10. Sample Learning Activities 6-8: Ethics, Genetics, and Disability Small Group Activities

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CHAPTER 10
Sample Learning Activities 6–8
Ethics, Genetics, and Disability
Small Group Activities

This chapter illustrates the pedagogical benefits of MUVE small group discussions described in Chapter 9 by presenting three in-depth illustrations of basic-level small group MUVE learning activities: Ethics, Genetics, and Disabilities Discussion Groups. Descriptions of these activities will include the following: an introduction to the activity, performance outcomes, MUVE setup requirements, activity procedures, and evaluation methods.

This chapter is for you if:

1. You are interested MUVE small group learning activities.
2. You are planning your first MUVE small group learning activity.
3. You are interested in the format of a simple topical discussion group.

Sample Learning Activity 6: Ethics Discussion Group

Introduction and Purpose

In this activity, students apply ethics course work in a small group setting in a MUVE. The purpose of this learning activity is to engage undergraduate students in small group discussions in which they apply ethics concepts reviewed in class to specific ethical issues.

Target Population

The activity works best when there are five to six students in each discussion group. The assignment is most successful when a student is assigned to lead the group discussion. One way to orient students to group leadership is to provide all students with a list of expectations for group leadership. The course instructor may choose to lead the first discussion group, to provide role modeling.
Performance Outcomes

At the end of each thirty-minute ethics discussion group, participants will have demonstrated the following (the asterisk refers to objectives for the designated group leader alone):

1. Identification of ethical principles (autonomy, fidelity, beneficence, nonmaleficence, paternalism) illustrated in the ethical dilemma under discussion.

2. Identification of the ethical principle that most describes their own personal view of the ethical dilemma under discussion.

3. Approximately equal contributions from all participants.

4. At least one instance of feedback to a peer during the discussion (agreeing, disagreeing, affirming, requesting an expansion of or query about their statement, etc.).

5. Participation in formulation of a consensus statement for the questions posed in the discussion group assignments.

*6. The group leader will welcome students, start the group on time, state the group task, facilitate the group discussion, assist the group with staying on task, serve as timekeeper, end the discussion on time, and send the discussion transcript to participants and the course instructor after the activity is completed.

Instructional Note: To achieve full credit points for this activity, each student is expected to contribute in both volume and quality of input and to respond to another group member at least once. The group as a whole is expected to complete the assigned task within the time allotted.

MUVE Setup

There are no particular setup requirements for the Ethics Discussion Group. The class should receive orientation to the activity in writing and in class so any questions about the activity can be answered prior to the day of the activity. The location for the learning activity can either be assigned by the instructor or selected by the group leader. The location of the learning activity should be selected on the basis of its privacy and other esthetic criteria. For example, a beautiful and secluded environment that appears comfortable may help participants feel relaxed and comfortable with sharing difficult ideas.
Activity Procedures

1. Group signup: The instructor may assign discussion groups or the class may form groups independently. For logistical ease, it is usually best to have students pick their own group to participate in. Group members who know each other’s schedule often find it easier to agree on meeting times for the activity. It works well to either assign leaders or to offer extra credit for students willing to be group leaders. In either case, group leaders post the time, date, and location of the MUVE learning activity they are leading. Students can then sign up with them directly. This can be done in class if the course meets in person or online in an online discussion thread in an online course.

2. Discussion group membership: Small MUVE discussion groups work best with six participants (one leader, five participants). A seventh participant makes the group cumbersome, and it often takes the group longer to complete group tasks. (I typically exercise some flexibility here depending on class size.) Eight or more students are not recommended for this activity. Groups of fewer than four participants are not recommended.

3. The instructor e-mails group leaders the topic for group discussion and the leadership evaluation matrix so that leaders are clear what is expected of them. The group members are sent a description of the discussion assignment and the assignment grading matrix.

4. The group meets in the MUVE region they have selected and the discussion is completed within the specified time period. Note: individuals who arrive late have points deducted, and it is recommended that they not receive credit for the assignment if they are more than a few minutes late. Because this assignment is relatively short and the flow of discussion easily disrupted, it is essential that all group members are on time for the assignment.

5. The small group leader copies the discussion transcript and mails it to all group members and the course instructor.

6. Depending on the assignment evaluation plan, individual, peer, and/or group evaluations are completed by the students and group leaders.

7. Grades and feedback are distributed to groups, individual members, and the group leader.

8. The instructor completes formative and summative evaluation for the learning activity, including quantifiable student performance data and anecdotal data from student feedback and comments.
Evaluation

Formative and summative evaluation is completed by the instructor. Average percentages for student grades, percentages of individuals who met the assignment objectives, and performance scores for the class as a whole can be summarized to track individual, class, and learning activity performance. If a portfolio evaluation is used for the class, copies of the activity transcript, completed grading matrices, areas of strengths and opportunities for improvement, and the self, peer, and group evaluations can all become elements of the portfolio. (See Appendixes 6–9 for samples of student self, peer, and group evaluation matrices, as well as instructor summary forms.)

