MAKING DISCUSSION BOARDS WORK
KSBIT LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

**BENEFITS OF DISCUSSION BOARDS**

- Students are more likely to connect/cite sources and class readings
- Students are more likely to challenge one another’s ideas and assumptions
- Extend conversations beyond class meetings
- Achieve high levels of cognitive and exploratory learning
- Externalize/model critical thinking
- Build a sense of active ownership and responsibility rather than just waiting for faculty to tell them the “right answer”

**ASSIGNMENT IDEAS**

- **Guest experts**: invite an expert to participate in a short Q&A with students via a discussion board
- **Small group discussions**: can focus discussion and prevent students from feeling that someone else has already posted “the answer”
- **Debates/roleplay**: Assigning some students to specific roles regarding a difficult business situation. Other students may ask questions of those roles or respond to the positions that those roles take.
- **Constructivist learning**: Posing questions or scenarios that ask students to leverage their own unique experiences (professional and/or personal). Allows students to learn from one another and prevents “ditto” answers

**ESSENTIALS**

- Set clear expectations regarding:
  - anticipated outcomes of discussion
  - behavior within discussions
  - Level/quality of participation that is expected
- Assessment must be clear:
  - use a rubric to demonstrate exactly how discussion boards will be evaluated
  - reduces the chance that students will perceive discussions as “busy work
  - Combining qualitative and quantitative assessment are most effective
  - Helps show that prompts are clearly tied to course content
- Prompts should go beyond simple answers such as agree/disagree or “right answers.” If it could be a quiz question, it’s not a good discussion prompt.
- Faculty should serve as facilitators only
  - Allow students to have ownership of the discussion
  - Faculty wrap-ups: public praise for deserving students, attention to critical points
  - Faculty who prove that the discussion is valuable will help students see it as valuable as well.

QUESTIONS? KSBLEARN@INDIANA.EDU
CHALLENGE: Discussions wander off topic or don’t arrive at desired insights

STRATEGIES:
• Identify discreet topics to be discussed sequentially
• Release new topics at specific times or when critical points are reached

CHALLENGE: Only a small number of students post meaningful contributions

STRATEGIES:
• Assign specific students to prepare initial responses to a series of questions. Other students respond to those initial posts
• Release new topics at specific times or when critical points are reached
• Split students into smaller groups with identical discussion prompts
• “Cold Call” students for initial posting that other students respond to
• Assign roles such as stakeholders from a case or pro/cons representing specific points of view
• Ask students to use contribution labels to encourage meaningful posts
  • Clarifying
  • Connecting
  • Questioning
  • Challenging

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