


Implementing Online Discussions

Contemporary discussions of education increasingly emphasize the social nature of learning (Palincsar and Herrenkohl 2002), which focuses on interactions or discussions among students, or among students and instructors. A discussion provides a means for students to exchange opinions, share multiple perspectives, and clarify various thoughts (Dunlap, 2005). Some scholars have identified student discussion as being one of the activities that students find most beneficial to their learning (Ertmer et al 2007; Richardson and Swan 2003).

Effective online discussion questions promote the course purpose while demonstrating achievement of learning objectives (Caulfield, 2011). Questions that concentrate on concepts, principles and skill development, can maintain student interest and create a sense of community in the course (Berge, 2008). Effective online discussion questions ideally are content based, open ended, and designed to reveal student understanding as they provoke critical analysis (Baker, 2011). For example, critical analytical skills may be honed through student scrutiny and critique of demonstrations (Lynam, 2009) and posted case studies. Observation reveals that engaging questions permit discussants to weave in their own experiences. This often transitions discussions into “communities of practice” where knowledge among discussants is shared and enlarged (Rau, 2009).

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Discussion Tools Available to Yale Faculty

Below are discussion tools which are available to the Yale community and help guides to assist with the use of these tools.

Canvas Discussions

The native Canvas Discussions tool is an excellent way to start primarily text-oriented asynchronous discussion with students.

- [Creating a Discussion Board](#)
- [How do I use the Discussions Index Page?](#)
- [How do I view and sort discussion replies as an instructor?](#)
- [How do I create a group discussion in a course?](#)
- [How can I require students to reply to a course discussion before they see other replies?](#)

CoursePress

CoursePress is a WordPress platform offered by the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning that is integrated into Canvas. It is for students and faculty who need a flexible, online platform to help them with their academic work. Instructors can use CoursePress to create a blog-like discussion space where there can be one site for the entire course to develop blog posts or each student can receive their own site to design and create individual blogs which other students can then respond to.

To request a CoursePress site for your course please [fill out this form](#).

VoiceThread

VoiceThread is a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos, which allows people to navigate slides and leave asynchronous media comments on the slides in a number of formats:

1. Voice Only Comment (recorded with a computer microphone in VoiceThread, with a telephone, or as a file upload).
2. Video Comment (recorded with a webcam in VoiceThread or as a file upload).
3. Text Only Comment (written directly in VoiceThread).

This tool can be used for back and forth discussion rather than just adding comments for the instructor to view.

- [Adding a VoiceThread Activity to your Course](#)
- [Setting up a Create-a-VoiceThread Assignment](#)

- [Setting up a Commenting Assignment](#)
- [Setting up a Watch Assignment](#)
- [Grading Student Work](#)

Discussion Examples and Recommendations

- Design a **threaded discussion** to share and iterate upon ideas shared by each student in the course.
 - Debate pros and cons of a single issue or multiple issues.
 - Ask multiple questions of a single discussion leader.
 - Facilitate group discussions around multiple topics.
 - Facilitate discussions around a single discussion.
 - Explore at length the feasibility of different solutions to a complex problem.
 - Organize results from a complex research activity where the students can reflect on the results.
- Create a **focused discussion** question to answer a single question.
 - Share resources among peers.
 - Collect results from a simple research activity.
 - Correct misconceptions.
 - Share insights about a single reading.
- Ask **leading questions** prior to class time in order to enhance the in-class discussion by allowing students to begin discussing the topic.
- Provide students with a "**Water Cooler**" discussion forum which would be a student-led forum where students would be able to use to ask each other questions and build a sense of community.
- Utilize threaded discussions for students to **provide peer feedback** on assignments prior to submission.

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