


Online Discussions


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Tools Available in Blackboard




- **Blogs** → multiple students can create entries in a weblog format
- **Collaboration** → chat rooms (synchronous discussions)
- **Discussion Board** → asynchronous discussions
- **Journals** → individual student reflections (between student and instructor only)
- **Messages** → Blackboard email system (stays within Blackboard)
- **Self and Peer Assessment*** → peer review system
- **Send Email** → Listserv system (email to TAMUK email account)
- **Groups** → Assign students into groups, use Bb tools within groups

Planning for Online Discussions




- **Anticipate**
 - How many interactions are possible between students?
 - How often will they login?
- **Clarify Requirements**
 - Number of logins
 - Number of postings
 - Quality and quantity of postings
 - Formal v. Informal discussions
- **Clarify Purpose**
 - What is the expected outcome of the discussion?

Facilitating Online Discussions




- **Watch**
 - Is the topic drifting?
 - Steer the discussion with regular weaving messages
- **Guide**
 - Guide discussions by asking "leading" questions rather than speaking up yourself
 - Be the "Guide on the Side," not the "Sage on the Stage"
- **Model**
 - Use language that encourages other perspectives ("I am curious to know what some other opinions are.")
 - Be yourself! Allow your personality to show, and encourage students to do the same

Facilitating Online Discussions




- **Be On Guard**
 - For negative or hostile interaction
 - Be prepared to censor messages, ban participants, or arbitrate when conflict arises
- **Bring Closure**
 - Always bring the discussion to an end
 - Provide a summary or ask a student/group to do so
 - Provide assessment/evaluation for that particular discussion so that students have a concrete understanding of how they have performed/contributed
- **Encourage**
 - Use private email to encourage students who may be falling behind or seem to feel uncomfortable
 - Tell them what they are doing right and what they could be doing better


Assessing Online Discussions




- **Evaluate**
 - Specify how the participants will be evaluated
 - Quality or quantity of posting
 - Number of postings
 - Having read all of the messages
 - Responses to messages
 - How many different time they log in
- **Assess**
 - Variation among students' personalities, learning levels, styles, and confidence

Managing Volume for You 

- **Accept that you cannot be everywhere, in all discussions!**
 - Make this very clear to students
 - "I will not be able to reply to every original message you post!"
 - "Students are expected to provide feedback to each other. It is a part of your grade."
 - Enlist a TA to help you manage messages
 - Have the TA keep track of requirements while you move about the conversation
 - Have the TA respond (if qualified)
- **Formally close the discussion on the end date**

Other Strategies... 

- **Know exactly what you want the outcome to be**
- **Develop appropriate strategies to meet that outcome**
 - Beginning an online discussion without parameters will create quite a mess for both you and your students!
 - It is also likely to lead to confused, disgruntled, and unmotivated students
- **Be very specific!**
 - What guidelines students are to follow
 - What actions meet the requirements

Tips for Your Students 

- **In large volume classes, do not attempt to read every post**
- **Find something that is interesting to you and follow it**
 - Students are more likely to participate, learn, and remember information if they are actually interested in what they are discussing
- **One the same note, every now and again, visit a new discussion – go outside of your comfort zone or your current knowledge base**
 - You might like it
 - You will interact with different students
 - You will learn something new!
- **Don't wait until the last minute**
 - It means you are not fully participating
 - There is no leeway to deal with technical problems
