Comments on Other:

- In the beginning I started off pretty good with staying consistent then we got in the nitty gritty of my course and work and time began to slip away from me.
- At first, I would check it 2-3 times per week but this drastically fell once I realized quickly that there was absolutely no educational value to all the effort put in. As stated previously, Yellowdig missed its intention of promoting free discussion and learning. Instead, weekly point expectations were so grossly high that most posts were contrived nonsense.
- Sometimes I check once a week. When there is project, I check everyday.
- Sometimes check daily, and sometimes 2-3 times per week. It depends on the course content during that week.

How has (or has not) Yellowdig supported your learning this semester?
It helped my professional life and was able to incorporate into everyday business activities.
Learn from others, as people do post some amazing stuff out there. Motivates me to handpick a few key takeaways.
It has not. It became tedious and not beneficial. It helped when students had questions so that everyone could see the answer, but if you don't check it regularly you may miss an important question being asked
It was good to read differing perspectives. I view it as blogging (not in a good way). Not a fan overall, would rather have to do more quality/live interaction then sit and read a post.
Other students' explanation was easier for me to understand, versus the textbook terminology. I was able to ask questions and receive rapid responses.
Some of the posts shared encouraged the continual learning of a topic or illustrated a concept with real-world examples. Those were helpful learning tools.
Really informative but just a lot on top of an already loaded course.
It has definitely helped me in learning. It is a treasure trove of really good articles. You can learn a lot about the topics discussed in class. You can also post questions and get feedback from everyone.
It just seems like a solution trying to find a problem to solve. Was there something missing in the course before yellow dig came around? Neat tool, but I didn't see it's value in helping us learn about project management.
It was useful when I didn't quite understand a topic from the lecture and somebody uploaded an article and made the top simpler to understand.
It absolutely stunted my experience, decreased my overall respect for the program, and would never recommend it to anyone. I will now go out of my way to make sure any future courses I enroll in do not have Yellowdig (or any similar forced participation platform)
It helped me identify the key topic of each week because there are too many things introduced at the same time. When I went to Yellowdig and browse posts from others, I could get a quick idea of what other students care about the most, and then compared to what I have learned.

Would You Recommend Yellowdig to Your Peers?	
Yes	11 (47.8%)
No	12 (52.2%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a new thing, some new form of collaborating with the entire class in the times of COVID. It is definitely one should try and explore. • It offers a networking experience and allows to connect and encourage others. • Requires regular engagement meaning you don't fall behind on class material. • It really depends on what purpose it is being used for. I don't want to suggest adding another place to check for something just for the sake of check in. But, if it can be used to add value on the discussion and capture all the posts then I will suggest to go for it. • It felt difficult to keep track and be engaged with the content as frequently as expected. I think the participation aspect of Yellowdig is novel but it didn't result in me gaining more knowledge or sharing as much insights with classmates as much as I originally expected to. It didn't feel as organic as it was advertised to be from the beginning of the semester. • Did not help with learning about project management. I have it in 2 other classes and having to log posts and comments for 3 classes a week was too much an administrative burden. 	

Do you think we should continue the use of Yellowdig as part of the course curriculum?	
Yes	15 (65.2%)
No	7 (30.4%)
No Answer	1 (4.4%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think it should be used in the manner it was used. I'd get rid of point requirements and judge participation based on a weekly post or posts related to lecture. • One of the main reason was at times , I did more research about a specific topic and this made me dive deep into few concepts. You want to share the best and also something that is new for everyone on Yellowdig. 	

- The course is a very strenuous and has a lot of content. Yellow dig added on to stress.
- I love Yellowdig because it is nice to have a platform where everybody shares their thoughts. I can ask questions and get the answers pretty fast. However, I think the weekly min participation. points are too high. I know a lot of people could get 100% each week, but as a person who doesn't always use social media to communicate, I feel this is too much.
- Yellowdig might become a better tool if the discussions are better structured and a topic of discussion is set. The current system encourages lots of article-sharing with sometimes misleading info and comments without much substance.
- The time and point requirements were higher than necessary.
- The interface wasn't conducive to support learning.
- Yellowdig can be used and made a great experience for students if only structured differently. It shouldn't be mandated by making it a part of the grade. It should instead be used as an incentive to the grades. Like the top 5 scorers get an extra 5% or something.
- If the learning is still virtual then it is a 'must have' tool to engage students outside of class so that students can have a common platform to share their experience of learning.
- It feels like it only focuses on quantity of the posts or the presence on the platform but the 'Quality' of posts and the impact a post can make on the discussion or on learning is not so clear (other than getting accolades). Making comments on other's posts just to earn points does not sound too fruitful. If this is the case, it is just a burden on students and should not be continued on the course curriculum.

ENCE 665 Management of Project Teams

29 STUDENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Experience has shown that successful project managers are not only technically competent but that they have above average skills in human relations and communications. The course will prepare students working in teams or as project managers to optimize the utilization of their most important resource: people. Successful project delivery requires the ability to manage yourself and other people effectively to deliver projects that frequently focus on strategic change initiatives. Relying primarily on a wide range of research and experience, this course will help guide project manager in building the other skills needed to be truly successful in the competitive Project Team.

HOW YELLOWDIG WAS USED IN THE COURSE

Overview

Yellowdig (YD) was deployed in the first phase of the pilot in fall 2020. ENCE 665 integrated YD into many of the standard assignments in the course. This was done in part because the level of effort required of students and faculty using YD was unknown at the start of the pilot. The instructor, with the permission of the students, participated fully as a member of the learning community, earning the weekly points. In addition, the instructor read, commented, and awarded accolades for all YD posts initiated by students. Workload for the instructor averaged 30 minutes daily.

