Strategies to Manage High Enrollment Online Courses

A Magna Online Seminar presented on February 7, 2012 by Susan Fein, eLearning Consultant and Instructional Designer for Washington State University Online.

Learn how to:

- Use tools or technologies to help produce a desired learning outcome
- Incorporate pre-existing resources to add variety and fun to assignments
- Increase peer-to-peer interaction and reduce instructor workload
- Replace some manually graded assignments with auto-graded activities

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Hello, and welcome to Magna’s online seminar, Strategies to Manage High Enrollment Online Courses, cosponsored by Magna Publications and Online Classroom. I’m Rob Kelly, Editor of Online Classroom, and I’ll be moderating today. I’m pleased you could join us.

Before we begin, I’d like to point out a few things about how the seminar works. If you have a question or comment for today’s presenter, you can enter it in the chat box at the bottom of your screen. The seminar also includes handouts and supplemental material.

If you haven’t already printed them, they can be found in the file share box on the left of your screen. Click on either PowerPoint handouts or supplemental materials, and then click on save to my computer to download, and then you can open it and print it. If you experience technical difficulties during the presentation, please call our customer service staff at 800-433-0499, extension 2.

And now I’m pleased to introduce Susan Fein. Susan Fein is an e-learning consultant and instructional designer for Washington State University Online. It’s WSU’s program that delivers undergraduate and graduate degrees. She serves as a team leader for WSU’s faculty training program and focuses on strategies that increase online course management and efficiency, particularly for large enrollment sessions. Welcome, Susan Fein.

Thank you very much, Rob. I’m very excited to have this opportunity. I’m looking forward to presenting some strategies about how people can maximize their instructional efficiency, reduce the instructor workload, and at the same time enhance the student experience.

So the first thing we’re going to do, sorry about that, already off on my miscues. The first thing I would like to do is let’s hear from you folks. What constitutes a high enrollment number of folks in your courses? So Rob is going to put up a poll, because I need to have a sense of the numbers that are important to you. And, Rob, you’ll let me know when all the results are in, yes?

You know, roughly 80-something.

Okay. So it looks like most of the numbers are coming in in the less than 100 number. So that gives me a good idea. Good. Thank you, everyone. I appreciate the input. I realize that we all have different definitions of what that means.

So the strategies and suggestions I’m going to be making today are certainly applicable to any of those numbers. We have courses that have
like 20 or 30 people, but that’s considered a high enrollment. So it really depends on the structure of your course.

Throughout the presentation, I’m going to be focusing on proven instructional design principles and some technologies that you can use to enhance course management. And the suggestions are ways to take advantage of a lot of features that are in most learning management systems, plus some third-party resources. And the goal, of course, is to always focus on helping the instructor reduce the workload, increase student engagement, and foster a stimulating learning experience.

But I think it’s critical for everyone to remember that the instructor’s skills and knowledge are really the most essential contributions to student success. But when an instructor is kind of burdened with an overwhelming volume of administrative activities or a higher than normal amount of papers to grade and give feedback about that sometimes the student experience can suffer.

So I’m hoping that during the presentation you’re inspired to try at least a few of the suggestions and ideas that I'm going to bring out, and those will ultimately help you focus your time and energy on providing quality feedback and guidance through this.

The tips and the strategies are all very easy to implement, and they fall into one of three basic categories. First I’m going to be discussing how you can change the structure and design of the course to make some changes that will help you out.

The second area is recommending and describing a few third-party resources, many of which are either free or very, very low cost, that can help you kind of spice up the course content without having to create materials . . . and, finally, we’ll be looking at a few different methods that can allow the students to take more ownership of their own learning experience. And we’ve found that to be a very effective strategy.

So, again, going to ask for your feedback before we launch into me saying what I want to share. I think it’s really important for me to get a sense of what your primary concerns are, because everybody has got a different concern about, oh, I’ve got all these extra students. These are, this slide and the next one list some very common concerns. I’ll give you a moment to just look at those. And now I’m going to go to the next slide, a few more.

So hopefully your concerns showed up on one of those items or fell into one of those categories. And, again, to give me a little bit of information so I know where to focus my time and attention today, we’re going to
have Rob put up another poll asking you to give me feedback about what your biggest concern is about teaching a high-enrollment class. Don’t be shy.

I love watching the numbers change. Okay. All right. So it looks like it was fairly predictable that keeping the content engaging, a little worry about facilitating of discussions, which is a very common issue, and then the volume of grading. So and grading and feedback kind of go together, so those are somewhat similar. Great. All right. So let’s talk about those things. I appreciate that feedback. All right.

So the first area I’m going to begin talking about is what kinds of changes can you make to the actual structure and design of a course to have an impact on the efficiency of the instructor? And I’m going to primarily be focusing on assessments, discussions, and group activities, but I’ll also summarize some additional ideas that perhaps you haven’t considered, and a couple of them are noted there about staggered due dates and some of the LMS . . .

I’ll also be suggesting using third-party resources to help you. And least you think I’m forcing you to do all the work, I promise I’m not going to do that. But we are going to do one more poll. So I am going to be starting out talking about specifics.

So take a list at this list here for a second, and tell me which of these items you’re currently using and fairly regularly. And you can select more than one, so select all that apply as a regular part of your online . . . good. Okay.

A few brave people are using games. That’s great to hear. Good, and then a higher percentage than I expected about the self-assessment and reflection. That’s excellent. Okay. All right. That’s good to know. Thank you everyone.

