

Best Practices 2.0: Utilizing online technologies in your class

Online Group Collaboration

Online Group Collaboration allows students to interact with one another in the online environment through chat rooms, discussion boards, and email. Additionally, it can be used as a means for students to self-assess their readiness for online learning in either hybrid or online courses.

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Short Synopsis of Idea: Using a platform such as Blackboard/Vista, faculty can involve students in online collaboration. By asking students to reflect on the experience of collaborating online, faculty can assist students in determining if they are likely to be successful in the online learning environment.

Materials Needed: Educational platform with discussion boards, chat rooms, and email capability. Exercise or activity that requires a group of students to reach consensus on an issue.

Learning Outcomes Addressed: Critical Thinking Skills, Connections with Peers, Technology Skills

Description of Activity or Idea: In Part 1 of this activity, students must read a short story that establishes a question of culpability in the outcome of a hypothetical situation. Each student must individually rank order the characters in the story based on their level of responsibility. Next, as part of a group, students must reach consensus on the rank order of characters using only the online environment (i.e., discussion board, chat room, and email). I usually have an "online day" the class day before this assignment is due (meaning we do not meet in the classroom). This simulates an online environment and discourages face-to-face discussions.

For Part 2 of this activity, students must reflect on the experience of collaborating online, and each student must individually write a one-page essay that responds to the following prompts:

- (1) Describe the experience of collaborating online. Was it easy or difficult? Enjoyable or aggravating?
- (2) Have you learned anything new about technology or your abilities to operate in the online environment?
- (3) Did you prefer collaborating online rather than in person? Why or why not?
- (4) The class day preceding the due date for this assignment, we did not meet in the classroom but rather had an online day in which you were to work only in the online environment. Thus, we met in the classroom only once that week. Did you like having fewer classroom meetings? Did you feel disconnected from the instructor and your peers?
- (5) Based on your response to question (4) and your online collaboration experience, do you believe you would like to take and could be successful in an entirely online course? Why or why not?

The purpose of the assignment is (1) to provide students experience in using discussion boards, chat rooms, and email for the purpose of collaboration and (2) to give students the opportunity to assess how well they function in the online learning environment and consider whether they are well-suited to hybrid or online courses. Consequently, the focus of their deliberation and the actual consensus the group reaches is of less import than the actual experience of collaborating.

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Preparation and Feedback

1. Assign a reading or assignment that will require collaboration. The reading I use can be found at: <http://slpinfomaniac.com/ETHICS/drawbridge.htm>
2. In your online classroom, create a Discussion Board and Chat Room for each group:

