



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

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## Online Learning: What the Students Are Saying?

*Jim Quirk (SPA-GOVT), Melissa Scholes Young (CAS-LIT),  
Sarah McKinley (Class of 2019) & Chandler Randol (Class of 2018)*



27th Annual Ann Ferren Conference on Teaching, Research, and Learning  
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What are students saying about their online learning courses?  
Let's ask them...

http:



## **Schedule:**

--We'll consider data from the 80 undergraduate 2015 summer online courses Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs)

-- We'll listen to dozens of students tell us in their own words what they do and don't like in online courses

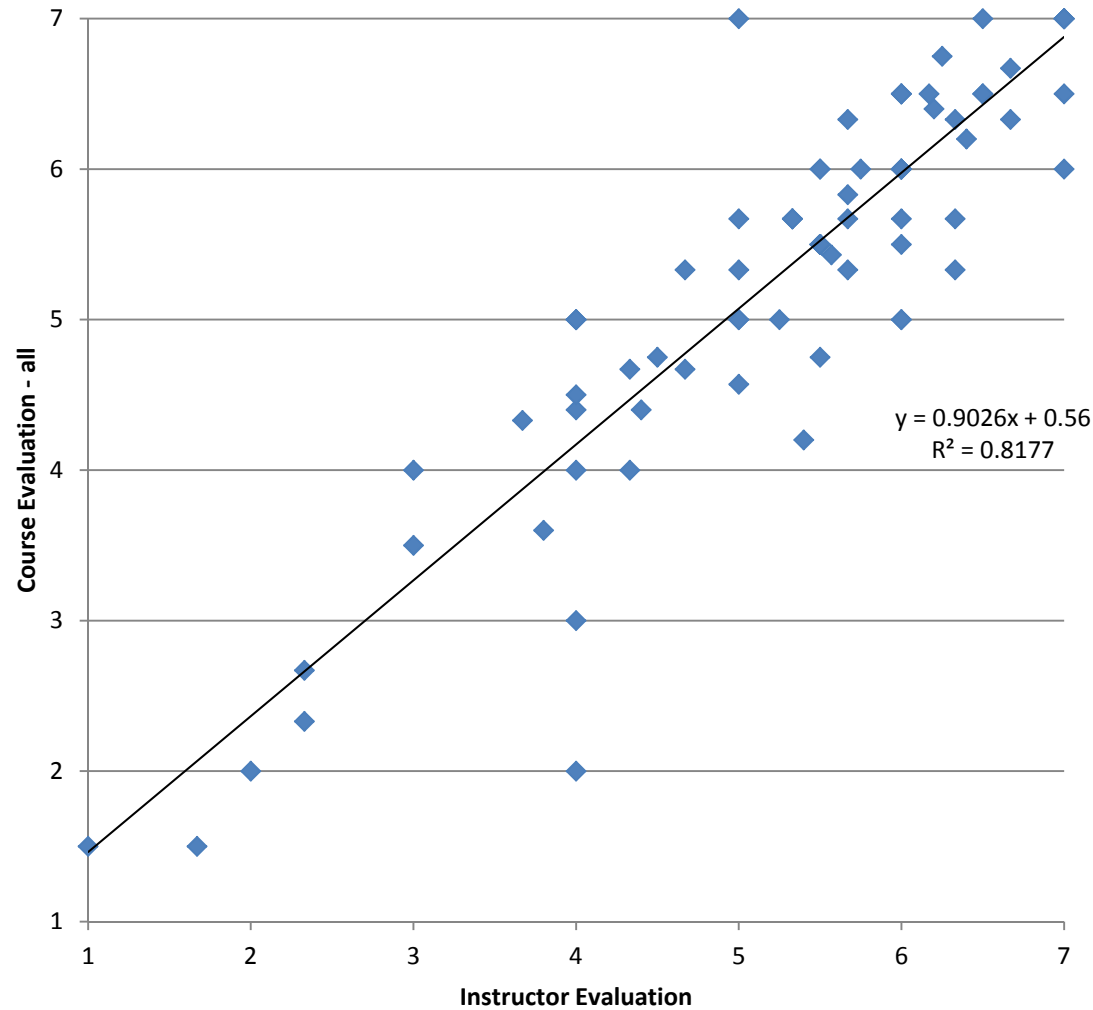
-- We'll talk about what it takes to build and sustain productive, enjoyable, rewarding online-course communities

