

Teaching Tip Tuesday

Canvas Discussion Tool

Although online instructors often use the Canvas discussion tool to facilitate exchanges between students, there is tremendous untapped potential for using this interface as part of all courses. The list below provides some great ideas for how you might incorporate online discussions in your course to facilitate specific learning goals.

Uses for Canvas Discussions

- 1. Exploration of course content.** You can promote deeper understanding of readings and lectures by asking students to summarize their take home points from these sources and to relate content to other areas of knowledge, either in your course or in their personal lives. This type of integration leads to deeper thinking and review of material.
- 2. Metacognition.** Asking students to explain something they feel they understood well in a lecture or reading and to pose specific questions about content they don't feel they understood as well provides an avenue for both review of content and reflection their understanding. Review will help them retain information, and identifying the weak points in their knowledge may help them know where to focus their study efforts.
- 3. Problem solving.** Much like an in-class discussion, online discussions can use complex problems or case studies as a prompt. Through back-and-forth exchanges, students can work in small groups to identify a solution.
- 4. Debates or role-playing.** Sometimes, students gain more insight into the concerns and motivations of others when they try to argue from the perspective of another person. Using online discussion provides an opportunity for students to take on a perspective that may differ from their own, and process arguments from that perspective.
- 5. In-class discussion extension.** In some cases, students who are engaging well with a topic exhaust the time allotted for discussion during class. When discussions are going well, you may want to keep them going by initiating an online extension.
- 6. Group Projects.** Online "group" discussions can be used as an asynchronous collaboration space for groups projects. Given the busy lives of our students, they are not always able to meet outside of class. This asynchronous option may facilitate closer community and collaboration between students.
- 7. Guest "Speaker" Q & A.** There are times when instructors feel that another member of the University team might be a good resource for students or be able to provide beneficial input in discussion of some topics. You can add such people to your course to participate as "guests" in some discussions.