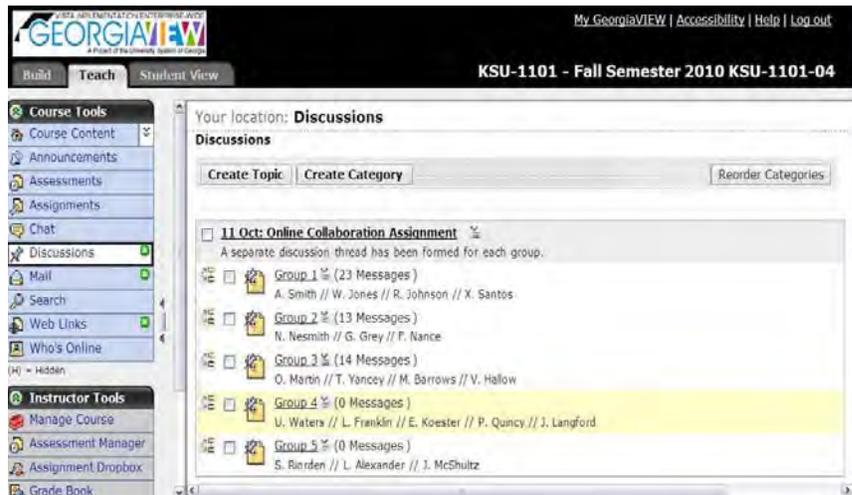


Figure 1: Discussion Board Groups

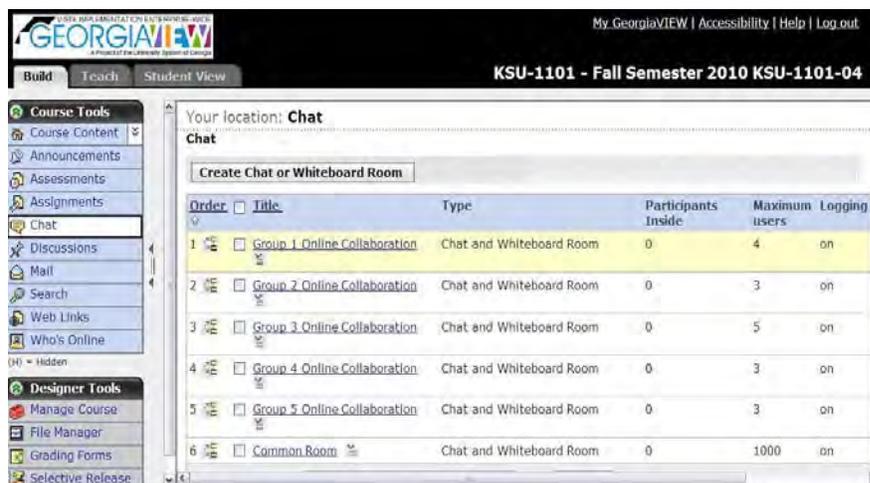


Figure 2: Chat Rooms / White Boards

3. Assign the reading and explain the assignment a minimum of one week prior to the due date.
4. Provide students with prompts to facilitate the writing of the reflection paper (see preceding section).
5. Assign or have students self-select groups.
6. Present group discussion boards and chat rooms/whiteboards to the class.
7. Consider using a site such as <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html> to facilitate a discussion of appropriate online etiquette.
8. Monitor the discussion boards and chat rooms for interaction and etiquette.
9. Discuss the students' reaction to the assignment once they have submitted their essays.

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The Shared FYE Course Portal

Our teaching loads, service, creative and research projects often keep us so busy that there is very little time for collaboration and sharing best practices with one another. A shared portal provides a means for sharing ideas, assignments, campus activities, service learning projects, interactive lessons, relevant news and trends and much more with your full-time colleagues as well as your adjunct, part-time and learning community faculty members and, of course, your students.

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Short Synopsis of the Idea: The shared course portal serves two purposes. First, it provides a dynamic shared environment where your FYE Director and faculty members, especially subject-matter experts, can post course materials that can be accessed by everyone teaching the course. Faculty may choose which material to include in their face-to-face, hybrid, or online classes and can be encouraged to submit their own ideas for posting. Further, at KSU, like many institutions, we employ adjunct and part-time faculty members – particularly in the fall semester. For those preparing to teach the course, access to ideas, assignments, assessments and other resources has proven to be highly desirable and very beneficial. Second, it provides students with a rich environment of interactive activities and supplemental materials that address each learning style and enhance the learning experience.

Learning Outcomes Addressed: Depending upon content posted, outcomes may include but are not limited to academic/cognitive skills, critical thinking skills, life skills, connections with peers, faculty and staff, global perspectives, and technology skills.

Suggested Materials (dependent upon specific environment):

Learning Management System (e.g. Blackboard, Moodle, Sakai Tools, etc...)	Custom Editor (e.g. Hayden-McNeil, Cengage, Pearson Publishing, etc...)
Department or University Website	Microsoft PowerPoint
Screen recording and Video Editing Software (e.g. Adobe Captivate, TechSmith Camtasia)	Screen Capture Software (e.g. TechSmith Snagit, Inbit Fullshot, Socusoft Any Capture)
Assessment tools (e.g. personality, career, stress, self-awareness, motivation, leadership)	Hardware (e.g. headsets, microphones, video cameras, web cameras)

(Continued)

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Description of Resources and Activities: Your shared first-year experience portal can be as basic or as intricate as you choose to make it. Are you just getting starting in your FYE program? Or do you have many faculty members who have been developing resources for years? Below you will find some of the resources that we have, or are currently posting to our shared portal.