Organization of YD

YD was set up using the recommended parameters. Extensive directions were provided to the students and within 2 weeks the majority of the students had enrolled. YD was organized with Topics which matched the weekly class modules. Initially, the instructor labelled posts and ultimately students labelled their own for ease of review.

The instructor explained fully that this was a pilot of YD in 3 graduate and 3 undergraduate courses in fall 2020. To support the pilot and to support the desired learning outcomes of the course with a particular emphasis on increasing student engagement (online, pandemic environment with lots of stressors), the instructor asked that all students feel free to post or share with the instructor their observations about YD during the semester. Students after the initial surprise of the YD pilot were quite helpful in sorting out YD and patient with any initial set up issues.

YD was not initially linked into Canvas and students did not report any issues with having to go to a separate site. This process continued through the end of the semester for simplicity's sake. The spring semester will begin with YD fully integrated with Canvas.

Weekly course modules were modified to include three reminders to post to YD.

Instructor Role

With the consent of the class, the instructor participated as a full member of the learning community. Her role included: original postings, accolades for students starting a new post within topics, questions for deeper understanding, commentary on application/experiences, corrections when necessary relative to understanding of course content. Only one student was noted to be posting Joycean comments and that student received feedback that the content of his posts did not meet expectations. That student later withdrew from the class for personal reasons.

Instructor reviewed weekly YD points earned for the first three to four weeks of the course sending personal reminders to students who were lagging in their initial participation. Most students were able to adopt the new habit of posting and reviewing others' posts within the first several weeks of course.

Adjustments Made to Assignments

ENCE 665 usually includes a number of assignments each week: readings, course videos, weekly quizzes, and pearl diving essays. Usually, there is a midterm and a final exam and a team case.

This year, in response to Provost Rankin's suggestion that faculty revise courses to have fewer high stakes, graded assignments, and in light of the then unknown workload related to YD both for the instructor and the students, these assignments were modified as follows.

- No changes were made to:
 - Required readings
 - Course videos
 - Weekly quizzes
 - Team case
- Pearl diving essays were reduced in number, retaining only the core PD's in the Know Yourself, Know Others section. This reduction was from 14 PD's to three.
- Midterm and final exams were dropped.

Integration with Assignments & Weekly Zoom Sessions

As the semester began, the possibilities for integration of YD with other assignments was not yet obvious. Through the course of the semester, however, several possibilities emerged. Research required for completion of the PD's could be posted to YD, earning points on both assignments without additional work.

YD conversations often followed weekly Zoom sessions with first instructor and then student suggestions to continue the discussions on YD. As the semester progressed, students frequently initiated extensions of class topics with YD posts.

A focus of ENCE 665 is research by students each week using substantive business press or academic sources. YD postings generally met that standard with a few notable exceptions. Bright, shiny but insubstantial or incorrect articles were posted occasionally, but earned the specified points nonetheless. Those posts did generate feedback from the instructor and discussion ensued about the relative value/accuracy of these articles. The instructor saw these discussions as an opportunity to help students begin to think critically about the sources of their information and to challenge opinions or conclusions with which they disagreed. There were some great discussions as students elaborated on course content.

Outcomes & Observations

I was not particularly enthused about doing a pilot program this fall with all the other variables of online education during the pandemic. I have become however a great fan of YD as a teaching tool.

My biggest insight was in line with the educational philosophy I'd been using, but moved my teaching practice to a new, higher level. YD talks about courses as a learning community. It is a significant shift in thinking about the classroom not as a sage on the stage or even a facilitated learning opportunity (FLO, my practice style) to think of my role as a member, albeit a senior member, of the learning community of students. I adopted this language and it resulted in a very different class approach.

To enhance engagement this semester and to build a strong learning community, ENCE 665 also expanded its use of Zoom and Zoom breakout rooms. In prior semesters of online teaching the typical Zoom meeting began with a social check-in, moved to questions for understanding, and then dug into more detailed review and application of the week's material. Students were selectively participative in that model with the extraverts reliably carrying the discussion.

This semester, in conjunction with the YD pilot, the Zoom agenda radically changed. The change at its core was for the students to be responsible for teaching content each week to the class. This was accomplished by posting 6 topics, content and/or application of content) in Canvas groups. Initially, students were simply randomly assigned to these topics. Later they were free to choose the topic they preferred. Student teams of 5 were tasked with working together and developing a comprehensive, concise presentation to be delivered each week.

As a result of these weekly teams, the students developed much deeper personal relationships than I've seen developed through classroom team projects and seemed quite motivated about the weekly presentations. The introverts and the extraverts were nearly indistinguishable each week in Zoom sessions. Teams

were subject to questions from their classmates and me on their presentations. If a team member stumbled, other team members graciously helped them out.

This Zoom process seems to have supported the ease of discussion in YD for the students. Students were noticeably interested in the welfare of their classmates this semester. When offered the choice of randomly assigned teams, personally selected teams, or teams set by the instructor to assure a mix of experience, performance so far in class, and demographics, the students selected the instructor assigned teams.

YD and Zoom in combination seem to have ignited a higher level of self-directed learning among the class with everyone participating. The presentation skills of the students improved markedly, and they report learning a great deal from these weekly small team activities.

