

Article Detail

Title: Roadmap to Thoughtful Online Discussion
-- Oxymoron or Reality?

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Abstract: Online discussions have the potential to enhance learning in a significant and engaging manner, but there are few proven strategies for helping faculty to implement discussions with their students. This five-stage problem allows faculty to participate in online discussions as their students would in the context of a faculty development workshop. The workshop goals are to stimulate high levels of engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking, which participants transfer to the planning, implementation, and assessment of their online course discussions. The workshop also provides the opportunity to interact with an expert at a distance who can ask probing questions and make comments to identify assumptions, suggest alternatives, or summarize major contributions.

During the first stages of the problem, the workshop participants assume the roles of faculty members who are team teaching an interdisciplinary course, Current Middle Eastern Issues. They have set up a discussion area for their class on "hot topics," but are disappointed in the quality of the discussion that ensued. Their first assignment is to analyze the class discussion. In the workshop, the participants are divided into online groups of four to six participants. The collaborative groups use asynchronous online discussions to propose strategies and select the best strategies for enhancing the quality of their class discussion. Near the end of the workshop, the faculty members assume their normal teaching roles and participate in a mini-lecture and discussion on rubrics for online discussions. In the final stage, the participants develop individual action plans to apply the principles to their own classes. The problem uses fictionalized real-world data, a mix of online and face-to-face discussion, mini-lecture and time to apply what they learned to their own "real-world classes."

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