The Discussion Board is a great tool for allowing asynchronous, reflective communication. Discussion Boards allow students time to formulate a response, offer a safer communication arena for shy or ESL students, and can enhance face-to-face discussion that have taken place in class. They can also become a place for more informal discussion and sharing such as for introductions or a FAQ for the course. You, as an instructor and facilitator of the discussion board, are able to assess your students’ grasp of the course content from their posts.

It’s a best practice to establish guidelines such as appropriate use of the Discussion Board, provide a model for a good post which helps illustrate substantial vs. insubstantial posting, and to let students know how often you expect them to post as well as how often they can expect you to participate in the discussion. Most instructors grade discussions in order to encourage student participation. It is possible to grade discussions right within Blackboard’s Grade Center and typically, instructors use a rubric on which to grade discussion posts. You might want to consult Rick King’s “Discussion Rubric” sample, posted on the FCLD website.

Discussion Board Structure

**Forum**
A forum is made up of threads and replies to those threads. The forum description is used to explain guidelines for the discussion and describe the general topic.

**Thread**
Threads are added by students and instructors to start new topics. The instructor launches the discussion by posting an initial thread. The essential question that begins a discussion needs to be open-ended, thought-provoking, and deep enough to allow students to synthesize and analyze course content in their subsequent discussion.

**Reply**
Discussion participants use the Reply button to respond to the thread questions, or to reply to each other’s replies. These replies are called ‘posts’. Listed posts are indented, according to which post was being read when the reply button was used.

Setting up a Forum
Instructors can set up several forums each having its own topic or set up a forum that contains many topics by adding threads. Note: Students cannot post to the Discussion Board until you set up a forum and/or add a thread.
To begin adding forums to the main discussion board in your course:

- In the menu of your course, click on the **Discussion Board** button in your course menu. (If you do not have a Discussion Board button, click on the **Tools** button instead and select the Discussion Board from there.)

- To add a Forum to the Discussion Board, select **Create Forum**. Provide a name and include a general description of the forum topic. If this is the first forum of the semester, you may want to include general instructions and guidelines for forum participation, such as how often to post or how long posts should be.

- Fill in forum settings. If you would like your students to be able to initiate conversations, be sure to click “Allow members to create new threads.” Otherwise, students can only post to the discussion board if you post questions first. Click **Submit**.

### 3. Forum Settings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allow Anonymous Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow Author to Delete Own Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only posts with no replies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow Post Tagging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow Reply with Quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow File Attachments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow Members to Create New Threads</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subscribe
- Do not allow subscriptions
- Allow members to subscribe to threads
- Allow members to subscribe to forum
- Include body of post in the email
- Include link to post

Grade
- No Grading in Forum
- Grade Discussion Forum: Points possible
- Grade Threads

**Forum Settings**

Descriptions of the Forum Settings options appears below:

**Allow Anonymous Posts** - Allows students to post without identifying themselves. Not recommended.

**Allow Author to Delete Own Posts** - Allows students to delete messages they have posted. Before enabling this option, you may wish to consider how this might disrupt the flow of conversation (especially if you are grading posts).

**Allow Author to Edit Own Published Posts** – Allows students the ability to modify published posts; again, consider how this might alter the flow of conversation or grading.

**Allow Post Tagging** – Allows tags (keywords for searching later) to be added to messages on the forum after using *Collect*.

**Allow Users to Reply with Quote** – Includes original message text when replying to that message. It is not necessary to allow this as there is always a button available that allows anyone to see the text of the post they are replying to within the reply screen.

**Allow File Attachments** – Allows file attachments to be added.
Allow Members to Create New Threads – Allows students to start topics within the forum.

Subscribe – Allows participants to receive an e-mail notification when new posts are created.

Allow Members to Rate Posts – Allows students and instructors to insert a one-to-five star rating as a form of peer review. Instructors might use this if they have students propose solutions to a problem, then vote on the best solution.