-- We'll hear from two AU undergrads about their own online-course experiences

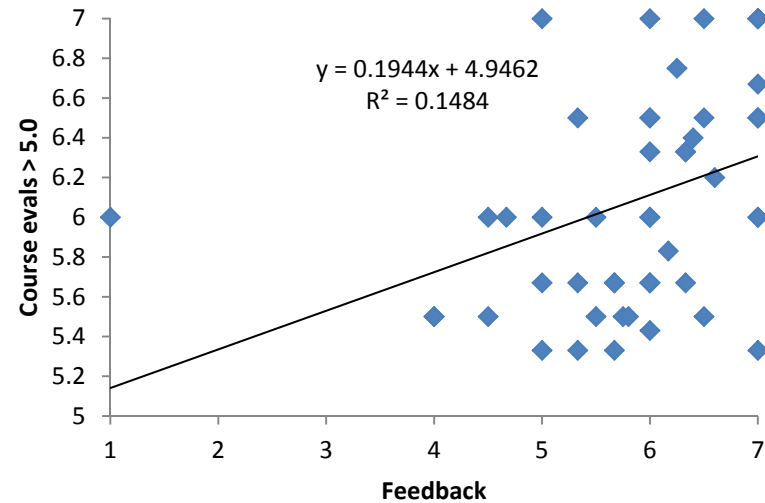
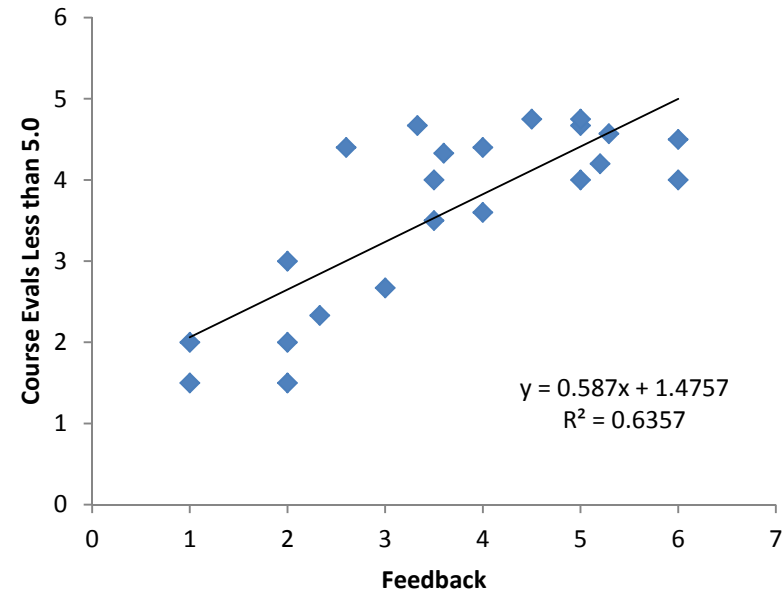
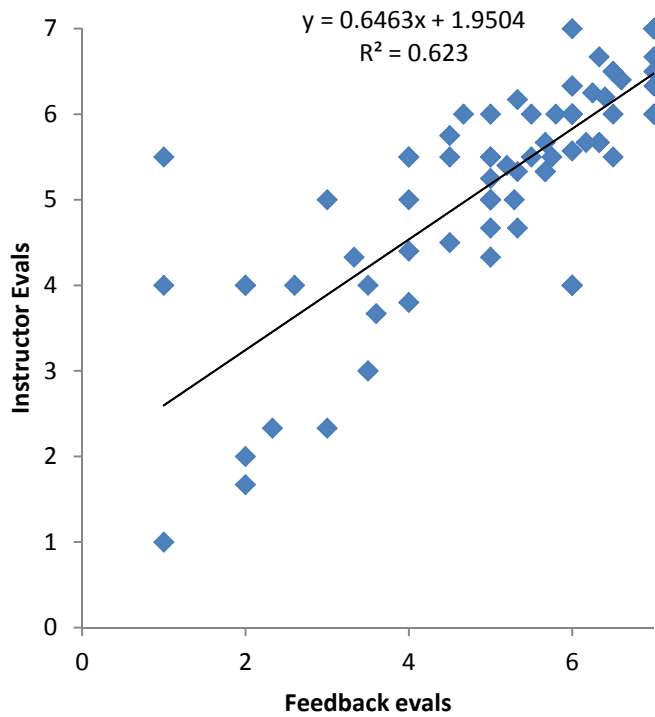
-- We'll open the room for discussion so we can learn from each other