So a lot of you definitely indicated that you’re using assessments, and that was certainly not a surprise. That’s an important element. So we’re going to start out asking about assessments. And this is an area where a lot of saving of time is available.

Many courses focus on assessments that are subjective, the writing assignments and things like that. And those are very important and critical to the success for lots of classes and the subject matter being taught. However, one of the easiest ways that you can immediately reduce your workload is to convert one or more activities in the entire course to an objective-style assessment.
And I will say that there are people who insist that their subject matter absolutely cannot be addressed through any kind of objective-style quiz or assignment. And I will respectfully disagree with that decision, because I really believe that the way in which learning is evoked from the students is really separate from the content that’s being studied.

I don't think there’s any topic that doesn’t lend itself to some type of objective style. So philosophy or religion or science courses or music or agriculture or nursing, any of those are equally available to have some kind of objective-style assessment.

So the key to developing those is to identify and extract, related to your topic, the relevant facts, figures, terminology, chronology of events, the key people involved, major events, things like that, that kind of data that can be applied and critically analyzed via certain things like scenarios or case studies. And those can be structured very easily for objective-style formats.

So assessments can often use the unique acronyms or definitions or jargon that are common to a lot of different disciplines. There’s some examples there listed. I'm not going to review those. Another strategy is to just simply replace, instead of every single writing assignment that has a laborious grading component for the instructor, to perhaps consider replacing one writing assignment with a quiz perhaps delivered after every reading assignment, something like that.

So those are some easily implemented, immediate timesavings to take advantage of the auto grading capability of the LMS for doing objective assessments. And then sometimes people are a little bit concerned about security issues, so, within LMS, so most systems have a lot of powerful features. I’m actually going to be talking about that in a moment.

Also, most LMS systems have great opportunity to give feedback to the students within the objective-style assessment and a lot of excellent controls on when the student would see that or how to deliver that information, whether you want to distinguish between feedback appropriate for the right answer versus feedback for the incorrect answer. And I strongly encourage you to use those features built into your LMS if you’re not already familiar with them.

The other reason I like to suggest using objective-style elements for assessment is most instructors and professors do agree that for students to be able to make a meaningful contribution to discussions or to synthesize the different perspectives and engage in critical thinking activities, they really need to have a good grasp of fundamental concepts and relevant data first.
And objective-style quizzes or exams are not replacing analytical or critical thinking assessment. They’re really just incorporating an added, alternative layer of learning that creates the context and the foundation for that higher order thinking.

So a lot of people disagree with my perspective. And if you’re one of them, that’s awesome. I would love to hear all opinions. But what we’re going to do is just take another little poll here about your attitude or beliefs about objective-style assessments. And if you’re not in favor of them, I’d love to get your feedback about those. And if you are and do use them, feel free to select that option. Okay. There it comes. Okay.

I can’t quite tell when everyone has voted, but it looks like most of the audience is using the objective-style assessments. And I think that’s great, because that’s an excellent timesaver, so good. And I’m glad to see that not a huge concern about cheating, but we will talk about that. Okay.

Well, most of you are probably already aware of the fabulous benefits of using an objective-style assessment for the instructor. So we’ll go over just those very briefly. Obviously, the biggest one is the timesaving that’s realized through automatic grading. And that is absolutely essential in a large-enrollment course . . . just cave under all the volume if you didn’t use that.

You can also get a better sense of your students’ progress much earlier in the term than you can if you only use writing assignments and perhaps don’t even have a major one until maybe even the first third of the term. And once you, when you get better indication of students’ progress, you can redirect or revisit some challenging content, you know, much earlier in the game, as needed.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, the LMS systems have really easy to implement tools, powerful options to control delivery of the questions. And for those who are concerned about cheating or security, yes, that’s a valid concern. But almost all the LMS systems have question banks or pools, random delivery of questions, and even random delivery of their answer choices, setting time limits, those types of settings that can do a lot to help you really keep a pretty good handle on the cheating.

I mean, a determined student who is determined to cheat is going to find a way. But really, those are very effective. There are certain other security settings sometimes, if you have a lockdown-type browser situation that you might want to implement. Again, there’s lots of good choices out there. And we, at our university, use a lot of proctoring options for
instructors who are very concerned about that, and we use both in-person as well as remote proctoring options. Those can be very useful.

I think varying the questions that you use and the structure of the questions is also a great strategy. Don’t use all the same multiple choice or whatever. So use multiple select . . . I like matching and chronology. If your topic lends itself to knowing the sequence of events, I think chronology questions are really great, if your LMS uses those, things like that.

So, obviously, you need to use the tools at hand through your LMS system that best suit your own material and the intended outcomes. One of the things that I think is really easy for people to forget is what is my intended outcome and learning objective, and how can I best help my students accomplish that.

And that’s, as an instructional designer, when I’m working with the professors and instructors that I collaborate with and guide, that’s always where I bring the conversation back to. So if you’re not already doing that, that’s the suggestion for the starting place is think about what the learning outcome is and then design your assessment or your activity from that point.

So just my final little statement about the benefits to the instructor is that objective-style assessments really do provide a lot of consistency, and they’re nearly always a very effective element for almost any topic. I can really not think of too many topics that wouldn’t have benefits.

Now the students also benefit. People like immediate feedback, and they get that promptly, maybe not immediate, because we certainly coach and guide most of our instructors to show feedback other than just the grade or score after the assessment has closed down and shut down. But, of course, that’s dependent on what your needs are.

