Discussion Boards Can & Should Be More Than Busy Work

Upcoming Events:
https://cfde.emory.edu/programs/online-education/index.html
Tuesdays in March & April, 10:00-11:00
Drop-in Working Hours
Fridays March 12th - April 2nd, 10:30-11:45
It's About Flipping Time! program
Register: https://calendly.com/emory-cfde

Resources:
Teaching Toolkit:
https://cfde.emory.edu/toolkit/
Recorded Zoom Engagement Webinars and Handouts:
https://cfde.emory.edu/programs/online-education/recorded-webinars.html

Who's Here

Facilitators:
Liesl Wuest
Associate Director of Learning Design & Technology
CFDE
Alicia Lane
Graduate Assistant LD&T
CFDE
Savannah Post
Graduate Assistant LD&T
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Faculty Panel:
Sarah Bogue
Assistant Professor in the Practice of History of Christianity
Director of Digital Learning, Candler
John Kim
Senior Lecturer in Organization & Management, Goizueta
Don Noble
Instructor, Center for the Study of Human Health, ECAS
Connie Roth
Professor, Physics, ECAS & Laney

Program Outline
● Overview of Uses, Best Practices & Strategies - ~25 minutes
● Faculty Panel - ~35 minutes
● Q & A - remaining time - ~ 15 minutes

If you have questions, put them in the chat and we will address them during the Q&A time rather than directly in the chat.

What do you use Discussion Boards for?
● Discussion of questions: general, essential, conceptual
● Scaffolding final assignments
● Shared information
● Blogs
● Encouraging students to read ahead, and show them that they can answer each other’s questions; that they too are experts on the topic (emerging experts)
● Peer review
● Submitting video posts based on a given prompt related to course content
● I am a postdoc so I have had to complete them moreso than create them

What are some problems you’ve been experiencing?
● Quality of discussion
  ○ Hard to think of generative topics that create good discussion
  ○ Students engage with each other to get the homework points associated with posting... but then don’t engage past that.
  ○ A lot of comments undergrads leave in discussions are just agreeing with others, e.g., “liked your point on X”, which doesn’t really advance the discussion.
● Every course having discussion boards
  ○ “death by popcorn” complaints by students
● Technical difficulties
  ○ video uploads
  ○ hard to follow thread at times
● How –professional- to be in your language
Think About Purpose

Support Class Discussions (classroom or Zoom)
- Class preparation: reflect on materials before class
- Follow-up: reflection, muddy points, I wonder
- Alternative participation space for discussion (in class OR in Canvas)
- Student-led discussions

Small Group Discussions
- More time for back and forth, reflection
- Builds community with groups of students

Build Community
- Great for student intro/ice breakers in an on-campus course
  - Ask a fun question, hopes, concerns etc.
  - Throw in a fun prompt every few weeks
  - Favorite vacation, pet, movie

Group Work
- Contributions
- Drafts
- Resources

Shared Resources
- Websites
- Videos
- Articles

Scaffolded Assignments
- Background research
- Topic
- Resources
- Drafts/revisions
- Final

Provide Structure

Clearly define expectations for participation
- How often students should post & when they need to post by
  - Length of posts: 200 word original post, two 50-word responses
- What is an acceptable post?
  - Contains new ideas; has substance
  - Responds to others with feedback and additional thoughts
  - X number of resources
  - Hitting specific project benchmarks
- Follow "netiquette" guidelines

Style of response
- Conversational
- Academic
- Repository

*This should be determined by the purpose of the DB

Good Prompts for Engaging Discussions

- Interesting: don't have one right answer
- Controversial: but be sure to be aware of "hot topic" issues and how to facilitate this with respect and equity
- Evaluation: which is better and why?
- Tie content into frameworks of knowledge: how does this fit with what you already know? Does it change anything?
- How does this relate to your personal experience?
  - Connecting to self is a great way to increase intrinsic interest in a subject and supports long-term learning! DBs are a great place for this.

Not So Good Prompts for Not So Engaging Discussions

- Facts
- Questions with one right answer
- Yes/No questions (use polls for that!)
- Vague prompts:
  - Any questions? (there can be a space for this in Canvas, but it shouldn't be the weekly discussion if you want it actually be used?)
  - Who wants to start us off?
- Simply asking for an opinion - the opinion needs to be based on facts and they should be accountable for that
Rubric Examples:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1moviOp90IYTgVb94w9FeO2oSI-kNPAQw_CtWuU0nrCE/edit?usp=sharing

Mix It Up
- DBs don't always have to be text-based!
- Ask for images, audio or video
- Easy to do with phones and tablets
- Help break up the monotony of text
- Can be more personal and engaging

...but don't forget guidelines, especially with audio/video
- Can you explain/critique/analyze/summarize
  - In 30 seconds?
  - Less than 2 minutes?
- This could be with the whole class or with a small group.

Facilitation Tips
- You don’t have to respond to every post, but be present and involved in conversations
- Let students know how you intend to participate:
  - Expect posts twice a week – M/W
  - Expect responses before class
- Reference posts in class
  - Note ideas
  - Ask students to expand on their ideas etc.
- Students as facilitators

Let’s hear from our faculty!