YD discussions around stress, energy and time management resulted in extending the Zoom discussions with students sharing obstacles and success stories, as well as offering a collegial consult to fellow learners. Discussions on race, gender, and culture/religious bias continued into YD with some remarkably candid self-disclosures from students who had gained new insight from their course work and discussions. These candid self-disclosures resulted in very supportive comments from their fellow learners.

CHANGES TO THE COURSE FOR SPRING 2021

The professor has modified ENCE 665 as follows in response to feedback from the fall 2020 pilot.

- Total Point Goal

The feedback asked for a major reduction in the total point goal from 14,000 to something much less, say 5,000. In reviewing results of participation for the fall semester, the average points earned were in the high 12,000's and the mode of points earned was 14,000. Students clearly made the effort and were able to attain the point goal.

Significant reductions in assignments were made to accommodate YD during the fall semester. Pearl diving essays went from 14 to 3 and midterm and final exams were replaced with weekly comprehensive quizzes.

Fall survey results also reported that 76% of respondents would recommend YD to their peers and 84% recommended continuation with YD as part of the course. These data supported not dramatically reducing the points goal for the semester.

Fall 2020	14,000
Spring 2021	14,025

- YD Extra Credit or Not Graded

Neither extra credit nor an ungraded assignment seemed reasonable given the replacement of YD for other graded assignments. From a teaching standpoint, the reach of instructor comments is much greater on YD.

- Points Awarded

Students reported that high quality posts and comments should earn more points if the overall point goal remained the same. Rather than reduce the point goal overall, points for types of posts were increased.

	Fall 2020	Spring 2021
Total Point Goal	14,000	14,025
Weekly Goal	1,000	825
Weekly Buffer	250	330
Total Max Weekly Points	1,250	1,155
New Post, 40-word min	150	200
New comment, 20-word min	80	80
Receiving comment	55	50 (recommended)
Receiving reaction	30	25 recommended)

Note that this semester is longer by a week or two so the workload is actually a bit less. Increase in buffer points per week will provide students with greater week to week flexibility.

- Length of Posts for Points Awards

Per survey data that suggested students felt the word length was too arbitrary, length of posts was not reduced, but points awarded were increased.

- Quality of Posts Evaluated

Students reported on the survey that they felt some were chasing points by posting banal posts that met the word count. I found little of that, but this semester I have added negative points as an instructor option so that point chasing comments can be disincentivized early in the semester, if necessary.

SURVEY RESULTS

What did you like most about using Yellowdig and why?
Weekly articles were very helpful, got some insights and tools I have used in other courses as well.
Great forum for sharing ideas openly.
Reading through each post has been especially enriching and educational. I like how you can attach files and like a post.
Variety of information shared. Opportunity to discuss/share opinions. Opportunity to boost grade.
GUI is very interactive. It fits the mental map of many social media applications we use daily. It allows us to post content, comment on others content and put reactions on it. Also allows to define the post like "discussion builder", "Informative" etc.
I like the more in-depth nature of conversation. Access to the professor remotely.
Great internal university platform to share questions about content and homework to the whole class, including the professor. Sometimes it's hard or impossible to coordinate with fellow students outside of class so Yellowdig made this much easier.
What did you like least about Yellowdig and why?
Extremely forced due to an exceptionally high point goal. Subsequently, this made it very time-consuming and promoted posting quantity over quality. That is, most posts were completely contrived and not educational, contrary to the entire reason for Yellowdig (i.e. to insight class participation as an educational tool). I very much dislike social media; therefore, Yellowdig being modeled to act as such was very off-putting.
Time spent on Yellowdig took time that could be spent on the course material that would be graded. I do not think that is fair distribution of how points are awarded and some people really contributed nothing but still received credit because they 'made a post' about something regarding nothing.
It felt relentless at times especially when other class assignments hit crunch time. With 30 people in the class, there were nearly 3000 posts from the semester. I feel like I missed a lot of discussion because there was just too much content.
That it's mandated. Point load is too much, it's like mandated socializing.

<p>It was a bit difficult to keep up with all the posts and how they became "old" feed quickly. Also, the points that were required for each week didn't allow for a nice discussion because there ended up being so many posts for a few weeks.</p>
<p>I didn't appreciate the fact that you had to have a certain amount of words in a post for points. Instead of making it point based, it could be post based (i.e. comment = 80 points, posts = 150 points, etc). With this you do run into the risk of having people post anything just to get points, but at this point in our career and education, people should know better or do something to learn than just to get by.</p>
<p>My only dislike is that Yellowdig is made compulsory and has points associated to my final grade. Certain weeks it felt like I had to just comment/post just to get that grade.</p>
<p>A lot of work for not a lot of points.</p>

How Often Did You Check Yellowdig?	
Daily	9 (36%)
Once per week	3 (12%)
2-3 Times per week	11 (44%)
Other	2 (8%)
<p>Comments on Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many at first in the semester but this died off after I realized it had no educational value. Completely unengaging, just glorified busy work. Very inappropriate and demeaning to graduate students, many of whom have years of experience in the private and public sector. • It depended, usually twice a week, sometimes once a week, sometimes 3 times a week, sometimes I didn't visit YD at all in a week 	

How many hours per week do you spend Yellowdig?	
Less than 1 hour per week	
1-2 hours per week	11 (44%)
3-4 hours per week	12 (48%)
Other	2 (8%)

How did you use Yellowdig?	
Post new content	2 (8%)
Generally just respond to other people's posts	1 (4%)
Post new content AND comment on other people's posts.	22 (88%)

