

## Innovating Course Delivery | Text Transcript | The Hub for Teaching & Learning Excellence

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This is a text transcript for the recorded event “Innovating Course Delivery” presented by the Hub for Teaching & Learning Excellence in the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences (CSAHS). The event was recorded on January 16, 2019.

Transcript:

**Byron Sheldrick:**

This I think is our fourth event, and I think we have two more lunch and learns planned for later in this semester and I'm very happy to say, all of them have been well attended and also, we haven't neglected the critical part of lunch and learn, which is Kate Parizeau just said to me, is lunch.

And so, lunch is here and please if you haven't got food yet, make sure you go.

I said earlier, that when this is over, we open the doors. We invite the students to come in and any leftovers actually disappear incredibly quickly, which is a great thing.

So, today's event is, I think something that is really exciting. And I say that, only partially because I was involved in it, but mostly because I was involved in it.

So this is about an innovation, in terms of how within the Political Science department, which is my home department, how we try to rethink our first year course.

And the origins of this came about as a result of several kind of, pressures that the department was finding in terms of its first year course. It's a large course. It offers multiple sections. It's trying to meet many different conflicting needs.

The department also has a number of collaborative programs that it participates in, that are not just Political Science majors, but there's Criminal Justice and Public Policy, International Development, Environmental Governance.

It's a whole range of these other programs and for resource reasons, we had actually years earlier, gotten rid of our first year seminars. So these were large courses, but they were lecture only.

Students come in three hours a week, two hour and 1/2 sessions or three 50 minute sessions, and then they leave. And TAs were assigned the course, but really just were marking and grading.

And so, part of the origins, this came out of a quality assurance report that we had, which said, you need to think about your first year.

You've got a bunch of courses. We have other courses too in our first year. But this course, it's not as big.

It's not clear how it's serving students and at the same time that report also said, you need to give your graduate students more meaningful opportunities to teach. And your first year students need small group experiences.

So there were a large number of conflicting, kind of, and important requirements that we were trying to address.

And so, the idea developed to try and think about a hybrid course or a blended course, in which we actually reduced face-to-face lecture time, increase student engagement and learning through a variety of blended or online and small group experiences, which then those small group experiences would be led by graduate teaching assistants.

And so, this was the proposal. We receive the grant from The Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund, to help develop this, and that was critically important.

And then we assembled, just the most fabulous team of people who are here, and to work on this. They are gonna talk more about how this came about and what the course looks like and the development process.

I was involved throughout as well, but I can speak to some of the more administrative challenges in this, to a certain extent.

So, I'll just introduce our panelists, but before I do, I also like to say that Natalie Green who's at the back, was also involved and was from Open Education and was so tremendously supportive right throughout the process and also always, I think, kept us honest.

Particularly what I, Like, I put my administrator's hat on and then I always go, "Can we cut a corner here?" And Natalie always saying, "No. We can't cut that corner. We need to think that through." And I go, "Ohh okay, I guess." And then we did. So, it was all very good.

(Group laughing)

Mostly. But they thought it through. I didn't do a lot of thinking.

So, the panelists today are Dennis York from Open Education, who was our key team member in terms of developing a lot of the logistics and the support, and the technology and helping us walk through the things, like learning outcomes, what it would look like. Nanita Mohan, who is a sessional lecture in the Political Science department, who is critical in terms of developing this, but also has now taught the course twice.

Is this your third offering you're doing this semester? Second?

Nanita Mohan:

Yes.

Byron Sheldrick:

Third, third.

Nanita Mohan:

Third, yeah.

Byron Sheldrick:

Third time.

And Nanita has also done several conference presentations on this, and recently also was successful in getting a little research grant, through the CUPE Sessional Research Fund to continue working on developing this sort of model, and Carol Dauda, a Political Science faculty member who along with me are two of the people who taught the old version of Political Science 1150, a lot of years and Carol was also just tremendously important and sort of, trying to think through what the content should be, what our objectives were in terms of developing this course.

And all of us have been involved in developing the content, various sections of the content of this course.

So with that, I think I will turn it, I think it's Dennis who's gonna speak first.

**Dennis York:**

Yeah. All right.

Thank you Byron for such a introduction, and I think we went through very productive collaboration developed in this course and it took us some time to put it all together.

So I'll start the presentation by sort of, introducing the topic of blended learning, why institutions turn to the blended learning methodology as well as some of the problematics of the definition of blended learning and what are the key instructional design dilemmas that we often faced when we're thinking about whether the blended learning is appropriate for the course.

Today public postsecondary institutions have faced, facing multiple challenges, such as financial cutbacks. We have a more student population who are often work and commute to the institution.

We also have institution requesting increased sizes of classes.

So, to address these type of challenges, we often try to think about how to redesign, reconceptualize the learning experience for our students, and the current research suggests that, the blended learning could be a viable option as it allows to bring together two environments and provide some flexibility to the students, by combining face-to-face and the online learning environments and at the same time it allows to maintain some of the physical interaction, physical content between the students and their peers and the instructor.

Research also currently suggests that blended learning is more likely to improve student satisfaction and learning performance, it also improves the retention and helps to manage classroom space better, and we also try to utilize the learning technology to maximize learning opportunities for the student in the online or face-to-face environments.