Examples and Descriptions of Basic Resources and Activities

The following resources do not require technology applications and skills or other resources.

Campus Connections (FAQs): post links most frequently visited by first-semester students

Campus Events, Clubs, Service Learning: make it easy for students to find ways to engage on campus

Academic Integrity Agreement: find it, read it, print it, sign it (students locate & navigate the portal)

History of your University: Easily updated online (internal and external links)

Resources for Student Success: Writing Lab, Math Lab, Tutors, S.I. Sessions, Workshops

Resources for your Current Common Reader: Ex. Outcasts United – Facebook ties to CIA fact book

Timely Articles & Current Trends in Higher Ed. & Other Topics: E-books to replace textbooks? Implications of state budget cuts, Face-to-face vs. online class, Global Community: Haiti, Egypt, etc...

Simple PowerPoint Presentations: perhaps handout or notes pages (consider file size)

Student Essays (Testimonials): from FYE semester, second semester, upper class & graduating seniors

Quiz Banks & Learning Self-Assessment Tools: students can assess their understanding of topics

Examples and Descriptions of More Advanced Resources and Activities

The following resources may require intermediate or advanced technology applications and skills, additional hardware, special licensing, ongoing time investment, and/or vendor support.

Professor-created Presentations: using screen capture software and audio recordings

Interactive Instruction: created by your custom publisher or by using screen capture software

Quiz Banks and Learning Assessment Tools: assigned and submitted for grading

Student Videos: FYE, challenges\successes, sharing service learning activities, graduating seniors

Subject Guides: created by our reference librarians & specific to topics (Instructions, guides, Netbooks, stacks, and journals specific to topics such as academic research, careers, & ethics

Assessments Library: For self-discovery & reflection (stress, leadership, motivation) or to measure competencies before, during, and at the conclusion of FYE semester

E-Chapters: for your online textbook or custom textbook

Important note: Eliminate platform and version incompatibilities by purchasing and using Adobe Acrobat!

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Are you looking for ways to get your students involved with each other online in their First Year Seminar classes? **Discussion Boards** are a way to promote various topics and allow interaction among students online.

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Short Synopsis of Idea: Utilizing an educational platform such as Blackboard/Vista, faculty has an opportunity to engage students through a variety of mediums. Whether you are teaching your First-Year Experience course online, in a hybrid format, or holding some class meetings online, discussions boards are a great way to get your students involved and thinking.

Materials Needed: Educational platform with discussion boards already set-up or utilize a web based platform such as wiki.

Possible Learning Outcomes Addressed: Academic/Cognitive Skills, Critical Thinking Skills, Connections with Peers, and Global Perspectives

Description of Activity or Idea: Discussion Boards are an interactive way to convey ideas about current events, global issues, and transitional issues college students are facing while promoting self-confidence through group interaction. My classes have discussed current events, global issues with their common reader, higher education, and reflections of their first year.