How has (or has not) Yellowdig supported your learning this semester?
What I learned in in class was strengthened by posts made on YD.
Provided me with great research-based articles about topics we've learned; I plan on referencing some of those articles in the future. Allowed me the chance to get to know my classmates a little better, considering the class was online.
It was good to read differing perspectives. I view it as blogging (not in a good way). Not a fan overall would rather have to do more quality/live interaction then sit and read a post
Helped to understand the material better, given a much wider perspective on ideas discussed in class.
It absolutely stunted my experience, decreased my overall respect for the program, and would never recommend it to anyone. I will now go out of my way to make sure any future courses I enroll in does not have Yellowdig (or any similar forced participation platform).
It has helped me interact with other students on various topics for the course, which wouldn't have been possible in class It looks and feels very much like many social media applications which made it easy to understand and use it.
I learned a lot from all the articles everyone posted, got great feedback on mine. Quite difficult to use and understand at the beginning esp w the class points breakdown and such. Maybe at the beginning of the semester, the professor could share a slide on class breakdown of points w YD and also if there's a YD training video, the students can watch that - just so it's easier to get a head start and everyone has a reference for future. It's pretty intuitive otherwise.
Classmates provided some good information that was not covered in class. It made the class more inviting. Because so much discussion occurred outside class, it made the discussion easier during class.

Would You Recommend Yellowdig to Your Peers?	
Yes	19 (76%)
No	6 (24%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be helpful to people who need a bit more time to gather their thoughts when making a reply. • I think if it's used well, it can promote good conversation. • For a graduate program, students should want to dive deeper on their own, these weekly participation activities at face value seem to be catering to the lowest denominator of the class who ultimately don't participate purposefully in Yellowdig. 	

Do you think we should continue the use of Yellowdig as part of the course curriculum?	
Yes	21 (84%)
No	4 (16%)
<p>Comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please consider if this could be done in Canvas. It seemed clunky to transition between platforms. • It's very informative and provides more lessons on use and application of class content through various posts by class community. It also keeps all students highly engaged in class discussions each week. • It is a great tool but there should be a very creative way grading the content just to deter students from posting "irrelevant" content just for the sake of posting. • I would continue this but keep the weekly points a bit lower as people started to post too much and some weeks were tough to catch up on all the posts. • Compared to canvas discussion boards its better, I don't necessarily see the value of either though. • But do not integrate it with final grade. I felt 10% being tied to it is too much because there are certain weeks where you just do not/cannot do it. Also, it is not fair for people who put in a lot of effort to search for new articles compared to people who can just comment 80 words. 	

- This is already a challenging/demanding course load between watching weekly videos, lots of reading, studying, quizzes, zoom sessions, etc.... Take something away if you want to add more.

ENCE 666 COST ENGINEERING & CONTROL

21 STUDENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course covers analytical techniques to estimate and control project costs, including site investigation, quantity takeoff, work analysis, and bid preparation. Systematic cost control as related to job production and historical data. It also includes the fundamentals of different types of cost estimating, the appropriate use of each, and examination of popular software.

HOW YELLOWDIG WAS USED IN THE COURSE

The Yellowdig assignments started the week of 9/27 after resolving some technical conflicts with Yellowdig. Each week topics were added by the professor to keep the class focused and have a diversified list of topics as the semester progressed. The diverse topics included community info, breaking news, introduction, questions, planning and scheduling, estimating and bidding, change orders, real life experiences, project controls, smart construction, Shark Tank innovation ideas, Shark Tank reality TV show on innovations, and Impacts of COVID-19 on construction. Some of these topics significantly helped the students prepare for the end of semester team presentations.

The quality of the posting and commenting were very good, and the students put in some quality time to produce them. The diversity of topics led to many very interesting posts (261) and comments (699) for a substantial number of transactions (960), for a total of 11 weeks. Most of the students were very active in Yellowdig putting in several hours per week. Some of the posting were discussed during face-to-face class time. The professor was also able to comment to the students in Yellowdig and therefore connect with the students. The responses led many students to increase their grades. The student's work products were very good.

The point system was set up based on the number of weeks of active participation. Yellowdig participation accounted for 11% of the students' total grade (1% per week for 11 weeks). The professor used the 1,000 recommended weekly point goal from Yellowdig and allowed the students to shoot for 1,250 points which allows them to bank 250 points in a week. Some students achieved more than the 100% score by using the banking of 250 extra potential points each week. There appeared to be minimal point chasing encountered, but there must have been some going on, and it was difficult to detect and measure.

CHANGES TO THE COURSE FOR SPRING 2021

Below is a list of the planned adjustments that the professor is making for the spring 2021 semester.

- Significantly reduce the percentage amount for Yellowdig in the final course grading. Last semester it started as 15% but due to a delayed start it was reduced to 11%. For the spring 2021 semester, to minimize student concerns and point chasing, Yellowdig will only be worth 2% of the students' final grade. This will be reviewed again at the end of the semester and will be evaluated for future percentage grading.
- Decrease the weekly target points for a post and comments to facilitate getting to the goal of 500 points. Last semester it was 1,000 points.
- Postings will be worth 300 points. Comments, both outgoing and received will be worth 100 points. Goal is to have one quality post and two quality comments per week. This is more manageable for the students.
- Weekly periodic buffer will be 25% bringing the maximum scoring per week from 500 points to 625 points with buffer.
- There will be a minimum of 12 weeks participation.
- There will be a Yellowdig orientation during the first week of classes.
- Integrate Yellowdig more in the Zoom class.
- Start the weekly Yellowdig point period on Saturday morning and end on Friday night.

