

TEACHING ELEMENTS

ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

VERSION 1.0 | 7/3/14

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO INTERACT WITH THEIR PEERS AND SHARE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF COURSE TOPICS?

The Discussions tool is an asynchronous collaboration area where students and instructors can post, read and reply to messages on different topics. It is commonly used to share thoughts about course materials, ask questions, share files, and serve as a place where students can collaborate with peers on assignments and homework.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT ONLINE DISCUSSIONS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON LEARNING?



Research shows that use of an online discussion forum has a positive impact on student satisfaction and learning. For example, it has the potential to:

- Build class community by promoting discussion and serve as a vehicle through which learning can occur online. (Palloff and Pratt, 1999).
- Contribute to the development of problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills (Kolloff, 2011).
- Promote coherent shared understanding of content (Newmann and Wehlage, 1993).
- Provide students a higher level of performance than in the same online course without discussions (Beaudoin, 2001).
- Improve student achievement and satisfaction, as reflected by test performance, grades, and student satisfaction (Roblyer & Ekhaml, 2000).

MYCOURSES DISCUSSION IN ACTION

The myCourses Discussions tool can support a wide range of course activities and interaction such as:

- **Critical Thinking and Engaged Learning Strategies:** Supports a variety of critical thinking and engaged learning strategies across a number of disciplines. Students can work individually or in small teams. For some examples of these kinds of these learning activities using myCourses Discussions see:
 - [Problem of the Week \(pdf\)](#)
 - [Case Study Analysis \(pdf\)](#)

- **Community Building among Online Learners:** Serves as a virtual 'course commons' that facilitates more informal, social exchanges as a means for students to get to know one another in a fully online course. For examples of community building activities using myCourses Discussions tool, see:
 - [Personal Introductions \(pdf\)](#)
 - [Virtual Café/Lounge \(pdf\)](#)
- **Class Communication and Mechanics:** Streamlines and organize a variety of course-related communications and logistics, especially within an online course. For examples used in myCourses Discussions, see:
 - [Q and A Forum \(pdf\)](#)
- For suggestions on developing and managing activities in myCourses Discussions tool, see also:
 - [9 Essential Practices for your Discussion Activity \(pdf\)](#)

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

TLS Resources:

The following resources provide configuration instructions for the Discussions tool in myCourses.

Setup Checklist

- [Discussion setup checklist \(pdf\)](#)

Technical Documentation

- [Discussion technical documentation](#)

Video Tutorials

- [Setting up your discussion](#)
- [Posting / Replying to Messages](#)
- [Discussion demonstration for your students](#)

Book:

- Stavredes, T. (2011). *Effective online teaching: Foundations and strategies for student success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Articles:

- Conaway, R.N., Easton, S.S. & Schmidt, W.V. (2005). Strategies for enhancing student interaction and immediacy in online courses. *Business Communication Quarterly* 68(1), 23-35.
- Kolloff, M. (2011). Strategies for effective student/student interaction in online courses. 17th annual conference on distance teaching and learning.

- Muirhead, B. (2004). Encouraging interaction in online classes. *International Journal of Instructional Technology & Distance Learning* 1(6). Retrieved from http://www.itdl.org/journal/jun_04/article07.htm

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- Beaudoin, M. (2001). Learning or lurking? Tracking the 'invisible' online student. Orlando, FL: Paper delivered at the 7th Sloan-C International Conference on Asynchronous Learning Networks.
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- Roblyer, M.D. & Ekhaml, L. (2000). How interactive are your distance courses? A rubric for assessing interaction in distance learning. DLA 2000 proceedings, Callaway, Georgia, June 7-9, 2000.
- Swan, K. (2002). Building learning communities in online courses: The importance of interaction. *Education, Communication & Information*, 2(1), 23-49.