## **Examining the SETs data from 2015 Summer Online – 80 undergraduate courses:**

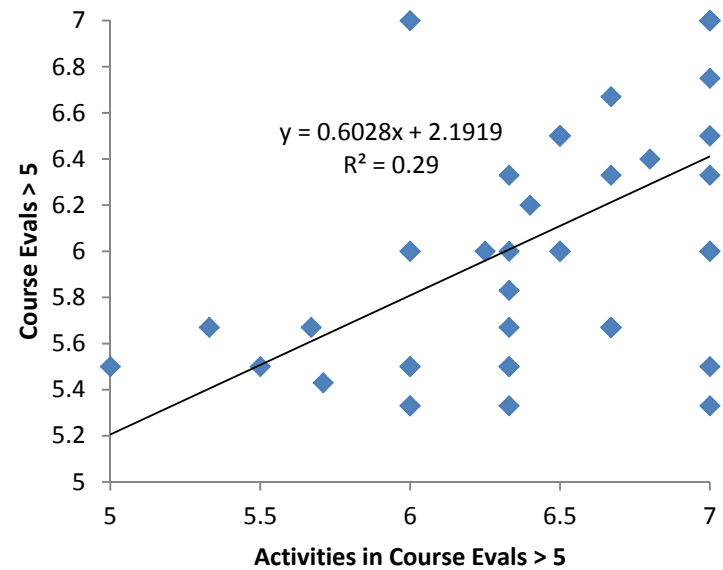
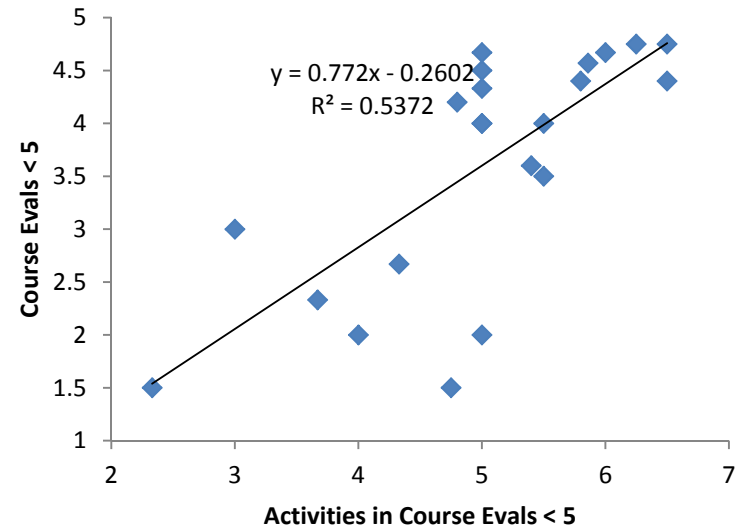
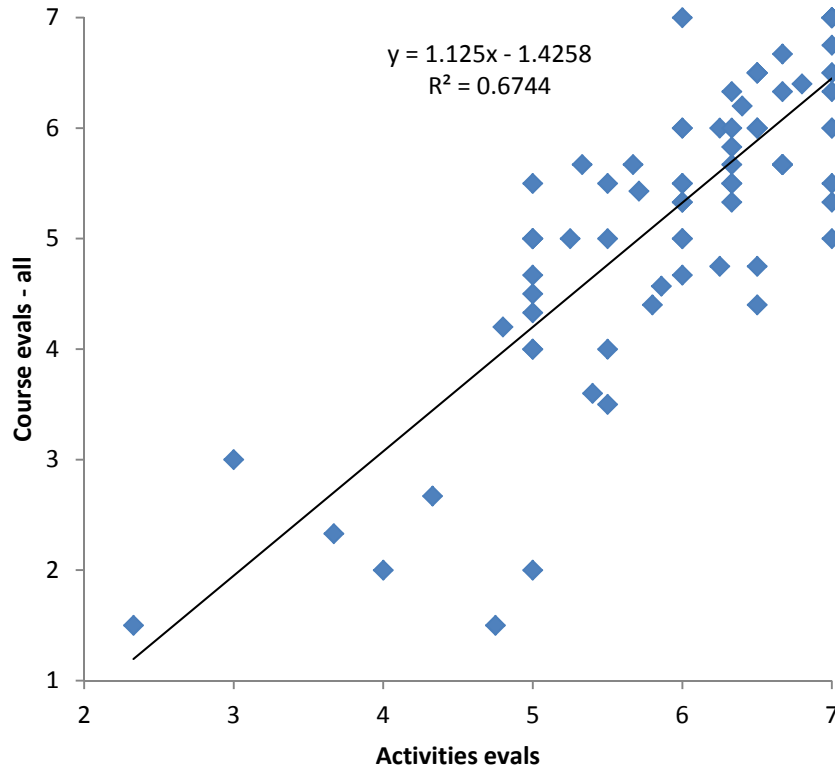
- Students want good activities
- Students want good instructor feedback
- Good activities and good feedback are necessary but not sufficient
- Class size matters
- Response rate invalidates all this?



