

Chapter 59

Discussion Board Assignments and Their Impact on Creating Engaged Learning Environments in Art History Online Courses

Anahit Ter-Stepanian
Southern Connecticut State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The adaptation of traditional, face-to-face courses to the online format presents both challenges and opportunities. Many pedagogical practices need to be rethought when designing online courses. A successful online course needs to be intellectually stimulating and engaging. The chapter demonstrates how to create an engaging learning environment without any additional budget. The author describes approaches that she has developed, experimented with, and found to be effective in asynchronous online art history courses, as well as learner engagement strategies she has implemented in the eLearning environment. Advantages of scenario-based discussions board assignments and the effects of role playing in discussion forums are discussed. The author shares examples of personalized discussion board assignments aimed to motivate online learners, create a collaborative learning environment, improve peer-to-peer interaction, and prevent plagiarism.

INTRODUCTION

The adaptation of traditional, face-to-face courses to the online format requires instructors of all disciplines to overcome serious pedagogical challenges. The online teaching environment differs considerably from the traditional face-to-face classroom. Course developers need to rethink all

components of the teaching process from course design to classroom interaction. Distance learning also changes the role of the instructor and presents a new type of instructor-learner and learner-learner interaction. Material delivery, requirements, assignments, discussions, and evaluation need to be modified to better respond to the needs of an online learner. Clarification of technical aspects

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2122-0.ch059

of online teaching is readily offered to novice online instructors, whereas pedagogical aspects of online teaching are more often left to individual instructors' intuition. Instructors feel isolated and many would like to learn effective pedagogical strategies (Bailey & Card, 2009). In addition, there are fundamental pedagogical problems pertaining to specific disciplines. Art history is not an exception; there are almost no research studies on pedagogical aspects of online art history teaching (Donahue-Wallace, 2008).

I design and teach asynchronous art history online courses since 2003. My first online course design experience was at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, a rapidly growing private catholic university in suburban Connecticut. Since 2006 I design and teach art history online courses also at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, a state art school, located in Boston, Massachusetts, a large, densely populated city in northeastern United States, and at Albertus Magnus College a small private catholic liberal arts school in New Haven, Connecticut, a city of a little over one hundred thousand inhabitants, home of Yale University. In 2008 I developed two online courses at Southern Connecticut State University, a large state school, located also in New Haven, CT. Courses range from foundational-level one and two-semester Western art history survey courses to upper-level courses in the area of my specialization, twentieth-century art, Russian modernism, and Armenian architecture.

Examples of assignments in this article are from foundational-level History of Art I and History of Art II online courses I taught at Southern Connecticut State University and Albertus Magnus College. I used blog-type and threaded discussions. Students were comfortable using both types. Students were able to see all postings and instructor comments. Commenting on peer postings was encouraged, but not required and not graded. Thirty to forty students were enrolled in each class. Each week students had to complete a timed online test and post one discussion board topic.

The general aim of this experiment was to create an engaging collaborative learning environment and an atmosphere conducive to creativity, achieve improved learning outcomes, increase students' participation in discussions, and foster critical thinking. The specific aim was to encourage students to explore political, religious, and historic conditions of the societies where works of art were produced and research artists' and art commissioners' motivations and inspirations. Although originally plagiarism prevention was not among general or specific goals, I see a sharp decline in attempts to use readily available paragraphs in discussions in the result of very specific scenario-based assignments.

Learning management systems, discussion board forums are among the educational tools to drive the experiment. Observation is used to assess results of the experience.

BACKGROUND

The importance of building online community in a virtual classroom has been emphasized in research on online teaching (Paloff & Pratt, 2007). Instructors apply different methods to build communities in the virtual classroom. Some instructors suggest holding synchronous chat sessions stating that real time dialogue tends to increase the sense of community (Bailey & Card, 2009), while others prefer asynchronous communication, as it allows for a possibility to take time and evaluate best responses before engaging in classroom discussion (Lyons, 2004).

Distance education is strongly associated with sharing of information and construction of knowledge through interaction with peers. The theory of computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) examines the problems of co-construction of knowledge. Stahl (2004) suggested collaboration theory and introduced the term "building collaborative knowing" to describe the kind of learning that takes place when a group of learners

7 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/discussion-board-assignments-their-
impact/72110](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/discussion-board-assignments-their-impact/72110)

Related Content

Making Sense of Technologically Enhanced Learning in Context: A Research Agenda

Simon B. Heilesen and Sisse Siggaard Jensen (2006). *Enhancing Learning Through Technology* (pp. 269-291).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/making-sense-technologically-enhanced-learning/18357

E-Mentoring: An Extended Practice, An Emerging Discipline

Angélica Rísquez (2008). *Advances in E-Learning: Experiences and Methodologies* (pp. 61-82).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/mentoring-extended-practice-emerging-discipline/4732

Examining Social, Personal, and Technological Factors Influencing Student's ICT Usage

Wahid Ahmad Darand Kounsar Jan (2021). *Challenges and Opportunities for the Global Implementation of E-Learning Frameworks* (pp. 180-201).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/examining-social-personal-and-technological-factors-influencing-students-ict-usage/277752

Task-Oriented Online Discussion: A Practical Model for Student Learning

Byron Harvard, Jianxia Du and Anthony Olinzock (2007). *Integrating Information & Communications Technologies Into the Classroom* (pp. 154-166).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/task-orientation-online-discussion/24037

Introducing Concepts

Jon Dron (2007). *Control and Constraint in E-Learning: Choosing When to Choose* (pp. 1-17).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/introducing-concepts/7144