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Scaffolding Critical Thinking

Active Learning through Online Group Selection, Discussions, and Peer Reviews

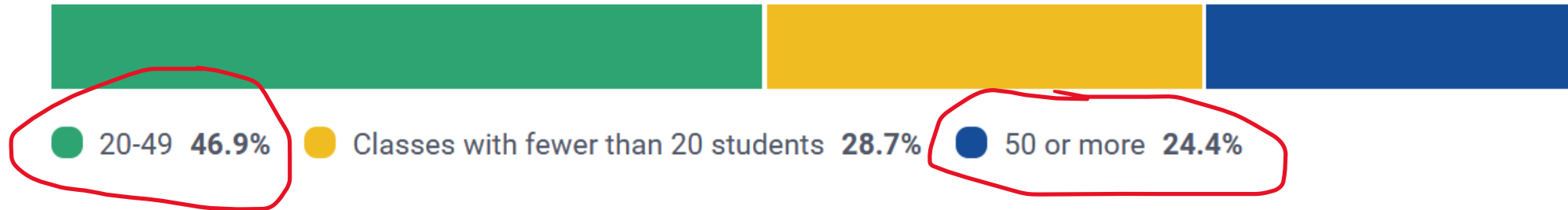Gail Sears Humiston, Ph.D.

UCF Class Sizes

Class Sizes

● 20-49 **46.9%**   ● Classes with fewer than 20 students **28.7%**   ● 50 or more **24.4%**

Source: U.S. News

As class sizes get larger, what goes wrong with traditional in-class learning activities, such as discussions and presentations?
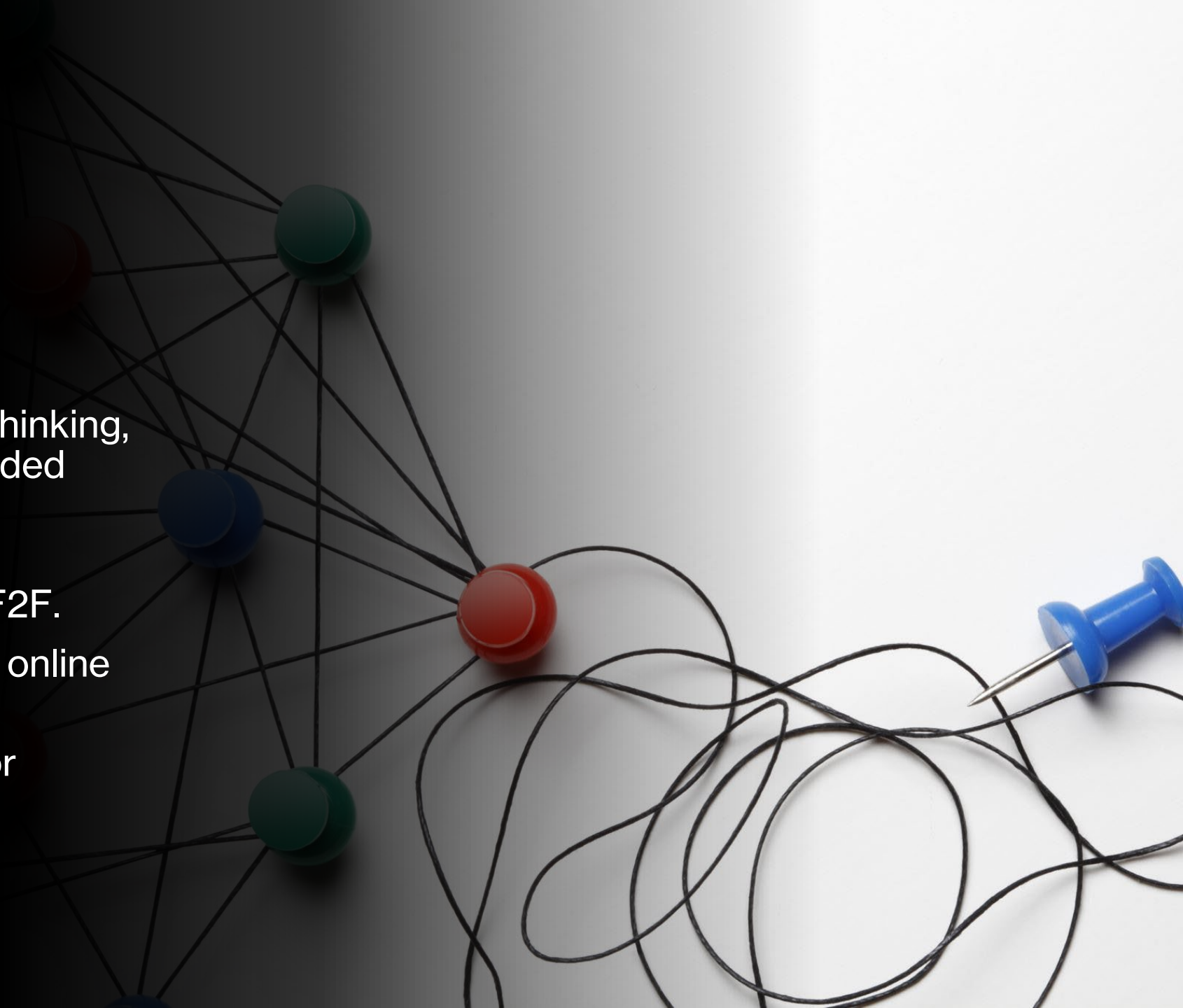
Outline

