

TEACHING ELEMENTS

DISCUSSION

ACTIVITY: PERSONAL

INTRODUCTIONS

VERSION 1.0 | 6/30/14

Description:

In an online course, students are asked to introduce themselves and provide some biographical information via the Discussions tool as a means for getting to know each other on a more person-to-person level.

Benefits:

- Allows both the instructor and students to informally get to know each other prior to having to interact for more formal, graded activities.
- Students are given an opportunity to orientate themselves to the Discussions tool in a low-stakes way and become more comfortable interacting online.
- The instructor has an opportunity to informally assess each student's existing knowledge or experience with the course content.

Activity Steps

1. The instructor sets up a Discussion Forum that includes a "Personal Introductions" topic.
2. Students are asked to share some biographical information such as the area in which they live, their professional or academic experiences, hobbies, or family life. Or, students are asked to describe an experience they have had that allows them to make a connection between their 'real world' experiences and the concepts that will be covered in the course.
3. Students are asked to "shake virtual hands" by responding to at least two other student posts that were of particular interest to them or that they could relate to.
4. The instructor provides a brief response to each individual's personal introduction as a way to establish a connection with each student at the beginning of the course.

Tips for this Activity:

- Make the “instructor’s bio” the first introduction to be posted. Students may be hesitant to be the first one to post a message to the Discussions board, especially at the start of the semester. Seeing an introduction from the instructor is a good way to prompt the conversation and reinforces for the student where to go in the online course for this activity.
- As part of the introduction, consider asking students a question that relates to the subject matter. Having them reflect on an issue or concept that relates to what will be covered can help get them focused on the content delivery and activities to come. It also provides the instructor an opportunity to loosely gauge each student’s familiarity with the course content at the start of the semester.
- Encourage students to post a portrait of themselves, a picture of the region in which they live, or a picture that helps convey who they are. Adding a visual element along with the written introduction can help further humanize the online environment and offer an opportunity for students to relate to one another on a more personal level.