**Brett Garland:** Hi my name is Brett Garland I’m an associate professor with the department of Criminology and Criminal Justice and I’ve been teaching online here at Missouri State for about three years. I teach courses in policing, courses in research methods, data analysis and also specialized courses in hate crime and gang.

My reasons for doing a re-design of my Crim. 350 Policing course were rooted in the fact that I wanted to try as best as possible to replicate the active learning experiences and the use of Socratic dialogue that I often employ in seated classes. And when I started doing online classes one of the first tools I used was the traditional discussion board. But, I found that students felt disconnected with just using the traditional discussion board, especially my graduate students, and a lot of my undergraduate students as well, were really yearning for more of a connection with other students. More specifically what they were wanting was more connection with audio and video; they wanted the online course to feel more like a seated course.

My reasons for redesigning my Crim. 350 Policing course online had a lot to do with the fact that I often found students feeling disconnected in the way I had been running my online courses in the past. What I have always tried to do in my seated courses is to employ active learning techniques and Socratic dialogue. Initially using online courses I the existing technology of the traditional discussion boards. But as I did it I found that many of the students felt disconnected, that they weren’t really in a class, that they were doing more of a correspondence course and just kind of mingling in there with other students. So I wanted to try to get that Socratic element integrated into my online and actually get meaningful sustained discussions going in an online format where students also could experience their classmates in both an audio and visual way and not just with typed written letters. So, the technique that I used to get this going was a video conferencing technology and specifically I used something called Adobe Connect and with Adobe Connect you can use webcam so the students could see one another or if webcams aren’t available there is audio capability where all the students can hear one another by participating in small group video conferencing sessions. And this gets students hearing one another and with use of a web cam seeing one another and they actually start to have the experience of something like a classroom environment and students that I have talked to after taking this course, after they have taken my course really seem to appreciate that element. Now I did not totally abandon the discussion board technology what I did was I used Adobe Connect to have discussion meetings briefly and the discussion leaders tape their video conferences, which is a very key feature of Adobe Connect, and in taping these all the students could then see the small group conferences and then all students could go into the discussion board and then comment with one another on questions that were actually produced by the week’s discussion leaders. What I found was different about this is students didn’t feel as disconnected anymore because they are responding to things that were said by people that they could see and they could hear. To get the conversation on discussion board going in a Socratic style of format I totally redid my course rubric. Some of the features that I emphasized in the redesigned course rubric had to do with scoring on continuity of posts and specifically having to do with continuity through the week. So I would give more points
for people who posted on discussions boards at the beginning of the week and multiple times throughout the week. I also had a feature on my reconstructed rubric that had to do with engagement where I award students who ask questions to their classmates and then follow up after their classmates responded to those initial questions and I found that that got students engaged more. One of the problems I tried to address with this new rubric is keeping students on track with more of the intellectual side of the discussion. In the past I have watched students in the discussion board drift into more causal types of conversation which did not necessary deal with the content of the week for my course. So, I used the rubric to reward people for coming up with examples and analogies and relating those to something specific in the class text, or bringing in new material from outside of the text into the discussion board and generating some type of exchange from outside material and I felt that that was a good way of keeping students on topic and engage with the concepts and the themes and statistics, the figures that were being conveyed in the week’s chapter.

Students responded to this new style of course design with my online course initially with shock. I think they were used to more discussion boards that took more of a blog type of format where they had to post a couple of time and maybe respond to a couple of students here and there but didn’t really have to engage in multiple conversation with students through the entirety of the week. So I think coming into my class from other classes where they experienced the discussion board they felt that it was a totally different world. Also there was some resistant to the video conferencing. With video conferencing if you have five or six students engaged you have to set up time where all students can get together and a lot of the students were under the impression that in an online course you do it on your own time when you have the time to do it and so the simple act of scheduling the video conference had some resistance at the very beginning. But over time as they got used to the course the comfort level of the students also became improved.

In terms of the future of this course what I’d like to add on to it is some type of feature where students could do video responses on their own in a format something like a blog, where they compose their own video blog to material that has either been presented in the course or have been discussed in one of the video conferences that will enable all students each week to get on camera and then students can see each other a bit more frequently.