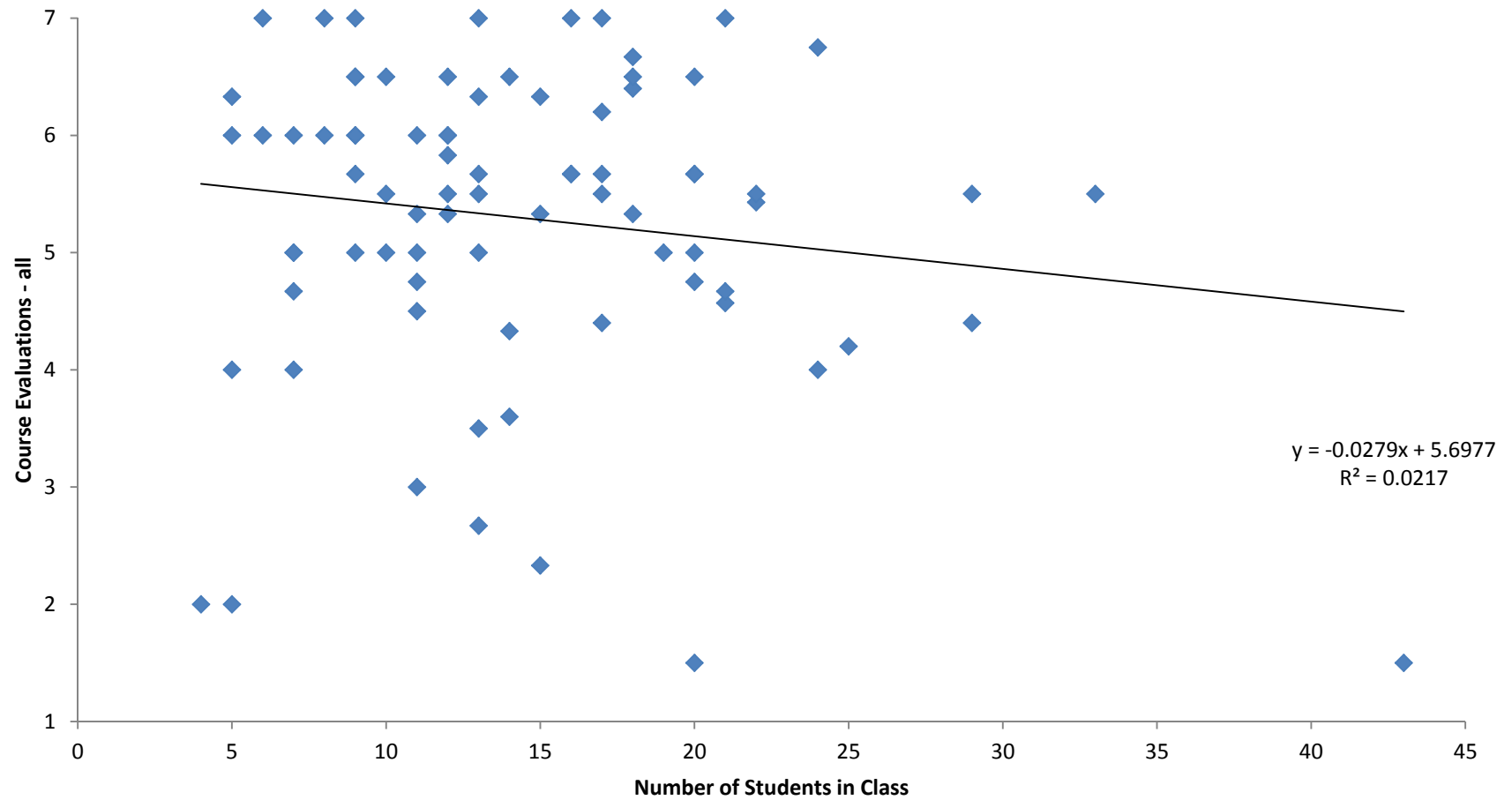
Yes, of course  
– close  
relation  
between  
instructor  
evaluation and  
course  
evaluation –  
***the instructor  
is integral to a  
good course***



