



# Using Infographics as a Teaching Tool

## Teaching Beyond the Podium Podcast

### 00:06 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Hello, my name is Alexandra Bailey and welcome to the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. This podcast is hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida. And our guests share their best tips, strategies, innovations and stories about teaching. Our guest today is Dr. Rick Cates, clinical Associate Professor of health services, research, management and policy in the College of Public Health and Health Professions. Now, Rick has had a fascinating professional life that has had numerous bends in the road. In fact, Rick explains that this is an entirely new career for him, one that he feels, uses all of his diverse talents and experiences.

### 00:49 Dr. Rick Kates

This is probably my seventh career in life. And my son had gotten a scholarship at the College of Charleston, I went back to school, and I already had an MBA when I was in corporate. And I was going to do a PhD in business. And so I started that path. And then I kind of was looking at what was going on in our country, and where could I give back. And that's when I decided to get a PhD in in policy and health management. My, my main focus is teaching and I really try to, to make a difference in our students' lives. And I, you know, today I hope to share an interesting and the worthwhile tool that I think other professors could benefit from,

### 01:34 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

In his quest to create valuable teaching and learning experiences for students, learning experiences that help students develop expertise and content and concrete skills they can apply in any field. Rick stumbled across the possibilities of having students develop infographics, as part of their course assignments or assessments. Using infographics as assignments could potentially help students synthesize the course materials and demonstrate mastery in a creative and interesting way, while learning a series of professional skills that can be applied later on in any profession they choose.

## 02:13 Dr. Rick Kates

I got exposed to that when I was working with CITT. And, you know, we looked at some ideas of how we could make a difference in terms of, you know, rather than writing a big, long paper. And so if a student can actually you give them a topic to research, and they can take all the information and make the whole make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. And what I'm getting at is their ability to take the data in the charts and the information and create a one page infographic that tells their story that that explains, you know, what's going on, or they're able to take the data and change it and modify it and have a visual element that says, Yeah, I can see that the students got the point or they tell a story, or they have a call to action. Like, it could be something as simple like, you're responsible for getting people to wash their hands at the hospital at the restaurant. And you end your infographic in one page shows the reasons why. So there's a lot of benefits to using an infographic. And I think if as a professor if you teach it the right way, and you do the groundwork upfront, that the students can have a very valuable product that you can see that they've made the connections that they're critically thinking about the material you had them research.

## 03:36 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

When Rick was first exploring the potential of using infographics and his courses, he discovered that implementing this practice can really be boiled down to four simple steps. The first step is to help students clearly understand what an infographic really is providing students with examples that help them to visualize the purpose and intent of infographics which take complex information and offer simple compelling means of sharing that through visuals, graphics, and short bits of text that all work together. Things to take into consideration are also the audience and purpose for the infographics.

## 04:15 Dr. Rick Kates

There's an excellent handout and it's called the infographic seminar handout. And this handout was given out at a seminar in 2005, which kind of shows you how long you know infographics has been around and how they started Think about it, but I would use that as a starting point to start to explain to your students what to look for, and what really is an infographic.

## 04:38 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

One of the challenges that Rick frequently encounters is overcoming students' creativity block. Often students are so comfortable with writing long papers, this format is so deeply ingrained in

them, that they shy away from creativity and may even be doubtful that their ideas can be communicated with so few words. So helping students to imagine more effective and efficient ways of communicating ideas through visuals graphs. And those short bits of texts that are carefully designed to have the greatest impact is really valuable. Students, according to Rick may need a little encouragement to get creative.

## 05:17 Dr. Rick Kates

And one of the things that students struggle with that's very different is that they haven't been creative in a while. And you almost have to joke around with them and say, you know, it's like, when was the last time you had a box of crayons and colored? And how do you? How can you think about things differently when we were doing that pops in my head was the baby boomers and how the baby boomers are, are affecting health care costs. Just one young man, he's got a picture of a little baby, and behind the baby was— it looked like a cloud or look like a mushroom and didn't quite get it right away. And I said, What are you trying to get across? He said Dr. K, it's the baby boomers, man.

## 05:59 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Step three, in building an infographics activity into your course, is sharing with students the value and impact of symbols, imagery that becomes universally recognized as representative of certain ideas. Rick shares some good examples and help students to apply these principles as they work on their own infographics.

## 06:20 Dr. Rick Kates

The one picture I like to use is you ever seen the picture of the handicap sign for the wheelchair? You got that circle, right? And then you see the person sitting in a chair? Well, it's so simple. And I can show just a little piece of it. And so I'll show the bottom of it, you'll see the wheel in the chair. And I'll ask the students, what is this? And then I'll show and, and I like to show them the whole picture. They've, they get it right away. And so the abstract is a key component to making things understandable. And making things that are very complex, almost simplified.

## 06:58 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Rick suggests that step four is helping students represent those complex problems that are typically difficult to communicate and interpret in simple yet effective ways. This means critically thinking about the intent and the audience, and the purpose of that infographic.

## 07:15 Dr. Rick Kates

The underground railroads in London, right? Well, people would try, they would try to make maps and draw the maps out. And these photographers would try to draw the maps out and put them on one card. So you can say, Hey, where are you going? This is how to get there. Well imagine all these different tunnels, it was just a Spaghetti Factory. I mean, it was a mess. And how do you simplify it? Going back to the abstract. So Harry Beck is the gentleman that came up with this idea. And what he did was, he kind of used the same concept as electricians would use, and drawing schematics. And so what he did was he drew all the tunnels, and he drew vertical, and horizontal lines, and then 45 degrees, you know, and turns and used different colors to represent the different tracks.

