## Resource Guide

## Fostering Discussion in Online Classes

Online courses routinely rely on discussion as a way to engage students with course material and with one another.  The purposes and modes of discussion can vary greatly, depending on the role of and purposes for discussion in the online environment.  Often, "discussion" becomes a short-hand for student contributions – interpretive comments on course readings, peer feedback on projects and papers, provocative questions intended to spur new ways of interacting with the instructor and other students.

- **Choose the best tool for your goals**: Although a threaded discussion tool might seem like the only option for online discussions, many learning management systems also have other tools, such as blogs, where students may share ideas and post comments in response to others' ideas. Depending on your goals for online engagement, you may find that students are more likely to respond in deeper, more focused ways to individual student blog posts (or other tools) than through threaded discussion boards.

- **Set clear expectations**: Students need explicit information about *how* to engage in discussion, not just *what* they need to do for discussion points.  If you value substance and quality over number and amount of comments or posts, make this visible to students by *describing* the features of a high-quality contribution.  For example, instead of telling students to "post 3 comments on the discussion board by the deadline," you might describe what makes comments successful: "Responses should pose questions that lead to new directions."

- **Respond to student posts by directing them back to one another**: Rather than responding with your own ideas, encourage student-to-student interaction with responses like, "That sounds similar to the comments made by *X*. What do the rest of you think? Are these points the same or different?  How so?"

Resources

Conrad, R. & Donaldson,  J.A. (2012). Continuing to Engage the Online Learner. Jossey-Bass.
LINK: http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-111800017X.html

Davis, B. G. (2009). "Online Discussions." Tools for Teaching (2nd edition). Jossey-Bass.
LINK: http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787965677.htmlInsert Resource 2

Owens, R. (2009). "Eight Tips for Facilitating Effective Discussion Forums." Faculty Focus.
LINK: http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/asynchronous-learning-and-trends/eight-tips-for-facilitating-effective-online-discussion-forums/

*For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at cttl@slu.edu.*