

UB Teaches and Learns

by Kathleen MK Boje, Associate Professor Pharmaceutics

Practical approaches to engage students

It's that time of year again! Soon both campuses will be abuzz with activity and the UB community will be once again welcoming enthusiastic and energized students.

As we revisit our syllabi and plan for our courses, our challenge is to tap into that student enthusiasm to promote the teaching / learning process. *UBlearns* is one the many tools that instructors have to assist in channeling and harnessing student energy.

The goal of this article is to share several techniques for using *UBlearns* to augment the teaching / learning process in one's courses. I and my departmental colleagues have used these techniques as student preparatory activities in a variety of class settings and sizes. Among the techniques are jigsaw readings, student questions on assigned readings, student reading synopses, class surveys, content frequently asked questions (FAQ), and exam / homework problem review. These techniques are flexible, can be modified for various course needs / objectives, and not particularly instructor labor-intensive. (However, TA's with *UBlearns* CourseBuilder / Teacher's Assistant permissions are recommended for large classes).

The Jigsaw Reading

Overview: The Jigsaw Reading is a cooperative learning strategy that helps students construct their own learning. This approach has been adapted for different formats and purposes; the variation described here utilizes *UBlearns* and face-to-face classroom time for student discussion of lengthy reading materials (such as reviews or reports). In brief, different students read different sections of the review then share their knowledge with other students who were assigned other reading sections.

Class level and size: Suitable for any level (undergraduate and graduate) and size (10 – 200+). I've successfully used this technique with upper division undergraduates in class sizes of 60-80 students.

Implementation: The set-up and execution of this approach is illustrated in Figure 1 for the hypothetical paper "The Ponderous Review". The instructor assigns each student (designated by number as S1, S2, ... in this example) to two categorical groups: an Expertise Group and a Teaching Group. The membership of each categorical group is different. All students in the Expertise Group read the same section of the review. (Note: There will be a number of Expertise Groups since the review is divided into different reading sections.) Teaching Groups are composed of students who were each assigned unique reading sections; the design of the Teaching Groups should be such that each student in the group contributes information from a unique section of the review. (See Figure 1.)

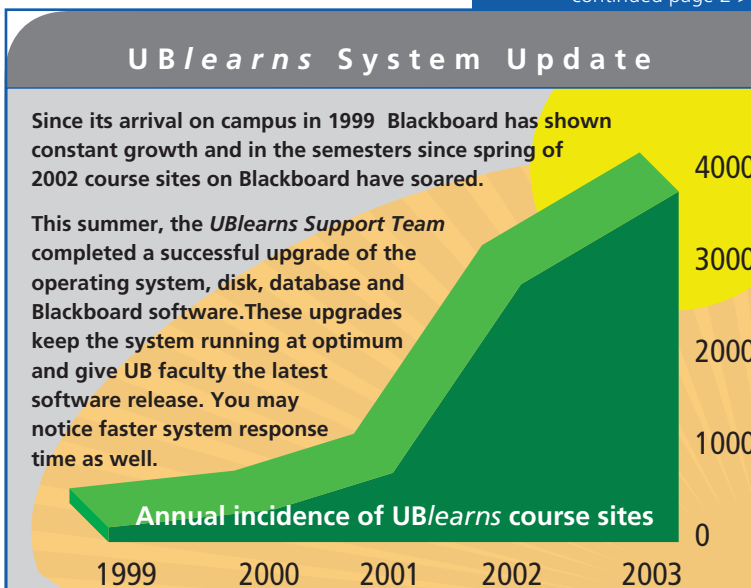
To provide students with an overview of the review without requiring students to read it in its entirety, the instructor creates Teaching Groups using the Group Pages feature of *UBlearns* and requires that each student post a synopsis of his/her reading section in the Discussion Board area of the assigned Teaching Group. Students are required to review their Teaching Group mates' postings, which can be accomplished by requiring students to post one or more questions to a group mate and to post responses to posted questions.

