Discussion Board

What is it?

An internet forum, or message board, is an online discussion site where people can hold conversations in the form of posted messages and can be used over an extended period of time (asynchronously). A discussion forum is hierarchical or tree-like in structure: a forum can contain a number of sub-forums, each of which may have several topics. Within a forum’s topic, each new discussion started is called a thread, and can be replied to by as many people as so wish.

What could you do?

Online discussion might be incorporated into subject design in order to:

- Assist staff and students to communicate from a distance;
- Enable discussion to extend beyond the allotted class time;
- Involve people from outside the course group;
- Provide an alternative form of communication to in-class, verbal discussion – whether simply to provide variety in the subject, to meet the different needs and preferences of individuals, or to allow students time to reflect on the debate and consider their response before contributing;
- Develop students’ skills in using online communication tools; and/or
- Respond to students’ widespread and increasing use of online communication in other aspects of their lives.

(Creating Effective Websites for University Teaching)

Discussion boards don’t always have to be an in-depth class discussion. Other activity ideas include: class debate, team discussions, report weekly project findings, web quests, role play and feedback, gather resources and reviews, assessment support, Helpline, rotated student-led discussions, weekly magazine. Discussion boards can be used to assess students learning – Blackboard discussion boards have in-built tools to support grading.

Tips?

Discussion boards need some structure and rules – be explicit about what is appropriate and where. Discussion boards are more effective when facilitated or led. Facilitating an online discussion is an art – there are many approaches to pick from e.g.

- Salmon’s Five Stage Moderation Model www.atimod.com/index.php
- Hootstein’s ‘Four Pairs of Shoes’ Model https://classroom.peoriaud.k12.az.us/sites/dpasquariello/Online%20Teaching/Wearing%20Four%20Pairs%20of%20Shoes.pdf

Make sure it is worth it – students have access to many ways to discuss course topics – face-to-face, Facebook, phones and many more – what does the discussion board you are managing offer?
What have people done?