Relationship between  
**instructor feedback**  
 and course evals – esp.  
 for lower course evals



Relationship between **activities** and course evals – esp. for lower course evals (no, not as dramatic as for feedback)



If you look at the whole universe,  
class size doesn't seem to matter – but...

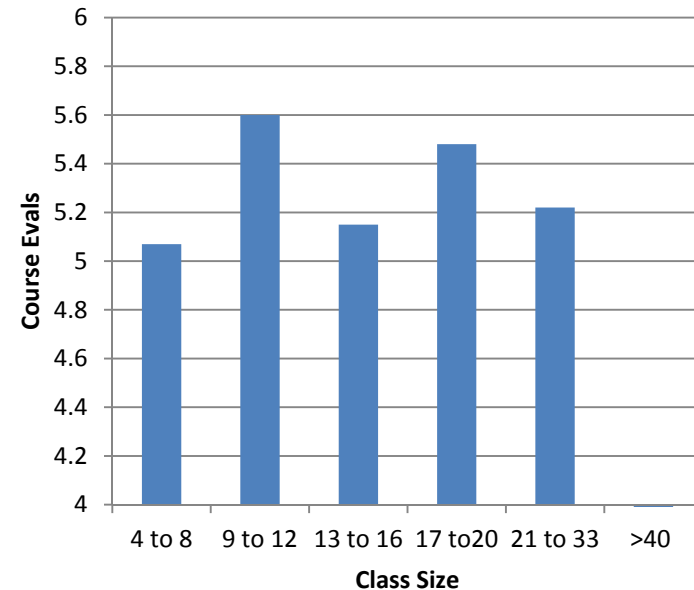
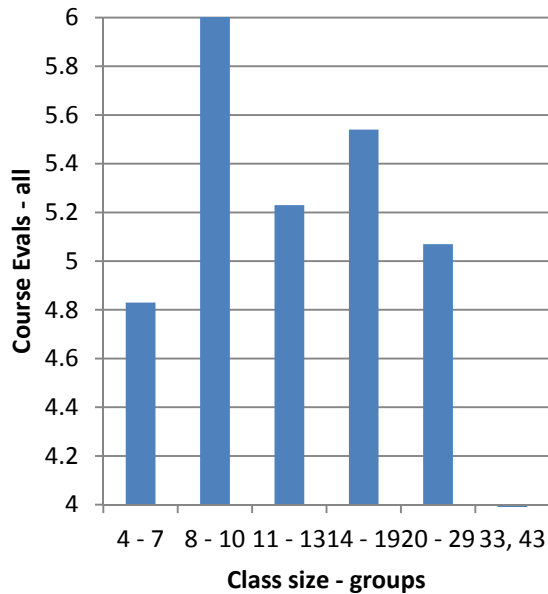