- Review the basics of critical thinking, backward design, and scaffolded learning.

- Benefits of incorporating asynchronous activities into F2F.

- Incorporating small(er) group online discussions.

- Incorporating peer reviews for presentations.

Scaffolding Critical Thinking: The Basics

Critical Thinking: [Bloom's Taxonomy](#)

Plan Using [Backward Design](#)

Incorporate [Scaffolded](#) Learning Activities

Benefits of Asynchronous Activities

Benefits of incorporating asynchronous activities, such as discussions and presentations, into a live course:

1. Each student is required to participate.
2. Students have time to formulate more substantive submissions.
3. Instructor can give targeted feedback (Bender, 2012).
4. Advanced students help less advanced students and gain confidence.
5. It facilitates scaffolded learning activities.

Incorporating Small(er) Group Online Discussions

The "Whys" and "Hows"

Learning Outcome

- One major learning objective in the course is for students to:

"Apply and evaluate an ethical theory as it applies to the criminal justice* response to a social justice issue**."

*If the assignment was limited to evaluating a theory to only criminal justice (CJ), students would easily find sources to summarize.

**By requiring students to apply and evaluate a theory to CJ as it *intersects* with a social justice issue, students are tasked with original, critical thinking.

Demonstration of Learning: Formal Paper

- The means by which students are to demonstrate their ability to evaluate an ethical theory is by submitting a **Formal Paper assignment.** It calls for students to include the following sections:

  a. An introduction with a thesis statement.

  b. Identification and description of the social justice issue that intersects with criminal justice (including the CJ response or contribution to the SJ issue).

  c. Identification and description of an ethical theory from the course that applies to the criminal justice response or contribution to the social justice issue.

  d. Application of the ethical theory to the CJ response or contribution to the SJ issue.

  e. Evaluation of the theory.

  f. Conclusion and implications.

Scaffolding to the Formal Paper

Entire Class Discussions: Prior to Group Discussions

- How the CJ responds to social justice issues:
  - Behavioral Health
  - Environmental Crime
  - Racial Inequality
  - Gender & Sexual Orientation Inequality
  - Socioeconomic Inequality

Group Discussions: Students Select their Social Justice (SJ) Group

- Students select their SJ topic and join a group to explore the theoretical sections of the Paper:
  - Identification and description of a theory from the course.
  - Application of the theory.
  - Evaluation of the theory.
  - Thesis statement.

Small(er) Groups: Why

- Small-group discussions are beneficial.
    - Participation is higher.
    - Student's perceptions of learning is higher.
    - More equal participation of students of different ethnic backgrounds.
    - Previous academic achievements have less influence on discussion participation (Pollock, Hamann, Wilson, 2011).
    - Students can be given the option of self-selecting topics.
    - Students who struggle with more critical thinking, such as applying and evaluating a theory, benefit from engaging with more advanced students.
        - I permit student to change their theory prior to the Formal Paper.