Specifying the criteria for the quality of student postings is essential! Often, the instructor needs to define the obvious, such as the quality (proper English, grammar and spelling) and length (a paragraph of X sentences) of the synopsis. Clearly defining instructor expectations on the quality of the response postings (insightful questions, critical comments, justified opinion statements) is important too. Lastly, to avoid plagiarism from the original review, students must be instructed to paraphrase their synopsis using their own words!

Classroom Follow-Through: This section is optional, but highly recommended to reinforce and expand student knowledge of the assigned review. Each Expertise Group assembles to discuss the common reading assignment. It is helpful to require that each member of each Expertise Group prepare a summary page of the group discussion. When this activity is completed, students reorganize into Teaching Groups to share with their new group what they've learned in their Expertise Group. Again, each member of the Teaching Group can be required to prepare a summary page of the group discussion. Thereafter, if desired, the instructor can facilitate a class – wide discussion of the review.

Assessment: The instructor can assess the quality of the *UBlearns* postings, as well as the summary pages of the Expertise

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and Teaching Group discussions. Peer evaluation techniques can be used to assess each student's contributions in each Expertise and Teaching Group.

Figure 1. How to set up a Jigsaw Reading

1
STEP

Create "Expertise Groups", Inform students of the assignment

Student Reading Assignments for "The Ponderous Review".

Instructions to the students: Some parts we'll all read, and on other parts we'll take turns, summarize and share. You must be prepared to discuss your section in depth in class!

All students must read the Introduction and Conclusions of "The Ponderous Review". Check below for your additional reading assignment.

Expertise Reading Assignment Groups

(S1 is the name for student #1, S2 for student #2, etc.)

Expertise Group #1: First section – S1, S2, S3

Expertise Group #2: Second section – S4, S5, S6

Expertise Group #3: Third Section – S7, S8, S9

2
STEP

Create "Teaching Groups" in UBlearns; Inform students of the assignment

UBlearns Group Discussion Board – "The Ponderous Review" Jigsaw reading

Instructions to the students: Post a 2-3 sentence of your assigned reading section in your assigned Teaching Discussion Group. (Check below for your group.) Please review your classmates' postings in preparation for the next class. You must post one question to a fellow group member about his/her reading AND you must answer any questions posted to you.

Teaching Groups

Teaching Group A – S1, S4, S7

Teaching Group B – S2, S5, S8

Teaching Group C – S3, S6, S9

3
STEP

(Optional): Classroom Discussion

During class time, students break into their Expertise Groups to discuss the reading section in depth. This is followed by reconvening into their Teaching Groups to teach each other about his/her reading section

Student Questions on Assigned Readings

Overview: Students are given readings assignments and required to generate questions based on their comprehension of the readings.

Class level and size: Several of my colleagues have used this technique at the undergraduate and graduate levels, in class sizes of 10-50 students. This technique can be readily deployed in larger classes, though it may be helpful to divide the class into smaller groups (see Implementation).

Implementation: In small classes, students are assigned readings and required to post questions about those readings in the Discussion Board area of UBlearns.

(Larger classes can be subdivided into groups, using Group Pages feature of UBlearns. Students then post in the Group Discussion Board common to his/her group.)

It is helpful to specify the number and quality of questions that each student must post. (Examples of question types based on cognitive levels can be found in Reference #1). Explicitly prohibiting duplicative questions will encourage students to think independently. Specifying the deadline, e.g., 24 hours before class, or the consequences of not posting (or late posting), is important for classroom follow-through.

Classroom Follow-Through: Either before (or during class), the instructor reviews the question postings. During class, the instructor facilitates a class discussion of the more interesting or provocative questions. Discussion can occur as an entire class or in smaller groups.

As a post class assignment, one of my colleagues assigns posted questions (that were not discussed in class) for the students to submit written essays.

