



INDIANA UNIVERSITY
BLOOMINGTON

CASE STUDY

Indiana University Bloomington turns to digital communities to make student collaboration more effective.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr. Meghan Porter, Professor of Chemistry at Indiana University Bloomington, was no stranger to large classes, often teaching courses with in-person sections that total 700 learners, and online courses numbering 150-180 students. With so many students, managing communication and providing effective support was overwhelming. Dr. Porter needed a more efficient and scalable way to stay connected to her students, whether learning is done in-person or online.

She found her solution with InScribe's digital communities, a collaborative student support platform that creates a flexible, on-demand space to engage students, answer questions, and encourage peer to peer support. During the first semester Dr. Porter used InScribe in a class with fewer than 200 students, the class asked 237 questions, which received 386 answers and gathered more than 62,000 views from classmates. By shifting student support to a collaborative space, Dr. Porter was able to reach more students with her answers. Moreover, she encouraged peer to peer support, which created a faster time-to-response, reduced the number of questions she had to address directly, and increased her students' understanding of course materials.



WORKFLOW EFFICIENCY FOR INSTRUCTORS



Decrease in number of repetitive emails



Delegation of question responses to students in the community or teaching assistants



Improved communication with students across all course sections



"Any time that we have given feedback to InScribe, a feature has been added very quickly. The instructor update feature we use to control emails sent to students is an example. As a professor using InScribe, that is really nice because we are working with a company that is going to make the product better, not just leave it as it is."

Dr. Meghan Porter, Lecturer, Department of Chemistry, Indiana University Bloomington

ABOUT INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON

Indiana University Bloomington is the flagship university of the University of Indiana System, with more than 40,000 students enrolled each year. The university prides itself on a high touch support model for learners, especially during the early years when students are adjusting to college life and are often in high-enrollment classes which can limit the amount of direct access they have to their faculty instructors.



THE CHALLENGE

Dr. Meghan Porter, professor of Chemistry at IU Bloomington, was committed to building a learning environment that promoted high levels of engagement and support for her students. But with more than 700 students in a single course, maintaining a robust and efficient flow of communication can be extremely difficult.

Dr. Porter found herself answering many of the same questions over and over again, taking time away from other key teaching activities. Moreover, she worried that the online environment meant students were more isolated and didn't have enough opportunities to organically engage and connect with each other. Dr. Porter needed a new model of communication and collaboration. One that would save time, increase access to support, and help her students find new ways to connect with her and with each other.

"Students are awake and working on problems when I am not. If they post on InScribe, they can get help when I am not available – late at night, or over the weekend – so I'm not tied to my email." - Dr. Meghan Porter

THE SOLUTION: ON-DEMAND, DIGITAL SUPPORT



Dr. Porter identified InScribe, a virtual community platform, as a potential solution. InScribe connects students with classmates and faculty in an on-demand, digital space where they can ask questions, find answers, and share ideas. Dr. Porter integrated InScribe directly into her Canvas LMS course shell, providing easy access without requiring her students to locate or log into a new application. She then introduced the expectation that any questions related to coursework should be asked via the new community. Dr. Porter assured her students she would provide prompt answers in this space, but also encouraged them to watch for incoming questions and take the opportunity to respond to and help their classmates when they could.

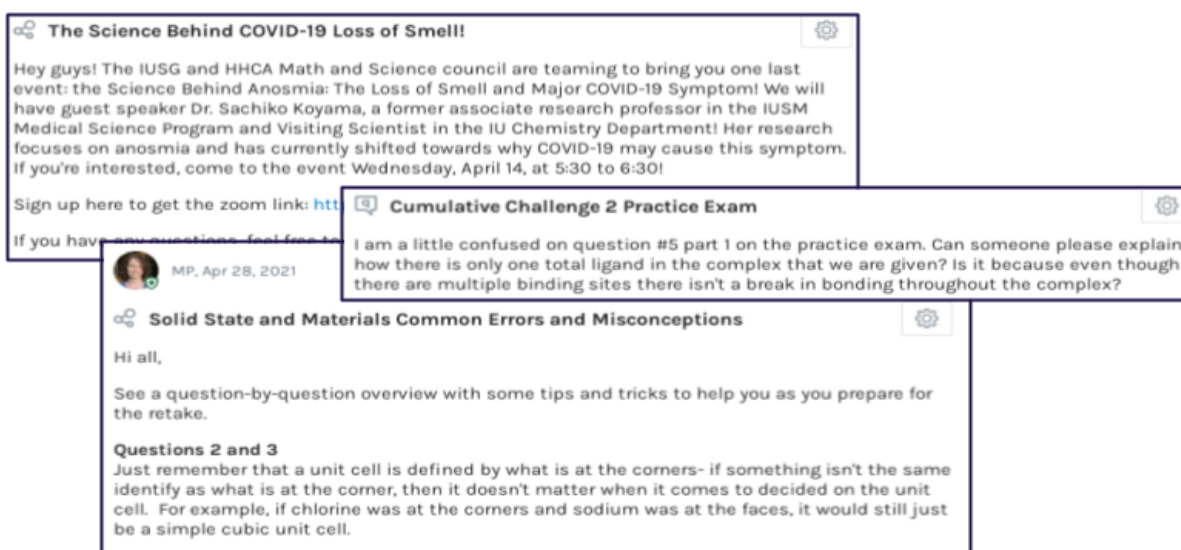
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The benefits of the virtual learning community were evident immediately. Students were able to seek answers at all times of day, often finding existing solutions to help, or getting support from a peer who was also studying in the evening or on the weekend. Every question was tagged to a course topic and stored, creating a searchable knowledge base that all students could tap into. Many students also found and shared outside resources, such as video or articles, that related to and enhanced the course materials. This crowd-sourced approach helped the knowledge repository grow quickly so students could find support more quickly.

