COURSELINK TUNE-UP SERIES: DISCUSSIONS TOOL

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AGENDA

• Discussion Challenges and Engagement Options
• Working with Availability Options
• Quick Discussion Tips
• Finding Support for Discussions
• Question & Answer Period (Optional)
DISCUSSION CHALLENGES AND ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS
Discussions — Challenges

Discussions can be a great way to engage students with material and with each other... **BUT**

- New students may not be familiar with the tool and nervous about using it
- Students often feel overwhelmed by the number of posts they need to make daily/weekly (across all courses)
- Getting students to post original/meaningful threads is sometimes difficult & a lot of what is posted is repetitive
- Discussion activities can often feel like a box-checking activity rather than a true active learning experience
**DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT**

How can you make your discussions more engaging?

Let’s explore some ways to:

- Encourage/increase activity in discussion topics
- Avoid repetitive, unoriginal posts
- Give students a reason to access discussions beyond making required/graded posts
**DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: NUMBER OF REQUIRED DISCUSSIONS**

Have less required/assessed discussion activities!

- Do you *really* need students to post every week?
- Consider every 2 weeks (6 total) or every 3 weeks (4 total)
- Students can post anytime in the 2- or 3-week window
- Use a grade category to drop the lowest discussion grade
DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: STIMULATE DISCUSSIONS WITH ORIGINAL THOUGHT

Encourage original posts

• Leverage the “users must start a thread before they can read and reply to other threads” option
• Helps avoid students rehashing what the first 2 or 3 students posted
**DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT:**

**ENCOURAGE READING WITH RATINGS**

Encourage students to read their peers’ posts

- Enable the 5-star rating or up vote option
- Provides a small element of gamification
- Consider a small reward (bonus mark) for students with the highest-rated posts (as judged by their peers)
**DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: ANSWER STUDENT QUESTIONS (REDUCE EMAIL)**

Create an Ask Your Instructor Topic

- Students access discussions to ask questions & find answers
- Set expectations on replies via the description
- Popular questions/answers can be pinned (top of topic)
- Enable the anonymous post option for students to increase activity
DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: BUILD A COMMUNITY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Create an informal discussion area (Coffee Shop)

- Popular in OpenEd’s DE courses
- Helps students learn how to use the tool
- Allows students to continue in-class discussions online, look for study groups, etc.
- Set rules/expectations for the discussion area!

This discussion area is intended for students. As your instructor I will not be actively monitoring this discussion, however please feel free to contact me if anything in this discussion requires my attention.

This discussion area is a great place to connect with your classmates to form study groups, talk about the course or course-related topics, continue discussions started in the classroom, or just enjoy each other’s company online.
DISCUSSIONS – ENGAGEMENT: RELATE COURSE CONTENT TO CURRENT EVENTS

Add New Topics During the Semester

• Connect course content with current events
• Ask related open-ended questions in the description and link to a reference/source
• Continue the discussion in-class

Course-Related Current Events

Throughout the semester I will create some discussion topics in this forum that relate course content to current events/news. We will continue conversations online in class during seminars.

Inflation Rates

Review this recent video clip from CBC News about Canadian dealing with high inflation.

Considering what was covered in lecture this week, how long do you expect inflation rates to continue to rise and why? What are some possible measures both public and private sectors could take to lessen the impact?
DEMO

• Enable the “users must start a thread before they can read and reply” option
  – Student experience
• Enable star rating / up vote options
  – Student experience
  – See rating scores via Statistics
• Explore an “Ask Your Instructor” forum/topic
  – Enable anonymous post option
  – Student Experience
• Explore a “Coffee Shop” discussion area for students
WORKING WITH FORUM & TOPIC AVAILABILITY
Forum and Topic Availability: What is it?

Availability determines when discussions topics:

• Are restricted to students (shows only title/access dates)
• Will allow posts from students (new threads/replies)
• Are hidden entirely from students

Instructor/TA View

Student View
Forum and Topic Availability: How Do It Work?

Availability Start Dates and End Dates
- Accessed from a forum’s/topic’s Restrictions tab
- Choose to enable a start date/end date
- Set when an availability setting should begin/end/change
- Select what happens before (start) or after (end)
**Forum and Topic Availability: Common Use 1**

**End Date**
- Lock a topic after a specific date and time (due date)
  - Enable “Has End Date” and set a date/time
  - Select “Visible with submission restricted after end”
  - As of that date/time no new posts can be added
  - Students can still view what was posted/see rubrics

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**No “New Thread” Button**
Forum and Topic Availability: Common Use 2

Start Date

- Hide a topic / keep activity “secret” until it begins
  - Enable “Has Start Date” and set a date/time
  - Select:
    - “Hidden before start” (hide it entirely)
    - “Visible with access restricted” (hide description)

Topic not visible to students

Topic title visible to students, but no description until date
DEMO

• Use Availability settings to:
  – Prevent a discussion topic from allowing new posts after a due date (Has End Date)
  – Hide a discussion topic from student view until a specific date (Has Start Date)
Quick Discussion Tips: 3 Options you may not be using (but could)

1. Pin Threads
   • Select threads and make them appear at the top
   • Great for highlighting important/excellent posts

2. Post to All Groups
   • Used for group-restricted discussion topics
   • Allows instructors to post the same message to all groups at once

3. Enable Moderation
   • Posts from students do not become public until approved by the instructor/TA
   • Can be toggled on when discussions get too heated
DEMO

• How to pin a thread
• How to post to all groups at once
• How to enable moderation
**DISCUSSIONS TOOL SUPPORT**

CourseLink Support can provide timely assistance for how-to questions about the Discussions tool.

**CourseLink Support**

*Email:* [courselink@uoguelph.ca](mailto:courselink@uoguelph.ca)

*Phone:* X. 56939

*Hours:*

Mon-Fri. 8:30 AM-8:30 PM, Sat. 10 AM-4 PM, Sun. 12-6 PM

CourseLink Support also has a resource page for Discussions:

[https://support.opened.uoguelph.ca/instructors/courselink/tools/content/grades](https://support.opened.uoguelph.ca/instructors/courselink/tools/content/grades)
ITS ASSISTANCE & DISCUSSIONS SESSIONS

If you are looking to make significant adjustments to your current discussions or starting from scratch, the ITS team offers consultations.

Contact the Instructional Technology Specialist (ITS) Team
• Email: insttech@uoguelph.ca
• Consultation Request Form: https://uoguelph.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_03zMVhZjuVsXL5H

Previous Discussions Tool Sessions (Recorded):
• Next Level Discussion Options
  https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/rethink-your-assessments-for-remote-environments-with-ed-tech#Discussion
  – Includes more information on using rating systems and bonus grades
• CourseLink Discussions Tool (Online Assessments with EdTech)
  https://opened.uoguelph.ca/instructor-resources/winter-2022-programming#Discussions
  – Includes more information on performing assessments in Discussions