In a recent survey of teachers, conducted by campus technology, 73% of faculty reported that they use blended approach, to deliver their courses, while 15% of the faculty still use the face-to-face instruction without any online access.

The National Center for Academic Transformation and their the director Carol Twigg, she recommends the institution to actually focus on their large enrollment courses to justify the investment in the redesign, because it makes a bigger impact, because you have a lot of students that are taking the first introductory courses.

And by doing these redesigned initiatives, the departments for the institutions, they try to reach more students on the scale quickly, without sacrificing the huge overhead costs.

It also, as I mentioned, helps to maintain the face-to-face contact with students, while providing them with some flexibility. For instance, for the students who commute into the campus often or who have part-time job opportunities.

It also allows to reconceptualize the learning process and focus more on the training and teaching students in applying the concepts and key ideas that they received from the lectures or from the textbook.

And also research suggests that the student satisfaction and the learning performance also is better in the blended courses, than in just fully face-to-face.

And again, the use of online environment allows us to utilize the technology to maximize learning experience and create more rewarding opportunities for students to utilize their knowledge.

So, in practice and in the literature, we found some problematics in terms of definition of blended learning, because blended, the concept of blended learning has been used for ages. Like, we've been blending various type of activities, resources, different environments.

But, with online technology, we start blending the actual online and face-to-face learning environments.

And different institutions take different stances on how they define blended learning. So it is important for educators and researchers to define what they mean by blended learning.

At open ed, we conceived blended learning as a meaningful and purposeful integration of these two environments face-to-face and online.

And we also subscribe to the idea of replacing, meaningfully, the face-to-face time with the online time, and modifying the approach, how we teach lectures for instance, in the classroom to make them more interactive and utilize some active learning approaches, and then use the online activities also to help students to focus on the concepts and the challenges that they've discovered. Let's say in the lectures, to take it a little bit further and dive deeper into those concepts.

There is also a plethora of different approaches, how you can blend the course and what time, what percentage of time you would use online or face-to-face.

So that also, makes it a little bit more complicated in terms of whether there is a template that would be successful, that we could use were different courses.

There's so many contextual packages that you need to take into account, when you're thinking about blended learning, because it depends on the discipline. Your teaching depends on the student population that are taking the courses, whether they're first-year students, whether they're graduate students.

So, all these factors and they contribute to the way, how the blend will be shaped, put together.

So, as an instructional designers, we work closely with the faculty members for the course developers to sort of, explore the three instructional dilemmas to help us gather all the information needed to come up with the right blend for the course.

The first one is the learning activities. What learning activities are more suitable for online environment and what learning activities are more suitable for face-to-face environment?

There's so many activities out there, and there's so many technology that could be used to support both face-to-face online teaching.

So it is important to look at all those activities and the learning outcomes that these activities are trying to support and select the one that are best suited for these different environments.

The other thing, that we're looking into the relationship between the face-to-face and online components, how students are bringing the knowledge that they, for instance, were given in a face-to-face environment and how they've taken it further and build on that in the online environment, and vice versa.

So it is important to have that meaningful connection between these two different environments, to have that progression from one learning activity to another learning activity, so the students can see that continuity of the learning events that happen in the course.

And the third one, is the course time. The literature suggests that if you have 30%, from 30% to 79% replaced with online time, that would be considered a blended course.

So it is important also, to look at how you distribute the hours and how much you devote time to, or face-to-face and online environment as well.

So those are the three key questions that we typically go through in the conversation and the decision-making that takes some time to collect all that information and come up with the right blend for the instructor and for the course, to support the rewarding experiences of students.

**Carol Dauda:**

Okay, I'm gonna go to the chart first. I'll go back to that slide. I love my charts. (laughs)

When we started this, one of, and one of my main things, but I think all of us was our aim to introduce the student to the discipline of political science. And that has been the aim of the first year course before this iteration as well.

And so, content is very important to us, and how content is delivered, was very important to us.

But our aim also was for students to have a variety of ways to access the content and to interact with the content.

So that, sort of, was the beginning of thinking of our blend, what we were going to blend, when it came to face-to-face and online. So, we wanted to blend both the face-to-face and the online, taking advantage of both.

So, for the face-to-face, we wanted to take advantage of the interaction of students, both with their instructors which would be the lecturer and the TA, and their peers. So we wanted that face-to-face interaction for those.

Online, we wanted to take advantage of just what you were talking about.

Technology and the variety of ways that we can create experiences for students, both individual student individual experiences and those participating with others, but all to do with the content.

So really, that continuity within each one of our modules, within each one of our weeks, was really centered around dealing with the content in these ways, in these blended ways.

It kind of looks easy now, but it wasn't easy.

(Group laughs)

We had to go at it and create things. So, the content.

As you can see here, we have in red everything to do with content. Where it shows up and how students interact with it.

So we had the lecture. We start the week with the lecture, and the lecture sets out the main ideas of the content for the week.

That's a very important component for the students, because they're gonna take that content and they're gonna work with it, variously throughout the week.

Then we have what we came to call, "Diving Deeper". And so, one section of the lecture we chose.

And when it came to actually devising the nitty-gritty of the content, we took a lot of time figuring out which one we thought we would take. And so, we take that one part and through online, it could be a video. Byron did a video, when it came to ideologies.

