Creating Online Discussions that Increase Student Engagement and Measure Learning

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Session Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

• Create engaging online discussions in a variety of formats.

• Create online discussion questions to assess learning at all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

• Understand the impact of instructor engagement in online discussion forums.
What the Data Tells Us

JWU online students tell us:
• They value instructor presence in online courses.
• Student to student interaction is important.

Studies show:
• Design of the online discussion question impacts the level of learning for students (Zhu, 2006).
• Cognitive engagement in discussions can be increased with small changes to question design (Howell-Richardson & Mellar, 1996).
Why Use Discussions?

Before you can construct a useful discussion question, you need to know its purpose.

Why do YOU use them (or want to use them)?
Improved Comprehension

• Allow students to clarify their understanding of a key concept or issue.

Example:

“What impact do you think collective bargaining has on job satisfaction and employees?”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
  • Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
  • Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Knowledge Construction

• Encourage a deeper understanding of key concepts
• Allow students to apply knowledge to new contexts
• Allow students to make connections between concepts
• Help students acquire new meanings

Example: “Now that you’ve studied flavor profiles for pairing wine and cheese, describe what foods you would pair with green tea and Orange Pekoe tea and why.”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
  • Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
  • Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Reflection

• Students can demonstrate synthesis of key concepts.
• Students can describe how a situation or concept has value to them.
• Allows students to provide their personal experiences or opinions.

Example: “Discuss your experiences with purchasing tickets to an event from a major ticketing company. What could have been improved? What worked well?”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
  • Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
  • Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Critical Thinking

• Encourage students to engage constructively in critical analysis of key ideas, concepts, philosophies or processes/procedures.
• Encourage students to form, defend, and reflect on their own position on an issue or topic.

Example: “Think of a function in your organization that is not working well. How would you improve it using information technology? Be creative. Don’t be afraid to propose a solution that hasn’t been created yet.”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
  • Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
  • Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Create a Learning Community

- Students can develop a sense of belonging to a group (class).
- Foster student engagement.
- Typically these are used for the introductory discussion question for a class.

Example: “Briefly introduce yourself .... Finally, take a few moments and sentences to answer the question: How is psychology relevant to your life?”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
  • Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
  • Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Collaborative Learning

- Enable students to learn from each other.
- Allow students to share knowledge and experience.
- Allow students to support and help each other.

Example: “Share your research question. Explain why you think it makes a good research question. Describe what challenges you foresee in designing research to answer your question.”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
  • Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
  • Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Build an Argument or Position

• Allow students to analyze the logic or power of another’s argument.
• Allow students to build and defend a position, using materials from the course or other sources.

Example: “How can we help students become better consumers of online information? Use outside resources as well as the readings from this week to support your argument.”
Questions to Ask Yourself

• Is this open-ended?
• Is there more than one, specific answer?
• Will this question generate dialogue?
• Do I need to provide a response prompt?
• Will students’ answers tell me if they understand the concept(s)?
Feedback for You

Formative assessment can be challenging in an online environment – Discussion Forums can let you do that in a timely manner.

• Allows you to gauge learning.
• Identify areas of misunderstanding or areas of weakness.
• Provide an opportunity for additional teaching or support for students.
Bloom’s Taxonomy (Revised)

- **Remembering**: Can the student recall or remember the information? (define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, state)
- **Understanding**: Can the student explain ideas or concepts? (classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase)
- **Applying**: Can the student use information in a new way? (choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write)
- **Analyzing**: Can the student distinguish between different parts? (appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test)
- **Evaluating**: Can the student justify a stand or decision? (appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate)
- **Creating**: Can the student create a new product or point of view? (assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write)
Bloom’s Taxonomy: Remembering
Discussion Forum Activity:

Use a jigsaw technique:

• Students work individually (or in groups)* to locate and compile a list of web resources on a given topic.
• These resources are then shared in the discussion forum with the rest of the class.