Students benefit because they love variety. They won’t get as bored. If it’s always discussion, discussion, discussion, that can get a little bit ho-hum, and they get kind of, oh, gosh, that again. So we really encourage a lot of variety in the presentation and quizzes and objective-style assessment can be helpful for that.

You can use assessment-structured tools, by the way, for assignments that aren’t necessarily a quiz or an exam. An example that we use at our university, one of our geology teachers has a lot of information that she wants students to learn. They are graded assignments, but they’re not quizzes. And so they, he presents a lot of images and, you know . . . what
was happening with the earth’s core during which, you know, whatever millennium, and then they choose from that.

So remember that assessment tools don’t always have to be only used for something that is a quiz or a test. So they can be used greater variety. And when you combine both objective and subjective assessments, it, as I said earlier, provides a lot of variety.

And let’s be honest. We all know about this whole thing about learning styles. And whether they really do affect a student’s outcome may not be true. But the reality is that some students do better at writing and composing, while others are, excel at assimilating or remembering facts and information.

And if you judiciously combine a variety of those varying formats, your course doesn’t end up being kind of heavily weighted in favor of one or the other of those different schools of thought. And it kind of levels the playing field for the online student and gives a more well-rounded learning platform. And, again, I think it really keeps the students engaged, because it offers them a more diverse variety of activities that can appeal to people’s different learning preferences.

So that’s really all I’ve got to say about assessment. If anyone has a what if or, you know, what did you think about what I say? Do you think objective-style assessments are good? You know, feel free to make comments. Otherwise, I’m going to actually move on to . . .

Rob Kelly: Susan, there is a comment in there, if you’d care to comment on the comment.

Susan Fein: Oh, good. I didn’t see that. Thank you, Rob. I’m sorry that I was paying too much attention to my side. Good. Let me read what Gloria Reynolds has said. Yes, mm-hmm, yeah, I would agree that you can present that foundational kind of information, and then you still have the critical thinking.

I coach some of my instructors that I work with to create scenario-based questions. You know, here’s the little story. And then if they really haven’t grasped the fundamental concept of whatever it is that you’re dealing with, they are not going to know which of the choices, even in a multiple choice, objective-style assessment that’s been created. You have to apply that thinking critically in order to correctly answer that question, and I think that’s what Ms. Reynolds was trying to comment on or trying to point out in that comment.
Does anyone else have an additional comment or question or anything like that before we move on? Okay. I’m not seeing any new entries in the chat box. So, okay, so I want to move along to discussions.

These are, obviously, very common, and almost everyone responded that they are using discussions in their online courses, and that’s excellent. Discussions are a very powerful way to engage the students, create collaboration, and create a sense of community, and we certainly encourage that.

If you’re not already doing this, we strongly encourage every course to have two standard forums, discussion forums, one, announcements from the instructor and the other questions for the instructor. And a lot of you are probably already doing that. But if you’re not, I strongly urge you to add those two in.

These, they’re obvious in their titles, but the announcements section is great when you need to communicate to everybody some piece of information and you don’t want to do it through the e-mail or whatever the internal e-mail is in your LMS system.

And then questions for can really be a timesaver. We encourage all of our instructors to note what questions are there, and then when you post the answer, everyone can go and see the answer. We also encourage a lot of our instructors to let other students respond. Sometimes they can get the answers posted before an instructor gets in there.

And so when they check it out, we encourage them to just reaffirm whatever a student may have commented saying, you know, thanks. Joe answered that question. Thank you very much. In addition to what Joe posted, here’s some additional things to consider. Or if the student got it completely wrong, you can very delicately make the correction and say something like, yes, that could be the case, but here’s what really I was thinking, and post that.

So we really encourage you to use the discussion forum as a way to communicate with all of your students simultaneously and thereby reduce that need to eliminate, not eliminate, but reduce any individual response . . .

So it’s very common knowledge, of course, that a well-designed online course includes discussions, because as we’ve already said, they foster engagement, build rapport, develop community, and so on. So no disagreement there.
However, I think there are some real common mistakes that get made by
instructors using discussion. So I want to spend a couple of moments
talking about those and give you some ideas, if you don’t already do some
things differently.

I am, I think the first thing that is that there is a common misconception
that you have to reply to every single post that’s out there. And that would
be completely overwhelming, even in a low-enrollment course, let alone a
higher-enrollment course. It’s really overwhelming for the instructor to
read all the posts and keep current with the grading and the feedback. So
please do remember you don’t need to respond to all of them.

In fact, you don’t even need to grade them all. We strongly suggest
adopting a strategy where you grade a subset. So just for example, let’s
say that you have ten total discussions. Well, just let your students know
that to get the appropriate grades in the class in discussions, they’ll be
graded on a subset of those, maybe five or eight or whatever the number is
for your course, and that they’ll be randomly selected discussions.

And since the students are not going to know, in advance, which of the ten
are going to be chosen for grading, they’re going to be well served just to
give their full effort to all of them, because they could be at risk for if
they, you know, skip one, that could be the one that gets selected for
grading, and then they would, you know, receive a lower score.

So that is an excellent strategy for a large-enrollment course. If you want
to have, you know, 15 different discussions, but you don’t want to be
forced to grade them all, that’s an excellent strategy to reduce your
workload.

Also, rethink or be willing to revisit the possibility that the discussion
format might not be the absolute best way to achieve the desired learning
outcome for every lesson. And think about what might be a better way to
evoke whatever the learning outcome is that you’re committed to
accomplishing for that lesson.

