Inside Independent Learning

Effective Use of Discussion Boards in D2L

Creating Community in Independent Learning

In the modern world of online learning, Facebook friends, and Tweeting, the definition of community is constantly being envisioned anew. While the original Independent Learning students of 1892 might have defined community as being location-based in some way, modern technology has made the formation of community possible outside of the physical constraints of geographical location.

As Independent Learning Instructors, modern technology has made it possible for you to connect with students and colleagues in a new way. The Inside Independent Learning newsletters, our quarterly instructor appreciation meetings, and our new virtual space offer Independent Learning instructors a space in which we can create a new kind of professional community.

Many distance learning studies indicate that student course completion is higher when students have the opportunity to build community in virtual course spaces. Because our courses are asynchronous, the community built in an Independent Learning course might be a small one, consisting of the course instructor and one student.

D2L Discussion Boards also offer a virtual space for a different type of community: Independent Learning students can read posts from former students and leave posts for future students to read, thus creating a type of asynchronous learning community.

Please see the D2L Discussion Board article for some creative ways to use your D2L course Discussion Board as a community-building tool in your Independent Learning courses.

Special points of interest:

- Community
- First Instructor Meeting
- Internet space
- D2L Discussion Boards
- Editing you user profile
- Introducing: Sandra Loman
- Next Month: Fall Topic Series: Chats

Announcing the Second Quarterly DCS IL Instructor Appreciation and Professional Development Meeting: A Working Lunch

February 19th from 1-3 pm Room 7045, 21 N. Park Street Madison, WI 53715

Continuing Studies
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

First Quarterly Instructor Appreciation Meeting a Success!

Thank you to all of the DCS IL Instructors who took the time to attend our first quarterly DCS IL Instructor Appreciation and Professional Development Meeting!

Independent Learning offers fantastic educational opportunities to students because of your commitment to student learning and success.

The quarterly meetings are an opportunity for us at the Division of Continuing Studies to express our appreciation for all you do to make the Independent Learning program a success. These meetings also allow us the opportunity to get to know each other, hear the latest news and developments in Independent Learning, and offer opportunities for professional development.

If you are unable to attend the meetings in person, please feel free to join us virtually (more details coming soon!) or check out our new DCS IL Instructor Resource page.

IL students are a diverse group of learners, who need to be able to access their courses when it is convenient to them. Because our IL instruction staff mirrors our IL students in diversity of location and convenient access times, it was a priority for us to make sure that DCS IL Instructors could access resources in the same convenient, online format our students currently or soon will enjoy.

Please allow one week for the instructor meeting content videos to be posted on the new DCS IL Instructor Resource site. You will receive email notification when the content has been uploaded.

Online DCS Independent Learning Instructor Space!

We are happy to announce the launch of a DCS IL Instructor Resource Space!

You can access this online space at the following web address: http://go.wisc.edu/ilinstructors

This space is intended to offer DCS IL Instructors a handy space to locate resources and a space to connect with your Independent Learning colleagues.

The Instructor Resource Space has three main areas that will be maintained by the IL Academic Program Coordinator: an archive space for the Inside IL Newsletter, a How-To Guide space for helpful technical and process guides for Independent Learning Instructors, and a Development Space, where you will be able to access the content of the Quarterly DCS IL Instructor appreciation and professional development meetings.

In addition, you are welcome to author posts for your IL colleagues! In order to author a post, you must be logged in to the site. Please check your email for your log in information.

One final and important piece of information for you: the DCS IL Instructor Resource is open for anyone to see, so please keep this in mind when publishing any posts. It is possible that current or former students as well as the general public could view your posts.
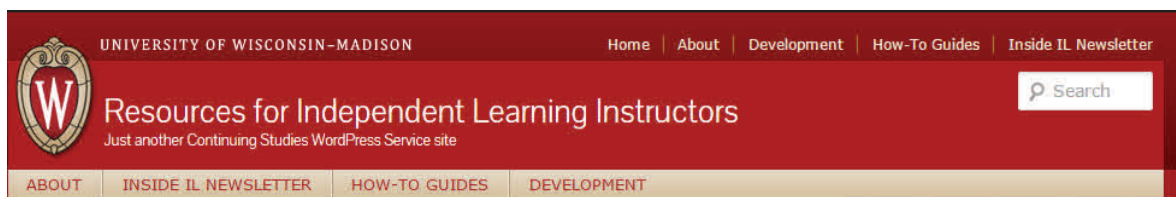
Discussion Boards

In a classroom situation, instructors often use small group discussions to help foster students' learning. Offering a question-and-answer portion to each class period also helps solidify learning. Often, if one student has a question, other students in the classroom will have the same or a similar question, and it is quite time efficient for instructors to answer that question in a group setting, instead of multiple times in discussion with individual students.

