Using the Groups Feature in Western Online

Introduction:

It is believed that the greater the interactivity in an online course and the more attention paid to developing a sense of community will increase the likeliness that students will stay in the course until its completion. The groups tool in Western Online provides a way for instructors to ensure greater engagement, interactivity and community building in their online courses.

Table of Contents

Best Practices for Using the Groups Tool in Western Online 2
Tutorial One: Setting up Small Break Out Groups 4
Tutorial Two: Setting up Group Assignments 9
Tutorial Three: Setting up Groups for Special Release 12
Tutorial Four: Setting up a Group by Individual Student 16
Best Practices for Using the Groups Tool in Western Online

Use Groups in D2L to:

• Efficiently manage large course rosters by creatively forming smaller discussion and work groups within the overall course population

• Keep in mind that too small of a group can also be troublesome. Ensure that groups are large enough to have critical mass that allows for good interaction.

• Create special work areas for users with different learning needs (differentiation)

• Allow students to choose from specified topics, projects and etc. (PBL, student-centered learning, differentiation)

• Assign leadership roles to small group members who can then report out to the larger course population on a regular basis (PBL, team building, team based learning)

• Provide the same content for different learning levels (differentiation, student-centered-learning)

How Groups Work in Western Online (D2L):

• Users can belong to multiple groups within the same course at the same time

• Each group can have its own discussion forums, dropbox folders and locker area for students to work in.

• Instructors can grade members of a group individually or as a team

• Instructors can assign students to specific groups, students can self-assign themselves to specific groups, or students can be automatically enrolled (assigned to groups randomly)
Types of Group Enrollment:

Before you set up your group(s) in D2L, it is best to make some preliminary decisions about your groups by answering questions such as:

- What is the purpose of this group? (Self-select for a project or role in a project, efficiently manage a large discussion group for full class discussion, set up an individual journaling area, allow special access, and etc.)

- How many groups do you want to have?

- How many students do you want to have in each group?

- Do you want students to be able to select their group?

- Do you want students to be automatically/randomly enrolled into the groups?

- Do you want to manually enroll students into the various groups?

Once you have answered these types of questions, you can look at the following table and determine the type of group enrollment you would like to set up. See a listing and description of the various enrollment types in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong># of Groups - No Auto Enrollments</strong></td>
<td>• Specified number of groups; you can add any number of users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice Idea</strong></td>
<td>• Use when you know how many groups you want to create and which users you want to add to each group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice Idea</strong></td>
<td>• When you manually want to enroll users in the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Groups of #</strong></td>
<td>• Create a minimum number of groups needed to place users in groups of a specified maximum size.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice Idea</strong></td>
<td>• More groups are generated as needed to accommodate users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Groups of # - Self Enrollment</strong></td>
<td>• Randomized groups are created.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Best Practice Idea</strong></td>
<td>• Create a specified number of groups, which users self-enroll in from the Groups page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Tutorial One: Setting up Small Break Out Groups

In this tutorial we will set up an online discussion and assign a group setting that will allow the instructor to view all groups together or filter by a single group. Students will only see posts from other users in their assigned group. This is best for grading small group discussions. Everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section.

Here’s how you do this in your course:

First you will set up your Group:

A. Click on the Communication link/drop-down menu in your course page’s top navigation then choose Groups.

B. Click the New Category button.

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| # of Groups Capacity of # - Self Enrollment | • Create a specified number of groups with a specified number of enrollments per group.  
• Users choose which group they want to enroll in.  
• Choose this group type when you know how many users you want in each group, you want to allow users to choose their own groups and you want each group to have a maximum number of users. |
| Single user, member-specific groups   | • Create a group with a single member where the first and last name of the user is the name of the group.  
• When a new learner is enrolled a group is automatically created for them. |

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C. Enter a name for the category in the **Category Name** field. For instance we might name this “Small Discussion Group Breakouts.”

D. In the **Enrollment Type** drop-down menu, choose the type of enrollment you want for your group (remember the questions and chart above). Say we believe are going to have a class of at least 24 and we want to have 6 students per group. We would want to create **Groups of Number** enrollment to ensure that each group had 6 members. If more than 24 students were to enroll and you click the auto enroll option, a new group would be created to contain the remaining members.