Force Moderation of Posts – If this is selected, instructors must read all incoming posts, and then elect to reject or publish the post. This is not a recommended practice.

Grade - allows instructor to grade the discussions and posts grade in the online Grade Center.

Getting into the Forum
To monitor and facilitate the discussion board, enter the forum by clicking on the forum name.

Starting the Discussion
To start the discussion, click on Create Thread. Fill in the subject, then put in the starting comments and questions for your topic. A good discussion board question is one that gets the student to analyze and synthesize ideas, rather than simply summarizing a reading or restating facts.

Reading and Replying to Questions
Students and instructors click on a thread or any other subject line of any post to read it. Once that happens, the screen divides into two sections; the threads and posts related to the post you clicked are listed in the top portion while the post itself shows in the bottom section. Click either Reply button to respond the post you clicked. A link to your response will appear in chronological order indented once under the original post you clicked.
Viewing the Forum

The best way to view the forum is by using the Tree View found in the upper right. Discussion boards are organized such that when a reply is made to a post it appears indented underneath. The authors of each of the posts show to the right, along with a date and time stamp.

Using Groups in the Discussion Board

Many instructors prefer to break their students up into small groups and give each group its own Discussion Board. The thinking behind this is that when you have many students discussing and responding to the same question, the first responders have the advantage since those that follow need to come up with different thoughts if theirs are already represented on the board. To help alleviate this problem and give more students the chance to have an ‘original’ post, you can break your students into groups and post the same questions to each of these groups. Neither group can see the other’s posts, so this allows more students the chance to post without being penalized for posts similar to their classmates. To create groups, click Users and Groups from the Control Panel, then select Groups.
**Copying Forums**

If you do create groups, you will probably give each group the same forum descriptions and essential questions. Blackboard allows you to copy forums and settings from group to group which can save you a lot of time since you won’t have to start from scratch for each group. To copy from group to group, select Discussion Board from Course Tools, then select the group in which you have created forums:

- Select a forum you wish to copy, then select Copy from the dropdown menu.

![Copying a forum](image)

- In the next view, give the forum a name, choose whether or not you want to copy the entire forum or just the settings, which group you want to copy to, and then Submit.

**Grading Forums and Threads**

Discussions may be graded by forum or by thread. Grading by forum means the student will receive a single grade for all of their contributions to a forum. Grading by thread means the student will receive individual grades for their responses to a particular topic.

To grade a forum:

Select Discussion Board from the Course Menu, click the forum you wish to grade, and then click Grade Forum.
From the list of names, select the **Grade** button to the right of the student name.

All of the posts for that student, for that forum appear on the left while on the right in the box with three sections: **Forum Statistics**, **Forum Grade**, and **Contributors**. Select Edit Grade to add a grade and comments for the student. Use the **Show All** in the Contributors section to move to other students’ posts for grading.
Advanced Forum Options

Collect Posts

If you prefer to read all of a student’s contributions on a single page, or if you would like to print out discussion board posts to read later, you can use the Collect button.

To “collect” posts, click into any forum or thread on the Discussion Board and click the top box to select all posts. Then, click Collect.

You can then read all posts in the forum on the screen or use the Print Preview button in the upper left corner to print them out to read later.

Changing Participants Roles

Instructors have a number of options to allow students to lead and manage discussion board forums. This can be done by changing participant roles in a forum. The forum options are as follows:

- **Manager** - Has full rights to edit, modify, moderate, and grade forums.
- **Builder** - Has all rights except the ability to manage or grade forums or threads. This might be a good role to assign students in turn so they each can run a forum throughout the semester.
- **Moderator** – Has partial rights to moderate the forum, but may not grade them.
- **Grader** – Has right to read, reply to, and grade all posts but their own.
- **Participant** – Can only read and post to forums. This is the default setting for students.
- **Reader** - Has rights to read forums, but may not post to them.
- **Blocked** – Does not have access to the forum.