Your D2L Discussion board can function as an important discussion and communication tool with your students. Because students complete their course at their own pace, the discussion posts will not happen in real-time. However, it can be a useful tool for instructors to refer newly registered students to the discussion board and suggest that the students see if their question is already answered there before emailing the instructor.

Instructors can build the content of their discussion boards by requiring students to post general questions to the discussion board rather than emailing the instructor. Some examples may include a preferred file type for assignments, how to access textbook materials online, and how to schedule office hour appointments. Students should still be encouraged to email their instructor with personal and grade questions that they would not want other students to see.

Each Discussion section in D2L probably already has an "ask the instructor" discussion started. Individual courses might warrant setting up additional discussions as a space for students to post about their learning. When designing these discussions, it is important for instructors to keep in mind and to share with student users that these discussions are not happening in real time. Students are not likely to receive comments from other students working on the same unit in most courses. However, such discussion topics can offer the student a place to practice what they are learning and participate in an asynchronous learning community. Examples of suitable topics could be: introducing oneself and one's goals for the course

in the target language (for language courses); posting an article, current event, or real world example that illustrates a unit topic or concept; or reflecting on a situation in which the student would respond differently now after learning the concepts in the current unit.

Such asynchronous discussion posts can be valuable to the student authoring the post, as it requires the student think critically about what they are learning and apply it in a different way. Such posts can also be valuable instructional tools for future students who may be struggling with a topic or concept. Rather than sending their instructor an email, such students could read through other students' posts to help them gain better understanding of the concept.

As an instructor working with discussion board posts, it is important to be a visible participant in the discussion. The most successful discussions, whether in person or in writing, usually have a committed facilitator who keeps the discussion moving and clarifies or contributes to the discussion as needed.

Good Practice Reminder: Entering Grades in LPV/LRMS

Independent Learning instructors are doing a fantastic job returning student assignments in the three day assignment feedback window. When leaving feedback for students, IL instructors are also doing a wonderful job of using *only* D2L and iStudy.

IL instructors are required to enter student grades in three locations. First, on your payroll tally sheet. Second, in D2L or iStudy. Finally, instructors need to enter student assignment, exam, and course grades in the LPV/LRMS, which is the official student record.

It is vital that instructors keep the grades in the LPV/LRMS up to date each time an assignment or exam is graded.

Only the grades in the official student record are official grades. Official grades are consulted whenever a student calls in to request an exam, purchase an extension, or file a complaint. Keeping the official grades up-to-date is an important part of the IL Instruction job, and is necessary for our colleagues in Student Services to be able to do their jobs. Time is lost and mistakes are easily made when this record is not up to date.
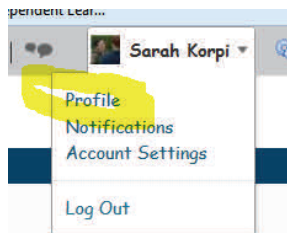
The LPV/LRMS student profile can be a great way for instructors to get know their students as well. When you look up a student by name or registration ID, instructors can see which other IL courses the student has taken. This can give instructors an idea of how familiar the student may already be with the process of taking an independent learning course. In the notes section (located just about the list of course registrations), instructors can see each time contact was make between student services and the student, as well as details about the result of that contact.

D2L Gem: Editing Your User Profile

Editing your D2L User Profile can put a more personal touch on your D2L course interactions. If you upload a photo, your photo will display next to each thing you post in addition to being visible in the course list. Students can click on your photo to read the personal information you have decided to share with your students. Making this information available to your students can make the course feel more personal to students who learn in an asynchronous environment.