And if a discussion, sometimes it’s not hashing it out with another student.
That’s not the best way to get the learning. Sometimes it’s self-reflection
or it’s going off to the Internet and doing some research. I don’t know.
There’s lots of possibilities, but it doesn’t always have to be a discussion.

I have a concern, if you will, that we’ve gotten so attached to discussions
that people assume that they are really always the best way. And they are
excellent, and I’m a very strong supporter of them, but they’re not always
the best way to accomplish the learning outcome.
And if I can take just a minute to convey a little personal story here, I was a student in an online course about a year or so ago. And it wasn’t an academic thing. It was, I was invited to sit in on a different university’s online seminar that they put, or online course with their instructors to learn how to be an instructor teaching in the online environment. And so as an instructional designer, I sat in on that.

And I discovered something quite shocking. Here I was doing the class during my workday, not after hours like most online students or many online students. I didn’t pay any tuition to be in there. And I had a, there was no grading or assessment. So I had the least stressful type of scenario, and, yet, I found myself doing the absolute minimum needed to fulfill on the assignments, most of which were discussions.

And I, you know, even though I was kind of curious about some of the other people in the course, I just didn’t have time to read it. Now I don’t think that I’m all that different than the students that are taking classes online, usually working adults who have a full-time job and families and other considerations. These are busy people.

So I sometimes worry that discussions have become almost too routine or perhaps are almost busywork. So I would just invite everybody to rethink those and really look to see if a discussion is the best way. And consider like a personal journal, perhaps, or a self-reflection paper, something like that. That might be a better way to get at the same learning outcome.

Okay. Again, I’m ready to move on to a slightly different topic. So if someone has a challenge to any of the statements that I made, like, whoa, you know, you’re crazy, discussions have to be part of every lesson, please feel free to post that in the discussion board or in the chat box. Sorry. Okay. I’m not seeing any new comments, so we’re going to move on talking about groups . . .

Rob Kelly: Oh, there actually is a comment in here.

Susan Fein: Oh, there is.

Susan Fein: There is one. Great. Thank you, Rob. Okay. Letting students offer topic forums from time to time cuts down. Yes, it does. And there’s another comment coming in. I’ll wait until Ms. Dunn is done. Yes, so I think we were right about to talk about that on about creating subgroups for discussion so that they remain more focused. Thank you. That’s actually next on my list, so perfect timing.

In a course that has more than, say, maximum 20 to 25 students, I think you need to use subgroups. Anything more than that just gets
overwhelming for the students, and it’s really more challenging for them to interact.

So most LMS tools do offer a very easy to implement, automatic way to create subgroups or teams, whatever the terminology is. And I like to recommend creating those randomly. But I, we definitely do have courses that are structured around a common interest.

And so we want to put, I have a class that I manage, which is one about tourism and learning about different foreign countries. So that instructor likes to ask students which foreign country they’re interested in, and then he puts them in common groups. But however you manage it, it really doesn’t matter, and either way works fine.

We like to suggest certain sizes of groups. Obviously, there is variation in this, so don’t, this isn’t cast in concrete. But for discussions, effective discussion, usually between 10 and 20 members is about what’s recommended. That is enough. It’s a manageable number for the students as well as for any moderator, and but it’s enough diversity to give a good amount of varying opinions for the original and the response . . .

Now, if you’re interested in doing group projects, like a research assignment or a marketing proposal or something like that or a presentation, I believe much smaller numbers are more applicable, maybe three to five, maybe as many as seven people in a group for those kinds of . . . okay. So for discussions, somewhere between 10 and 20 is usually very effective.

I like to remind people that groups are not only an excellent way to build community and engagement, but they also reinforce a lot of valuable skills and give students an opportunity to practice leadership and negotiation, teamwork, delegating things, a lot of qualities that are really highly valued in our professional work environment.

And some people already come to the online course with those kinds of skills, and that’s great. Then they can model those particular skills for others who may not be or, and we all bring different sets of skills. So one person might be great at delegation and community building, and somebody else might be really good at leadership. So it’s a great way. And those are just life skills that we all need to get. So that’s like a side benefit that I believe.

So I’m seeing another note here. How do I deal with students who don’t participate? Very good. And that is a question that comes up a lot with a lot of instructors, so I will address that. The biggest thing is the concern that the grade is not going to be fair.
So and there’s two approaches. So in a group project where you’ve got, let’s say you’ve got five people in a group project, and they have a deliverable, and everybody in the group gets the same grade, based on what that deliverable is.

Most of the instructors that we work with at WSU, who do that kind of a project, have a secondary assignment or feedback from each member of the team where it’s a little kind of a survey, if you will. Usually it can be done in a variety of ways, it’s not important, where the students say, yeah, I’m going to rate the quality of participation and interaction of all the other people, the other four people that were on my team.

And the instructor gets an affirmation and can then adjust. If everybody says, you know, person, if Joe was terrible and never participated, and everybody else got an A, Joe probably isn’t going to get an A. And, obviously, it’s at this instructor’s discretion to figure out how to interpret that feedback.

And I didn’t provide any of those examples in the supplemental materials, but we have several instructors at our campus who do those kinds of evaluations, and there may be three or four questions that they focus on. So that’s one way to do it.

So it’s a little bit trickier when it’s just discussion, and it’s not like a group project. And the way we recommend that is, well, there’s a couple different approaches, but the first one is that the student probably won’t get their grades or the participation grade if they don’t meet those minimum requirements of that typical one original and two response posts.