# Sweet Spot: 8 to 10 students

**Avg Course Evals > 6.0 : 6, 8, 9, 16, 18 students**

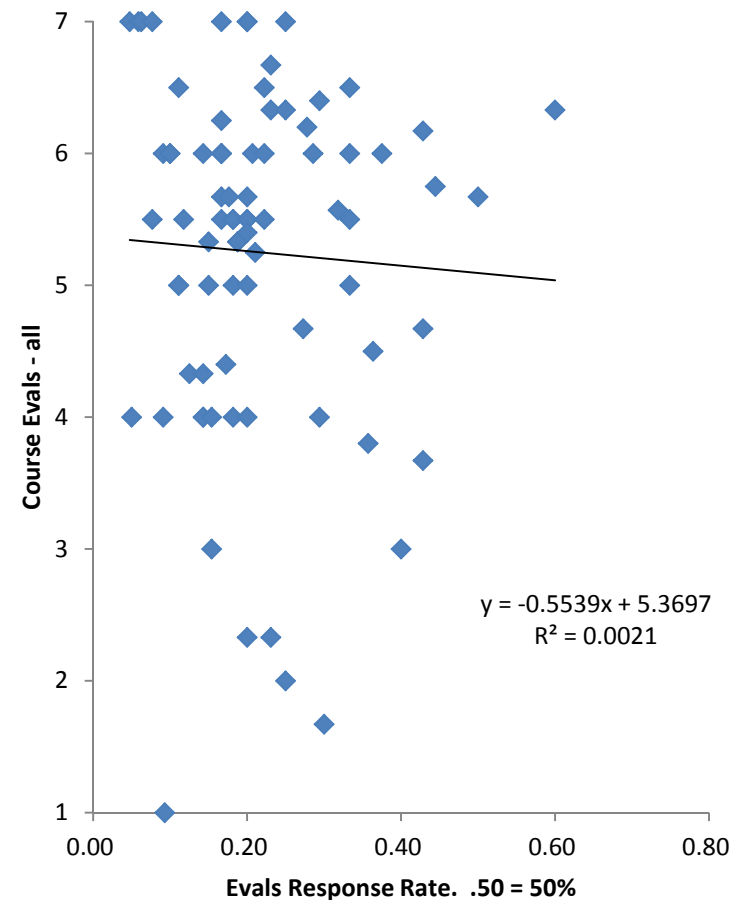
courses	students	avg eval
12	4 - 7	4.83
12	8 - 10	6.05
19	11 - 13	5.23
19	14 - 19	5.54
16	20 - 29	5.07
2	33, 43	3.5

courses	students	avg eval
14	4 to 8	5.07
22	9 to 12	5.6
16	13 to 16	5.15
16	17 to 20	5.48
11	21 to 33	5.22
1	>40	1.5