E. In the **Number of Users** field you would enter 6. (or whatever number you desire for your course).

F. Under **Advanced Properties** ensure that the **Auto-enroll new users** option is checked if you want new user’s to be added to groups automatically upon enrollment. Also, ensure that **Randomize users in group** is checked.

G. Click the **Save** button.
Next you will set up your Discussion:

H. Click on the Communication link/drop-down menu in your course page’s top navigation bar then choose Discussions.

I. Click the New drop-down menu and choose New Forum.

J. Enter a name for the forum in the Title field.

K. Enter a description in the Description field if desired.

L. Make any other necessary changes to the settings listed under Options.

M. Click the Save and Close button at the bottom of the page.

N. Click on the New drop-down menu button and choose New Topic.

O. In the Choose a Forum drop-down menu, choose the Forum that you just made in the previous step (Small Group Discussions Week 1.)
P. Under **Topic Type**, choose **Group or section topic**, everyone can access this topic but students only see threads from their own group or section.

**Note:** You must have a group set up in your course for this option to appear.

Q. The **Group or Section Category** drop-down menu will appear. Choose the discussion group that you created previously. In my example it was (Discussion Groups).

R. Enter a title in the **Title** field.
   (This is the title of your topic or discussion question.)

S. In the **Description** field, enter instructions for what participants are supposed to do in this discussion, you should also enter the discussion question(s) in this field.

T. Make any other desired adjustments to the discussion options and availability.

U. Click the **Save and Close button** at the bottom of the page.
Now You Will Experiment with Viewing and Participating in the Discussion:

V. When you are returned to the Discussion List, find the discussion topic you just created and click on the link to be taken into it. Since you assigned groups to this discussion there are some new things you can do in this area.

W. Click on the Start a New Thread button.

X. Notice, that at the top of the post you have a drop-down menu that allows you to post the thread to everyone, or just a specific group.

This allows you to differentiate your discussions and teaching amongst small groups or the whole group. You can go ahead and enter a post and click Post or you can click Cancel.

We just wanted you to see that you can control which groups the post goes to or send it to everyone.

Y. Once you have posted your thread or cancelled you will be returned to the Group Discussion window. Under the Start a New Thread button, you will notice the worlds Filter by: and then a drop-down menu. Click on the drop-down menu and you will see options for All Groups or individual groups. This allows you to look at responses to the overall discussion based on a group. So you do not see everyone’s response at the same time.

Z. Additionally, in the second drop-down All Threads you can add an additional filter to search only Unread or Flagged posts.
Tutorial Two: Setting up Group Assignments
(Any group member can submit and view files for a group, including files and comments added by you in the Dropbox.)

First you will set up your Group:
For this group we will set it so that students can sign up for a specific project that they will hand in through Western Online’s Dropbox (Assignments) tool.

A. Click on the Communication link/drop-down menu in your course page’s top navigation then choose Groups.

B. Click on New Category.

C. Enter a name for the category in the Category Name field. For instance we might name this “City News Projects”

D. In the Enrollment Type drop-down menu, choose the type of enrollment you want for your group (remember the questions and chart above). For this project we would like to provide 4 topics from which students can choose the one they want to do, and I want to have two members per group. So, I chose # of Groups Capacity of # - Self Enrollment.

E. In the Number of Users field you would enter 2 (or whatever number you wish to have).

F. In the Number of Groups field you would enter 4 (or whatever number you wish to have).

G. Click the Save button.
H. You will then be taken to the Manage Groups window. Here you will want to name each of the groups based on the project assignment and add a brief description so that students know what they are signing up for.

I. Click on the Group 1 link.

J. In the Group Name field type a descriptive name for the first group.

K. If necessary, add a description about the group/project choice in the Description field.

L. Click the Save button.

M. Repeat steps H-L until you have added descriptive information for each group.
Then you will set up your Assignment:

N. Click on the **Assessments** link/drop-down menu in your course page’s top navigation then choose **Assignments**.

O. Click the **New Folder** button.

P. Enter a name for the **Folder** (Assignment) in the field provided.

Q. Under **folder type**, choose **Group Submission Folder**.

R. Choose the Group Category that you want to attach the assignment to under the **Group Category** drop-down menu (e.g. mine was City News Group Projects)

S. Make other necessary settings to the Dropbox folder you are creating and click the **Save and Close** button.
Tutorial Three: Setting up Groups for Special Release
(You would do this at times when you want to give more time or date alternatives for an exam, or differentiate content for specific users or groups of users.)

