

Assessing Participation

Two assessment frameworks are outlined here as well as further strategies that have been identified within the University of Adelaide.

The assessment frameworks are outlined in Terry Anderson's 'Teaching in an Online Learning Context' within Chapter 11 of Theory and Practice of Online Learning, Anderson & Elloumi, Eds. (2004) http://cde.athabascau.ca/online_book/

Assessment Framework 1

Asynchronous Online Learning at graduate level – Susan Levine (2002).
<http://www.listserv.uga.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0208&L=itforum&F=&S=&P=12778>

The following instructions assess both the quantity and quality aspects of discussion board postings. The instructions also reveal a high level of teaching presence as structured and explicit which is required in an online learning environment.

The following message is posted to students:

1. The instructor will start each discussion by posting one or more questions at the beginning of each week. The discussion will continue for a week at which time the discussion board will close for that week.
2. Focus on the questions posted. But also bring in related thoughts and materials, other readings, or questions that occur to you from the ongoing discussion.
3. You are expected to post at least two substantive messages for each discussion question. Your postings should reflect an understanding of the course material.
4. Your postings should advance the group's negotiation of ideas and meanings about the material, that is, your contributions should go beyond a 'ditto'. Some ways you can further the discussion include:
 - a. Expressing opinions or observations. These should be offered in depth and supported by more than personal opinion.
 - b. Making a connection between the current discussion and previous discussions, a personal experience, or concepts from the readings.
 - c. Commenting on or asking for clarification of another student's statement
 - d. Synthesizing other students' responses, or
 - e. Posing a substantive question aimed at furthering the group's understanding.

Assessment Framework 2

More prescriptive recommendations for postings are provided by Dabbagh (2000)
<http://mason.gmu.edu/~ndabbagh/wblg/online-protocol.html>

1. Postings should be evenly distributed during the discussion period (not concentrated all on one day or at the beginning and/or end of the period)
2. Postings should be a minimum of one short paragraph and a maximum of two paragraphs
3. Avoid postings that are limited to “I agree” or “great idea” etc. If you agree (or disagree) with a posting then say why you agree by supporting your statement with concepts from the readings or by bringing in a related example or experience.
4. Address the questions as much as possible (don’t let the discussion stray).
5. Try to use quotes from the articles that support your postings. Include page numbers when you do that.
6. Build on others’ responses to create threads.
7. Bring in related prior knowledge (work experience, prior coursework, readings, etc)
8. Use proper etiquette (proper language, typing, etc)

Dabbagh uses a rubric, for assessing messages on a weekly basis. See
<http://mason.gmu.edu/~ndabbagh/wblg/online-protocol.html>

MyUni Strategies

Dr Mike Keller of the University of Adelaide uses rubrics and other strategies to guide, assess and provide feedback on student participation in discussion boards.

See ‘Assessing students’ contributions to *MyUni* discussion boards

<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/materia/seminars/pastevents/>

See also ‘The online management of pests: discussion forums as a learning/teaching tool’

http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/materia/leap/case_studies/keller.html

See also Use of Rubrics in Online Assessment by Baron and Keller within Online or technologically assisted assessment, 2003 Evaluations and Assessment 2003 Conference

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/evaluations/program.htm>

Another strategy includes the use of exemplars. Within MyUni, instructors are able to archive discussion board forums and threads. Archives are not able to be copied from one course to another, however they can be downloaded and then used in future courses to illustrate both good and poor quality of postings.

References

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