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Using Discussion Boards to Support Face-to-Face or Online Courses

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What is a Discussion Board?

Discussion boards are message exchange areas, asynchronous tools, and “pull” technologies.

Discussion Board Benefits

- Extends time for reasoned inquiry beyond class time
- Provides practice in critical reasoning
- Enables less talkative students to participate
- Allows students to answer each other’s questions
- Enables use of secondary sources in discussions
- Stores a record or archive of conversations
- Allows participation of outside guests (or distant students) in discussions over a period of time

Creating Discussion Board Questions

A common element for learning in a typical classroom environment is the social and communicative interactions between student and teacher, and student and student. The ability to ask a question, to share an opinion with a fellow student, or to disagree with the point of view in a reading assignment are all fundamental learning activities.

Discussion Board Roles for Instructors

Instructors can be a moderator and/or facilitators.

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Effective Discussion Board Questions:

- Do not have "Yes" or "No" answers
- Invite alternatives or expansion
- Suggest that there are degrees/gradations involved
- Use verbs that require complex thinking skills

Effective Discussion Board Question Types

Exploratory	Poses a problem others can answer/respond to
Argumentation	Discusses reasoning as a way to trigger discussion
Critical	Challenges others' statements/ideas
Heuristic	Expresses discovery
Reflective	Examines past events in relation to present
Interpretive	Interprets content through opinion supported by facts
Analytical	Interprets content through synthesis of other content
Informative	Provides relevant information from literature
Explanatory	Clarifies, elaborates on previous messages
Implicative	Calls for action, presents a proposal

Question Board Types to Avoid

Affective	Only contains personal feelings
Judgmental	Only contains agree/disagree with no elaboration
Experiential	Only contains personal experience with no reflection
Reproductional	Recapitulates what's been said as the author's own work
Miscellaneous	Off topic messages, including technical requests

Adapted from Uzuner, S. (2007). Educationally valuable talk: A new concept for determining the quality of online conversations. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching 3* (4). Retrieved 4 March 2008 from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol3no4/uzuner.htm

Directed Discussions

- Directed discussions
- Focus on a specific topic or item

Online Debates

- Divide students into teams
- Assign roles (moderator, note taker, rebuttal)
- Require research to support argument
- Encourage requests for explanations/defenses of views
- Result: a consensus position

References

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