## 08:04 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Rick makes room for students to take ownership of their own learning. He gives them freedom and flexibility to explore topics, approaches, and tools. But he also places the responsibility for identifying the best tools and sharing those with others, right back on the students. That way, they can find the tools that are most useful and friendly to use to develop their work.

## 08:29 Dr. Rick Kates

And so where do you start? Because if you just cut them loose right away, I don't recommend that because you're not going to get the quality that you're looking for. So yes, you could do it with PowerPoint. Yes, you could do it with Word. But there's a lot of free programs out there, you can create a discussion board, and you tell all your students say, guys go out and look at what's the greatest. And then in your in your discussion, post, hey, I really liked this product. Because of this, this one was very easy to work with, and then kind of get a consensus, and then we can share that in the class.

## 09:06 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

When creating infographics or other creative forms of assessment. Quality, consistent feedback is key. It's really key to any assessment or assignment. But when encouraging students to be creative and try something new, such as developing infographics, feedback is where learning really happens for the students. So Rick takes the time to offer valuable suggestions throughout the scaffolded project.

## 09:33 Dr. Rick Kates

You got to give them feedback. And you got to say, Hey, you know, you got a little bit too much text here. Can you can you streamline that? What is your story? What are you trying to tell us? You know, what is the? What's that initial hook? What gets us excited about seeing a graphic? What do you—what is your topic, what is your title? And you know, what is your call to action maybe at the end and so that's where they start to see the value in it.

## 10:01 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Rick also makes sure to review his own teaching regularly and revisit items that may not have been clear to the students. This kind of scaffolded feedback circle creates a truly valuable learning experience for the students.

## 10:14 Dr. Rick Kates

First time I grade I'm pretty generous, you know, I'm not, I'm not going to just, you know, I grade a little bit stricter in time like, like some of the basic stuff that's often missed that we all miss that we all need to do better job is like, citing images, you know, and going to Creative Commons sites. So, I guess a lot of it is me going back and reteaching areas that maybe I was remiss on and maybe I need to do a better job on and maybe I need to explain Creative Commons to them and say, this is a good place to get a quality image that you could then modify to put into your infographic.

## 10:53 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

His infographic project wraps up with a debrief that allows students to present their work and get peer feedback, this debrief takes students learning to a different level.

## 11:04 Dr. Rick Kates

I might have the students in a you know, in a small discussion group, maybe a team creates an infographic or an individual has an infographic and then to combine that have a discussion question Where did their message get across, which is great for them too, because now they get feedback from their students. You know, after you saw this infographic did you did what was your thought in terms of providing additional services or the services that were explained about the people in, you know, the rural part of the country or or in this particular community.

## 11:39 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Rick suggests that instructors should model the use of infographics, incorporating best practices, and having students give them feedback and recommendations as they develop infographics to represent maybe the syllabus or some of the important information in the course. That way the students can see quality examples of infographics as they work through the course.

## 12:03 Dr. Rick Kates

A professor creates a master infographic that has the objectives and the concepts that they want their students to learn, and they're able to visually display it, what a cool thing to put on your, your syllabus, or another. Or maybe that's maybe you have modules, you know, you have a module in Canvas, you open it up, and there's your infographic of what you want to accomplish and what you want to do. I mean, that's really that's getting the instructor to start thinking differently about their content, and it gets the student to think differently about their content.

## 12:34 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Some students were a little hesitant to jump into this kind of creative activity. In fact, some of them seemed to prefer to simply listen to recorded lectures and study PowerPoints. It's important to remind students, though, that these kind of carefully crafted and curated learning experiences actually reflect the work that they might do in their future careers. These are skills that go hand in hand with the course content knowledge.

## 13:03 Dr. Rick Kates

Yeah, I mean, absolutely. I mean, anytime you try new things, things are gonna happen. And I guess, you know, when you're first starting off teaching, you know, you're gonna make mistakes, and you know, things happen. And I got pushback on this, because it's like, Dr. Cates, you know, I'm just here to get, you know, get the information and take the test. And, and yeah, I did get pushed back. And it did get. They weren't creative, or they weren't comfortable with it. And they were out of their comfort zone. And they just just give us the PowerPoint, tell us what we need to know on the test. And so after a while, they kind of see the value.

## 13:50 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Students are finding the value and use of their infographics as they're able to present at conferences, and in other classes, or even their professional work as they leave school. Creative assessments and assignments that tie together skills and knowledge are immensely valuable. And the students really appreciate it.

## 14:11 Dr. Rick Kates

I recently just had, we just had diversity day down the hill, and we had a poster presentations. And some of the students would use the infographics in their poster presentations. And visually, one was serving the rural community and she had the community and then the hands reaching out and how they were being supported by the resources that were available in that community, which was effective and visually, you could see that we're in the past that would have just been, you know, a lot of text if used in other classes. The feedback is that other instructors now are taking it and running with it. We've probably got, I don't know maybe a half dozen other instructors down the hill there that are that are that are using infographics in their classes. We're using it now for poster presentations. Like I said, they're just finding other applications and other ways to use it.

## 15:03 Dr. Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Thank you for listening to this episode of the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. For more helpful resources developed by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida. Visit our website, [teachthat.ufl.edu](http://teachthat.ufl.edu) we're happy you joined us and we hope to see you next time for more tips, strategies and ideas on teaching and learning at the University of Florida.