Assessment: Discussion Board postings can be graded on an all or none basis (either full or no credit) or on a graded basis using a rubric to evaluate the question quality. One example rubric that I've used for evaluation of question postings is: 1 - Factual Knowledge: "Please explain" basic questions requesting clarification or questions testing knowledge of facts; 2 - "What if; Why is" thinking questions of technical nature based on some basic understanding of a concept; 3 - Questions that reflect deeper analysis, synthesis and generalization or are thought provocative.

Student Reading Synopses

Overview: Students independently search for and select papers to read in a specified topic area. Students then use the Discussion Board to post a synopsis of the selected paper.

Class level and size: I've used technique has been used in class sizes of 20-80 students. For deployment in larger classes, or if there are a limited number of papers in a topic area, it may be helpful logistically to divide the class into groups using Group Pages feature of UBlearns. Students can then post in the Group Discussion Board common to his / her group.

Implementation: Students are assigned to use library resources / databases to search, select and read a journal article on the topic of interest. Students then post a synopsis of the main theme of his/her selected article, as well a citation for the article, in the UBlearns Discussion Board. Students can be encouraged to review other postings by requiring that each student post a comment or question to another student's posting.

It is helpful to specify to the students that:

- A** Each student must have a unique article. If a student selected an article that is already posted in the Discussion Board, then the student must identify another article. This prevents duplicative (and perhaps copy-cat) postings.
- B** Instructor expectations on the quality and length of the synopsis. Specifying the obvious, e.g. proper English and grammar, a short paragraph consisting of X sentences, etc, will limit instructor disappointment!
- C** Students must be prepared to discuss their article in class. This helps the student to make a serious effort to critically read and evaluate the article.
- D** Posted synopses must not be plagiarized. (Hence the requirement that the student also provide a citation or functional URL for the selected article.)
- E** Instructor expectations on the quality of the posting of a comment to another's article synopsis. Specifying that postings must be composed of insightful questions, critical comments or justified agree/disagree statements prevent the posting of a shallow response.

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F The deadline for all postings and consequences for not posting or posting late.

Classroom Follow-Through: Either before (or during class), the instructor can review the article postings and select out interesting postings for class discussion.

Assessment: Discussion Board postings can be graded on an all or none basis (either full or no credit) or on a graded basis using a rubric to evaluate the posting quality. The use of a rubric tends to motivate undergraduates to submit quality postings, provided that students know in advance what rubric will be used.

Content FAQ

Overview: The Discussion Board is used as a tool to disseminate frequently asked questions (FAQ) on matters pertaining to content.

Class level and size: Suitable for any level and size.

Implementation: The instructor collates FAQ's relating to content and posts them (with responses) in the Discussion Board. FAQ's can be obtained from questions e-mailed to the instructor or from in class techniques such as "The One Minute Paper" or "The Muddiest Point", where at the end of class, students jot down a question or two about confusing concepts or points. (Note: FAQs relating to course management, e.g. format of exams, due dates, etc can be handled via Announcements or e-mails sent to the entire class).

Classroom Follow-Through: A range of actions can be taken, such as no action at all, the announcing of the availability of the FAQ postings or classroom discussion on critical FAQs.

Assessment: None.

Class Surveys

Overview: The Survey tool can be used to survey student knowledge, attitudes or beliefs either before or after class discussion of a selected topic.

Class level and size: Suitable for any level and size.

Implementation: Survey questions are created using the Survey Manager / Survey Canvas tools of *UBlearns*. Students are then directed to complete the survey within a particular time frame.

Classroom Follow-Through: The survey results can be disclosed to the students in class either by the instructor logging into *UBlearns* and displaying

the results via the Control Panel, or by some other means (for example, PowerPoint, paper handouts). Survey results can be used as a springboard for class discussion.

Assessment: While the Survey tool records which students have attempted to take the survey, it does not track individual responses. Instead, results are presented in a statistical format. (Note: Since individual responses to questions are not available, it is not possible to know whether a particular student merely viewed the survey, or responded to part or all of the survey questions.) To encourage student use, the Survey could be mandated as an assignment and graded on an attempted / not attempted basis. This requires that the Instructor or Course Grader check the results on a routine basis, as sometimes a student (or two) will be locked out of the survey, requiring that the instructor / course grader reset the Survey for that student.

