

Teaching Online with Class Introductions

Dear Faculty,

Background: New Teaching Strategies for Online Learning During Weather Emergencies

If the university closes its residence halls and classrooms for a period of time during the semester, you can still continue to teach online through Blackboard.

In order for online teaching to be as effective as possible, the Library has asked the Blackboard Support Center to provide electronic information and face-to-face workshops about teaching strategies in Blackboard. These strategies can be useful to you in a variety of situations:

- A weather emergency which keeps you from coming to campus.
- A health emergency or pandemic, or a future, unusually serious outbreak of the seasonal flu.
- Finally, if your trip to a conference keeps you from campus, you can still continue your work with your students online.

In this spirit, we would appreciate it if you would practice various strategies presented here as soon as possible in your Blackboard course sites, or in the blogs or wikis you maintain outside of Blackboard. With practice over a period of time, new technology and new teaching strategies can be fun to learn. If you have to process the same amount of new information about teaching and technology over midterms, it might be a little less fun. It might even be hectic.

Class Introductions, a Frequently Asked Questions Forum, and Online Discussions

How can you learn about your students' interests? Where can they introduce themselves to you and each other? How can you answer common questions they have without having to respond to each email? And most importantly how can you reproduce class discussions in an online environment? (Some instructors insist that students in online written discussions provide more analysis of topics because they have time to reflect before they respond.)

If you are not familiar with the mechanics of creating an online discussion, there are two good choices. Feel free, of course, to use Google to access documentation about Blackboard at around 2,000 colleges and universities.

This link accesses a video tutorial providing [a tour of the discussion board feature in Blackboard 9](#), which is the version what we are using at AU.

Teaching Online with Class Introductions

Essentially, the steps for creating a discussion board within your Blackboard course are to enter the course, clicking on Discussions in the left hand menu, click on the blue "Create Forum" button on the page that loads, and title and choose settings for this forum, and push submit. Make sure to go back and *add* your first thread, or posting, or idea so that your students will know what they need to respond to. (Otherwise, students will not be able to post in the forum.)

You could ask your incoming students what they have already read about the topic. You could ask them what drew them to the course. And you could ask them what they expect to take away from your course.

Some examples:

1. Please introduce yourselves, now through the opening week of the class. (From a course in the Department of Justice, Law and Society, School of Public Affairs.)

We are about to establish a learning community that meets both face to face and online. To begin the process, please use the thread I have established in this forum to let your classmates know a little about you. Your introduction should be posted as soon as possible during the first week of the course.

I look forward to hearing from you! (In the first thread, the professor introduced herself.)

2. (An example from the History Department, College of Arts and Sciences.) First, please tell us a little about yourself. This can include anything: where you're from, your year at AU, your major, your outside interests, how you like living in Washington, etc. Then tell us your impressions of the period of history we're studying together this semester -- that is, Europe from the Italian Renaissance to the French Revolution. These impressions might come from anywhere: your reading, from movies or television programs, courses you've already taken in high school or college. It doesn't matter how vague or specific your impressions are -- and there's definitely no "right" or "wrong" answer to his question. (Note: we will not be grading your contributions to this Discussion Board, though your final grade for the course will drop 1/3 of a letter grade if you do not participate!)

Another common use of the Discussion Board is creating a forum where you can post answers to the questions your students frequently ask. You can also encourage students to answer each other's questions in this space. This will help preserve your time for the questions which truly require your individual attention.

If your schedule allows this week, please activate your course, and after it is available, which will be within the next six hours, create a Discussion Forum where students can introduce themselves.

Teaching Online with Class Introductions

Additional Resources for the Start of the Semester:

If you need to copy content between semesters, please see instructions here:

<http://www.american.edu/library/technology/blackboard/features.cfm#copy>

If you would like to merge sections of your course before you add your discussion boards, see this site:

<http://www.american.edu/library/technology/blackboard/features.cfm#combine>

Learn How to use LinkMaker—the single most powerful feature in Blackboard:

http://www.aladin.wrlc.org/bb/au/LinkMaker_help.pdf

Clean up your Blackboard site to make your courses easier to see and differentiate.

<http://www.american.edu/library/technology/blackboard/cleanup.cfm>

Please call the Blackboard Support Center with your questions at 202-885-3904, email them at blackboard@american.edu or stop by their new offices in the Library, third floor, Room 321.