*Groups are only recommended if there is a course objective that addresses collaboration or group work specifically.
Bloom’s Taxonomy: Understanding

- **Reminbering**
  - Can the student recall or remember the information?
  - Define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, state

- **Understanding**
  - Can the student explain ideas or concepts?
  - Classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase

- **Applying**
  - Can the student use information in a new way?
  - Choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write

- **Analyzing**
  - Can the student distinguish between different parts?
  - Appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

- **Evaluating**
  - Can the student justify a stand or decision?
  - Appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate

- **Creating**
  - Can the student create a new product or point of view?
  - Assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write
Discussion Forum Activity:

Ask students to estimate the amount of money spent on a type of food per capita. Then ask students to locate data to verify their estimation.
Bloom’s Taxonomy: Applying

Can the student create a new product or point of view?
- assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write

Can the student justify a stand or decision?
- appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate

Can the student distinguish between different parts?
- appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

Can the student use information in a new way?
- choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write

Can the student explain ideas or concepts?
- classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase

Can the student recall or remember the information?
- define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, state
Discussion Forum Activity:

Students design an online lesson for each other on a topic of their choice related to the course content. These are posted for feedback before being taught.
Bloom’s Taxonomy: Analyzing

Can the student create a new product or point of view?  
assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write

Can the student justify a stand or decision?  
appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate

Can the student distinguish between different parts?  
appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

Can the student use information in a new way?  
choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write

Can the student explain ideas or concepts?  
classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase

Can the student recall or remember the information?  
define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, state
Discussion Forum Activity:

Provide video (or links) to opposing views on a topic related to your course. Students analyze and compare the relative strength of the arguments.
Bloom’s Taxonomy: Evaluating

- Can the student create a new product or point of view?
  - assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write

- Can the student justify a stand or decision?
  - appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate

- Can the student distinguish between different parts?
  - appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test

- Can the student use information in a new way?
  - choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write

- Can the student explain ideas or concepts?
  - classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase

- Can the student recall or remember the information?
  - define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, state

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Discussion Forum Activity:

Assign students a role of a different stakeholder and ask them to research and discuss an issue from the point of view of their role.
Discussion Forum Activity:

Students design a plan for improving a process related to your course topic.

Students give constructive feedback in the discussion forum before submitting their plan for a final grade.
Making it More Interesting

- Use video
- Use audio
- Bring in current events
- Ask students to relate a personal experience or opinion
- Use a relevant article or case
- Encourage debate
- Use a variety of question formats throughout your course
Instructor Participation

Harasim et al, 1995 stated that instructors should “play a facilitative, observant, but background role” (as cited in Contact North, 2013).

Students report appreciating instructor participation in discussion forums that goes beyond “housekeeping” type of comments (Mazzolini and Maddison, 2007).

Simple interaction is not enough. “Sustained teaching presence that encourages participation, but is not teacher centered, is crucial” (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2005).
Research Findings

Mazzolini and Maddison (2005) found “that the way instructors post to forums may influence students’ forum discussions and participation in unexpected ways.”

• The more instructors posted, the less frequently students posted.
• However, number of postings alone does not indicate depth of learning or health of the discussion forum.
• Well thought-out instructor postings may aid learning regardless.
When to Participate

• Keep your purpose in mind!
• Set a positive tone.
• Support students who struggle.
• Address aggressive commenters.
• Steer the conversation back on track.
• Correct misconceptions.
• Ask questions that get or keep the conversation going.
• Add information that may add to student knowledge or understanding.
Set Clear Expectations

Providing students with clear expectations will help you get the type of responses and interactions you want.

Rubrics are a great way to do this.

Modeling the type of posts you want to see is also helpful.
Your Turn!
Questions?
Next Steps

This PPT presentation will be available on the NERCOMP2017 website.

Want to learn more?
A list of sources (articles and books) as well as other handouts will also be available on the NERCOMP2017 website.
Please fill out the session survey at this link:

http://goo.gl/xsogJd
Thank You!