Teaching with Technology Tip

Building a sense of community in your online course

In their book *The Online Teaching Survival Guide* Boettcher and Conrad (2016) state that one of the primary goals when teaching online is building a learning community. They further explain that online learning communities serve two purposes within the course.   Learning communities help support the "building of knowledge and competencies within learners and build a network of mutual respect" (p. 47).   Palloff and Pratt (2007) add "the learning community in an online course allows for mutual exploration of ideas, a safe space to reflect on and develop those ideas, and a collaborative, supportive approach to academic work."

Community building tools available within Blackboard include Blogs, Wikis, Journals, and Discussion Boards. Learn more about these tools in this week's Teaching with Technology Tip.

Blogs
A blog is a personal online journal that is intended to be shared with others. Blogs may also allow users to comment. The commenting provides students with an opportunity to interact with each other and express their thoughts and ideas. Blogs can give insight into how students view or see ideas, their activities, and a way for students to share their knowledge and any resources they have found.

In Blackboard, instructors create and manage the blogs. Blogs can be used for graded assignments or to gather opinions and information without assigning a grade. Blogs can also be set up within groups.

Here are some ideas for using a blog:

- Welcome activity for students to introduce themselves and post a photo
- Share opinions/ideas on the readings or a lesson topic
- Post a writing assignment for peer comments and feedback

For more technical information on blogs, you can go to the Blackboard Help site below:
https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Blogs

Wikis
Wikis allow students to contribute and modify one or more pages of created content and allow for sharing and collaboration among students. It is a source of information compiled by course members.

In Blackboard, participants in the wiki can create and edit pages while it Blackboard tracks changes and additions to the pages. The instructor acts as the facilitator and the students provide the content. Wikis can also be set up for specified groups.

Here are some ideas for using a wiki:

- Welcome and introduction page for students and posting their photo
- Sign-up sheet for projects or time slots for presentations
- List of resources
- Group presentation of information

- Building an informational resource
- Research projects
- Class collaboration for ideas

For more technical information on wikis, you can go to the Blackboard Help site below:
https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Wikis

Journals
Journals are a private space for students to post that only the instructor can see. The instructor can create specific subjects or it can be more open.

In Blackboard, instructos can make a journal public so all users can see and comment on a subject or give their insight. Journals are a great place for:

- Self-reflection
- Individual projects
- Posting ideas
- Sharing concerns they may have with the course
- Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) – i.e., Muddiest Point Journal
- Perspective or attitudes on subjects and how they have changed

For more technical information on journals, you can go to the Blackboard Help site below:
https://en-us.help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Journals

Discussion Boards
Discussion boards allow students to think critically about a topic or related topics where threads are created either by the instructor or by the student. Discussion boards create interaction among students because you can reply below the initial thread which creates a dialogue. Discussion boards are a great place for:

- Topic specific discussions
- Individual student projects and looking for feedback from peers
- Group projects and looking for feedback from peers
- Students leading a unit or chapter with summaries
- Brainstorming ideas

For more technical information on discussion boards, you can go to the Blackboard Help sites below:
https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Discussions/About_Discussions_Forums_Threads
https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Instructor/Interact/Discussions/Create_Discussions

For help incorporating Community Building into your course, schedule time to meet with us by clicking on this link Schedule a consultation with an Instructional Designer.