SURVEY RESULTS

What did you like most about using Yellowdig and why?
It's nice to discuss applications to our careers that we don't often discuss in class.
It js very interactive about relevant topics in the industry. It provides an opportunity to connect with peers to discuss various topics.
The students who decided to participate presented good articles and ideas about new technologies in the construction industry.
I get to know more than I can find myself and other people's perspectives.

I like that it automatically calculates points, so you don't have to rely on a professor to count everything correctly. I like that you can click "read" and collapse posts that you have commented on so that it is easy to find new posts.

Classmates' new ideas of topics different opinions on the same topic.

What did you like least about Yellowdig and why?

It was just added work, on top of all of the other assignments, quizzes, exams, and case studies we had. It also didn't have a clear point. Many students just shared random articles just to get points.

The limit of 80 points per post coupled with a class requirement of 1000 points per week led most in the class, including myself, to post about things we didn't care about just to get enough points.

I do not think that works any better than the ELMS discussion boards at generating real discussions between students. Forced participation hardly ever creates real conversations, just words made to get the points. I dislike that you must choose a topic.

That it's a part of grading. It's like mandated socializing. That's not fair. It should be promoted and people not participating shouldn't be penalized. Especially during a pandemic when people have more pressing matters at hand. And if it asks for a great deal of attention every week, then at least there should be some extra credit assignment that can cover for it. Or the weekly quota shouldn't be any more than 200 points.

The fact that it is another stand-alone application. Could have been convenient if it was integrated into ELMS.

I do not pay tuition to search an article and post it on Yellowdig. If I were to do it, I can always do it for free. Too much info on internet and we are required to stare at screen when we are paying thousands of dollars to make human connection and acquire experience. Yellowdig is okay, if we were to make a single post, single comment... This way, we can learn something useful from choice of our liking, instead of making 6-7 different posts, 10+ comments...

It requires the participation of others to be successful and receive enough points. It's not easy to add another thing to do several times per week to my schedule. It often takes a backseat to more pressing daily activities.

Comments need to be properly sorted by date/topic, hard to find specific posts otherwise. Points should be displayed even beyond the minimum needed per week (1,250)

Point structure could use improvement.

How Often Did You Check Yellowdig?	
Once per week	7
2-3 Times per week	8
Other	2

How many hours per week do you spend Yellowdig?	
Less than 1 hour per week	5
1-2 hours per week	7
3-4 hours per week	5

How did you use Yellowdig?	
Post new content	2
Generally, just respond to other people's posts	3
Post new content AND comment on other people's posts.	12

How has (or has not) Yellowdig supported your learning this semester?
DID NOT SUPPORT. It was a complete and absolute burden. However, I could see a use in undergraduate classes with the following improvements: A - Reduce the weekly goal of 1000 points OR B - increase the max post value (currently 80) to encourage more thoughtful posts as opposed to numerous thoughtless posts for "point chasing".
For this class... I learned about new technologies in the industry, which was very interesting and noteworthy.
The articles that other shared helped broach new topics.
I don't think it made a positive difference.
Yes, but just general information. Nothing really specific to the coursework.
Additional research on topics covered in class; exchanging ideas on the same information; and additional information from others on the topics

It has opened up discussion about real world application, but it has also added unnecessary time spent looking at similar articles and repetitive discussion.

It has done very little to support my learning, it has taken away time from focusing on things more important to my course studies.

Would You Recommend Yellowdig to Your Peers?

Yes	6
No	11

Do you think we should continue the use of Yellowdig as part of the course curriculum?

