Peer feedback in a large-scale online course

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<th>USING</th>
<th>COURSE FORMAT</th>
<th>CLASS SIZE</th>
<th>LMS</th>
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<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>400 students</td>
<td>Blackboard</td>
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<td>Group Member Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<th>DOMAIN</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
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<tr>
<td>MBA program</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
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**Background**

**ABOUT THE INSTITUTION**

*Boston University* is one of the leading private research and teaching institutions in the world today, with two primary campuses in the heart of Boston and programs around the world.

**ABOUT THE INSTRUCTORS**

*Denise Kreiger*, M.Ed. is a Digital Learning Designer in Instructional Production Services, Digital Learning & Innovation at Boston University where she designs and develops courses in the Questrom online MBA program.

*Monty Kaplan* is a Platform Administrator in Educational Technology, Digital Learning & Innovation at Boston University where he administers the Questrom online MBA platform delivery, including Blackboard Ultra and FeedbackFruits.

**Course objectives**

Upon completing this course, students were able to **produce** written memos based on the course lectures; as well as **critically evaluate** their own work, and that of their peers.

**BLOOM’S TAXONOMY**

The learning activities, according to Bloom’s Taxonomy, were mainly at the level of:

**Evaluating** own and peers’ work according to a given rubric.
The challenge

Facilitating a 15-week online course of 400 students is no simple feat. Especially when the course design demands the incorporation of peer feedback, group work, and automated grading.

So when setting up their online MBA program, Denise and Monty needed to find an effective tool that could put these goals into practice without sacrificing quality. The ‘ideal’ tool, according to the instructors, should:

1. reduce the manual workload when grading for a large student cohort;
2. incorporate elements of peer feedback and engagement;
3. allow students to work both individually and in teams to provide meaningful feedback.

Denise and Monty finally found this ‘right’ tool, which was FeedbackFruits’ Peer Review.

While Blackboard’s native tool for peer assessment failed to meet these requirements, Denise benefited from the fact that Peer Review - along with all FeedbackFruits tools - are fully integrated into Blackboard Ultra. This provided the ability to sync groups from the LMS to the FeedbackFruits activity, as well as enabling autograding of the assignment within the Blackboard Gradebook. The following section will cover just how Peer Review was implemented within the course.

The solution

The course curriculum was structured with asynchronous lectures in the first half of the week, followed by live sessions in the second half. A Peer Review assignment was arranged after each live session, which was called ‘FeedbackFruits Executive Memo submission’:

• Each student wrote and submitted an executive memo, then provide feedback on each other’s work based on a 3-criteria rubric.
• These submissions accounted for a total of 60% of the final grade.
• By the end of the course, students had to write a Formal Memo, which was marked by the instructors.
• The Formal Memo acted as a “summative assessment”, while the Executive Memo in the previous weeks were considered formative evaluations to help students practice and prepare for the final assignment.

Besides providing the platform, Peer Review also facilitated the assignment design through a 5-step procedure.
The setup

**STEP 1:** Assignment instructions & Collaboration
Instructors set the assignment guidelines, requirements, and expectations within the Peer Review environment.

**STEP 2:** Student submission & Settings
The instructors “set the stage” or describe the technical aspects for the submission, (e.g. deadline, format, number of reviews, or timeline).

**STEP 3:** Peer Review criteria & Settings
Students provided comments on peers’ executive memo based on 3 evaluation criteria.

**STEP 4:** Self reflection
Students had opportunities to reflect on their performance.

**STEP 5:** Grade weighting
Students’ submissions and reviews were automatically graded based on the grading weight specified by instructor within Peer Review.

The outcomes

The adoption proved to be a success, as shown by a critical rise in student engagement:

- 95% **on-time submissions** of the executive memo
- 97% **peer feedback completion** among students.

All students benefited from Peer Review, according to Denise and Monty, as the tool supported large-size classrooms, helped students develop lifelong skills (such as critical thinking and collaborative learning), and enabled both formative and summative assessments.

*Find further details of Denise and Monty’s use case in their presentation at the inspirED 2021 Virtual Conference.*

“**The FeedbackFruits Peer Review was highly scalable for large student cohorts and ideally suited for asynchronous online delivery**"

*Denise Krieger*
Digital Learning Designer, Boston University

“**That [auto-grading] actually addressed the scalability issue for us around the grading**"

*Monty Kaplan*
Platform Administrator, Boston University