It could be a commercial video of some sort, film. It could be a lecture. It could be an online lecture, that's to do with that content. But very specifically, that bit of content, or it could be a voiceover of slides.

There is so many ways that you could do that, Diving Deeper.

And so, that became really, the key for our content in the online.

And then, the Diving Deeper led to a Diving Deeper exercises.

So, once they had done the Diving Deeper, they would be directed to something to do that was to do with that content, and it was always to do with some kind of, using the content or interacting, an interactive exercise, et cetera.

So, it would be all the way from drag-and-drop to an online post or something, or answering some discussion questions, which would be in preparation for having a discussion in this seminar.

So, the important thing was, we wanted the Diving Deeper to be a very important part of the content.

It wasn't something that, ehh. You know, maybe I'll do that or not.

No. Very, very important.

Of course, we had more traditional ways, through readings as well, of getting the content.

So, having that was so important. So, I like to say that we created this incredible menu for us to choose from.

For every week, even every module we wouldn't have all things but we have this menu to choose from, and there would be enough continuity of the things.

Of course, there will always be a Diving Deeper. There may not always be a drag-and-drop exercise that goes with it. Might be something else.

But, if there was enough continuity so students weren't just sort of, ugh. Didn't know quite what to do with it.

So, very important.

So, the content then, was that.

The interaction for students then. We have interaction in both large and small group, for them to have. So we have, face-to-face interaction, and those would be, yeah?

**Questioner:**

I had a question related to content. So, if your layout is three one hour lectures...

**Byron Sheldrick:**

No.

**Nanita Mohan:**

No.

**Carol Dauda:**

No.

**Nanita Mohan:**

I'll be talking about that.

**Carol Dauda:**

We're coming, we're coming to that. So, we'll get to the nitty-grittys of it.

This is just, sort of an overview of what our task was to try and create a template from which we could work.

But we're going to explain each one.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

But to really quickly answer it, there's one lecture, an hour and 1/2. Day one. That's a Monday class.

Everything else builds to it. With the seminars, with the GTAs towards the end of the week, so everything is scaffolded and linked throughout, but we cut down on face-to-face lecture time.

**Carol Dauda:**

Yeah.

So, the interaction then. There are group activities and there are individual assignments. Right. So they get both.

And they get to interact with the content through both the active participatory work and the individual work, so that by the end of the week they've had several ways of interacting with this content. Both face-to-face and online, and both interactive and individual work.

So, the individual work, we have the traditional, with the online we have the traditional online tests. We have vlogging. We have, doing a post in your online participation group. So you can go back and forth.

As I said, it's kind of a menu to pick from, to slot and for each week, and for our modules.

So, planning was a big undertaking for us and it took a lot of times, a lot of meetings, a lot of frustrating meetings. (laughs)

I know you can speak to that Natalie. (laughs)

So, if we think that was complicated, try the implementation and that's Nanita's. (laughs)

### Nanita Mohan:

So, all of this looks very pretty in graphs. And, you know we had all these colorful graphs green and red, and then, when it came to actually putting things in practice, they one of the first semester I was like, ah.

So, I'm here to talk about how we actually, sort of, converted some of the things that Carol and Dennis said, into a practical way, and I have the pleasure of teaching this class for the first time, two semesters ago.

So right now, we're in our third offering, and I must say that, so far, touch-wood, it has gone pretty well, in terms of feedback from students, the teaching assistants and just the general consistency of this class.

So, I'm gonna talk about as you know, what you mentioned, how we actually, sort of developed a plan to have that consistency in place.

So, the lectures take place every Monday. Right now, we are scheduled from 5:30 to 6:50. So it's an hour and 20 minutes.

And the slides for the lecture are kept very basic. More focus on the theoretical concepts of political science. I don't go into detail, into too much detail because that's why we have the Diving Deeper for.

And I have an example of the week that I'm gonna show you. So basically, during the one hour and 20 minutes I talk about these concepts. I sort of, relate these concepts to the readings.

We have a custom textbook that we created for this class.

Each week is specific to a chapter from another textbook that we have. And once again, it's kept at a very basic level.

And students are then expected between Tuesday and Thursday, to do approximately eight to ten hours of online activity, online reading and that's what we call, Diving Deeper.



So, for example they would have to watch a video to supplement the lecture. They would have to do a drag-and-drop exercise, to sort of, apply some of the theoretical concepts that I talked about, during lecture.

And then, the seminars or the seminar tutorials, they're 50 minutes long and they're scheduled for Thursday and Friday. So, by Thursday or Friday, depending on when they are registered for the seminar, they will then take the information that they learned from the lectures, the Diving Deeper exercises, and the TAs will then, sort of, provide an activity that will bring everything together.

And the TAs have access to their drag-and-drop and Diving Deeper exercises, so they know the students have actually done them, or if they did it incorrectly, can bring it up, and I've created different activities for every week, so that they can actually apply some of the Diving Deeper and the lecture material into the seminars.

So, the seminars are right now, probably, if there was a challenge, it would be the seminars, because to establish consistency, I need to have TAs at the same level. So, some TAs do better than the others.