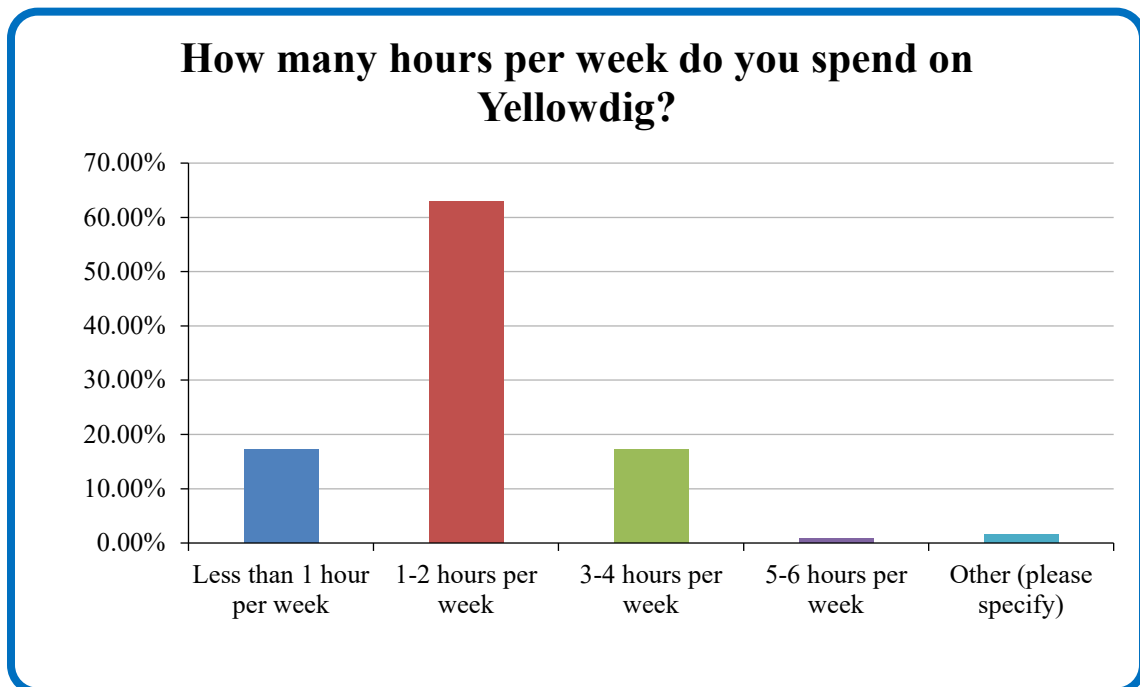
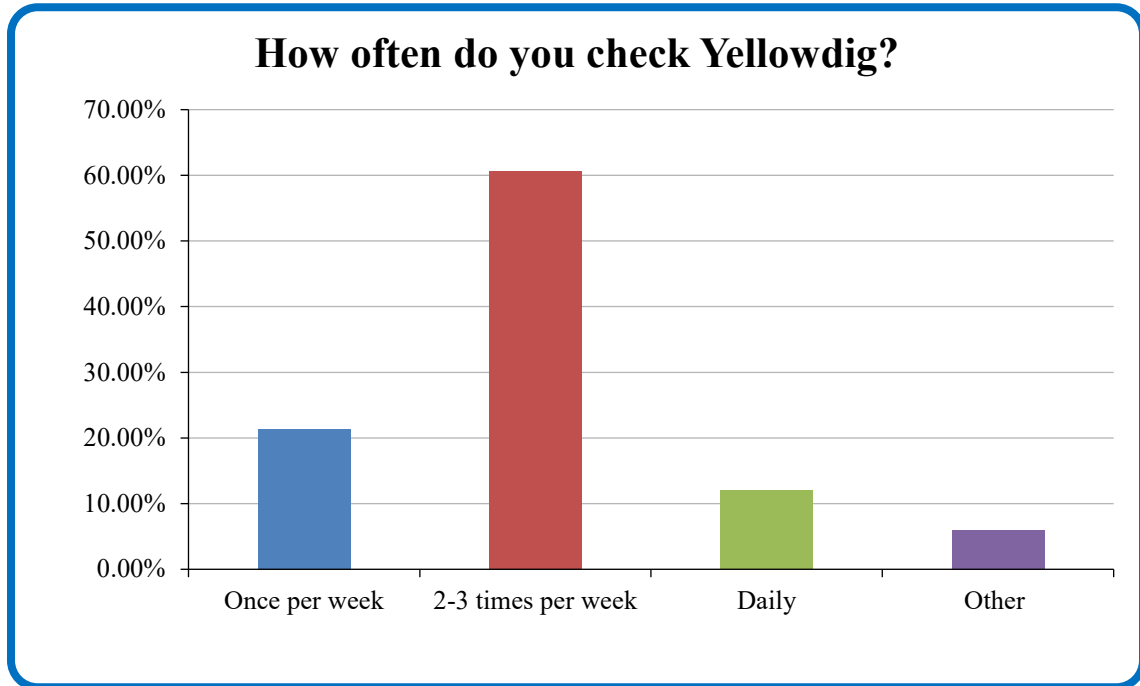
Yes	6
No	10
No Answer	1