And then we strongly encourage the instructor to make note of that and contact the student outside of a commonly physical space to privately contact the student and ask them, you know, if there’s any issues, if they have concerns, or if they’re struggling with something like that. So those are the primary suggestions.

But you’re right about group work. It can be a problem. But all the instructors who use it regularly are having great success getting that feedback. And the students know that they’re going to be asked for that feedback, so they know their, that their group members are going to be rating them. So that usually is motivation to do a pretty good job and carry their own there.

So I hope that addressed your question. Any further questions regarding that particular issue? Okay. Good. Let me move along to the next slide. All right. So teams or groups are really, really good and highly effective. Obviously, for the instructor, instead of grading 50 individual papers, now
you only have 10, you know, group papers to do, to grade and give feedback about.

And at the same time, again, I’m going to reinforce that earlier comment that you’ve inserted a transparent but very important layer of learning for your students that encompasses not just the content that they’re needing to get a grasp of but also those cooperative and interactive skills to reach consensus and delegate the tasks and deliver a cohesive final project. So those are good side benefits.

Teams are really great for debates or mock trials. So any time that your content lends itself to a constructive controversy, that’s a really great place to bring in those kinds of assignments and teamwork. They’re fun. They’re engaging. They can be really stimulating, especially if it’s a provocative kind of topic.

It can promote the need for the students to conduct some research, do analysis to critically interpret information, to logically defend positions, and to give a thoughtful response to opposing views. Those are all excellent skills.

And it’s especially fun and challenging if the students are assigned to argue for a position that they personally don’t necessarily agree with or believe in, which has happened in a lot of our, we used to offer a disability studies course online. And the students engaged in debates, and they were randomly assigned to argue one side or the other. And often, the student was assigned to argue for a side that they did not personally agree with and created a lot of educational opportunities, and a good follow-up session was usually lively discussion to follow-up.

And as, again, with some of these types of team activities, again, there’s that concern about how to fairly grade. And, again, we would just recommend that same procedure to ask them to assess each other and then use that input to adjust grades at that . . .

Okay. Most of you are probably aware that there are a lot of excellent tools out there, probably within your LMS system as well as out there as third-party resources, to help you manage the groups or help the students to manage their own group activity.

So things like wikis or instant messaging, live chat, Web conferencing, kind of similar to what we’re doing to have synchronous meetings, obviously discussion forums, blogs, those kinds of tools. If you’re not familiar with some of those tools or not using them, I would recommend picking one and get familiar a little bit more with it like that.
So I’m about to move along to a slightly different topic. So before I change gears, does anyone have any last minute? Okay. I see someone typing something in about the current topic, I hope.

Rob Kelly: Yeah, and while we’re waiting for that question or comment, I’m just curious, how might including synchronous sessions make you better able to manage a high-enrollment course?

Susan Fein: Okay. Good question. Thanks, Rob. One of our instructors wanted to great, great, sorry, break groups up into teams that he wanted to be able to have the presentation kind of in a wide delivery. And so that instructor chose to use a Web conferencing element as part of the assessment. So when they delivered their final project, he was able to sit in, and that reduced the timeframe for all the people to watch the, like a recording kind of presentation.

So, I mean, I suppose in a certain way the recording was, when they were doing it that way it was useful because they could kind of do it the, at their own convenience, whereas with a webinar or a synchronous activity, you have to schedule it.

But for this instructor, it was more timesaving for him to do it live where he could participate and give coaching and guidance to the presenting team. And then they recorded it and allowed the other students to watch it at a later time and learn from that presentation.

Susan Fein: Okay. Can you talk about how to, yes, that’s, wow, you have been giving me the cue for my very next slide. So I’m actually going to move forward to the next slide, because I was about to start talking about student ownership and student facilitation of things, which is exactly what Sue Dionne just was asking about. So that's pretty amazing.

So student facilitation is a really excellent way to cut down on the instructor’s workload and to save time. That’s an easy to implement element. It’s kind of a part of peer review.

So what we, oh, and let me just make note that some of the research that I’ve done, and I don’t have the citation, so I apologize, is that research does show that students have commented or indicated through surveys that they appreciate being able to share some responsibility for their own learning and their own learning environment, and that they’re more engaged and show a greater degree of satisfaction when they do that.

So peer review and student facilitators are a great way to save time in a large enrollment class. But one little caveat, of course, is that if you implement that, you are going to need to plan ahead and to provide some
well-written, detailed instructions explaining how to implement the activity along with clear expectations about what, from their perspective, constitutes success.

So and some of the supplemental materials that you can download include some grading of rubrics, some evaluation criteria of samples of those. And those are essential any time that you want to use peer review or student facilitation.

But once you get those prepared, that initial investment of time will save you tremendous time in a large enrollment course, because, and here’s a great example. In a group discussion, use, consider using rotating student facilitators. Again, make sure that they understand the rule and your guidelines and suggestions for how to be effective in that role and provide them with guidelines for how they perform in that task.

But then you don’t need to spend time doing that. And what we strongly recommend is instead of you having to facilitate individual group discussions that the students engage and then summarize the results of that discussions that’s then presented to the entire class, so everybody learns from the individual group discussion activities, and the facilitators, you know, can share any of their experience. And we have a lot of instructors who do that for all but the first couple of sessions, and then the students take over. So that’s a great way to save time.

Peer review, oh, here’s a question. Do you find it harder for first-year students? You know, I think that’s a really good question. And I’m not sure I can absolutely answer that with any great certainty. I’ve seen it be effective and not quite as effective at both lower and upper divisions.