So right now, I would say that, that is the only little bit of a bump that we have, because, you know, lectures always done by myself or whoever else is gonna lecture. So there's always that consistency,

Diving Deeper is the same. But, I think one of the complaints that I have heard, is that some TAs are better at, sort of, interpreting the information.

Some are less enthusiastic, et cetera. But, one semester I had what I call, my superstar team of TAs and it was four PhD students, and they were really, really good at sort of, taking the lead.

So, the other great thing about this class, is that we actually have little assessments. So, you know, not like a 30% midterm or 40% final.

Every week, they have something going on, and at first, I was really afraid because I'm used to teaching a huge class of 400 or 500 students, where you know, the only thing I can really afford to do, is two or three midterms, probably a few online blog assignments and a final exam.

But for this, we have divided the class into four modules. Each module consist of three weeks.

So this is a sample of our first module. So, week one: Power and Authority. Week two: Ideology and Political Parties. Week three: Representation and Democracy.

So, by putting it into modules, they sort of understand that this class works in four different components. So they know, that by the end of module one they have to have completed a few things. And then, in the end of module two, they would've had to complete a few things.

So, from the feedback I got, they actually really like these little components, because first of all they tend to do much better, when they have 5% discussion, 5% quiz and they also know that because they have to keep up with the readings, come to lecture, they need to retain the knowledge and they tend to do really well.

I think, last semester the average, sorry Troy, was a little bit higher (laughs) for our first year class, but we really couldn't help it.

They were really into the material, very enthusiastic and the seminar participation and attendance was really good as well as the lecture.

My lectures on Monday nights are, I would say at 80%, 85%. Because they know that, that's the only time they have to come, to learn about the theoretical parts of their course.

So, these are the other modules. So as I said, our first module was just a basic political power, concepts, ideas. Module two, we get into liberal or democratic states, module three, political participation, module four, global politics.

And in terms of distribution of marks, the seminar tutorials are 25%. So they are graded on attendance and participation.

There are discussions every week. There are 11 discussions in total, however they're only graded for four. So, one per module.

And the most, I think, successful thing about this class, is how we've divided the research assignment.

So I've taught very big classes. You know, first-year classes with four or 500 students, and it came to a point where, we really didn't have the manpower to grade any kind of term paper, research assignments, so I had to sort of kibosh that.

But with this, because each TA is responsible for approximately 40 students, we're actually able to give them the opportunity to teach about how to write a research assignment in four different ways.

So, the step one is when they have to do a research question and then step two, and annotated bibliography and then lit review and then finally, like an opinion piece at the end.

But basically, the seminars or part of the seminars are taken out to teach them how to come up with the research question, how to write a proper thesis so that they're a little bit more prepared in the second and third and fourth year. Something that, we in political science could not do in first year, because of the large classes and the lack of TAs that can help us with that.

They have three quizzes. Each quiz is due at the end of every module, with the exception of the last module, because it's close to the final exam. And the final exam is only worth 20%.

And they really like this, because there's not a lot of pressure at the end, because they can do a little bit along the way.

So, what I'm going to do right now, is show you an example of a week. So, I'll do the first week.

So this is how each week looks like.

We have an overview, and introduction of what the week is about. Learning outcomes and we've provided them a checklist as well.

And then, we've divided it into the in class, online and seminar activities.

So, and in class lecture, every week we upload the slides, so they have access to the slides.

So, I'm just gonna sort of show you how the first week's slides look like. So, as you can see there's only 11 slides for an hour and 20 minutes, but they're kept very basic.

So, for the first week, I talked about for example, Max Weber's ideal types of political authority. So, traditional, charismatic, legal-rational and that will give them sort of, just the basics of what they are.

And then what they need to do from Tuesday to Thursday is go to the online part, and they will then take the information from the lecture, and do what we call a drag-and-drop activity on the different types of political authority.

So, for example, not dependent on a person occupying a position. That would be, rational-legal.

Based on line of succession. Traditional. You know, Queen Elizabeth. She's an example of traditional.

Cult leaders, charismatic for example. I hope I got this right.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

You did.

(Group laughs)

**Nanita Mohan:**

And then,

**Byron Sheldrick:**

I was going (phew).

(Group laughs)

**Nanita Mohan:**

And then you can check them, and let's just say, I put this in it incorrect, so if I do retry and I do something incorrectly. So if I put this here, I can check and it'll say, it's incorrect.

So, they can do this and TAs actually have access to this. So, they can sort of monitor the progress of each student's as well, and the general perception of what students are doing, in terms of whether they're getting it right or not.

And then, once they complete this, on Thursday or Friday in the seminar, we then have activities where they can take this up and talk about why, you know, Queen Elizabeth is part of the traditional authority and why James Jones is not part of traditional. So, they can sort of have, an even more detailed discussion about the lecture material as well as the drag-and-drop.

So, just to give you another example of another week. This is the one that Carol created. She has a voiceover.

**Carol Dauda:**

And I didn't know that until now. (laughs)

**Nanita Mohan:**

So for this week once again, our in class lecture, we have slides that talks about democracy, different forms of democracy. Once again, very theoretical and then online activity. I don't know--

Carol in video:

Edmund argued in the early 19th century, that the elected representatives,

Nanita Mohan:

So this is basically extra slides that where she's talking about the different types of representation and then students will then take,

Carol in video:

While the representative should always,

Nanita Mohan:

Listen to their Diving Deeper and then sort of, apply the different types of representation to a quote. So, for example the first one, I'm not even reading. I'm just gonna just, for there, let's say it's partisan, and then go back.