First you will set up your Group:
A. Click on the Communication link/drop-down menu in your course page’s top navigation then choose Groups.

B. Click on New Category.

C. Enter a name in the Category Name field. For instance we might name this (Basketball Players Early Test)

D. In the Enrollment Type drop-down menu, choose the type of enrollment you want for your group (remember the questions and chart above). For this project we would like to setup special access for a group of users. I am going to set up a group for members of the Basketball Team who will need to take their exam/quiz early. So for the Enrollment Type we will choose # of Groups - No Auto Enrollments. This will allow us to enroll the users that we want into the group. We will only have one group in this category.

E. In the Number of Groups field you would enter a 1. (or whatever number you desire for your course).

F. Under Advanced Properties make whatever changes you desire.

G. Click the Save button.
H. You will be returned to the **Manage Groups** window. Click on the right drop-down arrow next to the **Basketball Players Early Test** (or whatever you had called your group). Choose **Enroll Users**.

I. You should now see a list of all users enrolled in your course. You can click the checkbox to the right of the names of the people you want to add to special access and then click the **Save** button to add them to the special release group you are creating.
Then you will set up the Special Access within the Quiz:

For the purpose of this tutorial we will use a pre-made quiz.

J. Click on the **Assessments** link/drop-down menu in your course page’s top navigation then choose **Quizzes**.

K. Choose a quiz that you already have created. Next to that quiz, click on the right-drop down menu and select **Edit**.

L. Click on the **Restrictions** tab.

M. Scroll down the page to where it says **Special Access**.

N. **Under Types of Access,** click on the **Allow selected users special access to this quiz** (this adds special access for a group of users, but not the entire class, yet the entire class can see the quiz.) Alternatively, you can choose **Allow only users with special access to see the quiz** which would keep everyone else in the class from seeing it. For best practice, use method one when you want to do things such as allow more time, allow users to take the quiz on another date/time, etc. Use the second method when you are trying to differentiate for learning levels and provide alternate content for different learners.

O. Click the **Add Users to Special Access** button.
P. Change the setting properties - time/date, time enforcement and etc.

Q. In the Users View By drop-down menu, choose Groups. Click Apply.

R. In the Groups drop-down menu, choose the group that you made (e.g. I am using the Basketball Basketball Players Early Test Group)

S. Select individual names or all members of the group by clicking in the radio buttons to the left of their names to add them to the list of users who will receive special access.

T. Click the Add Special Access button.

U. Click the Save and Close button.
Tutorial Four: Setting up a Group by Individual Student

Create a group with a single user where the first name and last name of the learner is the name of the group for journaling type assignments using the discussion board.) When new learners are added to the course a group is automatically created for them.

A. Click on the Communication link/drop-down menu in your course page's top navigation then choose Groups.

B. Click New Category (for this set of groups we will be setting up work groups for an individual blog/journal type activity)

C. Enter a name for the category in the field provided.

D. In the Enrollment Type drop-down menu, choose Single user, member-specific groups.

E. Select No Restrictions from the Restrict Enrollments Too* drop-down menu.

F. Click the Save button.
Next you will set up your Discussion:

G. Click on the **Communication** link/drop-down menu in your course page's top navigation bar then choose **Discussions**.

H. Click the **New** drop-down menu and choose **New Forum**.

I. Enter a name for the forum in the **Title** field.

J. Enter a description in the **Description** field if desired.

K. Make any other necessary changes to the settings listed under **Options**.

L. Click the **Save and Close** button at the bottom of the page.

M. Click on the **New** drop-down menu button and choose **New Topic**.

N. In the **Choose a Forum** drop-down menu, choose the Single Member Forum that you just made in the previous step.
O. Under **Topic Type**, choose **Group or section topic**.

**Note:** You must have a group set up in your course for this option to appear.

P. The **Group or Section Category** drop-down menu will appear. Choose the discussion group that you created previously. In my example it was (Blog Post Single Member Groups).

Q. Enter a title in the **Title** field.  
(This is the title of your topic or discussion question.)

R. In the **Description** field, enter instructions for what participants are supposed to do in this discussion, you should also enter the discussion question(s) in this field.

S. Make any other desired adjustments to the discussion options and availability.

T. Click the **Save and Close button** at the bottom of the page.