

Discussion Boards

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GIFTS:

Using Discussion Boards in a First-Year Engineering Class

Introduction and Implementation

Discussion boards can be useful to introduce topics, prompt student reflections, and promote community in a course.

In a large 2-course first-year engineering sequence, 2 instructors added weekly discussion boards to their course. One instructor discussed the topics prior to their posting, while the other discussed the responses after the posts.

Student Feedback

Students were asked which topics were the most interesting, most helpful and which gave them a new perspective. The top 6 most frequently mentioned topics are included below. These full prompts are included on the other side of this handout.

1. Sleep Cycles
2. Optimize Your Day
3. Strengths v. Weaknesses
4. Self Awareness
5. Freshman (& Life) Tips
6. Defining Success

Recommendations for Implementation

- **Consider the timing of the topics.** You want to have the students receive and reflect on the information at the appropriate time.
- **Include topics relevant to class and life.** If you just include topics relevant to life students may not see the connection to class.
- **Find ways to promote discussion on the boards.** If you require students to respond to other students posts that may help prompt more discussion.
- **Close the loop.** You should find ways to follow up on the discussions in class.

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Discussion Boards: Sample Prompts

Optimize Your Day

There are plenty of articles out there about optimizing productivity and time management (I included a few below but don't feel confined to these).

Class: For one day this week try 1 tip or strategy for optimizing productivity and/or time management and then post how it went for you.

Please try to make this a discussion so not everyone needs to post to the first level, consider replying to a previous post.

20+ Productivity Apps for College Students and Young Professionals: <https://zapiet.com/blog/college-student-productivity>

21 Ways to Optimize Your Life and Business in Seconds: <https://9clouds.com/blog/21-ways-to-optimize-your-life-in-seconds/>

Optimize These 3 Areas in Your Life for Highest Productivity: <http://time.com/3859238/career-productivity-optimize/>

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is a common term but not always fully understood. Self-awareness is not just being mindful of one's self in the moment, but also being able to identify the root of one's feelings and reactions to daily things. This article discusses self awareness (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/sideways-view/201511/self-awareness>).

Additionally, one can think about measuring signs of not being self-aware with these 7 signs (<https://www.inc.com/steve-tobak/7-signs-youre-not-as-self-aware-as-you-think.html>).

Class: Please post your 2-3 greatest strengths and 2-3 greatest weaknesses. Once you've identified them, then go ask someone, or a few people, close to you to share their opinion of your greatest strength and greatest weakness. How well do these align? Do you have any blind spots? Any realizations made?

Sleep Cycles

Many people under-value sleep, but everyone suffers on some level from a lack of proper sleep. This is a combination mostly of how long and how well you sleep, but also what time of day you sleep.

Humans have a natural sleep cycle that averages near 90 minutes (average 70-100 minutes). This means that once you fall asleep, you want to try to stay asleep until you have finished a full cycle of sleep (<https://health.nokia.com/blog/2015/03/17/the-4-different-stages-of-sleep/>). We are taught to "go to sleep early" and "set your alarm", but really we should focus on "waking up at the proper cycle point".

Ever wake up before your alarm and feel great...only to fall back asleep for a few extra minutes, or a half hour, and wake up and feel awful? That's your body waking up on its own...but then you fell back asleep and woke it up well into a sleep cycle.

This is explained with graphs (<https://www.sleepcycle.com/how-it-works/>) and there's even a calculator (<http://sleepyti.me/>)!

Class: Discuss your thoughts on sleep and any tips for sleeping better. In the next week, try to set your alarm to time-up with your sleep cycle (i.e. 4.5 / 6 / 7.5 hours), and start by shooting high. If you wake up before your alarm, then stay awake and start your day! Comment how this goes for you.

Additional Info: History (https://www.howstosleep.com/how_circadian.html), Science (<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/science/>)

Defining Success

Class: With at least 3 *specific* criteria for college and 5 *specific* criteria for your "adult" life, how do you define success for yourself?

Strengths vs. Weaknesses

Building off the discussion of self-awareness, it's important to think about strengths and weaknesses as a single unit. They are two sides of the same coin.

For example, many people would think positively about someone who is willing to take risks, thinks creatively for solutions, is knowledgeable, and is always honest. In theory. Because in practice, when someone is up against that same person, it can be perceived in a negative light sometimes. Likewise, the risk-taker may also feel frustrated because of the inability to the group (or single person) to see their view and be bold.

The point here, is that any "weakness" really just a strength bleeding through. So, taking the example above, the person that is willing to take risks can hone that bravery to help empower others to feel the same, or can focus on patience or being creative to get things done within the current system. And in doing this, others also don't feel as intimidated or pushed by that person.

Class: Please reflect back on your strengths and weaknesses. Are they related? Can you focus on honing your strength rather than just looking at a weakness? How can you rely more on your strengths for continued success?

Freshman (& Life) Tips

College is a very different experience and set of expectations than high school. Being mindful of the changes helps freshmen navigate it better. Top 10 tips: <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/08/06/10-tips-for-freshmen/>

42 more tips!: <https://collegeinfo geek.com/42-things-i-learned-freshman-year/>

Class: Please share any other tips for college or general life hacks. Anything that has particularly helped you?

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