Yeah so, so they can do this exercise, and then once again in the seminars, for this particular week they will participate in debate and determine which type of representation is better and why, and they will also start to work on their research questions.

So they'll take about 20 minutes. The TA will explain what a research question is, so they can also start working on that particular research assignment.

So basically, the key here is to always ensure consistency. Once there is a break in the consistency, then you know, we run into problems. And in order to ensure that consistency, we have to stick to those lecture slides, and the lecture material in that hour and 20 minutes.

And the first time this was offered that was a bit of a challenge, because as we all instructors know that we never really finish on time, and were always sort of having one or two slides that we take into the next week. So, in this case, the challenge is to try to get everything done in those time period, and then it will be smooth sailing.

So, even with the online activity, we don't try to give them too much, because they only have approximately eight hours to do everything, and then in the in-class seminars, the TAs make sure that they are ready. And they have to be ready. If they're not ready, and they're falling a little bit behind.

So, I guess to say, I mean, you know, like the first semester obviously we had some issues with that, but in the second semester I was able to, sort of, really convince students that you have to keep track with the readings, with the Diving Deeper otherwise it won't balance. And once they got that, it really flowed quite well.

Questioner:

I have two questions. First, do you or the TAs mark the 11 blogs?

Nanita Mohan:

The TAs do most of the marking. I do mark a few things. I just sort of relieve some of the time. But yeah, the TAs are mostly responsible for 90% of the grading.

Questioner:

Okay.

Carol Dauda:

And there wouldn't be 11 blogs because, we choose.

Nanita Mohan:

Only four are graded, but they have the opportunity to sort of, you know, blog or do a discussion or answer questions every week.

That's also just to keep them up-to-date with the material so that they're not falling behind.

And even the non-graded ones, students tend to participate, just to ensure that they know the material and then TAs can sort of, look into that.

Questioner:

And you said that, after the first lecture they're expected to spend eight to ten hours of reading that sounds like a lot.

Nanita Mohan:

Not reading, but doing the activities. That includes the textbook reading.

Byron Sheldrick:

Just on that though, the University guidelines and rules are that a 0.5 credit hour course, 0.5 credit course is 10 to 12 hours of student effort a week. So this is completely consistent with what the University expects.

Questioner:

Per course?

Byron Sheldrick:

A 0.5 credit course is 10 to 12 hours of student effort. And that is a combination of in class, attending lectures, readings, and other activities.

And that's what we've designed this around, and I think the key thing here is, the student response is really fabulous.

We assumed the students don't want to do the work. And so we gear our expectations downwards. But in fact, when you create meaningful and engaging exercises and opportunities to participate, students do it.

Nanita Mohan:

And I'm saying eight to ten hours as the max, right.

Byron Sheldrick:

And some weeks it may be less.

Nanita Mohan:

Some weeks is less. Yeah.

Byron Sheldrick:

And it depends on the student, right? How quickly they get the material.

Nanita Mohan:

Absolutely.

Byron Sheldrick:

How much time they need to spend. So it varies.

Nanita Mohan:

And out of the eight to ten hours, like some weeks we have videos, that are about an hour, an hour and 1/2. Right? So, for them to take notes from the video, for them to sort of, do the reading.

So that's just, I'm being very liberal with the eight to ten hours. It's probably less but,

Byron Sheldrick:

And I think we've been mindful too, when we designed it about not trying to overwhelm students. But it sounds like a lot. But I think we were very kind of, cognizant of that. Is that too much to ask, for them to do?

So, and then it varies, right. Because it's a menu as explained, so students have different options, different weeks. It always looks a little different.

There's that continuity and consistency about expectations, but within each week of a module, it varies. So it's not, it doesn't become routinized and boring, as a result as well, because there are different elements each week.

Nanita Mohan:

So, I mean--

Carol Dauda:

And Nanita, I would just say too, that we were very easy on the first week. And everybody, first week of September, your first year in political or in university, so.

Nanita Mohan:

Yeah, absolutely.

And also, like, the lectures one of the things I did that also got very good feedback, is we have four I guess, including myself, five different instructors that created the content for some of the weeks.

So what I did was, I got those instructors or those professors to come and do a guest lecture for the weeks that they created, and they really like that because then, they got to see who the other faculty members are.

Troy has been very nice with his time. He created the last week, and he comes to guest lectures during the last week. So they just really like you there. They're very engaged and you know, they kinda like the fact that there's a little bit of diversity 'cause it's not just me every week, mentoring.

So, lectures are very important because they set up the entire week of activities. And I tell them, I use about five minutes in the start of the class, to tell them what to expect for the rest of the week, and then I say, okay, well some of these things that I'm gonna talk about, are going to be applied in a Diving Deeper, and then some of that is gonna be then applied to the seminar as well.

So, between the seminars and the Diving Deeper, there's a lot more connection, I would say, than between the lecture and the Diving Deeper.

But, you know you have to sort of try to keep it very basic in the beginning, so that students, when they leave the lecture they're not supposed to know everything, where they're gonna skip the online part.

