FACILITATING EFFECTIVE ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

What To Do	How To Do It
Determine number of discussion forms	• Identify purpose of the forums and link them to specific things you want students to learn. Example: We are having this discussion forum this week because_____. • Avoid a one-forum-per-week approach; instead use forums to allow students to synthesize a coherent chunk of information, such as after a unit or series of related chapters. • For example, in a 14-week course in history, there could be a discussion forum for each major era covered. In an eight-week course on sociology, there could be a forum for the broad topic on capitalism, which would include sub-topics on ideology, welfare states and migration.
Determine faculty participation	• Avoid responding immediately to each post, which could silence students, but be sure to provide responses weekly or the close of each round so that students don't wonder about your presence. • Faculty interaction can include participation in the discussion by offering encouragement about insightful answers, answering questions about complex issues and guiding the discussion through the use of follow-up questions. • Think about writing up a summary of the main themes of the discussion and highlighting noteworthy student comments.
Create engaging prompts	• Avoid prompts that only ask for information; instead consider prompts where students connect course material to their own experience, such as "What is the best social media app you have used and why?" or "What is the most complex video game you have played and what made it complex?" • Ask students to post the results of an activity, such as a content analysis of a Ted Talk or results of a web scavenger hunt, where they contribute information based on their own experience and follow up with discussion
Establish your communication expectations and deal with concerns	• Post guidelines for interaction in the discussion forum on the first day you use the discussion forum. At minimum, guidelines should indicate how students should participate, interact with others, show respect for other opinions, and engage the topic. • Use a discussion board or break-out Collaborate rooms to get input from students for help in drafting guidelines and consequences for actions. • If a student posts misguided or wrong information, affirm or summarize the contribution and correct it with the proper interpretation. If students dominate the conversation, refer to the ground rules for discussion forum.
Establish grading expectations early	• Use a rubric to communicate expectations and share with students. • Consider writing some sample posts, annotated to show qualities you value. • Use a rubric to explain how students can improve their responses.