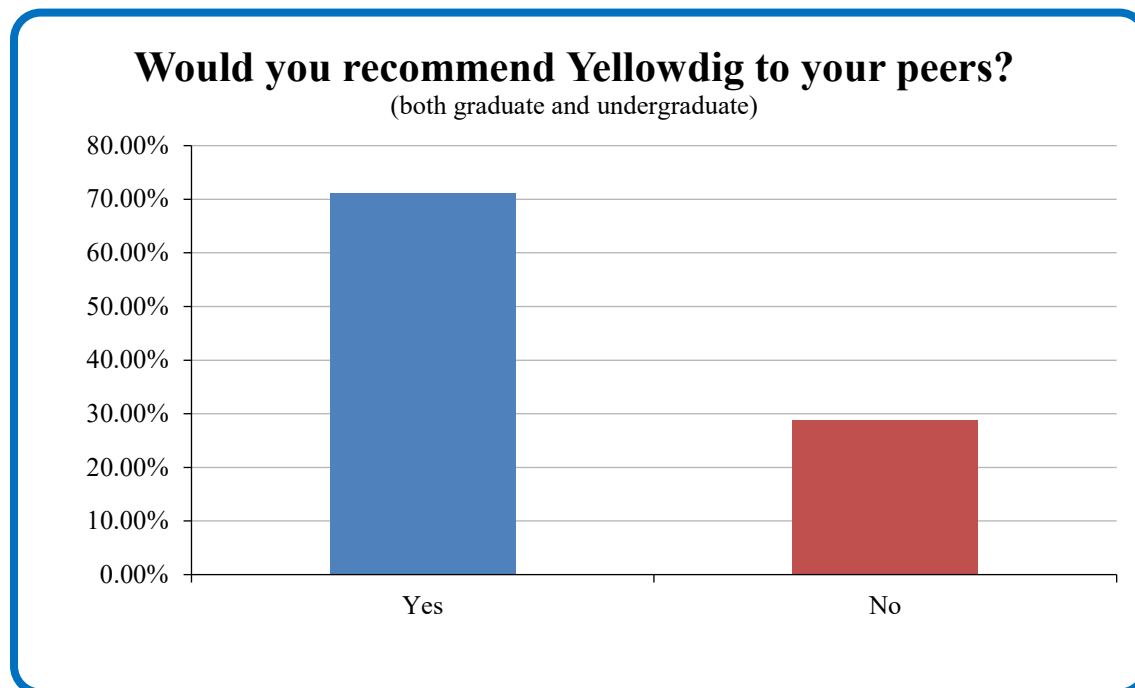
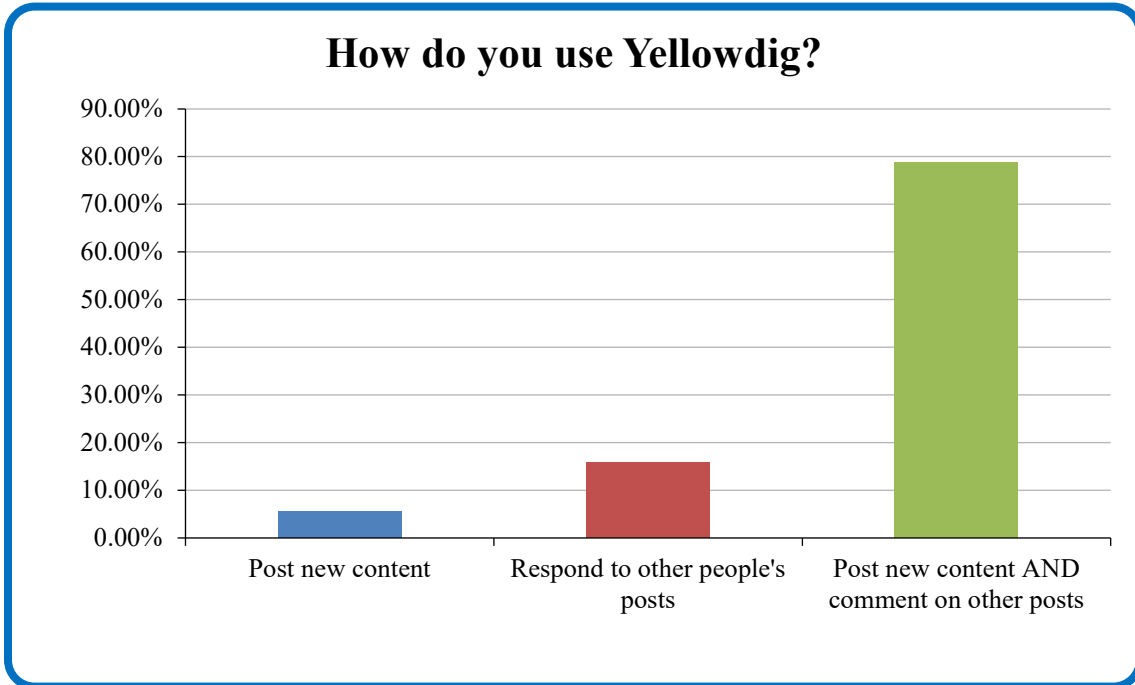
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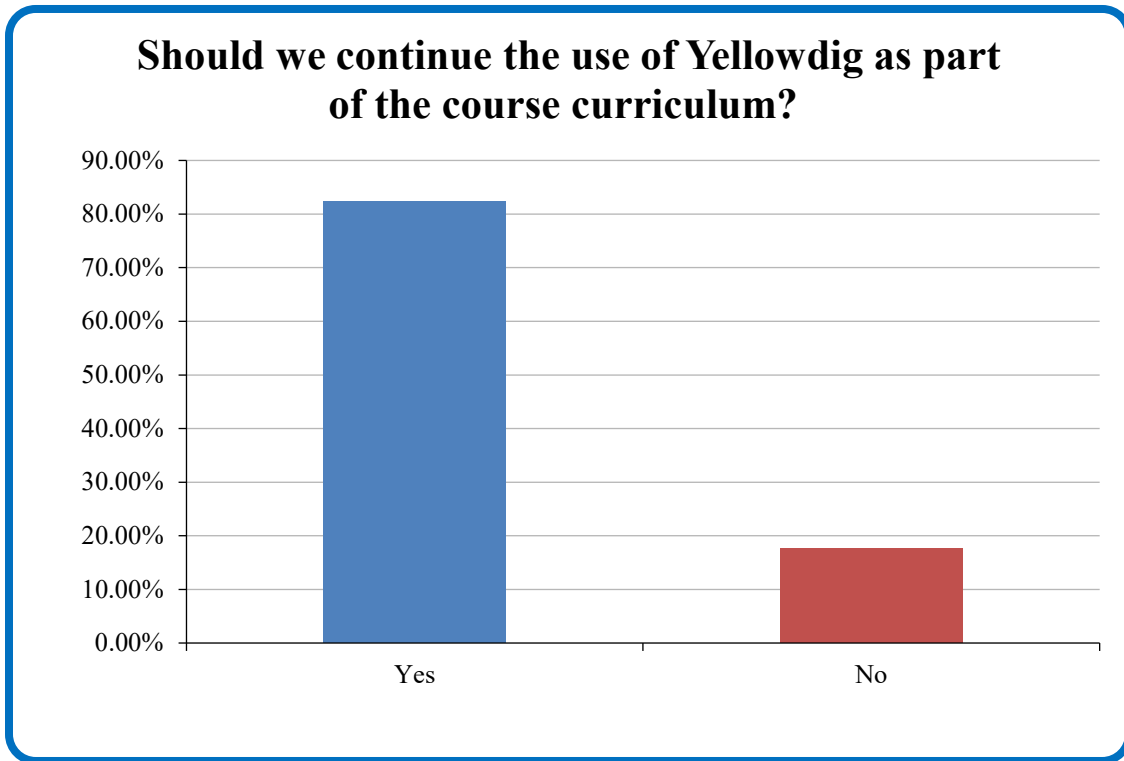
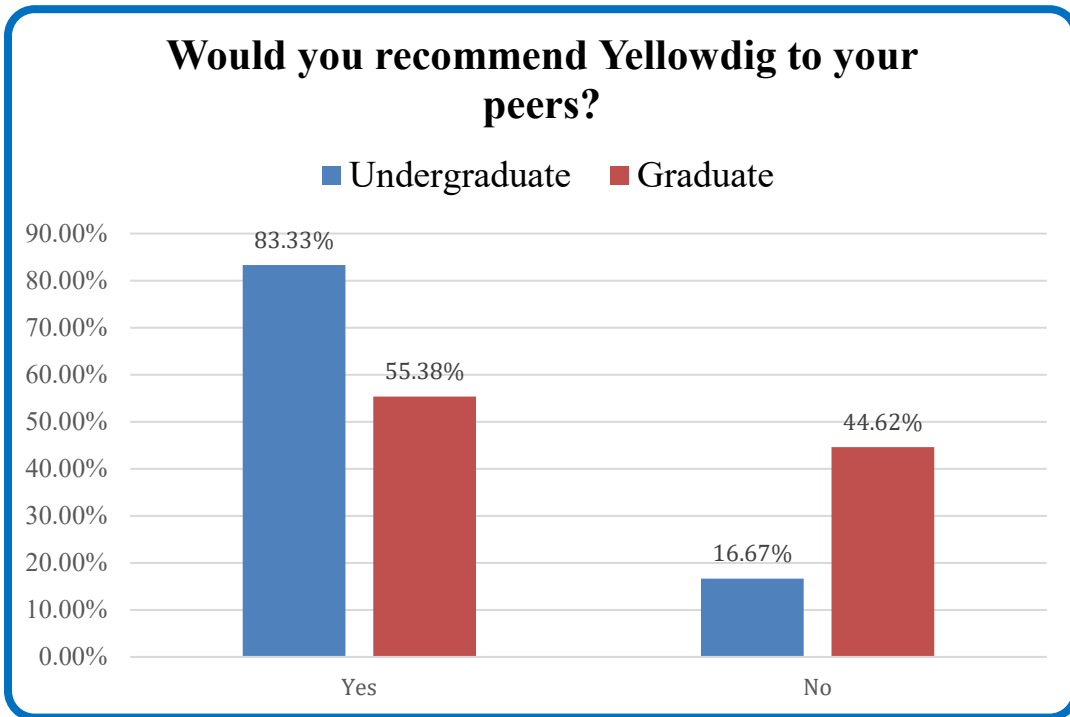
- Should maybe be for extra credit.
- This type of assignment has no place in a professional course in its current form.
- I just adds more work to the students and the topics discussed were really scattered.
- Does not fit well with how the content of this course is delivered. Not enough people from the class participate. The point count is too high if the Professor is not awarding accolades.
- I feel like a separate application just for a discussion board is unnecessary. This could have been easily achieved through a graded discussion board via Canvas.
- It is a positive way to exchange ideas and learn outside of the classroom.
- Yes but not for grading purposes.
- It helps students to get more insight about the real-world experience.
- Yes, lots of potential for sure. Can be a gamechanger with a few tweaks...
- It should be part of curriculum but with less percentage allocated to it.
- It can be continued without grading. Maybe extra credit can be given to those who excell at it. No should lose any grade because of yellow dig.