They're gonna be like, but, what about this or what about that? So, it's not that I try to discourage question during lecture, but I say well, you know, maybe this is something that can be taken up in your seminars or your seminar leader can talk about it.

Like, I do answer factual content question, but I don't try to generate as much discussion during the lecture, and just keep it straightforward with lecture.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

Open up to questions?

**Nanita Mohan:**

Yeah. Yeah, I was just going to, this is my last slide here.

But basically, it's just what I was trying to say how the Diving Deeper material for each module goes into more detail of what the lectures and the textbook is all about.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

So questions. So should I--

**Nanita Mohan:**

Thank you.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

Take the mic to people? Yeah. So, we're podcasting these and recording them, so that they can go on our website as a resource for people who might not have been able to be here.

So, I have the job of being Oprah Winfrey, and passing on the mic to people.

(Group laughing)

**Questioner #1:**

Well thank you.

Do you have any data that shows the different grades between different groups? And then, do they compare to the final exam grade of each student?

Nanita Mohan:

Sorry, what do you mean by groups?

Questioner #1:

So let's say, you have five different seminar leaders.

Nanita Mohan:

Yes.

Questioner #1:

They all give you--

Nanita Mohan:

Oh yes.

Questioner #1:

A list of grades. Do they differ between themselves?

Nanita Mohan:

I am collecting that. I did that for the first semester just to see.

The first semester was great. That was the semester that we had four really good TAs.

Then last semester, two were good. Two were okay.

So, I did compare it and actually did have to change some of the grades of one of the TAs because I guess, this is her first time teaching the class like this. But yeah, there was some discrepancy that I had to adjust.

Carol Dauda:

Can you add the handbook?

Nanita Mohan:

Pardon me?

Carol Dauda:

The TA handbook.

Nanita Mohan:

Yes. I did create a TA manual, so that every week I expect them to sort of follow it, the best possible.

But once again, it also depends on the TA, right. Like, some are more shy. Some are more assertive with these things.



But the TA manual helps them to kinda keep the participation activities more consistent, or hope so anyways.

**Questioner #1:**

The other point would be to compare the final exam grades from each group.

**Nanita Mohan:**

Yeah, that's true. I have not done that. Yeah.

(Group laughs)

**Questioner #2:**

Thank you very much. Very interesting. Very practical questions.

How big was the lecture? What size were the seminars? How many seminars were there? How did you get rooms?

(Group laughs)

I know you had an AD behind you, so that probably helped. Right?

I had kind of, TA feedback. I'm interested because it seems pretty intense for TAs, given the general, what a TA looks like generally across campus.

This one seems particularly intense.

**Nanita Mohan:**

I'll do the, how many students are in a class in a TA, and then you can talk about how you pull strings.  
(laughs)

So there are approximately 200 students in a lecture. 200 in the winter and 180 in the fall semester, so approximately 200.

Each seminar has no more than 25 students. So anywhere between 20 and 25 students.

There are eight seminars in total, four full-time TAs. Each TA is responsible for two seminars. So their grading is only based on those two seminars.

So they have anywhere between 40 to 50 students that they're responsible for, not taking into consideration who drops a class, and obviously who doesn't submit assignments, so.

In terms of TA feedback, I didn't hear any complain.

We had one TA, was commuting from Toronto. So she was able to sort of, come on Fridays to do back to back seminars. But she says, that everything was pretty straightforward and she didn't have to do a lot of prep on her part because she knew the material.

So I haven't really heard anything specific from any TAs.

We did have a meeting with some of the TAs, and you know, the feedback was pretty positive. But, yeah. I think they're okay with the amount of grading, and also because it's not, they're not doing 200 in week eight, and then they have two weeks to submit the grade.

They're kinda doing a little bit every week, plus they get to know their students as well. They really enjoy that part, the moderating part.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

I would say on that front too. I think at my college at least, and it would vary across the university. The model in some of our courses for TAs now, is that they primarily do grading, and they don't teach students.

So, they have office hours where they're not very busy and for weeks they might not have very much to do, and then they're inundated. Right?

So, that question of intensity is an interesting one, in that there is greater expectations to do more over the seminar, or on a more consistent basis, week to week but I'm not sure whether it, I would think they thought it was less onerous, when those really intense times came, because they had a fixed number of students, expectations about what was gonna be their grading responsibilities, and better able to organize their time as opposed to having 200 essays dumped on you, and you now have to grade them within the next week and a half.

Right. Which is typically how our model works, but having lots of free time in between. So, you know it's a different way of organizing it, but I think they found it also a better experience, so.

**Nanita Mohan:**

So, the other thing to is because they are consistently talking about the assignments, they get less emails about, oh, how do I write a research assignment? You know, what do you mean by APA style?

Because every week, they're taking about 10, 15 minutes to talk about what's due, and the assignments are scattered in four different components.

They're getting less questions, less students bugging them to help them. So that also helps, as well a good time.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

In terms of scheduling, Troy, you might actually be better placed to answer that than me, I had already abandoned the department by then.

(Group laughs)

We ran into several issues, I think. One is, yes, logistically this is more complex.

Right so, but, I think scheduling was reasonably cooperative.

**Troy Riddell:**

People are back and forth, but yeah.