My personal opinion, based on the classes that I’ve worked with, is that if you give excellent guidelines and provide very clear evaluation criteria rubrics or details, that students will respond to that. If you leave it too open-ended, it will fail. This is the one kind of those approaches that will not do well if you don’t do proper upfront stage setting. So I think that dictates the success more than the grade.

How do we empower students to take on ownership without criticizing? Hmm. I don’t think of it as criticizing. The instructor is not doing their job. I think there’s a changing or shifting, and maybe it’s just my perception. I don’t know. It would be interesting to hear what other people think about that. But I think an instructor, as a facilitator and collaborator, and guide and coach is a very powerful role, and a mentor, and that we don’t need to be, pardon my use of that term, but the sage on the stage.
So I really encourage people to share the burden, if you will, of instruction with the students. I mean, people have something to offer, even younger students. So that’s really my personal opinion. The students don’t always feel the same. Okay. Got it. That’s a valuable piece of information. I certainly wouldn’t want you to turn the entire course over to them. That would feel like you were abdicating your responsibilities.

Let me read Ms. Reynolds’ input. Okay. Got it. So she gets her feeling about whether they’re mature enough to take some ownership. Okay. Good. That’s a great approach. You could also make it not mandatory. You could make it voluntary, and those who want to take it on, and you’ve provided this really great guideline, might feel empowered by that. And those who don’t, you know, don’t.

Not every topic lends itself to these strategies and ideas. So you do have to see what’s going to work for your course and those students that you teach. So that’s great that you folks are bringing that up, because it does. All of these are it depends. You know, there’s nothing that like it’s always going to work. Any other comments or concerns before we continue on here? Okay. Not seeing any new comments coming in.

I want to just talk about peer review as a way to save some time for you as the instructor. And one place where that can be very effective, again, only if you provide solid instructions and guidelines upfront, are like let’s say there’s a large project.

And instead of you having to do a draft and then review the draft and give feedback to the student about the quality of that draft, and then they go back and do maybe a rewrite and then submit their final proposal, consider doing either a one-on-one partnership with students or a team of two or three where you provide the criteria for what the students ought to look at in assessing their classmate’s draft. And then they give feedback to each other.

Then they do the rewrite and only submit the final deliverable to you, thereby eliminating one step of guidance and coaching that you have to provide individually, and that can substantially reduce the amount of work on your plate.

That structure also has been shown to improve the quality of the final deliverable, because the students have a better sense of what the expectations are for the assignment upfront, and so we have found that. And when they give feedback to a student based on your evaluation criteria, then they generally will include those same elements in their own paper. They, you know, obviously . . .
A couple other suggestions. We’ve had some instructors very successfully use the reflection papers and personal journals. And one way to implement that is we had a course where it was about public, what’s the terminology, like it had the word bureaucracy in the title. I can’t remember the exact name of the course.

And the instructor complained to me, oh, the students always come in with such a negative point of view about bureaucracy. And by the end of the course, they have this really different understanding of what that means. And I said, wow, that’s a great example of how to use a self-reflection paper.

And so he implemented that in his course. He asked them very early on in the first week, you know, tell me. Share in a paper what your attitudes, opinions, beliefs, knowledge of this word bureaucracy. What does it mean, and why? And then at the end of the session he, you know, and it was useful for them to identify their own growth and their own learning and what they found out of engaging with the material that he had presented.

And then also, another element that’s been highly effective, we’re using this in a math class, is to create the problems instead of just having them solve the problem. So the math instructor gives extra credit, it’s not a required assignment, for taking some of the math concepts that have been used. She gives them a sample of two or three choices, and to take these scenarios and find the mathematical concept or equation or whatever that applies to this real world scenario.

And they kind of get to reverse engineer, and then they can get extra credit for that. That’s been a very effective approach for her, and especially in a math class, which doesn’t have a lot of student engagement back and forth. So that’s the ideas on that.

Back, one more comment about the reflection papers and journals is that a lot of topics don’t really lend them, they’re not as, you don’t want them to be public. We have some human development courses where the students are really engaging in some very personal introspection. And discussions can be awkward just because of the topic that’s being discussed.

So that instructor really doesn’t want the student sharing in a public way and has used reflection journals and doesn’t really have any student engagement other than at a very high level because of the sensitive nature of the topic that she’s teaching and has found that evokes the same learning outcome.

And reflection journals can also be a really great way to save time, because the student, ongoingly, makes posts to their own private journal
throughout the course. You can certainly read them as the instructor, but they’re not graded.

But then the student is required, as the graded assignment, to provide a summary of their learning, sort of over the course of the term, and then that’s the graded activity that’s submitted to you as the instructor. And so now, instead of reading those weekly or whatever, periodic entries, you’re only judging and having to grade that final submission. And so that can save a lot of time.

Do I recommend assessing? Yes, just the way I described. Certainly a self-reflection, like it’s one paper at the beginning and one paper at the end. I probably wouldn’t grade the beginning paper, but I would probably read them and then maybe just. And, again, you don’t even necessarily need to grade them for the quality of the content, mostly just that they did it, that they engaged in the activity. And so that would be one aspect of reducing your workload.

And the journals, I just described that. You certainly don’t need to read each entry, although you could and respond as appropriate. But that the student just does it and does submit the summary at the end might be the graded criteria.

I hope that addresses the concern or the question in another . . . yes. Okay. Good. Thank you. Anyone else have additional comments or concerns? We’re starting to get down time-wise, so, okay. Good. Well, let’s talk about just a few other things that contribute.