Class Instructions:

1. Choose a platform to allow your students to discuss a topic
2. As an introduction into the discussion board platform, I have them introduce themselves online with answers to specific questions. This will get them comfortable with the environment and posting online with other students.
3. Have the discussion board open for period of time allowing for interaction and multiple postings (Ex. weekly or monthly and either synchronous vs. asynchronous)
4. Have the discussion board assignment as part of their grade (Ex. 5 discussions a semester, given each month and worth 25 points each)
5. Give specific instructions on etiquette for the discussion board (see attached)
6. Develop a rubric for grading the discussion boards and share with students
7. Provide feedback to students (either in class, through email/announcements or online within the discussion board)
8. Monitor the discussion board for interaction, etiquette, and answers

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9. Prior to the semester beginning, I plan the date(s) and topic(s) of the Discussion Board(s) and make sure students are aware of the upcoming topics etc. to be discussed so they can get comfortable with the process

Discussion Board Ideas:

- A. **Higher Education:** List four reasons why you are seeking a higher education, and why you chose XYZ University. Make sure you follow/review the Discussion guidelines and post your response **BEFORE** the deadline.
- B. In paragraph form, discuss your views of the current economy and the impact for your future. Also list three fears/concerns for your future that are affected by the economy. Review the discussion guidelines **BEFORE** posting.
- C. **Global Citizen:** What does a Global Citizen mean to you? How can you be a better Global Citizen? In what ways can you make a contribution to make the world a better place for all beings? Review Discussion Guidelines **BEFORE** posting.
- D. **Reflection:** What has your experience been like this first semester or year of college? What would you change, if anything? What were some of your accomplishments? What did the Common Reader mean to you? Review Discussion guidelines **BEFORE** posting

Communication & Discussion Guidelines SAMPLE:

1. Always use complete sentences and proper grammar/spelling when communicating online.
2. Do not use profanity or foul language under any circumstance.
3. Responses to fellow students discussion opinions is acceptable as long as it is provided as additional feedback/discussion and **NOT** critical of any individual's opinions
4. **RESPECT FOR YOUR PROFESSOR AND FELLOW STUDENTS IS KEY TO SUCCESSFUL ONLINE COMMUNICATION**
5. Always read directions completely before beginning any assignment/activity/test/quiz/project/discussion etc. (Ask questions if something is unclear)
6. Please feel free to provide feedback/pose questions/address issues or concerns with your Professor via email/phone call/or the feedback survey provided in the Syllabus & General Information folder
7. Utilize the Student to Student Chat room for questions or general conversations with your fellow students
8. **Policy on Academic Integrity, Honesty, Plagiarism & Cheating:** (Post your schools policies here)

The Use of Multi-media for Presenting on a “Global Stage.”

Are you looking for a better way to assign group projects and presentations? Get away from the traditional PowerPoint presentation and assign Video Group Projects/PSA's to be posted on YouTube!

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Short Synopsis of Idea: By utilizing online media websites such as YouTube for student presentations, students have the opportunity to reach a much broader audience. When students know that the world will be watching and not just their classmates, they are motivated to put their best foot forward!

Materials Needed: Access to a computer with presentation software, a digital camera(Flip), an account or channel on YouTube and creativity.

Learning Outcomes Addressed: Academic/Cognitive Skills, Critical Thinking Skills, Connections with Peers, and Global Perspectives

Description of Activity or Idea: Video Group Projects/PSA's are a way for students to find their voice on issues that are important to them and to be heard. My students have been able to discuss their views on such topics as governance, conflict, resource management and global economics.

In Class Instructions:

1. Discuss possible broad “umbrella” topics to give your students a starting point.
2. Either assign groups or allow the students to choose their own groups (3-4 people per group)
3. Have the groups choose a topic important to them that falls under one of the broad “umbrella” topics that you discussed.
4. Once the groups have chosen a topic, they must approve it with you before they begin “production!”
5. Give specific instructions on length of the video and involvement of the group members (script writing, graphics, acting, etc.)
6. Develop a rubric for grading the Video Group Projects and share with students
7. Assign the project early in the semester and check on groups as the semester continues.
8. Set dates towards the end of the semester for posting of videos to YouTube and for in-class viewing.
9. Encourage students to make their videos go viral. Have them post links on Facebook to their videos. Groups enjoy seeing who can have the most “views.”

The Use of Multi-media for Presenting on a “Global Stage.”