Exam / Homework Problem Review

Overview: Students can use the Test tool as a resource for reviewing questions from past quizzes or exams. Alternatively, the Test tool can be used to post correct and incorrect answers from an exam / quiz that was just administered to the class.

Class level and size: Suitable for any level and size.

Implementation: Example questions (pre-test, post-test, review) with feedback for correct and incorrect responses can be posted using the *UBlearns* Test Manger / Test Canvas tools. A variety of question types can be created given the flexibility of the Test Manager / Test Canvas tools. For example, I have used this feature for student review of calculation problems, allowing students to access the test as many times as they wish. It is important to emphasize to students that their responses from a previous attempt are not saved when the student revisits the test.

Classroom Follow-Through: A limited range of actions can be taken, such as no action at all, or classroom review / discussion of critical questions that students tend to miss.

Assessment: Since authentication of student identity is problematic in unproctored settings, it is suggested that the test scores be discounted. However, to encourage student use, the test could be mandated as an assignment and graded on a done / not done basis. This requires that the Instructor or Course Grader check the results on a routine basis, as sometimes a student (or two) will be locked out of the test, requiring that the instructor / course grader reset the test for that student.

Resources:

1. Bonwell, C.C. and Eison, JA. (1991). Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, DC: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development. pp 25-26.

This brief text presents a variety of active learning strategies that offers high returns in student learning with only modest changes in teaching approaches. Many of the described techniques (e.g. modified lecture, questioning and discussion, debates, peer teaching, cooperative learning) are intended for a face-to-face classroom environment, but can be modified for or supported by a course management system (such as *UBlearns*).

Available from the ETC book collection, call no. TMD 6.2 B69

2. Palloff, R.M. and Pratt, K. (2001). Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom : The Realities of Online Teaching. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco, CA.

The conclusion of each chapter provides invaluable tips for anyone using a course management system (such as *UBlearns*). These practical pointers include such topics as working with the virtual student, managing on-line classroom dynamics, and managing a successful on-line course.

Available from the ETC book collection, call no. TWT 6.0 P35

Meet Your Support Staff

Thomas Slomka Educational Technology Center

Thom joined the University at Buffalo professional staff in 1997. His work in the Educational Technology Center focuses on enhancing teaching and learning by leveraging communication design and information technologies. He serves as lead instructional designer for *UBlearns*, and supports the development of innovative educational technology tools – building blocks -- that enhance Blackboard performance.



Prior to joining the University, Thom was principal designer at firms in New York and Buffalo. His areas of expertise include corporate communication, information design, and product design.

Thom is active in the Buffalo professional community, founding local professional organizations and regularly serves as a board member of local professional and educational planning committees and organizations. Thom enjoys speaking at regional and national meetings on issues related to communication design, critical thinking, pedagogy and learning technology; particular interests include traditional, hybrid and online learning.

For fun Thom relaxes with family, skis, plays soccer, throws a mean Bocce, and seeks the great outdoors whenever possible.

Contact Thom at: tslomka@buffalo.edu or 645-7700 ext. 4

From the Editor

by *Carole Ann Fabian, Director, ETC*

UBlearns, UB's centrally-supported course management environment, has become a faculty favorite for distributing course information and for enhancing teaching and learning with technology. Its phenomenal growth over the last 4 years (see page 1) has been supported by a dedicated team of technology and instructional design specialists from ASCIT, TKS, ETC and the Libraries.

In addition, we have formed the **UBlearns Advisory Group**. It provides faculty perspectives and helps to inform the Support Team in their continual development of the *UBlearns* course management system and its functional tools for teaching and learning.

The *UBlearns* Update newsletter was created in response to the Advisory Group recommendation for a regular communication vehicle for faculty that focused on the pedagogical and technical aspects of Blackboard on *UBlearns*.