So in addition to the structure and design modifications that I’ve already spoken about that really can support more efficient management in a high-enrollment class, there’s a few other sort of timesaving ideas that I like to recommend that sometimes people tend to usually overlook.

So boilerplate feedback, a lot of people have a tendency to use the same kinds of comments that they give to their students. Great job, I mean, those are silly examples, but, you know, you have certain phrases that you really like to use. If you’re not already doing this, you might consider having those in just a little word file or a notepad or something like that, and you just copy and paste when you’re giving your feedback in the course . . .

Now that might seem obvious, but you do need to be careful. You don’t want this to become a cookie-cutter solution. You always want to customize your comments. But, you know, good job or some traditional, you know, every time we do this assignment, I always end up giving this kind of similar feedback to half the students.
Well, that’s something that you can certainly save a lot of time with by not recreating the wheel over and over and over again. So it can really save you time and increase your efficiency and allow you to get to the papers more quickly. So that’s just one.

LMS features, now I’m not referring to any specific LMS in this presentation today. And most learning management systems do offer a lot of different, excellent tools. So some of the ones that I mention, please investigate how your learning management system might do that.

So for example, a batch upload, let’s say there’s an assignment, a writing assignment or something that you have to grade. And most of the time, the vast majority of students, say 80% of your students always get the same grade. They all get an A, because that’s what it is, or a B or whatever it is. But you know that most of your students are going to get this kind of typical grade.

So instead of independently putting that grade in for each person, because it’s not auto graded, you can batch upload it to everybody, and then just go undo the grade that the 20% of people who didn’t get that accomplished or receive. And so that’s kind of a reverse way, but it’s a real big timesaver. So now you don’t have to . . . of that independently.

Some LMS systems use the ability to attach or incorporate a rubric to an assignment or an assessment. And these can be both qualitative and quantitative. So I’m going to talk first about a quantitative type of a rubric. In other words, you’re just asking the LMS to measure did the student meet some minimum requirement? And this is often in conjunction with discussion posts.

So does, the question is did the student meet the obligation to do at least one original and at least two responses? And if yes, then automatically give them five points or whatever. And so you should investigate if your LMS does that kind of a functionality. And if it does, I strongly encourage you to use it. It’s a huge timesaver and particularly useful in large-enrollment courses.

What we instruct our, or coach our instructors to do is if they use that functionality to then go back, and if they do a random viewing of a handful of discussions for every student kind of along the way, and they see a pattern of not substantive entries, then they can go back and modify those point values accordingly. And that’s stated in the syllabus that the instructor has the discretion to modify those, so the students aren’t taken by surprise that they see a five points, and all of a sudden now it’s a four, something like that.
For regards to qualitative rubrics, which, again, the supplemental materials provided a few examples of those, I believe that if your LMS uses the ability to attach a rubric, those can be a huge timesaver, if nothing else, questions that students have about what your expectations are for the assignment.

The more students in a class, the more questions you’re going to get, and the clearer you can be right up front will eliminate a lot of those. So I strongly urge our instructors to use both styles of rubrics and look into the functionality of your LMS to see if it can accommodate those.

I’m not going to take a lot of time, because we are coming down to the last ten minutes, and I wanted to give a couple more minutes. But this thing about staggered dates, I’ll just give you a real, the high level. This is a great example of how to manage a large-enrollment class when you still need to do a lot of writing assignments.

This was an idea come up with, I can’t think of the word that I was looking for, by a general education instructor teaching like a history class with about 200 people in the class online. And she wanted to not, she didn’t want to reduce the number of assignments, but she just didn’t want to be bombarded with 200 all at one time.

So what she did was she divided the assignments in two different categories, either a movie, correlation to a movie, or a current event, and they had to do at least one in each of those two arenas. And they were, the topic or the movie assigned or the topic assigned was related to that week’s lesson. So like when they were studying Christopher Columbus, the assignment was something about him.

Anyway, that’s not important. The key really was that she assigned staggered due dates. So all the assignments were not due at the same time in the semester. So if you chose the option that was presented in lesson eight, for example, it was due at a different time than the assignment that was assigned in lesson three.

And so she had a nice, steady influx, because just by random chance, there was kind of a steady number of submissions being delivered throughout the entire semester, and that was a really excellent way for her to keep the same number of written assignments but spread them out so her burden was . . . and I love that idea, and I do it and suggest it to lots of other . . . okay.

I’m a big believer in using third-party resources to improve and enhance your course materials. And in a large-enrollment course, you know, a lot
of your communications are going to be with the class as a whole. It’s not
going to be as necessarily as much private, one-on-one.

And so you might recall that part of today’s goal was to present ideas that
enhance the online course content. And so here’s a few suggestions, some
of which you might already be familiar with, but maybe not, to kind of add
punch to your content, and you don’t have to create these from scratch.

And just know there’s tons and tons of great resources out there. My list is
not at all intended to be even remotely definitive. These are just kind of
my faves. Okay. So I’ve kind of focused primarily on videos and then
presentations . . . so let’s take a look at the, let’s, at the videos first.

I am a huge fan of ted.com. Love it. If you’re not familiar with it, go check
it out immediately. It’s fabulous. I’m sure most of you are also fans of
TED talks. But for those who are less familiar, just a quick review. Very
brief videos, 15 to 20 minutes, usually, from world-renowned knowledge
experts. And the approach is a little bit off the wall. And they’re thought
provoking and provocative, and I just really love them and think they’re,
you know, excellent and very great to use.

