



### Best Practices: The Discussion Board

The Discussion Board area in a Blackboard course parallels the “in-class” discussion in a face-to-face classroom. In a hybrid or supplemental course site, the Discussion Board can supplement face-to-face discussion or serve as a preparation for an upcoming in-class discussion. This handout is divided into two sections: *Course Design* and *Course Delivery*. *Course Design* is the preparation and building of the discussion boards in the course, while *Course Delivery* provides some helpful tips and suggestions for encouraging participation on the discussion boards.

#### Course Design Tips for Discussion Boards

- **Expectations and Grading**
  - Students don't do “optional.” Attach a point value to each discussion post/comment.
  - Determine an appropriate point value for amount of time it takes to participate.
  - Use specific, descriptive criteria for grading.
  
- **Clarity in Participation Requirements**
  - Include specific details about participation, such as length and posting dates (often part of the grading rubric.)
  - A standard netiquette policy is provided in the Syllabus Template and in the New Course Template in Blackboard. Use this netiquette statement as-is, modify it, or write your own – just be sure to create a set of behavioral expectations for the online environment.
  
- **Use Course Links within Lessons to direct navigation**
  - Create a Course Link in the Lesson folder to the Discussion Board at the point where you want students to engage in the conversation (i.e. If students are to read an article, submit an assignment, and then engage in the Discussion Board, place the Course Link following the assignment).
  - It is helpful to include the prompt in both the Discussion Forum and in the Course Link.
  
- **Correlate the Discussion Board forum to the Learning Objectives and To-Do list in the Lesson**
  - What's the purpose of the forum? How does it relate to the objectives?
  
- **Use the Groups function for large classes**
  - Blackboard Groups can allow you to divide up the students into team to allow for more robust discussion in smaller groups.
  
- **Write prompts to generate conversation**
  - Use open-ended questions.
  - Try to relate to “real-life” experiences, such as case studies.
  - Use questions to generate interest, such as contemporary issues or taking a Pro/Con stance with evidence to support the chosen position.



### Course Delivery Tips for Discussion Boards

- **Create an Introductions forum**
  - The New Course Template comes pre-populated an introductory forum entitled Tell Us About Yourself. You are encouraged to use this forum, modify it, or create your own.
  - It's important for students to have the opportunity to introduce themselves to their peers. It helps form an online community.
  - Don't forget to post your bio – a brief note about yourself often including a picture, video, or voki.
- **Make Your Presence Known**
  - Jump on in all discussions to at least say “nice work” or “great point”.
  - Monitor, contribute, and intervene when appropriate, but don't dominate the boards.
  - Try to balance the discussion (i.e. draw out silent types, quiet dominants.)
- **Reinforce Expectations**
  - It is helpful to use the first discussion in the course to reinforce the expectation and requirements of your forums right away. This will help minimize remediation weeks into the course.
  - Use announcements and grading feedback of the first forum as “teachable moments”.
- **Use the Course Questions & Blackboard Forums**
  - Encourage students to post general content-related and technology-related questions in these two forums.
  - Subscribe to the forums to receive email notification if a question is posted.
  - This allows for questions to be answered once with less email traffic in your inbox!
- **Wrap Up Discussion**
  - After each discussion, it's a great idea to wrap it up – either via the Announcements area, an audio file summarizing, or a simple post.
  - What should students take away from the Discussion? How does it relate to the rest of the course (or any future assignments)? What can they do better next time in the discussion area?