Many thanks to the 2003-2004 **UBlearns Advisory Group** for their service and commitment to making *UBlearns* work for you:

John Blyth, Kathleen Boje, Christine Chelus, Richard Feero, Peter Horvath, Denise Krause, Melissa Miskiewicz, Kay Sackett, Barbara Sherman, Powhatan Wooldridge, A. Neil Yerkey.

If you'd like to join the 2004-2005 *UBlearns* Advisory Group, please contact me at: cafabian@buffalo.edu or 645-7700 ext.2

Workshops

To view schedule and register for upcoming *UBlearns* workshops,

GO TO > <http://etc.buffalo.edu> > Instruction > Workshops



Educational Technology Center

University Libraries
212 Capen Hall
Buffalo, NY 14260-1680



UBlearns contacts:

For software and technical support, contact Systems support: ublearns@buffalo.edu or 645-2803
For course development and instruction, contact Faculty support: etc@buffalo.edu or 645-7700

UBlearns Update is a newsletter for faculty and staff to share knowledge in the area of teaching and learning using UB's centrally supported course management environment. **UBlearns Update** newsletter is a joint publication of **UBlearns Advisory Group**, the **UBlearns Support Team**, the **Educational Technology Center**, and **Instructional Technology Services**. To submit articles for consideration, contact Carole Ann Fabian, Director, Educational Technology Center at cafabian@buffalo.edu or 645-7700 x2.

PowerPoint

This document outlines the best ways of providing PowerPoint presentations to students via UBlearns or any other online environment.

Basic Recommendation

Create Print-Only Versions of Your PowerPoint Files

Discussion:

The **Blackboard Support Team** recommends that faculty do not upload an entire PowerPoint file, as students often print the presentation one slide at a time in full color, using massive amounts of University resources. If the instructor must have the full PowerPoint available (for example, it's a distance learning course or there are multimedia in the presentation that students must refer to), we suggest that a printable (i.e., 3- or 6-slide-per page handout) version be made available as well, using one of the methods outlined below.

Methods of Providing Printable versions of PowerPoint Presentations

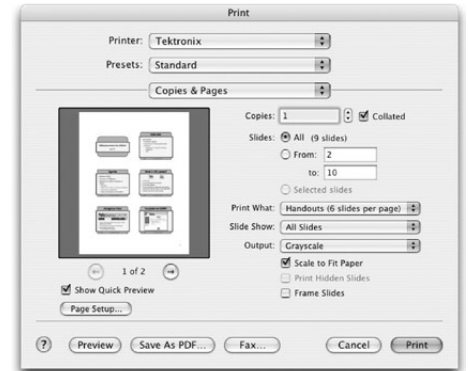
Solution 1: Convert PowerPoint to PDF handouts

This can be done with Adobe Acrobat (\$90 at UBMicro and installed on all ETC computers), or any number of free or inexpensive PDF creation programs. See <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,1191734,00.asp>. If you have Acrobat installed, follow these steps to create PDF handouts:

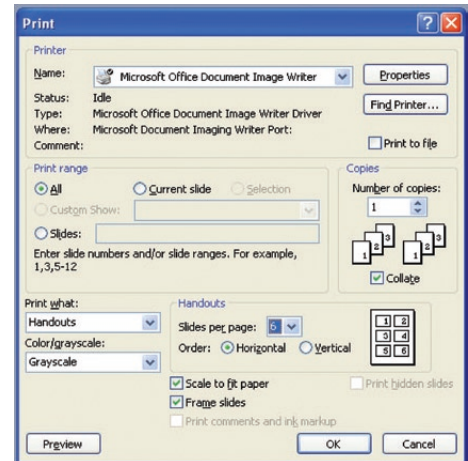
- 1) Click File > Print.
- 2) From the Printer Name drop down list, select Adobe PDF.
- 3) Under Print What, select:
 - Handouts
 - Grayscale
 - Either 3 or 6 slides per page
 - Click Ok.
- 4) Name the file and click Save.