Graphs of Specific Survey Questions

The 241 surveyed students also gave their feedback on their experiences learning with the tool, as well as offering other insights.







Students surveyed offered feedback about what they liked and disliked about Yellowdig, and how using the platform supported (or didn't support) their learning. Generally, their responses were positive, as follows:

- It helped me process class information better, since I could see what my classmates were learning. It allowed my classmates to give me help and support when I needed it, and it gave a feeling of closure with that week's class material.
- It created a sense of community and I was able to ask questions when confused.
- It helped maintain a more typical university experience that online classes due to COVID have drastically taken away from students. While there is no virtual replacement that comes close to an in-class experience, this was nice to have.
- It allowed seeing how the context of the class can be applied to the real world. It has allowed for the outside class conversation to arise.
- I think it's a good way to get a class participation grade and it's a good way to stay connected to the class.
- I think it enhances student involvement and allows people to learn from not only the professor, but from other students.
- Yellowdig is the most interactive platform I've used so far, especially in a purely virtual environment. It also gives students a good opportunity to get a different perspective on certain topics.
- I liked being able to build a sense of community, even though the course was fully online. I really liked the way Yellowdig tracked your word counts and your points for the week and the whole semester.
- This has really allowed me to make connections from the class topics into real life. I look for ways I can interestingly related content to the real world, allowing for applications to be made that I normally wouldn't think of, and it helped me have a feeling of a class bond that would have been there with simply a virtual classroom.
- Yellowdig helped further discussions about what we read in class in the assigned readings, which we didn't always get to discuss in class.
- Yellowdig was far superior to other discussion board assignments I have had in other classes.
- I think it was neat to access the multitude of resources and links that students post by scrolling through a feed.

Students with less favorable feedback cited that the point quota for posts was too high, and that some posts were irrelevant, misleading, or did not provide valuable information. Some felt that it often became too difficult to keep track and stay engaged with the content as frequently as expected, and that using the platform didn't feel as "organic" as it had been portrayed at the beginning of the semester.