



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

INTERACTION AND COLLABORATION ONLINE

Challenging the popular notion that online learning is passive and impersonal, this abstract creates sparks for ion-izing, electrifying, and galvanizing interaction and collaboration between and among students and between students and their instructor. In different lights, it details how to design, facilitate, and assess educating online discussions.

Designing Discussions

My online sections of Introduction to Business each enroll 20 to 35 students, who read a text, submit online quizzes, and participate in four discussions on WebBoard. The WebBoard hosts several community-building activities including Weekly Updates, Students' Lounge, Class List, TruthsNlie, Hall of Fame, and Discussions. Students interact in the first and third discussions and collaborate in the second and fourth. Interactive discussions invite students to reply iteratively, and collaborative discussions challenge them to interact toward a common goal. During a 16-week semester, interactive discussions span four weeks, and collaborative discussions continue for eight. All discussions are directly related to course content, driven by knowledge construction, and grounded in the work of educational theorists and practitioners.

Facilitating Discussions

The first interactive discussion invites students to critique a provocative statement in a popular mystery.

- In Walter Mosley's 1990 novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Dewitt Albright says to Easy Rawlings, "We all owe out something, Easy. When you owe out then you're in debt and when you're in debt then you can't be your own man. That's capitalism."

Do you agree with Dewitt's logic and conclusion? Carefully defend your answer and reply to other students' answers.

- Your participation in this first interactive discus-

sion, which begins today and ends (date), will be graded (0 to 40 points) according to five criteria:

1. Initiative—To what extent, if any, did you actively and consistently participate in this discussion?
2. Detail—To what extent, if any, was your discussion grammatically correct, free from misspellings, and consistent with the discussion's instructions?
3. Relevance—To what extent, if any, did your discussion stay on topic with grounded reasoning?
4. Expression—To what extent, if any, was your discussion clearly focused and tightly framed?
5. Contribution—To what extent, if any, did you make a concerted effort to develop a meaningful, interactive learning experience for your classmates and yourself?

- To maximize your points and minimize your disappointment, I'll quantify the first criterion. To earn a HIGH grade for Discussion 1, you MUST post at least 8 times.

- To avoid a fractured, fragmented, crazy-quilt discussion, please REPLY only to each post. Do NOT post a new topic. Always type "Discussion 1" in the Topic Box, and sign your full name to all of your posts. If you do not follow these instructions exactly, points will be deducted; and your posts may be deleted from the WebBoard.

- If you have any questions about these instructions, please raise them immediately in the space below marked "Questions."

The first collaborative discussion challenges students to critique a scene in an award-winning movie.

- Go to <http://www.filmsite.org/home.html>. Then, click Starting Points/100 more greats/Part 3/Network (1976).

- Read "Network's" entire review carefully, especially Arthur Jensen's blistering speech to Howard Beale that begins, "You have metttled with the primal forces of nature, Mr. Beale, and I won't have it."



• Contact an online classmate in the Students' Lounge or by e-mail; then, work together online to discuss Jensen's corporate cosmology (world view). For example, do you dis/agree with Jensen's corporate cosmology? Defend your answers.

• ALL of your thinking must be posted here, and you BOTH MUST sign your full names to ALL of your thinking.

• Your participation in this first collaborative discussion begins today, ends (date), is worth 0 to 80 points, and will be graded according to the five criteria listed in the first assignment.

• To earn a HIGH score for this discussion, each team must post at least 16 times.

• Again, NO points will be awarded for working alone. To earn points, you MUST work online with another classmate, post all of your work here, and sign BOTH of your full names to ALL of your work.

• Please REPLY only to each post. Do NOT post a new topic. ALWAYS type "Discussion 2" in the Topic Box, and sign BOTH of your full names to ALL of your posts.

• If these instructions are not followed exactly, points will be deducted; and your posts may be deleted from the WebBoard.

The students' second interactive discussion invites them to write about a business management student.

• Continue the story below. When you use a term from your text, type it in CAPITAL LETTERS, and reference the page number in brackets where it can be found (as shown below). You can add (Please REPLY only.) to the story as often as you like and can earn up to 100 points for participating meaningfully in this discussion, which ends (date).

• Again, please REPLY only to each post. Do NOT Post a New Topic. Your points will be posted online on (date). To receive a HIGH score for this discussion, you must add to the story at least eight times. Finally, always type "Discussion #3" in the Subject Box for all of your posts.

BUCKING THE SYSTEM—"Buck" Reynes had mixed feelings about his first semester at CLC. His BUSINESS (p. 4) courses, teachers, and new friends were great. But, he was shocked at the enormous amount of MONEY (p. 648) he spent for textbooks and disappointed that CLC's bookstore paid him only 50% of the purchase PRICE (p. 40) for his books at the end of the semester.

A natural born ENTREPRENEUR (p. 4), Buck decided to earn a PROFIT (p. 4) and to maximize his RETURN ON INVESTMENT (p. 11) by satisfying students' DEMAND (p. 39) to spend less for textbooks.

So, the first thing he did was ...

The second collaborative discussion challenges students to construct two accounting statements.

Contact one or more of your online classmates; then, work together online to prepare the two accounting statements described below. This discussion ends (date), and is worth up to 120 points. Points will be posted online on (date).

• Again, no points will be awarded for working alone. To earn points, you must work online with one or more of your classmates, post all of your work here, and sign all of your full names to all of your work.

• Please REPLY only to each post. Do NOT post a new topic. Finally, always type "Discussion #4" in the Topic Box for all of your posts.

Background: As private accountants for our small computer software business, please use the items below to prepare our corporation's Income Statement and Balance Sheet for the second quarter of 2002. Assume that the corporate tax rate is 33%. [There are 23 items listed for them to consider in preparing the assignment, including accounts receivable, land, and accounts payable.]

Assessing Discussions

The WebBoard accommodates a variety of assessments. In addition to assessing students' discussion participation according to published rubrics and students' self-assessments, it allows students to evaluate their classmates, the course, and discussions anonymously or transparently. Results of a recent interactive discussion bring assessment's value into relief as a discussion refinement tool: 78% of the students participated in the discussion, posting 1 to 20 times and averaging about 8 posts. With 4 e-mail reminders within 7 days of the discussion's deadline, 46% of the participating students replied (14% anonymously, 86% transparently) to 3 questions: What did you like about the discussion? What did you dislike about it? What are your suggestions for improving it?

In their own words, students' evaluations ranged from "disappointed," "hard to follow," and "irritating," to "thought provoking," "enjoy (ment)," and "fun."

James Paradiso, *Professor, Business Management*

For further information, contact the author at College of Lake County, 19351 W. Washington Street, Grayslake, IL 60030-1198. e-mail: paradiso@clc.cc.il.us