

# *Diana Franklin | TA | PHD Candidate*

*“Help! My students are zombies; walls are more interactive.”*

## **Scenario: Discussion Session Redux**

Diana is a TA in SI 544, Statistics and Data Analysis. She leads a weekly discussion section during which she reviews the material covered by the professor earlier in the week to cement student understanding of the course material. Specifically, she asks the students at the start of each discussion what topics they are having the most difficulty with and would like to review. This has not been effective. She finds the students are not engaged in discussion section, and are unresponsive when probed about issues they are having. The "discussion" section thus becomes an hour and a half of Diana lecturing, going over the week's material without any input from the students. Originally, Diana thought that the students were disengaged simply because they didn't need help with the material; however, the class average on the last exam was 68%, not a satisfactory score!

Frustrated and uncertain how to proceed, Diana decides to ask the students how discussion is working for them and how it can be improved. One student, named Tim, mentions that the course schedule (lecture on Monday and discussion on Thursday) is not ideal. By Thursday, students have already forgotten most of the material from Monday's class and haven't yet begun the homework. Tim suggests that discussion be moved closer to lecture.

Diana knows there is no possibility of moving discussion. She wishes there was a good way for her to document the students' confusion during lecture so she can plan her discussions accordingly. She's heard about Bblis, and wants to give it a try. She runs her idea by the course instructor, who agrees that it could help.

Diana creates a Bblis account, and sets up a private feedback channel for the class. She is able to easily import the email addresses of the students in the class and send them automated invites. She likes that she can make the feedback private; this particular feedback is to help her set up discussion topics, and she feels that students are more likely to contribute if they know their feedback is for her eyes only.

One of the features that she really likes about Bblis is that the feedback is real-time and time stamped. If she records the lecture, Bblis has a tool that will sync the PowerPoint with the feedback, so she can pinpoint exactly where students are getting confused.

Though Bblis is dynamic, she has some idea of what feedback would be most valuable for her preparation. Fortunately, Bblis has a framework for her to establish some feedback parameters. She creates a category called "Confusion", which will be represented by a slider that ranges from "Fully comprehending" to "Thoroughly confused." She also wants students to be able to leave her bblits, quick feedback bytes, generally one or two sentences. Bblits are useful because they are short and easy to construct, less demanding of attention than email, and she wants her students to focus on class!

The next lecture, she gives a short presentation to the class, showing them how to log in to Bblis, though she finds this isn't necessary. The students are already quite familiar with Facebook and Twitter, and take to Bblis easily. She shares her feedback goals with the students, and demonstrates the real-time nature of Bblis. The students can see how she will follow which topics are confusing to them and which are not just by following the "Confusion" meter.

After class, she logs into her Bblis account and downloads the feedback data so she can sync it with the recorded presentation. It appears students found the binomial distribution easy, but were very confused by both the Poisson and the normal distributions. In particular, they struggled with approximating distributions with the Poisson distribution. Several students submitted bblits about that. Some wrote more useful information than others. One student just wrote "huh?" Still, it is all helpful to her. With this data, she knows how to prepare for discussion on Thursday.