Introduction to Online Discussions

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Agenda

- Best practices for asynchronous online discussions
- How to create a discussion forum in Blackboard
- How to facilitate and grade a discussion in Blackboard
- Questions and brainstorming
Best practices for asynchronous online discussions
Best practices for writing discussion prompts

- To elicit a rich, engaging discussion, the prompt needs to invite a diverse range of responses
  - Two key questions:
    - What are your learning goals for the discussion?
    - How do you imagine the discussion playing out? What might students’ initial posts look like and—more importantly—how would they then respond to each other?
  - If your goal is for students to remember or understand, a discussion is probably not the best fit
    - Questions with straightforward “right” answers will quickly run their course
  - A discussion is a better fit if your goal is for students to apply, analyze, evaluate, or create
    - Questions that encourage critical and creative thinking will elicit diverse responses that serve as fodder for discussion
Strategies for encouraging productive discussions

- Provide clear instructions about how and when students should contribute
  - Are students expected to submit an initial post in response to the prompt?
    - If so, what is the due date and time?
  - Are students expected to respond to peers’ posts or yours?
    - If so, what is the due date and time?

- Provide detailed information about your criteria for evaluating participation
  - Begin with your learning goals for the initial post
    - How well did the student apply, analyze, evaluate, or create?
  - Then consider your learning goals for responses to others’ posts
    - What would a high-quality response look like—versus a low-quality response?

- Develop a rubric and make it available to students before the discussion
  - Note: A rubric can also help you grade discussion participation more efficiently
Best practices for facilitating discussions

- **Strike a balance between guiding the discussion and giving students room to develop their ideas**
  - Heavy facilitation can silence students
  - Lack of facilitation can suggest that you are not engaged

- **Jump in strategically to encourage high-quality participation and direct the conversation toward your learning goals**
  - Ask students to clarify or further develop their ideas
  - Rather than responding to an individual students, consider creating periodic summary posts
    - Pull together good ideas from different students’ posts, and give them credit
    - Correct misconceptions
    - Provide additional resources
  - After taking stock of the discussion so far, offer further prompts that nudge students toward your learning goals

- **Model your expectations for student participation**
How to create a discussion forum in Blackboard
Create a discussion forum

1. Navigate to your course in Blackboard
2. In the left-hand navigation menu, select Course Tools
3. Select Discussion Board
4. Select the discussion board for your course
5. Select Create Forum
Add discussion forum information

- **Provide a descriptive name for the discussion forum**
  - Consider including the date of the associated class meeting, to help students navigate to the correct discussion forum

- **Use the Description field to provide instructions**
  - Your description should answer the following questions
    - What is the discussion prompt?
    - For graded discussion forums, what are your expectations for participation?
      - Are students expected to submit an initial post in response to the prompt? If so, what is the due date and time?
      - Are students expected to respond to peers’ posts or yours? If so, what is the due date and time?
      - What are your criteria for evaluating participation? Will you be using a rubric?
    - Depending on the settings you select for the discussion forum, Blackboard may prompt you to add instructions in the Description field
Set up discussion forum availability options

- Students will *not* be able to access the discussion forum unless you make it available to them
  - Note that this is the default setting for discussion forums
- You can add date and time restrictions to limit students’ access to the discussion forum
  - Adding a “Display After” date can help you set the pace of the course by ensuring students cannot post to the discussion forum before they have been introduced to the relevant course content
Configure discussion forum settings

- In the default “Standard View,” students will be able view all of the previous posts in the discussion forum
  - Depending on your learning goals for the discussion forum, you may want to consider the alternative: Participants must create their own post in order to view previous posts

- By default, discussion forums are ungraded
  - If you select “Grade Discussion Forum,” additional options will appear
Set up discussion forum grading

- If you plan to grade the discussion forum, indicate the maximum number of points students can earn.

- By default, a student’s participation in the discussion forum will display as “needs grading” after each post.

- If you set a due date, late submissions will be indicated in the Grade Center.

- If you add a rubric, additional options will appear.
Add a rubric

- If you would like to use a rubric to grade discussion posts, you can
  - Add or adapt a rubric that you already created in your course
  - Create a new rubric
  - Note: You can also import a rubric that you created in a different course

- By default, rubrics are not shown to students
  - Consider selecting “Yes” so that students will be able to see the rubric and use it as a guide for making high-quality contributions to the discussion forum
Configure discussion forum settings (continued)

- By default, you and your students will be allowed to subscribe to the forum
  - Anyone who subscribes will receive an email notification when a new post is published

- Blackboard will automatically exclude settings that are incompatible with the settings you have already selected
  - For example, if you indicated that the discussion forum would be graded, Blackboard will exclude the option to allow anonymous posts
  - Excluded options will be grayed out and crossed out

- If you select “force moderation of posts,” you will have to review and approve every post before it is published to the discussion forum
Test-drive the discussion forum

- Select “Submit” to create the discussion forum
- The discussion forum should appear on the Discussion Board in your course
- Enter student preview mode to see your course as students see it
  - Are students able to access the Discussions link in the left-hand navigation menu?
    - If not, click on the gray chevron next to the link and select “Show Link”
  - Are students able to access the discussion forum (or not) as you intended?
    - If not, revisit the availability settings
  - Is the student experience what you expected?
How to facilitate and grade a discussion in Blackboard
View posts in a discussion forum

1. In the left-hand navigation menu, select **Discussions**

2. Click on the name of the discussion forum
   - Note: The Discussion Board includes a summary of activity for each discussion forum

3. Click on the name of a thread to view the initial post and any replies to that post
Subscribe to a discussion forum

1. In the left-hand navigation menu, select **Discussions**

2. Click on the name of the discussion forum

3. Click on **Subscribe**
Respond to a post

As the instructor, you can
- Reply to the student’s post
  - Note: All participants will be able to see your reply in the discussion forum
- Delete the student’s post
- Email the student through Blackboard

To reply to a post
1. Click on the name of a thread to view the posts
2. Navigate to the post you would like to reply to
3. Select Reply
4. Add your message to the student
   - Note: In addition to text, your reply can include hyperlinks, attachments, videos, et cetera
5. Select Submit to publish your reply to the discussion forum
Create a new thread

1. In the left-hand navigation menu, select **Discussions**
2. Click on the name of the discussion forum
3. Click on **Create Thread**
4. Add a subject line
5. Add your message
   - Note: In addition to text, your message can include hyperlinks, attachments, videos, et cetera
6. Select **Submit** to publish your reply to the discussion forum
Grade a discussion forum

1. In the left-hand navigation menu, select Grade Center
2. Select Full Grade Center
3. Navigate to the grading column for the discussion forum you want to grade
4. Identify a student whose submissions need grading (yellow exclamation point icon)
5. Select the gray chevron in the cell for the student’s submission
6. Select Grade User Activity
Grade a discussion forum (continued)

- The Grade Forum screen displays all of the student's posts for the discussion forum.
- On this screen, you can:
  - Assign a grade for the student's participation.
  - Use the rubric to evaluate the student's participation (if you added a rubric).
  - Provide feedback to the learner.
    - Note: This feedback is a private communication to the student.
- Select “Submit” to save.
Questions?

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