

Disrupting Discussion Boards in Online Education: Building a Better Way for Engagement and Learning through Innovation

Abstract

Discussion boards are a staple teaching strategy in online education. Despite this widely used pedagogical tool, students often report that the discussion board is tedious, boring, or lacks application to their course of study or growth in their desired field. This poster will provide an example of how one experienced advanced practice educator has used a lay press publication for a virtual book club discussion board in her graduate course. While lay press opportunities may not be achievable for all nursing coursework, the approach to innovation within traditional teaching techniques is available for any course within graduate education.

Methods

A lay press book was selected after careful consideration of the course objectives, content in the course, and relationship between scientific and lay press materials (See Figures 1 and 2).

Course Description:

"In-depth examination of the anatomy and physiologic processes of reproduction are studied, and will include normal growth and development, as well as clinical genetics. Essential information will be focused on understanding of the reproductive hormones and regulation of the menstrual cycle. With a complete understanding of menstrual hormone regulation, students will be better prepared to apply concepts to alterations that are encountered with maturation/development, puberty, pregnancy, lactation, menopause, and management of common gynecological needs (such as contraception)."

Course Materials and Assignment Details

A search online for book club discussion questions and prompts for face-to-face conversation yielded 7 discussion prompts within the discussion board. Prompts were adapted to find linkages with course readings in the textbook and chapters were not read in numerical order, but rather in line with content progression within the course materials.

Example Prompt and Weekly Content:

See Figure 3 for the course readings for Week 4

Week 5 Discussion Board prompt was:

Angier discusses medical evidence purporting that whether a person becomes a male or a female is a matter of chance, dependent upon the switching on or off certain genes and the sensitivity of certain tissues to hormones while the fetus is forming. How does the evidence presented here affect your understanding of sexual difference, and the relative importance of biological and cultural determinants of sexual identity?

Grading and directions for engagement were provided in the learning management system through the Guidelines for Discussion Board (See Figure 4).

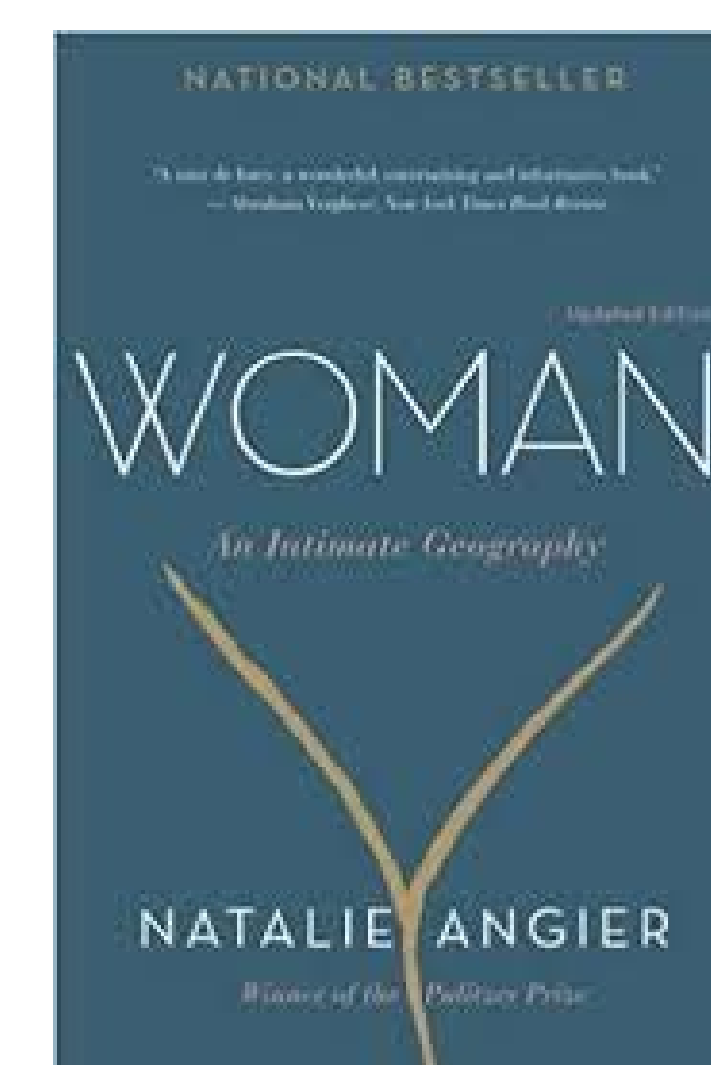


Figure 1. Lay Press Book.

