



Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning

Addressing the Teaching Challenges of Online Students in 2020 Through Engaging Discussions of Current Issues in Public Administration

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Rationale:

Engaging students in online classes remains a challenge. The current climate in the country has exacerbated these challenges. One of the strategies that I use to increase online engagement of my students is an assignment that focuses on the discussion of current issues in the news relating to the course, public administration. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the response of the federal, state, and local governments is an example of a public administration issue that falls within the scope of the course. By creating this discussion forum, online students can use it as a platform for engaging one another on current public administration issues that are in the mainstream media--issues that affect them on a daily basis. In the sections below, I present the purpose of the forum, learning objectives, discussion guidelines, grading rubrics, and a sample forum.

Description:

Current Issue in Public Administration Forum

Purpose

The purpose of this forum is to discuss current public administration issues in the news and apply public administration concepts to real world issues. In addition, the forum will help to increase the level of student engagement in the course.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the forum, students should be able to:

1. understand the complexity and challenges inherent in public administration issues at the national, state, and local levels;
2. conduct research and analyze current public administration issues;
3. develop the skills on how to present viewpoints in an objective and respectful manner; and
4. develop the skills to engage with other students in an online environment.

Discussion Guidelines

Students are randomly assigned to a group consisting of 4-5 students. Each group is responsible for posting and moderating a forum titled, "Current Issues in Public Administration Forum." The instructor must approve the forum topic by Monday at 12 pm of the week of the forum via e-mail. When the forum topic is approved, the group responsible for the forum for that week will post the forum topic by Tuesday 8 am. Other students will post their own responses to the forum topic by Thursday 11:59 pm. The group responsible will then respond to all other students' postings and moderate the forum via the discussion page provided on Webcourses by Friday 11:59 pm.

All students must ensure that viewpoints are objective and respectful of others. If the instructor views a posting to be offensive, inappropriate, inadequate (e.g., grammatically deficient or less than 100 words), or late, a substantial amount of points will be deducted. The forum constitutes 10% of the final grade. Each group submits a one-page (typed) document detailing each member's contribution to the forum via e-mail to the instructor by Friday 11:59 pm of the week of their forum. Failure to submit this document on time results in a 10% deduction of the forum grade.

I assign grades based on the grading rubrics below. The rubric in Table 1 is for student groups that are posting and moderating a forum while the rubric in Table 2 is for individual students that are responding to the forum topic.

Table 1. Grading rubric for groups posting and moderating a forum

CriteriaPoints	(%)
Relevance of the topic to public administration	25
Level of engagement of the class during the forum	25
Use of objective and respective viewpoints	15
Use of appropriate grammar	15
Timely submission of topic and members' contribution document	20
Total	100

Table 2. Grading rubric for individual students responding to a forum topic

CriteriaPoints	(%)
Strength and clarity of arguments	30
Minimum of 100 words response per student	20
Use of objective and respective viewpoints	15
Use of appropriate grammar	15
Timely submission	20
Total	100

Appraisal:

I have not conducted a formal evaluation. However, from the student perceptions of instruction, it is clear that students love this forum. In fact, some of the say that it is their favorite part of the course. In addition, I noticed that almost all the students' postings are over the 100 word count. This is an indication of their interest and engagement in the forums.

References:

<https://edservices.wiley.com/9-student-engagement-strategies-for-discussion-forums/>

Link or explanation: Below is a sample of an actual forum.

Topic: Government responsibility in the face of the Coronavirus

Discussion Prompt: As of January 21, 2020, there are 14 confirmed cases of coronavirus in the United States. According to the CDC, "On January 30, 2020, the International Health Regulations

Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization declared the outbreak a public health emergency”. First detected in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, the virus has spread to 37 international locations - including the United States. Current cases within the U.S. have been attributed to travel, with only 2 of the 14 cases resulting from person to person contact.

1. Following the January 30th classification, do you believe government officials have been proactive in taking actions that will help prevent the spread of the coronavirus in the United States?
2. Do you think that the Trump Administration's “2.5 billion supplemental budget request” is sufficient funding to combat the virus? (Politico, 2020)
3. Which level of government (federal, state, local) in the US is most likely to be effective in controlling the spread of coronavirus?

Reference Articles:

<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/24/trump-coronavirus-budget-request-117275> (Links to an external site.) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2020/02/25/coronavirus-government-quarantine/> (Links to an external site.) <https://hbr.org/2020/01/what-will-it-take-to-stop-coronavirus> (Links to an external site.) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/25/health/coronavirus-us.html> (Links to an external site.) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/summary.html> (Links to an external site.) <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries> (Links to an external site.) We look forward to a respectful debate and are excited to answer any questions you may have!