CASE STUDY

BYU-I decreases the need for synchronous tutoring sessions by 20% using virtual communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with BYU-Pathway Worldwide, BYU-Idaho (BYU-I) services online programs that attract more than 50,000 students from 180 countries around the world. With students learning at all hours of the day and night, many with limited access to reliable high-speed internet, BYU-I was struggling to provide the just-in-time academic support their diverse set of learners needed to succeed.

BYU-I tackled this challenge through the implementation of virtual learning communities, powered by the InScribe platform. These communities brought together students and tutors in shared spaces that were available 24 hours a day. Students could seek help when they needed it, from both tutors and peers, often outside of regular business hours. Furthermore, by moving away from bandwidth-intensive video-based tutoring, BYU-I increased access to learning support for a much broader set of international students.

In just one semester, BYU-I saw significant increases in peer to peer engagement and a 20% decrease in the need for synchronous tutoring sessions, all while achieving 91% satisfaction from students in the level of academic support provided.
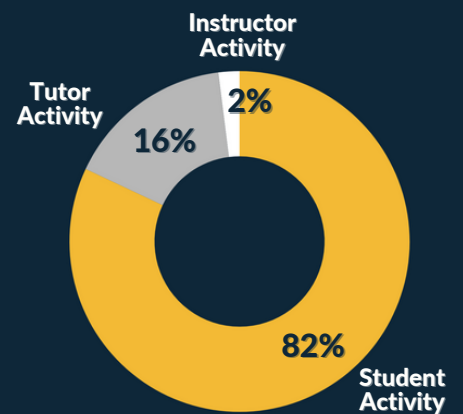
91,000+
Question Views in the course of the first year.

91%
Online Students feel supported by online tutoring and resources.

Community Activity by Role

Instructor Activity **2%**

Tutor Activity **16%**

Student Activity **82%**

Students organically took the lead, answering each other's questions and providing support at all times of day and night.

"Learning is always better when it's done in a collaborative way. Bringing community into the learning space not only helps students connect and reiterate their learning better, it helps improve the efficiency of the system because students are supporting students and not all the work is falling on the shoulders of just a few tutors."

Dr. Joel Galbraith, Online Academic Support Director, BYU-Idaho

LOCAL SUPPORT ACROSS ALL TIME ZONES

BYU-Idaho is a private, 4-year university that has long understood the power of online education to reach students that otherwise would not have access to a degree. This is exemplified in BYU-I's partnership with BYU Pathway Worldwide whose online program offers affordable, flexible, online degrees to more than 50,000 students all around the world.

But the global nature of the Pathway Worldwide program also creates challenges for the program's administrators and instructors. With students spread across so many time zones, offering just-in-time support was virtually impossible, even after staffing live tutors from 6 a.m - 11 p.m Mountain Time.

This misalignment between the availability of scheduled tutors for live support and the times during which students actively work on coursework, created a situation in which the tutoring resources were underutilized, and students were under-supported. A student in Tonga who needs help at 2:00 a.m. Mountain Time may not be able to get an appointment until 8:00 a.m. By then they are at work and miss the opportunity.

Compounding the challenges created by the myriad time zones, BYU-I's international learners do not all have reliable access to high speed internet. Focusing on live Zoom tutoring interventions generally required a strong internet connection, and therefore excluded some students simply because the bandwidth requirement or cost for data was too high.

Situations like this made it clear to Dr. Joel Galbraith, Online Academic Support Director, and Brian Godfrey, Online Tutor Manager, that their approach to student support needed less emphasis on synchronous interventions and more on creating better options for international students - delivering solutions that would be available wherever and whenever they needed help.

BUILDING A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The Online Academic Support team envisioned a different approach to academic support, one that incorporated more opportunities for asynchronous support, encouraged higher levels of peer to peer engagement, and decreased the reliance on synchronous, one-on-one tutoring. BYU-I brought this vision to life through the implementation of InScribe's virtual community platform. Individual learning communities were created for each of the online courses that were marked to receive tutoring services. These communities integrated directly into BYU-I's Canvas LMS so students had one-click access any time they had a question or needed help.

Within the community, learners could connect with other online students and with tutors. Questions could be posted to the community for a response and answers were automatically added to a repository that other students could search and view. While tutors were on staff to monitor the community and provide help, BYU-I found that other students were also motivated to help and were often the first to jump in and answer questions from their peers.
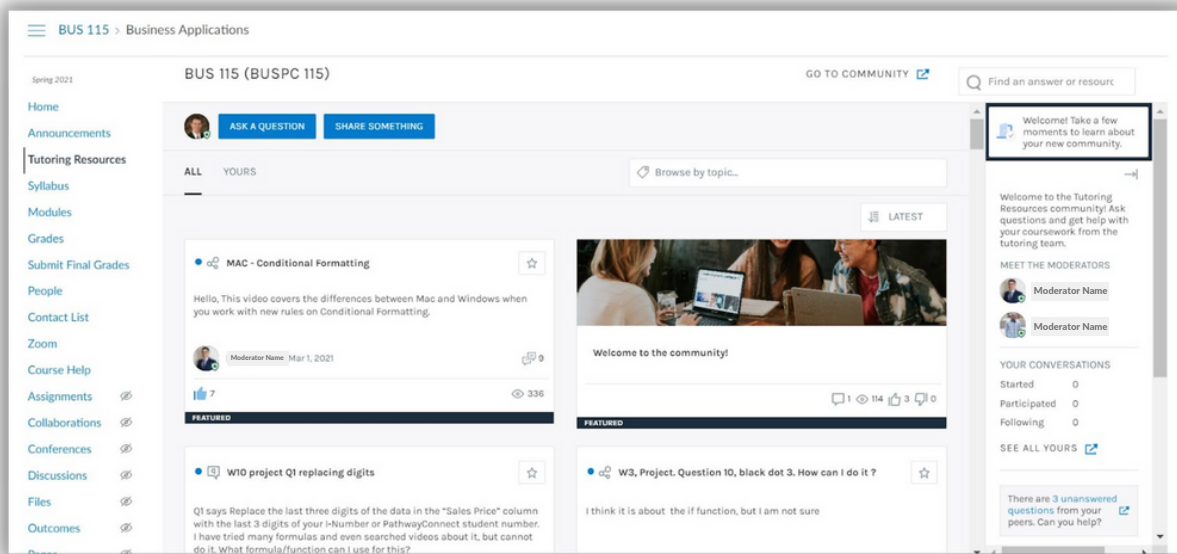
As tutors' time became more efficiently used, they began taking the opportunity to curate content in the community database and proactively post answers to frequently asked questions. This increased the number of on-demand resources available to students and helped ensure that the solutions in the database remained accurate and relevant.