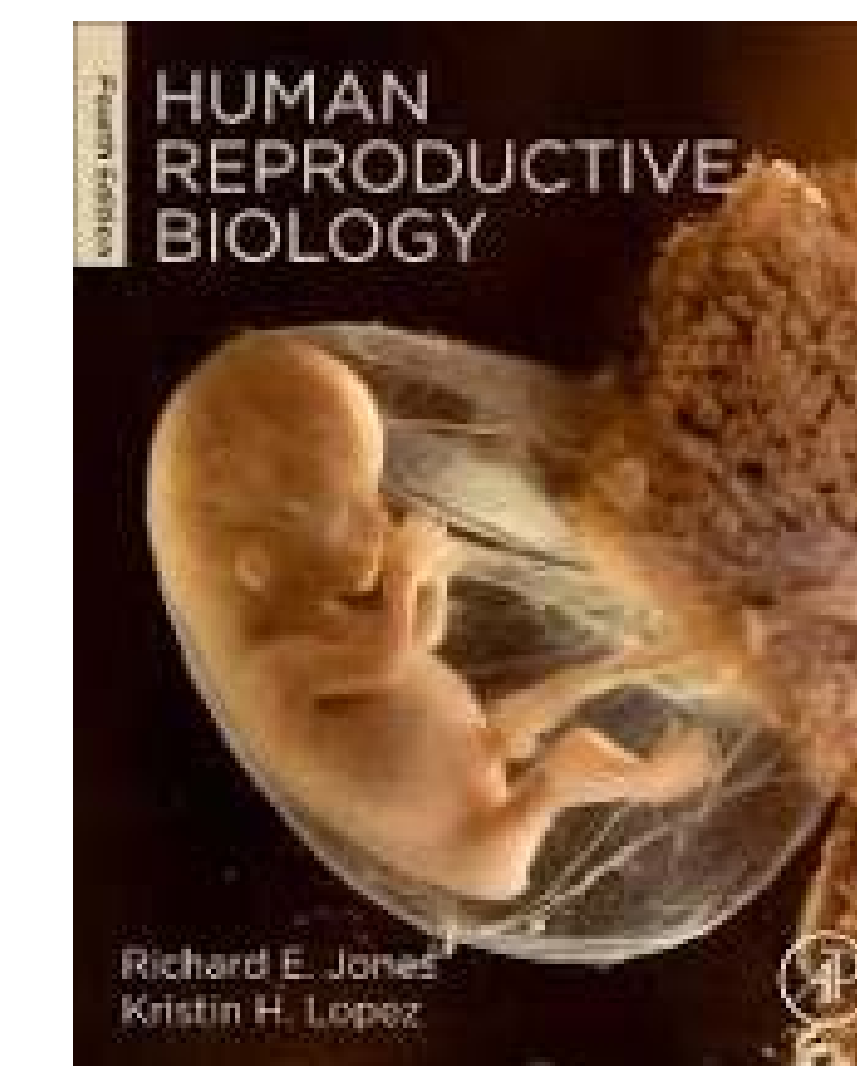


Figure 2. Course Textbook.

4	Woman:
09/14 to 09/20	<input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 3, Default Line: Is the Female Body a Passive Construct
	<input type="checkbox"/> Human Reproductive Biology:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Chapter 5, Sexual Differentiation

Figure 3. Course Schedule for Week 4

Woman: An Intimate Geography Book Club

Guidelines for Discussion Board

All discussion board topic assignments are posted within their assigned weekly folders on the Blackboard course site. Links are provided within the weekly folders, although you may also access the Discussion Board through the "Discussions" tab on the left-hand side of the page.