CommAcademy is another fabulous resource. It’s been in the news lately,
so I suspect most of you have heard about CommAcademy. Thousands, I
think, of video, short, to the point, two to three minutes. Some of them are
math instructors, are including links to appropriate CommAcademy videos
as supplemental materials, kind of the if you still are having trouble, you
know, understanding the concept that’s presented, you know, feel free to
use these videos as an additional resource. And they’re getting very good
results from that approach.

Google videos, YouTube, again, hundreds and thousands of excellent
content out there. You don’t need to recreate the wheel. And as long as
you’re linking out to it in your course space and not bringing it in, then
you’re perfectly within all those important consideration about copyright
limitations. So those are very important to keep in mind. So we link out to
those third-party websites, not imbed them.

And I’ll give you a quick example on YouTube. One of our instructors
was teaching a course on linguistics, and he used this very strange song, a
Christmas song, called Kung Pao Buckaroo Holiday. Never heard of it. I
thought it was really strange, performed by country singer Brad Paisley.

And I had never heard of the thing, but imagine my surprise when I went
online to YouTube, and there were like three or four links where we were
able to use it, and then it showed the actual lyrics and played the song.
And it was very effective for his linguistics assignment when he was teaching the course.

So all of these are very easy to use resources, they’re free, and the academic element can be found under C-SPAN and lots of others, National Geographic, How Stuff Works, Discovery Channel, CBC, lots and lots and lots. A few minutes on the Internet will result in a ton of great . . . so.

Presentation resources, okay, most of you, obviously, PowerPoint, what we used here today. Camtasia Studio and Jing are both really great for lecture capture. If you need to show something on your computer screen, and want to demonstrate that inside of a course space, those two can both be used.

I know that Camtasia Studio is not free. Jing is free on a limited version. But even the paid version, you know, you can get them at a pretty good price, and you can try them first. So if you need to do some kind of screen capture, those are excellent.

Tegrity is an excellent option for lecture capture. And I’ve implemented it in a couple of courses when the students need to deliver an oral presentation as a final project or as part of their deliverables. And that is a really great way for them to be able to do it. And that can really save you time because viewing and judging a short, two-to-five minute presentation is a lot faster and easier than reading a paper sometimes. So that can be another great timesaver.

If you’re using PowerPoint and like it, which I do, okay, good, someone put another good one in there for audio delivery, which is free, so check that out. Narrate your PowerPoint slides, if you’re not already doing that. It’s very easy.

And I’m pretty unadventurous. As you can tell, I’m a word person. I’m chat, chat, chat. So I wasn’t quite willing to considering Prezi, which is a nonlinear-oriented presentation tool. But if you’re more adventurous, and like that non-linear kind of delivery, Prezi is actually pretty cool. One of my coworkers used it recently, and I really liked her presentation a lot. I thought it was very effective and a nice change of pace. But I’m kind of too attached.

However, I wasn’t a totally wimp. I wasn’t willing to try Prezi, but I was willing to try ToonDoo, which I’d love to tell you about. It’s a visual kind of application. And I’m going to show you a sample of it here in one second.
Okay. Good. We’re getting a little bit of feedback about, yes, you do have to be careful about using Prezi. It does a lot of motion. You don’t want to overuse it. I think it’s really effective for a very short presentation where you do want to capture people’s attention, but you don’t want to, it does have a lot of movement, and it actually can be distracting. So that’s great coaching. Thank you, Beth Spartan Community College for your comments on that.

So I want to talk about ToonDoo. It’s a great, it’s toondoo.com. It's listed in the supplemental materials along with some other links. ToonDoo is, I’m not graphics oriented. I’m definitely a word-oriented person. This is a cartoon creation application, so that even the most graphically challenged person, like me, makes these very creative comic book-style panels.

And one of our instructors recently used it in her course for students to do their introduction instead of the traditional discussion posts. And the students loved it. So here’s my example that I created. And I don’t know how well you can read that. You might have to look kind of close. From those of you watching on a large screen, you might not be able to see that.

But basically, the first panel kind of gives a one sentence that I came from the business, corporate environment, and now I’m in higher education. And that, they’re very different environments. And the middle panel is saying that in making that transition, learning the higher ed culture has been a very big challenge for me.

And then the third panel says a little bit more personal, talking about where I live here in tiny little Pullman, Washington, way in the Pacific Northwest. We have very interesting weather here, and so it was a bit of a challenge for me adjusting to that. And so really, in three simple little panels, even a creatively challenged person like me was able to do that.

And I’m seeing that we have probably run out of time here, and so I do apologize. Okay. So I think we did cover everything. I think, really, these last two slides are just saying, yes, you can accomplish all of those concerns that you may have had at the beginning about providing timely feedback and grading and simulating the course and making it more engaging. And you can do that by changing the design, retaining all of your goals and objectives, and increasing your efficiency.

So I believe I’ve run out of steam here. What questions do you folks have?

**Rob Kelly:** Actually, we don’t have time for additional questions.

**Rob Kelly:** But, you know, if we do get any, we will forward those to you, and we can send out those responses to the participants. Thank you all for joining us.
Thank you, Susan Fein. For participants, your campus has received an e-mail evaluation form from us. Please fill it out, and tell us what you think of today’s program and what programs you’d like to see in the future. Complete information about our upcoming seminars and online classroom is available at www.magnapubs.com. Thanks again for joining us, and have a great day.