

## Activating Discussion Forums

### Educational situation:

Professor Mona feels that using discussion forum is not an effective or encouraging tool for participation. Every semester, she creates a discussion forum and asks the students to participate, but the level of students' interaction remains simple and limited, with students posting simple and uninteresting topics.

The professor says:

"The students rarely participate in it, even with my continuous encouragement. I feel it is an unhelpful method for teaching, and the students are not open to it. Why should I even use it? I do not see its importance if it is not effective."

One of the students says:

"The professor mentioned that she opened a discussion forum on the learning system, and in every lecture, she reminds us to participate in it. However, to be honest, there is nothing that motivated us to do so. Why should I write about a topic just for writing? I tried once to write, but no one responded to my topic. I find it an ineffective method and I do not prefer it."

### The Issue:

There is no engagement from the students to activate the discussion forum, and the professor has not found a suitable way to motivate the students to participate and engage. She believes that the discussion forum is not a useful method in teaching.

## Activating Discussion Forums

### Teaching Practice: Activating Discussion Forum

Discussion forums are a central and important tool in online education. It helps to develop students' understanding and discussions, as well as evaluates students' learning and ensure their understanding of the course material. It is also an important tool for applying and enhancing critical thinking strategies and providing information and extra support for students. (lopez, 2017)<sup>1</sup> the discussion forum extends the duration of learning outside the classroom and helps students learn and discuss what they have learned together. One of its advantages is that it provides an opportunity for shy students to express their opinions and ideas on the topics presented in class.

However, just opening the forum is not sufficient to motivate students to participate. The question remains: How can we enhance students' interest in online conversations through the discussion forum?

### Implementation procedures:

To activate the discussion forum, it is important for the professor to consider the following:

- Preparing the forum at the beginning of the semester and introducing it to the students and explaining its general rules. Additionally, teaching them the basic technical aspects, such as how to use formatting and other features.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lopez, B. (2017). Online Learning: Importance of Discussion Boards [online article]. Published in 11 Jan 2017 [<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/online-learning-importance-discussion-boards-betsy-lopez-phd>] <retrieved in Apr 2020>.

### Activating Discussion Forums

- Setting grades for students' participation in external topics related to the course, using a rubric that includes the main criteria for evaluating participation, such as: formatting the topic, having references (more than one reference), structuring and presenting the topic, using media, and so on. Furthermore, it is essential to assign a grade for student's interaction with their colleagues' posts, encouraging them to give critical, supportive, or additional point of view on the discussed topic.
- Encouraging students by having the professor post discussable topics in the forum: a challenging question, a real-life case study with a question like: what is your opinion? With or against? What is your point of view and why? (Example 1)
- Talking about the discussion forum during the lecture (not just giving a direct order). It is said that eating an apple in front of someone is more attractive than telling them to eat it! Talking about the forum will encourage students to visit it, explore the posted topics, and participate in the discussion (Example 2).
- Participating by the professor is very important: entering the forum and adding some topics and stories will help and greatly attract students to participate (be kind and friendly with them).
- Responding to the students' posts and encouraging them by providing moral support, highlighting the strengths in distinguished posts, and constructive criticism for weaker posts.
- Making sure to stimulate their thinking by asking questions that encourage them to understand the meaning and think about it realistically (Example 3).

## Activating Discussion Forums

### Examples of How to Activate the Discussion Forum

**Example 1:** The professor posts a topic in the forum about a news that spread in the media with its image and asks the students how this news relates to the theory they studied in a previous lecture. Also, asks whether they consider it a positive or negative phenomenon.

**Example 2:** At the end of the lecture, the professor talks about the topic presented by student X and says: "I read your post, and it was wonderful and thought-provoking. It reminded me of another historical event." When the students ask her about the topic, she can respond by saying, "I hope you all check her post, and if you have another example related to the topic she mentioned, please share it with us so we can discuss it together."

**Example 3:** The professor replies to one of the posts in the forum, saying: "Thank you for choosing this interesting topic. I have a question: Do you think this opinion would still hold if the incident had taken place in a different historical period?"

## Activating Discussion Forums

### Summary

Using discussion forum is very important for the online learning process. However, it requires activation, participation, encouragement, and creativity from the professor. It may seem challenging when applied for the first time, but with familiarity, this practice will become routine, easy, and even enjoyable for both the professor and the student, helping to extend learning experience beyond the classroom's time and boundaries.

Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching – Promising Faculty Ambassadors Program (second session) 1445 AH

Supervision and Review Team: Preparation: Dr. Nouf Alhuzami Review: Prof. Reem Alebaikan – Dr. Khawla Aldoweesh