This new approach allowed students to find solutions and get help any time of day or night. BYU-I's learning communities helped unite students around the globe and created a collaborative online environment that enabled the flexible, on-demand academic support that was so badly needed.
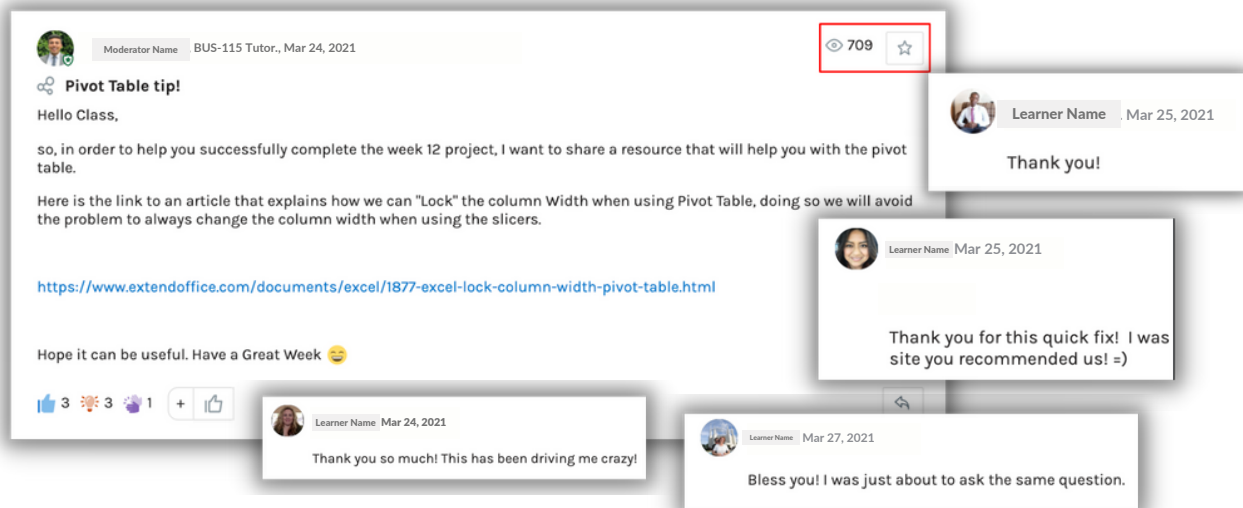
EARLY PROOF OF SUCCESS

After only one year of promoting the new community-based support approach via InScribe, BYU-I saw many early successes.

Data from the Winter 2021 semester showed an increase in online engagement. Across 19 pilot courses using the InScribe environment, 1,544 questions were asked and answered. Those solutions were then viewed 195,377 times by other learners. This staggering statistic points to broad participation in the learning communities and the ability of one student's question to benefit many learners.

With common answers becoming more readily available, fewer learners needed to schedule more expensive, less convenient, one on one tutoring sessions. In one semester, the number of live appointments dropped 20.53%, from 2541 to 1753. Having more available time has allowed tutors to work in the environment and engage students in other ways. Tutors work to curate resources available in InScribe to correspond with current lesson plans, and review questions from students to ensure all are answered.

Furthermore, the drop in live support did not mean students were struggling to find help. In the same time period, a survey of students reported that it was "easy to find answers in InScribe." With 68% of respondents receiving an answer within a few hours. Moreover, 91% of students reported feeling supported through tutoring and other academic support resources, including the InScribe community.

FOR STUDENTS, BY STUDENTS

While BYU-I intended for their learning communities to increase access to flexible support and peer engagement, they were equally pleased by the extent to which students organically took the lead, answering each other's questions and providing support at all times of day and night. Data showed that 16% of responses were from BYU-I tutors and 2% came from instructors. That meant that 82% of all activity and answers in the InScribe learning communities were coming from fellow students.

"InScribe has become a space by students, for students, supported by tutors who are also students. This is definitely a place for [them]," says Godfrey.

SCALING INSCRIBE TO ENSURE FUTURE SUCCESS

Based on their early success, BYU-I is expanding the use of InScribe's learning communities to cover many more online courses. As the number of Pathway students continues to grow, BYU-I remains confident in its new support approach and its ability to provide flexible, affordable and high impact education and support to learners around the world.

InScribe

Learn how the nation's leading educational institutions are using InScribe's **Community-Powered Support** to save time and drive student success.

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