InScribe also allowed Dr. Porter to “endorse” the best peer answers, validating the quality of the response and building up her students’ confidence in their ability to help others.

"If you can teach someone else about the topic at hand, that really helps your own understanding of the material," says Dr. Porter.

An additional benefit of the InScribe community was the ability to see how each student engaged with the community and who consistently provided good answers to their peers. Those students were then sought out for roles as teaching assistants to help future Indiana University students learning similar content.



The screenshot displays three overlapping posts from the InScribe community. The top post, titled "The Science Behind COVID-19 Loss of Smell!", is an announcement for an event featuring Dr. Sachiko Koyama. The middle post, titled "Cumulative Challenge 2 Practice Exam", is a question asking for help with a complex chemistry problem. The bottom post, titled "Solid State and Materials Common Errors and Misconceptions", is an announcement for a resource to help with a retake. Each post includes a gear icon in the top right corner, indicating settings or options.

STREAMLINING INSTRUCTOR COMMUNICATION

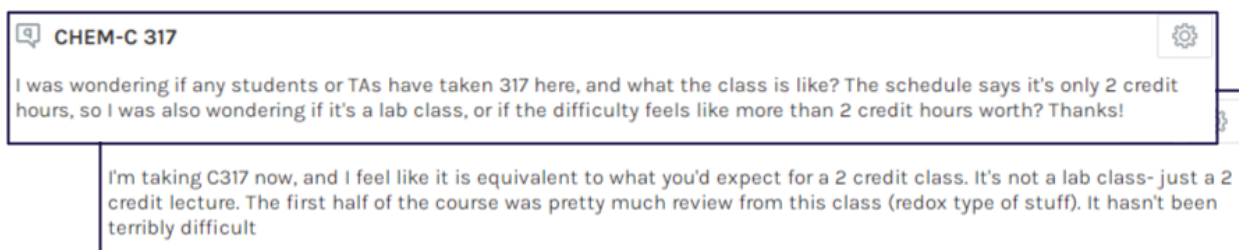
Dr. Porter found that encouraging students to answer classmates’ questions freed up her inbox for other student-related concerns, making her own direct communication with students more efficient. She also took advantage of features within InScribe to share key updates and resources with her students such as weekly announcements, clarifying details, or course expectations.

“InScribe has a feature that allows a student to get emailed right away when an instructor posts and you can then see how many views that post receives,” says Dr. Porter. “This way, I can post to InScribe, and know that my students won’t miss it.”

BUILDING COMMUNITY AMONG LEARNERS

Managing support and communication was not Dr. Porter's only concern. This period coincided with the ongoing uncertainty around COVID-19 and her students were struggling with the restrictions that frequently required them to be isolated from one another. Dr. Porter recognized her students' need for socialization and believed that her new learning community could provide an alternative space for more casual interactions.

To support this, Dr. Porter created a series of spaces in her community that would allow students to talk with each other about more than just the course materials. There was a dedicated topic for clubs and events, one in which students could get advice about future courses from fellow students, and an MCAT study group. There was even a topic called "Just for Fun" - a dedicated space for chemistry jokes and memes.



WHAT'S NEXT

Large classes offer unique challenges for faculty to ensure that students stay connected and feel supported. Dr. Meaghan Porter tackled both these challenges through the creation of a virtual community, powered by InScribe. In her community, students were able to seek help, support each other, and share ideas (and even a few jokes). Dr. Porter not only found efficiencies in her own processes, she watched as her students took charge of their learning, asking for the help and sharing their expertise with peers when they could.

The success Dr. Porter saw in her ability to streamline communication, improve access to support, and increase student engagement has inspired her to continue using InScribe, even as COVID restrictions ease and her courses shift back to an in person model of learning. She recognizes that the benefits of the virtual community - easy access to help, more scalable support, and high levels of peer to peer engagement - are truly relevant for all learners.



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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