We have decided to change things up a bit from the traditional (aka BORING) discussion boards of the past. We use the discussion board as a virtual "book club". Readings from our supplementary book, *Woman: An Intimate Geography*, will augment our readings from the academic textbooks. Using the concepts and ideas introduced in this supplementary reading, we'll discuss issues within this "book club". You may choose to add resources from outside the course (items you come along in your studies, interesting tidbits and images from the web, journal articles, etc.) within your posts in the discussion board. If you do so, we ask that you be sure to cite your source (using APA).

The following guidelines will direct our discussion board experience:

1. Weekly discussion boards will begin on Monday and will end by Sunday at 5 p.m. of the assigned week.
2. Each student must "enter" the discussion at least once during the week (Monday through Sunday) for minimal points. Contributions from class participants must be submitted by Sunday at 5 p.m.
3. Posts may be brief, yet should fully reflect your ideas.
4. Evidence that you are involved in the "discussion" is necessary for maximum points. Evidence will include postings in response to instructor and/or peers, original posts, original links, etc. One-time participation in the threaded discussion is NOT evidence of involvement.
5. You may share personal experiences, a community resource, ideas from the literature etc.
6. Comments should NOT be repetitive of peer responses.
7. Some of the selected topics can be charged with personal/emotional experiences or elicit variances in our moral beliefs/opinions. Please demonstrate respect to your peers and know that we will not come to consensus on all topics.
8. Please do NOT post any offensive material or any links that contain foul language. If you have any questions about a post, please contact me to discuss prior to posting.
9. The forums are designed to help you learn more about women's health subjects and frame how you will incorporate this knowledge into future practice.

Discussion board activity is worth 20% of your course grade (20 points). An overall grade will be given at the end of the semester, but a weekly grade for each discussion board will be entered. The following criteria will be used in assigning discussion board points:

1. Timeliness of post
2. Grammar, spelling, and appropriate use of APA-style for citations
3. Substantive submission (additive to discussion, not repetitive of peers, evidence of scholarly thought)/involvement in threaded discussion

Points will be awarded as follows:

- 10 points: on time, no errors, excellent posts regarding content and evidence of scholarly thought and interaction with peers/instructor
- 9 points: on time, few to no errors, posts meet expectations in content
- 8 points: on time, few errors, content somewhat lacking in depth and breadth compared to peers
- 7 points: less than 3 late entries, some errors, content lacking
- 6 points or less: repetitive late entries, errors throughout posts, content seriously lacking

Figure 4. Guidelines for Discussion Board

Evaluation & Conclusions

Within course feedback from students has included the following:

In the book Woman: An Intimate Geography, by Angier (2014), I have had an "ah-ha" moment in nearly every chapter. I love the way she discusses functions of the female body and the insights of different perspectives in her descriptions. I especially enjoy how she explains the function of each womanly aspect and justifies its specific purpose. I feel most of my "ah-ha" moments come from my initial learning, or the reiteration of similar material, after reading from the class textbook, Human Reproductive Biology, by Jones and Lopez (2014). I remember first reading about the Wolffian ducts in Angier's book, and then reading about them in more detail in the textbook. Angier's book is such an amusing and easy read that I don't realize how much knowledge I am gaining until I open the textbook and recognize several topics within the chapter.

Students in this graduate course have rated this discussion board experience as one of their highlights of their graduate program. Linkages between course content and the lay press deepen student understanding and bring out a passion for the content that hasn't been achieved through traditional teaching-learning methods.

Implications and Future Directions

Faculty are eager to disrupt traditional learning practices if it will lead to engagement, interest, and deeper learning for students. Opportunities for interaction with literature is an ideal opportunity for students and faculty to engage in knowledge acquisition, connection, and meaning.

KU is an EO/AA institution.