



i teach 2014



Facilitating Student Learning with Blackboard Discussions

Presenters:

Mitch Kundel, Ph.D.

Bryn Lutes, Ph.D.

In pairs, discuss the following questions



- How do you think Discussion Boards can be useful in a course?
- What challenges would you anticipate in using Discussion Boards as part of your class?

Using The Discussion Board to...



Enhance the quality and efficiency of communication between students and instructors.

1. Enhance in-class discussion
2. Conduct peer review of student writing
3. Provide opportunities for student questions

Facilitating Student Learning



Enhancing Class Discussions



In-Class Discussions



Can help students

- learn concepts in-depth
- learn to work collaboratively

Present challenges

- Discussions often dominated by few students
- Flow of conversation can be difficult to manage

One Model: Seminar in Academic Mentoring



- Chemistry Peer-Leader Training Course
- Topics covered
 - Facilitation Strategies
 - Questioning Strategies
 - Group Dynamics



Blackboard Discussion Board incorporated Fall 2012



Before 2012

- Open-ended question (e.g. how did your PLTL session go?)
- Free response from any student
- Trouble starting; resistance to ending

Since Fall 2012

- Before class, one group posts questions based on their PLTL sessions
- Instructors select 2-3 to base whole-group discussion at beginning of class
- Easier to end while also being productive
- Second group posts responses between class and next set of PLTL sessions

Example student post



Since this week's PLTL session was right after the students' first Gen Chem exam, the environment was completely different. I started off the session by doing a little activity where the students took turns describing what they felt confident about during the whole exam experience and what they did not feel comfortable about (I also asked how they thought they could improve on that). Of course this was only if they felt OK sharing with the rest of the group. Most students described similar pros and cons, but I noticed that people were not as willing to participate in discussion at all. As we started the PLTL, the room was dead silent for the first time since the first PLTL session. I had to wait a long time for students to speak up at all, and when I asked probing questions from the interrogative assignment, I wasn't given much feedback. I am not sure if this is because none of the students were motivated to do the problem set or look over their notes after just having finished an exam or because the mid semester slump has begun. For the first time ever, we could not finish the packet; we were able to get half way through the last problem, but I really wanted to finish it because it would have let me gauge how my peer group is feeling about this new material. Does anyone have ideas as to how I can motivate my group to talk more?

Example student post



Since this week's PLTL session was right after the students' first Gen Chem exam, the environment was completely different... I had to wait a long time for students to speak...and when I asked probing questions...I wasn't given much feedback...

Response to previous post



From what I've heard, this is a fairly common issue. I think one way to deal with this issue would be to target and address the mental issues that are causing the students' lack of motivation. One reason for some students could be that they are discouraged by how they did on the exam, and believe that there's no point in trying anymore if it's not going to help them anyway. I think to tackle this, you could try reminding your students that you struggled too (even if you didn't) and that this is only their first and one exam. There are still multiple quizzes, two more exams and a final that they can work towards doing better on. And it was also only their FIRST exam, they're only just getting a handle of how it works! Remind them how they still have lots of time to improve.

Another reason a few students may not be motivated is because maybe they found the exam easy or very doable, and now feel like they don't really need PLTL to help them out. A reminder that they still have many more graded examinations would be good for the too, so they remember that they aren't "done" yet, and still have another 2/3 of a semester to go!

Response to previous post



...you could try reminding your students that you struggled too (even if you didn't) and that this is ...only their FIRST exam...

**...A reminder that they still have many more graded examinations
...so they remember that...they still have another 2/3 of a semester to go!**

General Recommendations



- Carefully plan for how online discussions complement in-class discussion and activities.
- Incentivize discussion board participation for students.
- Design pre-class discussion prompts to prime students for in-class discussion.
- Explicitly incorporate Discussion Board posts into class discussion
- Consider assigning discussion posts or responses after class to continue dialogue.

Facilitating Student Learning



Conducting Peer Review

Why use peer review?



- Why use peer review? Students learn how to:
 - Read carefully
 - Strengthen their own writing by taking into account reader responses
 - Formulate and communicate constructive feedback
 - Respond to feedback on their own work
- Why conduct peer review online?
 - Saves class time
 - Gives students time to contribute more thoughtful ideas

Procedure for Online Peer Review



- Establish groups
 - Create a private Discussion Board for each Group
- Provide examples of feedback
- Set a structure for the review
 - Each student posts a draft
 - Other group members read the draft and provide comments
 - The writer reads the comments
 - The writer develops a plan for incorporating the comments
- Provide students with feedback on their comments

Facilitating Student Learning



Providing Opportunities for Questions



By ddpavumba on freedigitalphotos.net



By Stuart Miles at freedigitalphotos.net



Discussion Board for Q and A



- Make a forum (or multiple) available for student questions
- Set a deadline for student questions (e.g. 5 pm on Thursday)
- Only respond to previously unasked questions
- Respond to student questions at regular, advertised intervals
 - Part of this delay will allow students to answer the questions
 - Board becomes a place for students to demonstrate knowledge

Final Thoughts



- To grade or not to grade?
- Structure the Discussion Board use to facilitate communication
 - Between students for in- and out-of-class discussions
 - Provide constructive feedback in peer review
 - Between you and the students