Online Discussion Boards: *Humanizing* the Classroom

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Emphasis and Application

- **Emphasis:** Discussion boards are a vital part of the online classroom; the asynchronous communication offers an opportunity for students to share their perspectives on a given topic in each unit, and for faculty to share effective and meaningful feedback to students.

  - How do faculty appear "human" in a virtual environment in which, in many cases, students only have contact with their instructor via weekly discussion board conversations, particularly in courses in which live seminars are not required?

- **Application Example:**

    Kaplan University course, "American Women"

Discussion Board Facilitation

- Research studies have posited that student / faculty interaction on discussion boards may be three times the interaction with students in a ground campus classroom (Teaching Effectiveness, 2016).
  - Challenge: "Ghost town" discussion boards vs. interactive discussion boards

Image retrieved from usnews.com

Elements of Discussion Boards

Instructor interaction should be:
- Timely
- Specific / on-topic
- A model of expected behavior

- **Week 1 is vital!**
  - Assist students with navigation challenges
  - Establish community
- **Address expectations of the discussion board**
  - Explain how much you will be visible on the discussion board.
- **Netiquette guidelines**
- **Address requirements**
  - Number of posts and quality of posts
- **Model behavior and communication expectations**
  - Students will often mirror instructor posts
    - Use proper English, etc.;
    - Include APA formatting (or MLA, etc.) when connecting course materials
  - Ask questions related to course content and application to student experiences (where applicable for the latter)
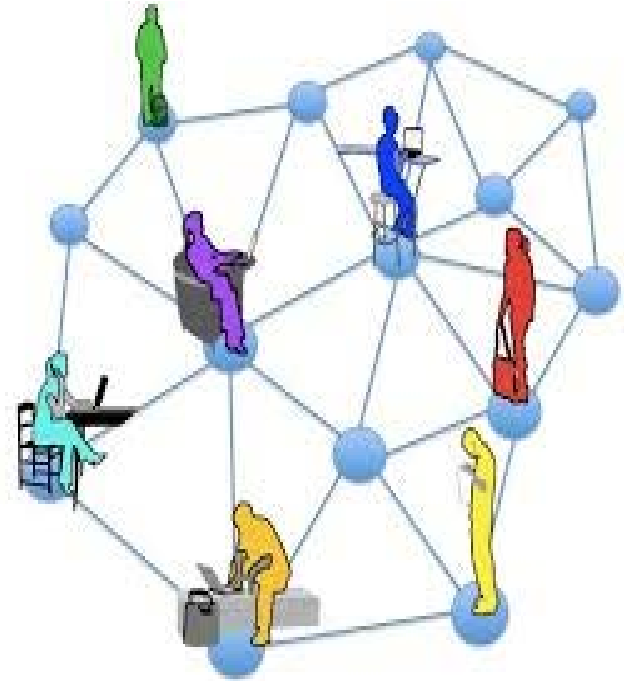

Image retrieved from blogs.curtin.edu.au

Supportive environment

- Keengwe and Kidd (2010) in Baker, J.D., (2011) contend that instructors should:
  - "…support the comments of others by acknowledging and extending their thinking
  - …extend the conversation by adding additional arguments that bolster an opinion
  - …compliment a participant for a statement
  - …persuade the more reserved students to join in."

Image retrieved from Google Images

Avoiding the "ghost town"

- Tips for "modeling" behavior:
  - Ask relevant questions
    - Ask open-ended questions
  - Make connections to previous material
  - Direct instruction: Instructor adds content / knowledge or addresses misconceptions as each discussion week unfolds.
  - Move the discussion forward by asking focused questions
    - Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) suggest that faculty should identify areas of "agreement and disagreement"; ask for clarification; and seek to find a consensus

Image retrieved from Google Images

Purposeful Interaction

- **Purposeful Discussion:**
  - For each unit week, ask yourself what you would like students the learn.
    - Review the course objectives and unit outcomes or objectives; tie the discussion into those objectives.
- **Clear Instructions and Grading:**
  - Include clear grading rubrics
  - Encourage students to support their perspectives
    - If APA (or similar formatting) is required, clarify this in the grading criteria.
- **Time:**
  - Students often have hectic schedules, and want to make the best use of their time.
    - Discussions should encourage reflective responses which require student engagement.
    - Grading criteria often requires that students respond to a certain number of classmates (i.e., 2 or more); as such, encourage students to select to whom they respond.

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Grading Rubric Example: American Women (Unit 9)

SS360 Discussion Board Participation Rubric

KAPLAN UNIVERSITY

Grade:	Grading Criteria
A: 36 - 40 points	• Responses are on topic, original, and contribute to the quality of the discussion. • Responses make frequent, informed references to unit material. • Responses are clearly written. • Responses meet posted length requirements. • Two or more responses per thread to classmates that are thoughtful and advance the discussion.
B: 32 – 35.9 points	• Responses are on topic, largely original, and contribute to the quality of the discussion. • Responses make some informed references to unit material. • Responses are generally clearly written. • Responses meet posted length requirements. • One response to a classmate per thread that is thoughtful and advances the discussion.
C: 28 – 31.9 points	• Responses are on topic, but lack originality, and lack a significant contribution to the quality of the discussion. • Responses make vague or summary references to unit material. • Responses have several mechanical or stylistic errors. • Responses do not meet posted length requirements. • Response(s) to others does not advance the discussion. • Student completed 2 classmate responses for each required discussion topic question; no initial responses included for discussion topic question(s).
D: 24 – 27.9 points	• Responses are only partially on topic, lack originality, and lack a significant contribution to the quality of the discussion. • Responses make little or no references to unit material. • Responses have several mechanical or stylistic errors. • Responses do not meet posted length requirements. • No responses to classmates. • If there are two questions, student didn't respond to one.
F: 0 – 23.9 points	• Responses are off topic, lack originality, and lack any contribution to the quality of the discussion. • Responses make little or no references to unit material. • Responses have several mechanical or stylistic errors. • Response is abusive or inappropriate (will result in 0 points automatically). • Response is plagiarized (will result in 0 points automatically). • Responses are missing. • No responses to classmates.

What do you think?

What are some practices which you use to facilitate discussions and make you more "human" as an instructor?

Image retrieved from http://nkelber.com

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