Canvas Groups: How

Scaffolding toward the Formal Paper

- Canvas permits the creation of groups (e.g., 3-10) for discussions.
  - Instructive links are at Webcourses @UCF Guides
  - I created a step-by-step page built into my Webcourse (See the handout.)
- CAVEAT – All students must join a group PRIOR to:
  1. selecting the "This is a Group Discussion" setting **and**
  2. publishing discussions.
- If allowing self-selection, there are two ways of reminding students to join a group:
  1. Create an "assignment" worth 0 points which puts it on students' "to do" list in Canvas.
  2. Instructor can message student who do not sign up in time.

A Side Note: Bibliography

- Although not the focus of the presentation, I also assign a Bibliography to be completed prior to the Paper.

- It's a lifesaver on grading!

  - If students are not finding articles from the discipline or their citations methods are incorrect, they get that feedback sooner, rather than after-the-fact.

Incorporating peer reviews for presentations

The "Whys" and "Hows"

Learning Outcomes

- Two more major learning objective in the course:

"Create a professional presentation to educate others on their service-learning volunteer activities."

1. Students are to connect their learning to the course and discipline.
2. They are to interact with other students to share diverse experiences and perspectives.

Demonstration of Learning: Poster Presentations

- The means by which students are to achieve the learning objectives is by submitting a **Poster Presentation assignment.** It calls for students to:
  - Create a poster about their service learning which includes:
    - Introduction
    - Course Connection
    - Community Impact
    - Reflection
  - Record a 3-minute narration.
  - Save their PPT as a video.
  - Upload the video.
  - Review their peers.

Incorporating Peer Review Presentations Online: Why

- In general, presentations are instructive to presenters by:
  - Learning how to organize material for an audience.
  - Learning how to speak in front of a group.
  - Developing professional skills.

- The audience also benefits if they are engaged in peer evaluations (Baranowksi & Weird, 2011).
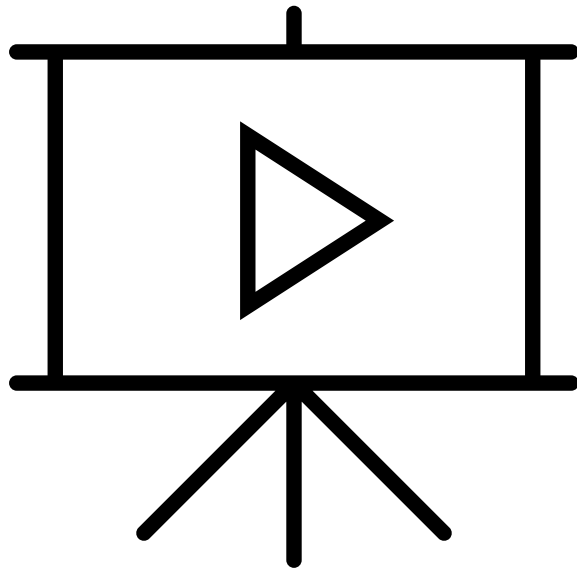
- Incorporating presentations using the peer review Canvas functions is beneficial:
  - Students can be taught to give web-based presentations using video and audio.
  - They get to practice and record until they are satisfied.
  - It is not necessary to devote weeks of class time to presentations.
  - Students benefit from engaging in peer reviews by sitting through a given number of presentations determined by the instructor, rather than class size.

Peer Review Presentations Online: How

The same discussions that scaffolded toward the Formal Paper are incorporated into the Presentations.

- The creation of a <u>peer review assignment</u> in Canvas is more straight forward than a groups discussion. (I don't use Groups.)
  - The grading rubric in the original assignment portal is used by the students.
    - It is worth 0 points to not affect students' grades.
    - However, it is the same rubric the instructor will use for grading presentations.
  - So, you'll need to create two (2) more assignments!
    1. A portal for the instructor to grade the presentations (using the same rubric as the students' peer reviews above.)
    2. A portal for the instructor to grade the peer reviews.