One of the reasons why this slot, the lecture slot is in the 5:30 is because, we needed that lecture early in the week. So we had to compromise.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

Can you hand this back to him?

**Troy Riddell:**

Oh yeah, thank you.

So, we had to compromise on the time slot for first week and then trying to get the number of, the seminars at the end of the week, is also a bit tricky.

So, if you have, if you try to scale this up to larger numbers, that also becomes more complicated, because then you need to squeeze the seminars into the Thursday and Friday. So there are some logistical issues.

But yeah, scheduling was good and working with us it just took a little bit of back-and-forth to get it right.

**Carol Dauda:**

I might just say too, that the idea was, that we've been floating around, that given more numbers depending on how that happens with our introductory course, that it might be better to have two sections of the course rather than trying to deal with the much. This seems to be a sweet spot, the 200.

And we're very concerned with quality. Very concerned with quality, that going this way. Dennis, we've had discussions about this, that the first thing that can go is quality if you're trying to solve a 600 member class.

**Questioner #3:**

Thank you. I'm just curious about resourcing in that, because four 1.0 TAs for a 200 person course is actually relatively high. So, did you actually increase resourcing to be able to do this?

(Faint speaking)

Okay.

(Group laughs)

**Byron Sheldrick:**

I mean, Yeah. And that's one of those questions. But I think we felt that, or I felt that certainly.

I think Troy would agree. I'm gonna put words in his mouth.

Is that in face of recommendations from the external consultants on the quality assurance, and that the opportunity to give our graduate students, real teaching opportunities.

So I can remember when I did my PhD, being able to be a teaching assistant, was incredibly important for my development as an academic and as an educator.

And as an undergrad student, that was an incredibly great opportunity.

I can remember more about certain experiences in those seminar groups and I actually can remember some very meaningful TAs more than I can remember some of my profs that I had in first year.

Yeah, I remember that prof in that history class, but I really remember the TA, 'cause they were phenomenal.

So, you know, that varies of course but those can be really important opportunities, and as a university were talking a lot about high-impact practices including small group experiences.

And so, there was a decision that we really need to be prepared to invest in that.

And yes, so. You know, we're a public institution. Not everything generates profits, and yes we need to reallocate resources and we need to think about how that looks.

But if we value it, then we should do it, and I think it's been a success in that regard, so. Yeah.

**Faculty member:**

I just have a comment.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

Sure.

**Faculty member:**

With four TAs for 200 students, you're still nowhere near science. (laughs)

I have 86 students, and I have 4 TAs. But they teach labs.

**Nanita Mohan:**

Oh wow.

**Carol Dauda:**

Right.

**Faculty member:**

So, you're still nowhere near, and we have smaller ratios than that for some of our courses, where their labs are particularly risky and we need to have quite small groups in the lab.

So, you're still nowhere near what we are doing, and we're probably higher than that in first year, 'cause each TA would have about 100 students, but they only see them every other week. So they only see them half the time.

**Nanita Mohan:**

Okay.

**Faculty member:**

But just to put that in perspective, like four TAs. I think for TA for 200 students, that's not that many.

(Group laughs)

Nanita Mohan:

Maybe we can talk about--

Byron Sheldrick:

That's good. We're gonna note that down.

Carol Dauda:

Yes, grab that.

(Group laughs)

Byron Sheldrick:

We have a comment over here.

(Group chattering)

Questioner #4:

Hi. I'm wondering if there were any negative comments from the students or any part of the online menus or options that you had, that they didn't work that well or that you're considering changing.

Nanita Mohan:

So umm. Of course we've had a few negative comments, mostly coming from upper year students taking this class. So, this class was designed specifically for first-year students.

The upper year students said things like, you know, the seminars are useless for me because I know how to write, or I think I know how to write a research assignment paper or it's too basic or some of the Diving Deeper, I don't need to know the additional information because I have the background. So that's one comment.

From first-year students, a few of them, the negative comments would be more catered towards the online component, because they're not ready for that kind of individual work.

But I actually teach, like, a first-year online class. It's just entirely online, right. So, I mean, it's just a different kind of teaching environment for them, and I guess they're not ready for that part where, oh, I have to go online, read something, do something and then what? What do I do now? Right. So they're not prepared for that yet.

But, I think after week eight, week nine, then the understand okay, well, this all kinda comes together and the TA will help me if I don't understand everything. So yeah.

Those are the two main complaints, from upper year students who don't think the seminars are useful, and from first-year students who think that, the online's a little bit intimidating.

Questioner #4:

So, you wouldn't consider changing or anything?

Nanita Mohan:

No. No, I actually really like how it's set up.

From an instructor's point of view, from a TA's point of view and you know, the evaluations have been pretty good, so.

**Carol Dauda:**

They are good.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

We may have time for one or two last comments. I'll hand it over to the Chair of Political Science.

**Nanita Mohan:**

Uh oh.

**Troy Riddell:**

Nanita, this is probably more directed more towards you, but a question about the challenge of offering a lecture, where you're kind of sticking mostly to the concepts and ideas, and you mentioned maybe not being able to be quite as interactive as you were before.

We lecture in our other classes, were used to sort of adding current events and interacting with students, maybe generating some debates.

