Student-Generated Digital Flashcards and the Learning of Constitutional Law

Dr. Manjo Oyson
Lecturer (Law), Law Discipline
School of Business and Law
Central Queensland University

Introduction

- Student engagement with on-campus life is in decline.
- The use of engaging assessment activities helps improve student experience, learning, and retention.
- The study examined whether the creation of cloud-based digital flashcards, as an assessment activity, by Constitutional Law students enhanced their learning and student experience.
- The assessment task was designed to encourage deep learning by encouraging students to relate new knowledge to what they already knew and their everyday experiences.
- The task, which involved creating learning artifacts, was also aimed at promoting active learning and meeting the learning needs of “digital natives”.
- The digital flashcards were also meant to comprise new learning resources that could be used by other students as study aids.

Methodology

- Students were asked to answer an online survey (how many answered?) using Qualtrics.
- An online focus group with 5 volunteers was also conducted to follow up on some of the significant themes identified in the survey data.
- Student grades were analysed.

Findings

Survey Results (59% response rate).

- Overall value of the digital flashcards. A majority of students (58%) rated the overall value of the digital flashcards as above average or poor, while 24% rated it as average.
- Learning of Constitutional Law. A majority felt that creating digital flashcards did not make the learning of Constitutional Law more interesting (59.5%) and did not help them understand Constitutional Law (51.9%).
- Complexity of assessment. 85.6% of students found the assessment challenging.
- Use of flashcards of other students. Most did not feel that using flashcards developed by other students helped them learn Constitutional Law (75%) or in their exam preparation (68.3%).

Focus Group Results.

- Relevance and value. The strong negative response to the assessment task centred on the relevance and value of building digital flashcards to student learning and future work.
- Assignment of topics. The assignment of topics was perceived by some students as unfair and contentious. Students felt that topics were not the same in terms of importance, difficulty, and alignment with the final exams.
- Software related issues. Students had serious concerns about having to learn the online software, Flashcard, and about technical issues involving formatting, having no spell-checker, and web browser compatibility.

Other Findings.

- Although there were more students who earned High Distinctions in their digital flashcard assessment (22.5%) than in the Legal Memorandum assessment (15.5%) and the final examination (15.5%), more students failed the digital flashcard assessment (16.9%) than in doing the Legal Memorandum (11.3%).
- The digital flashcard assessment had an equal number of students with Fail marks as the final examination.

- Of the 19 students (27%) who submitted their draft digital flashcards for formative feedback, 47% earned High Distinctions and Distinctions in their three key assessments and final grades. Six students (31.6%) failed in the digital flashcard assessment despite submitting their draft digital flashcards for formative feedback.

- Students tended to choose digital flashcards that were easiest to make, such as: question and answer cards, legislation cards, case, and secondary source cards.
- Most students did the assessment individually.

Conclusion

Digital flashcards can remain a useful learning resource for students, especially if created by teachers. For the creation of digital flashcards to be valued by students as an assessment task: 1) students should be given an option to choose from a few topics; 2) more effort should be exerted to explain the value and importance of the assessment task; 3) the web-based software must be stable and reliable; 4) the use of alternative software (e.g. MS Powerpoint) should be considered; and 5) fewer assessment tasks should be given.

The Assessment Task

- Students were tasked with creating 12 to 20 digital flashcards – out of thirteen types of digital flashcards – covering a randomly-assigned topic of Constitutional Law. Six types.
- For this assessment, you are required to develop and submit twenty digital flashcards that use at least six (of the thirteen) types.
- Students could work individually or in self-selected pairs.
- The digital flashcards were to be assessed according to the following marking criteria: overall content, evidence and argument (40%), overall creativity (15%), overall interpretation and evidence (15%), organisation (10%), style and format of flashcards (10%), use of at least six types of flashcards (5%) and referencing (5%).
- The digital flashcard assessment comprised 20% of students’ final marks. Other assessment tasks included a final examination (40%), legal memorandum (30%), and online participation (10%).
- To develop their digital flashcards, students had to use Flashcard, a free online software.
- Students were encouraged to submit a draft of their digital flashcards for formative feedback.

Types of Digital Flashcards

1. Case card – details the facts, points of law and outcomes of a case. The card should include the full reference and a link to full text where available.
2. Legislation card – details legislation, subordinate legislation, rules, or practice directions. The point of law should be stated. Links should be provided to the legislation and any relevant case cards.
3. Flowchart card – visually depicts a series of events or processes. It may take several forms: A diagram with links to other cards; a series of check boxes enabling a process to be followed.
4. Legal Principle card – identifies a key legal principle, along with its primary authority.
5. Review card – asks a question requiring a response. This may be a multiple-choice question, short answer question, reflection, etc.
6. Audio-visual card – this card requires the embedding or a link to a dynamic element such as an animation, film, YouTube film, interactive reveal etc. The audio-visual card should also identify the legal principal and link to any supporting materials.
7. Consumerism card – presents a legal dilemma, or something within the law, which seems unreasonable or otherwise noteworthy.
8. Secondary source card – contains information or issues arising from a secondary source such as a book, article, newspaper clipping, report, conference paper etc. Links should be provided to the secondary source where available.
9. Comparative card – explores comparisons between different jurisdictions or cultures.
11. Practical application card – shows a real-world application of the relevant legal principle. Links should be provided to any supporting materials.
12. Discussion card – is similar to a consumer card, but the topic for discussion is more about analysing the operation of the law (as opposed to discussing its quirks and difficulties).
13. Role-play card – is designed to allow students who are studying together to work through simple problem-style issues, which call into question the legal principles discussed elsewhere in the text.