More on Online Peer Reviews: Papers, Draft and Final

- Another use for Peer Reviews is for students to review each others' paper drafts.
  - The students would use the same grading rubric as used by the instructor for the final paper.
  - This way, students know how they will be assessed for the final submission!
  - Again, the instructor would need to create a second portal to grade students' peer reviews of each other.
- Later, final papers are uploaded for a final grade by the instructor.
  - The instructor uses the same rubric as the used to review each others' paper drafts.
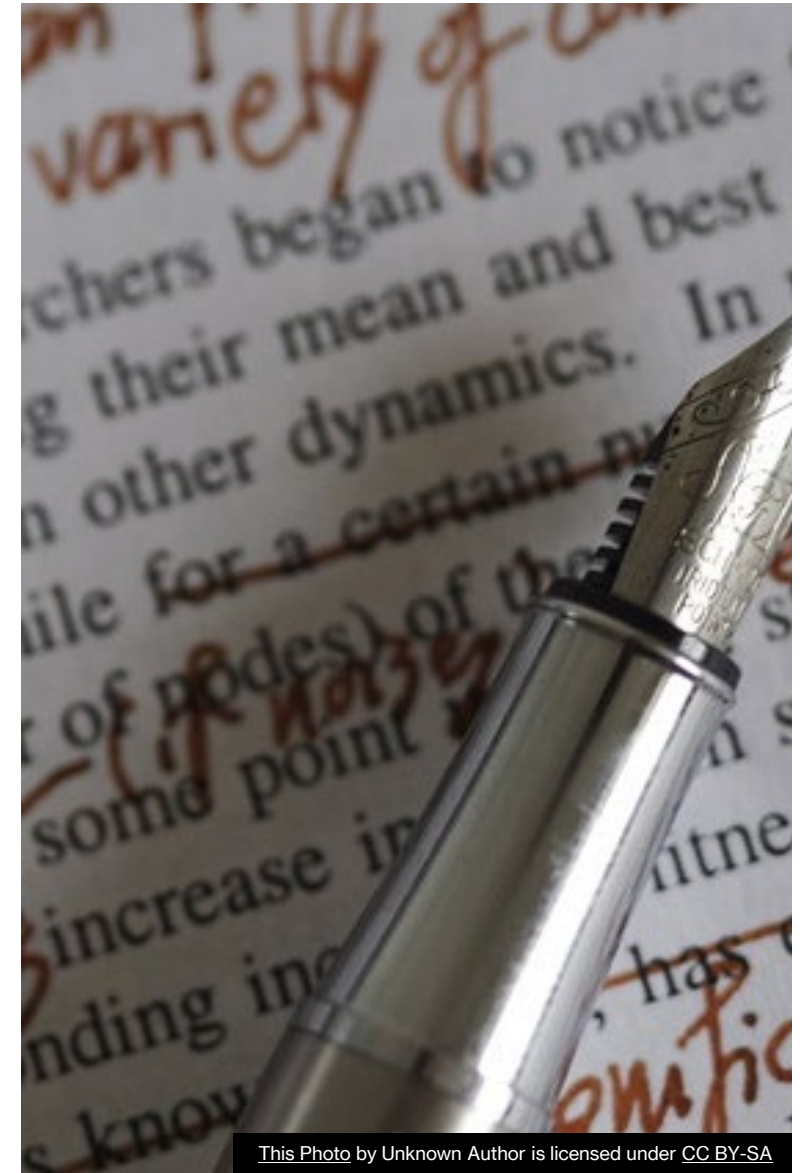
Contact Info

- I have saved pdf copies of the Webcourse pages, discussions, assignments, and rubrics to a One-Drive folder.

- I am happy to share the folder with you.

- Please contact me at Gail.Humiston@ucf.edu

Thank you for your time!!!! ☺

References

Baranowksi, M., and Weird, K. (2011). Peer evaluation in the political science classroom. *Political Science and Politics (44*(4), 805-811.

Bender, T. (2012). *Discussion-based online teaching to enhance student learning: Theory, practice, and assessment* (2nd ed.). Stylus Publishing.

Pollock, P., Hamann, K., and Wilson, B. (2011). Learning through discussions: Comparing the benefits of small-group and large-class settings. *Journal of Political Science Education, 7:1*, 48-64, DOI: 10.1080/15512169.2011.539913 .