The purpose of this workshop is to promote the design and facilitation of effective and engaging discussions in online courses.
By the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- Describe uses of online discussions boards
- Determine clear expectations about online requirements, deadlines, and grading
- Discuss facilitation strategies
- Develop discussion prompts for promoting critical thinking
Uses of Online Discussion Boards
How to effectively use online discussion boards?
A researcher conducts a quasi-experiment to determine if men score differently from women on the Graduate Record Exam. The researcher sets the critical value for the statistical test at .05, conducts the statistical test, and calculates an obtained value of .06.

Provide answers to each of the following and then respond to 2 peers:

- Write an appropriate null hypothesis for this quasi-experiment.
- Define 'statistical significance'.
- Determine if the obtained value of .06 is statistically significant or not statistically significant and explain why it is or why it is not.
- Define 'null hypothesis'.
- Determine if your null hypothesis should be rejected or not and explain why or why not.
• **Initial Post:** Using examples from the Nuremberg trials and Darfur, discuss the limitations raised in the readings about the limitations of the law and the limits of reconciliation to confront genocidal crimes and victimization.

• **Response Posts:** Read the posts of other learners and respond to at least two other learners. Your responses are expected to be substantive in nature and reference the assigned readings, as well as other theoretical, empirical, or professional literature to support your views and writings. In your response, do at least two of the following:
  • Ask a probing question.
  • Offer a suggestion.
  • Elaborate on a particular point.
  • Provide an alternative perspective.
Considerable research indicates that the effective use of discussion boards results in 1) greater cognitive and exploratory learning (Haggerty et al., 2001); increased student-to-student conversation and collaboration (Kassop, 2003; Rovai, 2004); development of critical thinking skills (Collison et al., 2000; Eklund & Eklund, 1996; Newman et al., 1999; Shapley, 2000); and enhanced student empowerment (Kassop, 2003; Kubala, 1998). These uses can be conducted through designing discussion boards for debates, role-playing, small group activities, and peer review.
Debates encourage students to think critically and to organize their thoughts in a clear, cohesive, and convincing manner.
Role playing can become ineffective if people are unclear about what they are supposed to do. The briefs for all sides of the role play should be unambiguous and totally in line with the objectives. Here again, any muddy thinking will have consequences. Be clear about the purpose. If you are assessing skills in a certain situation then the brief must reflect this. If you are assessing or developing behavior, keep technicalities out of the brief. Generally, remove technical content except for the very basic information needed to particularize the culture. Otherwise, lots of technical detail provides a bolt hole for people who are skilled or pre-occupied in technicalities, when they should be focusing on structure, or process or behavior. The exercise will keep its point and value if it avoids technical distractions. Role playing briefs should contain enough information for both parties to engage in a believable and relevant conversation, which should be in line with the objectives. Give as much detail as is necessary - too little and there won't be enough to sustain a conversation, too much and people will be swamped with information, most of which they either won't need or won't remember.
Small Group Activities

Group work improves critical thinking, problem solving, adaptability, and communication. In addition, group activities help to establish a sense of community and connectedness increasing motivation and satisfaction.
Peer Review

Incorporating peer review into your course can help your students become better writers, readers, and collaborators.
Activity

Develop an idea for a discussion board activity.
Clear Expectations
How do I assess participation?
The following is a summary of best practices for asynchronous discussions that is supported by the literature:

Develop clear guidelines and expectations for learners that are consistent throughout the course

- Length of posts (e.g. initial: 250-350, responses: 150-250)
  - Short posts lack critical thinking and depth
  - Long posts can be verbose and off topic
  - Establishing a word count encourages concise, focused posts
- Frequency and deadlines for posts
  - More posts correlate to higher grades
  - A good rule of thumb is an initial post followed by 2 responses this always learners to be the starter (raise issues and questions, provide reflection), responder (answer and post new questions), and facilitator (tutor, introduce new information) in the discussion.
  - May want to have a deadline for initial posts and response posts
- 20-40% of course grade

Develop rubrics that evaluate cognitive and social presence for substantive posts by assessing:
- Critical thinking
- Communication (grammar, spelling)
- Collaboration

Identify discussion board etiquette
Encourage learners to be committed to the discussion by being:
- Open and willing to share information
- Honest through providing constructive feedback
- Responsible for community formation through regular active engagement
- Willing to work collaboratively

Assessing Discussion Board Activities:
- Align to learning outcomes
- Aligned to the instruction
- Clear guidelines on how their work will be assessed.
Activity

Brainstorm discussion board expectations
Facilitation Strategies
How to keep the discussion lively?
mothering
Strategies

- Generate a warm climate
- Establish clear expectations
- Encourage participation early and often
- Model participation techniques
- Keep discussion on track
- Ensure the forum is a safe learning environment
- Pose thoughtful and engaging questions
- Bring closure prior to moving on
What other strategies have you used?
Discussion Prompts
How to write engaging and effective discussion prompts?
Assignments using the discussion board are probably best constructed to work toward accomplishment of learning outcomes at the middle levels of understanding. Here are a few examples of action verbs from relevant levels of Bloom’s cognitive domain:

- **Understanding**: Describe; Explain; Defend; Rewrite
- **Application**: Demonstrate; Illustrate; Interpret; Criticize
- **Analysis**: Predict; Compare; Examine; Analyze
- **Evaluation**: Argue; Assess; Judge; Rate; Support; Critique

Prompts that may generate productive discussion and increase comprehension of course content include those that ask students to:
- apply what they’ve learned,
- reflect, question and probe,
- analyze or synthesize information, or
- support a position they hold after evaluating an issue.
Generate Discussion by Asking Good Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INITIAL PROMPT</th>
<th>RESPONSE PROMPT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Open Ended</td>
<td>• Ask a probing question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on higher levels of cognition</td>
<td>• Offer a suggestion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Elaborate on a particular point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide an alternative perspective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Promote divergent and convergent forms of thinking
Defend arguments with supporting evidence from literature
Activity

Create an initial and response prompt
The benefits of using an online discussion board within online courses are numerous to enhance learning. Becoming informed about best practices will help make you and your students’ experience with the discussion board a rewarding experience and one that contributes effectively to learning.
Additional Resources

Online Teaching Website: http://www.kent.edu/onlineteaching

Presentations and Workshops:
http://www.kent.edu/onlineteaching/faculty-workshops

Local DL Support Staff
Thank You!
Online Classroom Examples and Ideas – Bb Learn Showcase Course

• Do you have contributions?

• Would you like to be enrolled?

Contact: Amy Grincewicz agrincew@kent.edu

• Examples and Ideas are always being added!