Discussion Board Best Practices

Discussion Boards are a staple of online courses. Course participants can post and respond to messages using the Discussion Board feature within UB Learns.

- **Forums** are used to organize discussions. A forum must be created before course participants can post and respond to messages using the Discussion Board feature. Students are unable to create forums.
- **Threads** are discussions within forums. A new post starts a thread. All responses appear in the same thread. Instructors determine whether students can initiate Threads.

Setting Up Your Course

- **Student Expectations**
  - Set clear expectations about online discussion requirements, deadlines, and grading procedures, as applicable.
- **Set Parameters**
  - You cannot be in all discussions all the time. Set parameters for yourself and let students know what they are: "I'll be in the discussions on these days", or, "I'll be in the Discussion 3 times this week".
- **Make good use of your time**
  - When responding to discussion questions, respond to several postings (or a thread) at once, not each post individually. For example: Mike, Alicia and Jaz- it looks like the three of you have similar ideas about how to solve this case.
- **Make discussions meaningful**
  - To do this you need to value them so your students will also value them. Assign points to your discussions based on the quality of posts, not quantity. Provide a rubric to guide the quality
- **Make discussions engaging**
  - Vary the types of discussion prompts; Interpretation questions, Analytical questions, Questions relate to viewpoints or to solutions, or a specific issue, etc.

During Your Course

- **Refer to Students by Name**
  - By referring to students by name in your postings it adds to your "presence" as an instructor. (e.g. "Jose and Cate -you bring up some excellent points about this scenario".)
- **Participate actively**
  - Answer questions, provide feedback, and pose conflicting questions. The more instructors are involved in online discussions, the more enthusiastic and the more willing students are to participate.

- **Post with intentionality - plan what you post**
  - Are you looking to help learners manage procedures (logistical prompts), engage with the content or course (process prompts), focus on discipline-specific content (subject matter prompts),apply content to real-world scenarios (application prompts), or offer learners encouragement and acknowledgement (affective prompts).
- **Keep the discussion focused**
  - Reframe questions if the discussion goes off topic. For example: Diego and Min -Good thought to bring in this population. Such a tool could limit external distractions. Could this be more motivating than regular instruction in some way or with some usage?
- **Ask for clarification.**
  - For example: Lisa--An excellent overview of the readings. Let me ask you to explain to everyone what you mean by active learning as a technique.
- **Use the Socratic method of questioning as appropriate and be careful not to halt the discussion.**
  - For example, say "Have you considered this..."
- **Draw conclusions and provide content expertise**
  - Provide advanced insights and help students apply, analyze, and synthesize information.
- **Recommend resources for extension of learning**
  - A recent report was put out by the US Dept of Energy looking at this very topic. Take a look at the report findings here: https://www.energy.gov/XXX
- **Have students provide the summary and synthesis**
  - What are the takeaways of this week's discussion?
- **Balance Group Dynamics**
  - Ensure that no student(s) dominates the conversation, be quick to intervene in the case of hostile or offensive postings. Encourage "quiet" students to participate. Online discussions should be an equal opportunity for all students to express themselves. In an online class no one can "sit in the back of the class"

Additional Resources

10 Tips for Effective Online Discussions

The ABCs of High Quality Online Discussions

Purdue Repository for Online Teaching and Learning

UB IT Discussion Boards