Solution 2: Send the presentation to Microsoft Word

- 1) In PowerPoint, click File > Send To > Microsoft Word.
- 2) Choose the desired format. Click OK.
- 3) Word will open to show the resulting document, which can be saved as a Word document and uploaded to UBlearns.



MacOs Print Dialog From PowerPoint



Windows Print Dialog From PowerPoint

Questions or Comments:

If you have any questions or would like to report additional information about this topic, please send an email to ublearns@buffalo.edu. Thank you.

UBlearns FAQ's

by Mark Woodard, Chief Application Administrator, Blackboard on UBlearns, ITS



The questions most commonly asked by instructors at the start of a semester

Q How do I request UBlearns course sites?

A Course sites are created for use on UBlearns via the Blackboard Instructor Web Interface (BIWI) web site. Faculty listed as "instructor of record" may enable (schedule for creation) and combine courses sites based upon registration number. Enabled course sites become available to instructors by 10am the following day, except Sunday in which case the site is created Monday morning. All registered students are automatically enrolled on the "official start date" for each course, and the class list is reconciled daily thru "Drop/Add." **Go to the BIWI: <http://myub.buffalo.edu/blkbrd>**

Q Will my Teaching Assistant be enrolled with registered students to my site?

A Only registered students are automatically enrolled in your course site. Instructors must manually enroll all non-registered users such as TA's, course builders, students completing a course from a previous semester and course co-instructors via the course site control panel. Instructors may select a role for each manually added user using the List / Modify Role utility via the course control panel.

Q Are there file size limitations/quotas for UBlearns course sites?

A Currently the Blackboard on UBlearns service does not limit or impose a quota on file uploads. Application Administrators do ask that instructors upload only pertinent course materials for each site, and remove any files that are no longer needed.

Q Can UBlearns course sites be enabled after a semester begins?

A UBlearns course sites may be enabled via the BIWI or at anytime during a semester. Course sites enabled after the start date of a course will be created with student enrollments added. Instructors may combine

course sites via the BIWI prior to the start of each semester. Once a semester begins instructor must email course site combination requests to ublearns@buffalo.edu.

Q Are there any workshops or one-on-one instruction sessions for faculty available for UBlearns?

A Yes, scheduled UBlearns workshops are offered for faculty throughout the year at Educational Technology Center (.etc.) north and south campus locations. Additionally, customized instruction is available either by appointment or on a walk-in basis. To request an appointment, email etc@buffalo.edu or call 645-7700 x0.

Q Where can I refer students that are having difficulty accessing UBlearns?

A Students with UBIT username and password questions may be directed to any CIT Computing site on the north or south campus, all computing sites offer UBCard Swipe stations. For assistance students may also email UBlearns@buffalo.edu for assistance.

Q Can you explain what the courseID numbers represent?

A CourseID's are created as a unique identifier for registration based course sites on UBlearns. For example: 200409_123456. 200409 indicates the year (2004) and Fall semester (09) _123456 represents the course registration number. Course sites that are combined with another class include _COMB, cross-listed course sites include _CL and chained classed add _CH at the end of the ID.

Q I have a combined course site and would like to manage the students by course enrollment, is this possible?

A User Management enables instructors to manage the users in their course sites. Via the Manage Groups page instructors can build study or project groups. Instructors can also add, remove, and modify groups from this page. The Instructor has the option of giving each group Discussion Board, Virtual Classroom, File Exchange and Email capabilities.

Visit the "UBlearns FAQ's Archive"
Go To > UBlearns > "Faculty Tab"

Tell Us What You Think ...Ask Us A Question

We would like to know what you think and answer questions that you have... Please complete the form below and fax to: 716-645-6207 or complete the form online at: <https://ublearns.buffalo.edu/ublearns/updateForm>

1 The most useful section of UBlearns Update newsletter is

2 The UBlearns Update newsletter would be better if:

3 I could use a "best practices" tip sheet on:

4 Suggest a topic for future editions of UBlearns Update newsletter:

5 I have a question about using Blackboard on UBlearns:

Please contact me. My email address is _____