Instructional Notes: The designation of a group leader is essential for the success of this activity. MUVE discussion groups without leaders often struggle with task completion and group process. An assigned group leader supports a better learning activity and development of leadership skills. It also enables the instructor to focus primarily on evaluation and feedback for the activity.

For classes that meet in person, MUVE learning activities can be done in lieu of class time. If the class is mandatory, class time can be shortened. When offering a MUVE alternative to an in-class assignment such as a discussion group, the last forty-five to sixty minutes of class can be devoted to the discussion group, and students doing the MUVE activity can leave the class. If the assignment is mandatory for all students, the instructor has the option of shortening class accordingly.

Sample Learning Activity 7: Genetics Discussion Group

Introduction and Purpose

The goal of this learning activity is student application of knowledge about family genetic charts to discussion of genetic disease transmission. This will include calculation of disease probability for diseases associated with dominant or recessive gene inheritance and application of course genetics content to a discussion of specific family case studies.

Target Population

This activity is particularly good for small group discussions. At the undergraduate level, the activity should be led by an instructor. Graduate students can do this activity independently in small groups.
Performance Outcomes

Upon completion of a thirty-minute learning activity, students will have:

1. Evaluated three family genetic charts, identifying and discussing the modes of transmission for each of the charts.
2. Given examples of diseases that are represented by the type of genetic abnormality transmission for each chart evaluated.
3. Demonstrated effective participation in the group discussion, including substantive contributions as well as feedback to peers.

MUVE Setup

The only setup requirement is the identification of a location on Genome Island in Second Life® that is suitable for a small group discussion. The outdoor lounge at the laboratory is ideal.

Activity Procedures

1. Students will be oriented to the small group activity and assigned a small group, which will agree on a date and time to meet inworld.
2. The small group will meet at the Genome Island landing area and proceed to the lounge platform of the laboratory structure (near the landing area).
3. For thirty minutes, students will click on one of the family genetic charts that hover over the lounge area. The group will discuss the genetic transmission it represents, as well as the diseases that are transmitted in that manner. Instructors can highlight specific issues related to the type of transmission and lead a discussion of specific diseases.
4. At the end of the discussion period, students copy the discussion transcript and send it to the instructor, along with sketches of each chart that was discussed and their individual, peer, and/or group evaluation.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this learning activity will depend on the instructor’s criteria for each chart the group discusses. Points are also awarded based on student
contributions to the group activity as well as their feedback to peers during the activity. A sample grading matrix is included in Appendix 10.

**Sample Learning Activity 8: Disabilities Discussion Group**

*Introduction and Purpose*

In this learning activity, a small group of students will explore Second Life®’s Virtual Ability Island to introduce a range of topics related to caring for individuals with disabilities.

*Target Population*

This activity is particularly good for small groups of undergraduate students, who can build on this treasure hunt with later group discussions on a wide variety of topics involving caring for people with disabilities. This learning activity does not require an assigned leader, but it is required that the group stay together (the group should not divide up to find the items). This can be evaluated using the activity transcript, which is required for learning activity evaluation.

*Performance Outcomes*

Upon completion of a thirty-minute learning activity, students will have worked together as a group to locate resources on the island that will help them demonstrate the following:

1. Description of four kinds of access barriers for people with physical disabilities.
2. Identification of a definition and description of both neurological and cognitive disabilities.
3. Identification of a definition and description of auditory and speech disabilities, as well as two strategies for working with each.
4. Discussion of issues related to the public image of people with disabilities and identification of terms that can be used to describe those who are disabled.
5. Evaluation of the learning activity transcript of the learning activity and documentation of their own answers to the questions posed by the activity.
MUVE Setup

None.

Activity Procedures

1. Students will be oriented to the small group activity and assigned a small group. The group will agree on a date and time to meet in Second Life®.

2. The small group will meet at the Virtual Ability Island landing area and proceed to the series of connected informational platforms that present a number of issues related to a variety of types of disability.

3. For thirty minutes, students will explore each of the platforms together, reading and reviewing the presentation material to answer the assignment questions.

4. At the end of the discussion period, students will copy the discussion transcript and send it to the instructor, along with answers to the assignment questions and summaries of individual, peer, and/or group evaluations.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this learning activity will depend on the instructor’s evaluation of the extent to which each group met the learning activities. For a sample of a grading matrix that can be used, see Appendix 11.

Reader’s Roadmap: Where Are We?

Part II concludes with Chapters 11 and 12, which present two complex small group MUVE learning activities. The Clinical Rounds learning activity in Chapter 11 illustrates a MUVE learning activity with complex content and structure. The Building Small Group Consensus Skills learning activity in Chapter 12 focuses on complex group dynamics and team-building competencies.