To edit your profile, click on your name in the upper right hand corner of D2L. Click the menu option titled "Profile."

On the Profile page, you can upload a photo and add information about your professional social networks, such as LinkedIn, your educational background, and some of your general likes and interests.
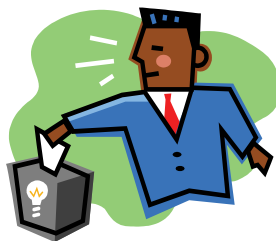
Making this information available to your students can help them develop expectations about you as an instructor and as a person, and underscores the fact that their instructor is a real person, not just an automated computer system.

Instructors should keep in mind that any information entered into your user profile will be visible to all students in the course, so information added should be written in the same, professional tone that instructors use for other course communication. There is no need to fill in all information on your profile. Instructors need only include information in fields they want students to be able to view.

Ideas & Suggestions

Remember, if you have any questions or concerns that you think would be of interest to your IL colleagues, please submit them for future IL Newsletters.

Coming Next Month: The Fall Topic Series

Because all IL courses will soon be offered in D2L, the Fall Topic Series is dedicated to Getting the Most out of D2L.

December: "chats"
January: Assessments and Quiz Tools

If you have any helpful tips or hints that you would like to share with your IL colleagues, please be sure to let Sarah know by November 15. If you have any questions about D2L that you would like to see addressed in the Fall Topic Series, just let Sarah know.

Introducing: Sandra Loman

Teaching a course in modern European history has been my retirement project, along with working as a Docent at the Chazen Museum of art. In fact, I taught a course in modern European history at Madison College for 33 years so working for DCS has been a continuation of my teaching career. At Madison College, I taught college transfer history courses in many areas, including Western Civilization, Women's history and European history, as well as a survey of African history. You might call me a utility infielder.

My primary academic focus has been on European history, which is how I came to teach this course for DCS. I had gotten to know Jane Schulenburg when I took some DCS courses from her and she asked me to take over for the previous instructor who was retiring. Soon after taking over this course, I was asked to convert it to an online course. That was both exciting and challenging and thrust me into a new approach to teaching. Redesigning a course I had taught for many years also meant refreshing and updating materials, which I found to be really engaging. The course as it stands now is rather different from the one I first taught in the early 1970s. So are the students. Their biggest challenge in an online history course seems to be writing clearly, accurately, and coherently. Working with students to improve their writing skills as well as learning about the history of modern Europe keeps me out of mischief and provides some of the satisfaction I found in classroom teaching.

Although I have lived in Madison since January 1971, I cannot call myself a Badger. Born in Washington State, I was raised in California, both north and south. My family moved to Colorado when I was 15, and I finished high school there. I returned to California for college and earned a degree in history with a minor in French. I attended Whittier College, a small, liberal arts college where I acquired important skills in both teaching and learning. I did my graduate work at the University of Colorado Boulder, studying European history and political science.

My interest in European history and culture was formed when I lived in Denmark as a high school exchange student. My first major study of European history was in Danish! I figured I could build on what I learned, even if it was in Danish. I have continued my interest in Europe through travel and through participating in a number of seminars offered by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The seminars took me to Yale, Princeton, the University of Michigan and the Library of Congress, as well as back to CU Boulder. My travels have taken me to France once a year for more than fifteen years, as well as to Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Turkey, and Scandinavia. Leading student tours to France for several years has been especially useful to my teaching and knowledge of French language and culture. Doing tours as a Docent at the Chazen has allowed me to continue teaching and learning as well as expanded my love of art. Most of my trips abroad now include a visit to at least one art museum as well as historical sites.

The picture of me was taken last spring on the Portuguese coast where we stopped on our way north to Alcabaca and Porto. Alcabaca is a small town with an amazing Cistercian abbey.

The trips are also a great way to feed my appetite for photography, which has become my favorite pastime in retirement. It was difficult to find a photo of me since I am usually the one taking the photos! Fortunately my husband, Jack, is a good photographer who was also my first photography teacher. Mastering digital photography and the software needed to process the photos has become another learning experience over that last several years. The one drawback is lugging around a large DSLR and the lenses I use. Thank goodness for wheeled bags!