Video Group Project Ideas:

- A. Resource Management – What can you do develop a “recycling mindset” in your community?**
- B. Conflict –Save Darfur...how you can help!**
- C. Economic Integration – What we need to do as a country to protect our financial situation.**
- D. Population – The effect of immigration on developed countries.**

Video Etiquette and Guidelines SAMPLE:

- 1. Be clear on your message. Make sure you are saying what you want to say!**
- 2. Do not use profanity or foul language under any circumstance. These videos can comeback to haunt you if you do represent yourself well!**
- 3. Make sure that the entire group has buy-in. If the entire group is not excited about the topic, it will be very apparent in the final product. Choose your topic wisely!**
- 4. RESPECT FOR YOUR PROFESSOR, FELLOW STUDENTS and INSTITUTION IS KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL VIDEO PRESENTATION. THE WORLD IS WATCHING!**
- 5. Ask questions if something is unclear...it simply means that you are learning!**
- 6. Please feel free to discuss with other groups. They may know a better and easier way of achieving your goal!**
- 7. Make it interesting! Would you want to watch what you produced?**
- 8. Most important....enjoy yourself and find your voice!**

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How to use Google Reader in your class

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Short Synopsis of Idea: Google Reader can be used as a research and discussion tool in any First-Year Experience course. It can be incorporated into the classroom and on Blackboard/Vista. Google Reader provides the latest information on news and current events.

Materials Needed: A subscription to Google Reader.

Learning Outcomes Addressed: Academic/Cognitive Skills, Critical Thinking Skills, Connections with Peers, and Global Perspectives.

Description of Activity or Idea: Google Reader allows students to learn about current events and global issues using familiar computer research skills. It also teaches them how to expand and adapt these skills for academic research.

Instructions for Setting up a Google Reader Account:

- If you have a Gmail account, then you automatically have a Google Reader Account.
- If you do not have a Gmail account, you can sign up for one at <http://www.google.com/reader>.
 - Click on “Create an account” button.
 - Creating an account involves providing Google with a valid email address.
- After you create an account, you can begin adding subscriptions.

Ways to Utilize Google Reader in your class:

- In-class or online discussion
- Research projects
- Google Reader has a sharing function, which allows you to share items and recommend items. This could be used for group work assignments or assignments in which students lead a class discussion.
- Google Reader can be displayed on a class website or blog. For more information on this feature, go to <http://googlereader.blogspot.com/> (Official blog for Google Reader).

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Sample Assignment:

Google Reader Assignment

What is Google Reader? (From google.com)

“Google Reader makes it easy to keep current with best practices and the latest in any content area. Students and teachers can select to receive updates from particular blogs, news sites, or other web pages. Google Reader constantly checks these sites for new content and then brings updates to a single location to be read, sorted, and shared - complete with annotations. This is like having a personalized inbox for a custom flow of information.”

For this assignment, you will first establish a Google Reader account (www.google.com/reader). If you have a Gmail account, then you automatically have access to Google Reader.

Throughout the course of the semester you will also subscribe to 5 accounts via your Google Reader account related to the course theme (Media and Society).

You will want to subscribe before the due dates. This assignment requires you to read the subscriptions on a regular basis.

For each subscription, you will write one paragraph.

When part one is due, you will submit two paragraphs. When part two is due, you will submit three paragraphs.

Part one- Due October 8th (you will discuss two of your subscriptions)

Part two- Due October 29th (you will discuss the rest of your subscriptions)

I will post an entry on VISTA asking you to submit a comment about your subscription.

In your comment, you will tell me and the rest of the class about your subscriptions. Your comment should be 1 paragraph in length (5-7 sentences).

In your paragraph, you will tell us about the subscription:

- Why did you pick it?
- What have you learned from subscribing to it?
- What are most of the posts about? Is there one subject/person/show/etc. that receives more coverage than other topics?
- Is this subscription worth reading? Why or why not?

Each paragraph is worth five points.