ASSIGNMENT

E-Digests and Blogs in Econometrics

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Write a community engagement plan. Describe two strategies you can implement in an online or blended course that would build community. A successful plan should include:

1. A description of two community building strategies.
2. Reasons for choosing these strategies.
3. How the strategies align with your learners’ needs. Explain exactly which types of learner this plan is designed for, and why this plan suits their learning needs.
**Introduction**

Central to online education is the need to create an online community of learners, that is an online environment where learners and instructors are coming together, so as to keeps students engaged with the modules/course content, to push their critical thinking or articulate their ideas, along with providing a supportive environment to do that. However, the interaction in an online course can create a much stronger academic community than a traditional in-person class where some students can sit anonymously in the back of the room while the lecturer/teacher lectures.

What I think firstly as a lecturer in Higher Education and before building an online community is my module’s objectives (goals), how I will achieve these objective with a community (online best practices) and how that will meet my students needs by establishing a sense of belonging, trust and mutual support among my students (cognitive presence).

Below I explain 2 strategies (online best practices) I am using for my online module ‘Econometrics’ (for the degree: BSs Economics) for undergraduate University students. The Econometrics module is quite technical and in parts difficult for students to comprehend especially with no strong mathematical background. The module is being divided into two parts: 1] theoretical concepts where introduces students to the basic Economic theory and related concepts and 2] application of the theory or practical part where students should apply the theory by using mathematical and statistical techniques.
Practices and Rational

**E-digest:** The discussion forum is really important for online interaction, debate, exchange of ideas between students and students and instructors. However, a strategy I am using to start effective discussions, and of course to guide my students’ reading and test their content knowledge, is with e-digests.

An e-digest is a customized weekly report featuring a summary of the week’s topic, relevant theoretical concepts and mathematical applications and by setting expectations (knowledge students should achieve). I also include news from the world related to the topic so as to show to my students the relevance of the concept to the real world. At the end I create two open short questions (a theoretical and a practical) for open discussion (so as to engage students) in the discussion forum and invite my students to discuss possible answers and exchange their ideas. Of course with that way I can test my students’ understanding or identify potential gaps in their content knowledge which is my main concert and guide their reading in a reasonable given time. I always give them 5 days to provide answers which give me enough time to read their answers and reflect on them in the next week’s e-digest. The main reason choosing this technique is to give time to my students to revise the week’s concepts through the materials in their own pace and their own time, therefore be more thoughtful. Furthermore, by promoting discussion and interaction brings out thematic elements of the problems they stem from. Additionally, students can include videos, graphs, images, and any other forms of multimedia that can be uploaded or linked on the web with their answers. Hence, e-digests are a great tool to guide students and prepare them for the final assessments (they can also be used as part of their revisions) and keep them engaged.

![Diagram of E-digest benefits](image-url)
**Blogs:** It allows for my student and myself to share ideas and information and discuss various topics in the form of an online journal, either in small groups or among the entire class (during a semester or an individual week). Blogs are not intended for collaborative work: students may comment on each other’s work but cannot edit each other. Furthermore, a blog can be used to reflect, post an event, an idea, criticism of an economic concept, review of a particular book. Students and instructors can post web links, photos, news’ events and can comment on the individual posts. It further gives me insights on what my students are thinking of the module and collect their feedback. An advantage of this strategy is that I can summarize class discussions that are taking place in small groups and provide further guidance and/or answer to possible students’ concerns.

My econometrics blog is set for all of my students to post but before that I have to evaluate the post so that it will not be irrelevant or insulting to others in any kind. Blogs can further assist in engaging students, developing their literacy skills and in building learning communities.

The benefits of blogs can be summarized below:
Furthermore, blogs are suitable for my student for the following reasons:

*Increasing Relevance of Learning*: collect students’ experiences and reflections can empower them to develop deeper understanding and become more engaged and self-directed in their own learning especially in a high technical module as Econometrics.

*Highly Motivating to Students*: Often allowing students who do not always participate a ‘voice’

*Literacy Skills Development*: Including developing improved vocabulary and skills in creating sustained pieces of writing especially for students that English is not their first language. They also develop skills in responding, reflecting and commenting on other people’s ideas.

*Flexible Resources*: Blogs provide a space for sharing and publishing of classroom resources which is independent of time and place. Students can engage in learning at a time and place that's best for them - including via mobile devices.

*Simple Technology*: Blogs are surprisingly easy to use, and require minimal technical skills to setup. They also provide tools which make it simple to publish and compile resources which include text, images, sound and video.