By default, privileges are set to “Participant.” To change a student’s forum role, select a forum, click the associated chevron to reveal the drop-down menu, and then select Manage. Each member is listed with an associated chevron from which you can change roles.
**Moderating Forums**

Discussions may be moderated, which allows the instructor to preview all incoming posts and decide whether or not to publish them. This option, **Force Moderation of Posts**, must be enabled when you first set up the forum (see p. 2). To moderate a forum:

- Enter a moderated forum.
- Select the **Moderate Forum** button which appears at the top.
- A new window opens with a list of queued posts. They will not be published on the forum until they have been reviewed and approved by you as moderator. The posts arranged chronologically with the newest at the top of the list.
- Select **Moderate** next to one of the posts. This opens the Moderate Post screen. Review the post, and then select **Publish** or **Return**. **Publish** means the post will be published to the forum. **Return** means the post will be returned to the participant. You also have the option of adding a message to the student. Be sure to **Submit**.

![Post Moderation](image)

Returning a Post to Student

**Tips for Using Discussion Boards**

- Mandate student participation by using participation points and a rubric.
- Provide students with examples of substantive posts and set ground rules ahead of time.
- Consider allowing students to help set the guidelines and rules for the discussion.
- Offer an ice-breaker assignment to get them comfortable with the Discussion Board.
- Set expected response times so students know when they should expect to hear from you and when they won’t hear from you (weekend or breaks, etc.) and when you expect to hear from them on any given forum.
- Redirect conversations to other students when appropriate (be a good facilitator).
- Set the tone: if you want conversation, be conversational.
- Be sure your starter questions aren’t actually assignments (unless that’s what how you want to use the discussion).
- Try to foster and maintain the feeling of connectedness across the entire online course.
- Schedule a computer lab and have an orientation to your discussion board forums.
- Uphold the integrity of the group’s trust (don’t allow lurkers, etc.).*
- Talk to students, not at them.*
Example Uses of Discussion Boards

- Creating several smaller group discussions rather than one big one for the whole class – then use the larger discussion for group report-outs.
- Inviting guest lecturers to join the discussion (contact FCLD for more information)
- Peer-to-peer discussions around your content.
- Managing group projects – students can “meet” online at their convenience.
- Discussion of case studies.
- Using it to cut down on e-mail ‘repeat’ questions (FAQ).
- Student-facilitated discussion.
- Continuation of discussions started in class.
- Sharing information about Internet resources pertaining to class content.

References: Dr. Rick King, ENHP

Getting Help with Technology at the University of Hartford

Faculty Center for Learning Development (FCLD)
FCLD provides consulting and instructional support to faculty and staff who are using technology in teaching and learning. The FCLD Faculty Lab in Mortensen 203a is available for faculty support and use and is equipped with instructional technology-related equipment including: PCs, Macs, scanners, and projectors as well as support staff. Faculty wishing to use the lab may contact FCLD.

Phone: (860) 768-4661
Email: fcld@hartford.edu
Website: http://www.hartford.edu/fcld/

Information Technology Services (ITS)
ITS Help Desk – Computing Center
For general computer and Internet/network support questions (not directly related to the classroom but rather passwords, Internet/email problems, printer not working, banner, campus Facebook, and grades).

Phone: (860) 768-5999
Email: its@hartford.edu
Website: http://uhaweb.hartford.edu/its/

Media Technology Services (MTS) – Harry Jack Gray Center E113
MTS maintains and installs classroom equipment, such as projectors, Sympodiams, and interactive white boards, delivers and sets up technology needed for classes such as laptops, overhead projectors, microphones, sound systems, DVD/VCRs, digital cameras, etc., and provides instruction on its use. MTS is also responsible for overseeing ECHO360 Lecture Capture classrooms and administers WebEx web conferencing accounts.

Phone: (860) 768-4643 (Main) or (860) 768-4662 (Tech Line)
Website: www.hartford.edu/mts