## We probably need to be a little skeptical of all this because of the very low response rates

- only 12% of courses had > 33% response rate
- 3/4 had  $\leq 25\%$  response rate
- > 25% had only one response
- > 33% had only 1 or 2 responses
- no obvious relation btw response rate and course eval



**What about when you actually talk to students?  
(which we will be doing here in a few minutes)**

**LIKES:**

Convenience and flexibility - for work, intern, travel, etc.

- although need structure too
  - some struggle for self-discipline w/o class times
- less stress, my own pace
- time to reflect before answering (cf. a classroom)

Accessible instructors - for questions, but also a one-time individual video chat (office hrs)

- at least one synchronous, live online get-together
- ask questions of us outside of class –
  - ask/gauge how we are doing

## **LIKES, continued**

Great communities: how to do that?

Melissa Young is next...

Videos from the instructors

- introducing the topic each week, etc.
- not 40-min lectures, but solid intros, connecting the dots, etc.

Variety of presentations

- books, videos, range of online sources, etc.
- balance between text and video

## **LIKES, continued**

### Technical favorites:

- ability to speed video to 1.5x speed
- transcript with video
- good online collaboration tools  
(Facebook, wordpress, LinkedIn, Google Docs, etc.)

# DISLIKES

## Lack of interaction with other students

- they don't want it to be an "independent study"
- tough to get "hallway chatter" about assignments, etc.
- I suggest an "online hallway" - forum for unsupervised/ungraded student interaction
- they want to learn from other students
- on the other hand: needs to be useful interaction
- group assignments can be "torture"
- and most students repeat same thing in discussions

## **DISLIKES, cont'd**

### Unavailable / unresponsive instructors

- I have a question....
- How am I doing / how can I do better?

### Technical / pedagogical :

- unorganized / difficult to navigate web pages
- reliance on textbooks instead of online opportunities (CSPAN, Netflix, loc.gov, etc.)
- preference for a few, high-point deliverables of classroom over many low-point deliverables typical of online courses

But one thing we don't ask about on the SETs is,

*How was your learning community?*

...next panelists on this





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then-20-something Bosnians call it their grandparents' war - the kids had all considered themselves Yugoslavs before the war.

REPLY



Most of the people I dealt with either served in the war, or they were witnesses to it. They really didn't want to talk about their experiences, they were too busy trying to get by and make due with what they had. That has changed some, especially for the younger Bosnians. For them, the war is history. The same thing is not true of their parents and grandparents who lived through it; for them, the fear of the war starting again is (or was) very real.

REPLY



ests11  
October 24, 2015 at 4:48 am

All true. I was with about 10-12 people all day, six days a week, and it was a month before one said her husband died in the war and another said he was briefly a POW. And yes, for the young people today, one said he just remembered when his mother would take them to the basement sometimes, when they heard planes... but other than that, no politically-aware memories...

REPLY



Krysten  
October 22, 2015 at 2:21 am

I enjoyed reading Holbrooke this week; I found him to be informative and his perspective fair and honest. A few things struck me as particularly noteworthy. I think what he heard me and came to have liked him as

But you do have to wonder: to what degree did Holbrooke make himself the hero of the tale?

Did he leave anything out?

REPLY



ests11  
October 22, 2015 at 11:02 am

Nice approach, Katalin. Holbrooke was indeed an oversized personality whom many dismissed as arrogant (compare, for example) the short clips we see of SecState Warren Christopher. Do you think that approach was helpful in the BIH process?

REPLY



krs018  
October 24, 2015 at 1:47 am

It was definitely a strange experience for me watching the clips. I read the entire book BEFORE watching the clips, and after finally

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