So, can you tell me about the challenges of keeping that lecture fresh and kind of, exciting for the students and for yourself, but also trying to stick to that, you know, let's get the concepts out and not have within a strict amount of time.

**Nanita Mohan:**

Yeah. So what I do is, I make sure I go through all the slides first. So the first half an hour, of just that boring (laughs) person talking about the concepts and then after that, I will go back and revisit some of the slides and say, okay, well this is happening right now and this kinda relates to this. What do you think? And then I'll open it up for discussion.

But I try to, sort of, make sure that I finish all of those slides and information that I have to first before engaging in it. So, sometimes I have time. Sometimes I don't.

Obviously, as I'm talking and I'm discussing and I'm throwing examples, students will stop me and ask questions.

I'm not dismissing them. I'll just maybe take two questions and then I say, okay, well we have to continue on, then I'll just finish the rest and then I'll come back if we have time. But it seems to work so far, so.

There's one week. I think it's week two on ideology, where you know, I'm doing a lot of explanation, because a lot of it is new to them. Like, what is reform liberalism, neoconservatism.

So I'm taking a bit more time and that's probably the most challenging of all the weeks, 'cause I usually don't have much time to finish all the slides. But other than that, it's pretty--

**Byron Sheldrick:**

So, when I used to lecture the traditional 1150 course, ideologies, I'd always give myself two weeks and I would take two months. So you know--

(Group laughs)

This is the problem, right. So that is a particularly challenging area.

And that's why the Diving Deeper that week, is one of the things I think is very important, is the historical context of how ideologies evolve.

There is no time to talk about that, right. All you can talk about is, this is what socialism is, this is what conservatism and this is what liberalism is.

So the Diving Deeper is actually, it's really boring 'cause its me sitting at my desk saying--

**Nanita Mohan:**

You guys wanna see it?

**Byron Sheldrick:**

No.

(Group laughs)

There's only one minute and not enough time, talking for about 10 minutes about, this sort of thing. So, you've learned what these terms are. Where did they come from? Here's all this exciting history, which I think is exciting. They may not.

And it's sort of elaborating on all that stuff, I think it's good, 'cause I got it down to 10 minutes as opposed to two months.

But nevertheless, so. You know and it's sort of like, but that is a huge challenge for sure.

**Nanita Mohan:**

I had a student who said, do we really have to know all this stuff that dude said?

**Byron Sheldrick:**

The dude.

**Nanita Mohan:**

The dude.

(Group laughs)

**Byron Sheldrick:**

I feel so hip and cool. I'm a dude now. That's awesome.

**Nanita Mohan:**

So, that's him.

Byron Sheldrick:

Yeah, there I am. Sitting in my office.

Do you wanna hear it?

Nanita Mohan:

Yes. Every word the dude said is important.

Byron Sheldrick:

Absolutely, that's it. A last comment or question?

Questioner #5:

I was just thinking how great it is with the emphasis on continuity between, like within a module, even week to week and that sort of thing.

And I was wondering if you also took this opportunity to create more continuity between this initial course and some of the courses that they'll encounter in second, third and fourth year, and if you had any challenges with that?

Nanita Mohan:

I don't teach third and fourth year. Second year, I don't think we have. Is there any course that's similar to this in the second year?

Byron Sheldrick:

No, but I think the question's more about kind of, preparatory for those courses.

I think what we did, the four modules are not, they're not just chosen randomly. And this was one of our big debates. I think we had long discussions, Nanita, Carol and myself about what is needed in a first-year course.

So there's all sorts of things that when I used to teach this course, that are not in this course. And there's stuff that Carol taught that is not in this course. And this was hard, right? 'Cause we have to let go.

And that's why, it's all about content but at another level it's not about content. It's not about saying we have to cover everything that we think a political scientist needs to know. But what are the key, core elements of the discipline of political science that we think students should be exposed to, at least in an introductory way that would prepare them in the second and third year.

So explicitly, like it doesn't necessarily scaffold directly to those courses, but I think that as a sort of, a preparatory intro course, I think we've gotten away from thinking about it as when I took first-year courses.

They were called survey courses. In a sense that you covered a bit of everything. We're not trying to cover a bit of everything. We're trying to give you the key concepts you're gonna need to succeed in the upper years.

And so it's that, it's preparatory rather than a survey. We're not attempting to cover everything, and in fact, I think as in our department, what we think of as the second year courses, I call them gateway



courses. That those courses are actually, if you wanna do IR, the second year International Relations course, is the gateway to that.

This is the gateway to the discipline, those are the gateways to more specific subject matter expertise.

(Faint speaking)

Yeah. All right so, on that then, I think we're out of time. We're a little past time. So I'll just thank everyone for attending and please let's give a round of applause for our panelists.

(Audience applause)

We're always welcome to, are open to getting questions or inquiries. So, I think you could email Nanita, Dennis, or Carol or myself if you have other--

**Nanita Mohan:**

Feedback.

**Byron Sheldrick:**

Other questions that didn't come up today.

The next Hub event is February 8th, and it's going to be on Indigenizing curriculum. So I would encourage people to come and check that out, and it's gonna be led by Kim Anderson of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition in our department.

I'm not sure all of what Kim has planned for us, but I'm sure it's gonna be fabulous.

So, awesome. Thank you again.

[End of transcript]