Objective

What do I teach online?
- GEO 105 - Geog. of Non-Western World
- GEO 326 - Geog. of Europe
- GEO 327 - Geog. of Asia
- GEO 329 - Geog. of US & Canada
- GEO 350 - Population Geog.

Online Discussions
I. Basic Concerns & Approaches
II. Examples
III. Best Practices

Disclaimer
Paleolithic Era of Distance Ed
"What works, works."
I. Basic Concerns & Approaches

Overriding Concerns in Online Course Design
- Reach Learning Outcomes
  - Comparable to classroom
- Optimize User-Friendliness

Fundamental Question
- What are we trying to accomplish with online discussions?

Some Objectives
- Socializing/building learning community (e.g., intros)
- Keeping everyone on same page
- Letting students help/mentor each other (and saving your time)
- Focusing
- Engaging/grappling with course content
- Problem solving and/or critical thinking
- Demonstrating mastery of course material
- Students creating/sharing course material
- Test prep
- Instructor getting feedback

> What else?
Number, Duration and Value of Discussion Assignments?

Value of Discussion Assignments
- Cumulatively: 20-40% of grade
- Other approaches?

Discussion Formats
- Open ended
- Instructor posts question/assignment then students respond
- Same as above + required student-to-student replies

Discussion Formats, cont.
- Continuum: Organic to Pedantic

Number & Duration of Discussion Assignments
- 8-10 weekly assignments
  - Plus "General Discussion Board"
- 5 two-week assignments
- One big free-for-all
- Other approaches?

Communicating Your Expectations
- Role of Discussions in Course
  - Periphery?
  - Heart?
Expectations, cont.

Discussion grading scheme:
- 27-30 pts. – Exceptional Participation
- 24-26 pts. – Very Good Participation
- 21-23 pts. – Average Participation
- 20 or fewer pts. – Below Average Participation
- 0 – Did Not Participate

Expectations, cont.

Plagiarism?

Writing Standards
- Continuum: Texting to Scholarly Writing

Expectations, cont.

“Discussion Board Writing Tips”

Two of My Quirks . . .

Redundancy
- No “Discussion” link/button on course home page
Deadlines within Weekly Schedule

- One, two, three?
- When?
- "End-of-work-week approach"

Catch-22

- The more successful your discussion assignments are, the more time you may spend interacting and/or grading?
- Hours/week?

Grading

- Timing?
- Additional feedback?

Instructor's Roles in Discussion?

My Approach

- Detailed weekly discussion assignment appears 4 pm Friday
- Requires research and initial post by 4 pm Wednesday
- Requires structured responses to other students by 4 pm Friday

II. Examples
My Approach

“I encourage you to participate much more than simply the 3 required weekly postings; students who are working toward a high grade in the course will make at least 4 or 5 postings weekly.”

Strongly emphasize...

- Spatial relationships: Interpretation of maps
- Interdisciplinary nature of geography
- Current events

Discussion Example #1

1) Original post: Post link to population distribution map for a state or province, and 5-sentence (min.) explanation of possible links between pop. distrib. and physical geog.

2) Reply: Explain why you agree/disagree with original post, and give additional interpretation of map in 5+ sentences.

Wisconsin - 2000 Population Density
Discussion Example #2

1) Post a summary of a current news article concerning religion in a SE Asian country. Relate content directly to our text readings about SE Asian history and culture.
2) Post substantive responses in which you add factual info strongly related to the topic of the original post.

Discussion Example #3 - Test Prep.

1) Post one short-answer question about each of the 4 chapters that will be covered on next week’s midterm.
2) Respond by providing answers of 15-plus words to another student’s set of questions.

Discussion Example #4 - PowerPoint

1) Post a 7-slide PowerPoint about the geography of contemporary migration to/from within a developing country.
2) View everyone’s PowerPoint; content will be covered on final exam.

Discussion Example #5

1) Post a detailed description of the ideal European city for relocation of a worldly OSU graduate. Consider employment prospects, cost of living, environmental quality, natural hazards, recreation, safety, entertainment, etc.
2) Cite geographic facts to explain why you agree or disagree.

Discussion Example #6

1) Find a thematic map of India. Explain the spatial patterns visible on the map and how they relate to SE Asian geographic themes we’ve studied.
2) Describe ways in which you agree/disagree with original post, and give additional interpretation of map.

Discussion Example #7

1) View the 4 attached images of contemporary China. Interpret one of them in terms of significant concepts and themes of E. Asian geography.
2) Substantively add to the interpretations of 2 photos other than the image you chose in your original post.
III. Best Practices

**Best Practices**

- Put a premium on organization
  - Integrate discussion assignments into curriculum
  - Link to course objectives/learning outcomes
  - Split class into groups as needed

- Make expectations clear
  - Schedule
  - Grade %
  - Level of participation
  - Grading criteria/hubrics
  - Notes
  - Caliber of writing
**Best Practices**

- Set high standards at outset
- Follow through with feedback
  - Answer student questions rapidly
  - Timely grading
  - Individual communication as needed
    - e.g., encourage students to take on other roles
- Be present
  - Be supportive/enthusiastic
  - Push/challenge
  - Play devil’s advocate as needed

**Best Practices**

Use variety of assignments/approaches:
- Open-ended starter questions
  - (Avoid yes/no questions!)
- Focused assignments
- Teamwork
- Student ownership

**Best Practices**

Start and end well!
- Intros at start
- Wrap-up concluding activity at end
- Model what is expected

**Resources**

- Foothill College Innovative Technology Academic Computing (Foothill College Innovative Technology Academic Computing), *Creating, Facilitating, and Sustaining Online Education.enumeration.* [waccc.submissional.com/courses/1376/](waccc.submissional.com/courses/1376/)
- George Mason University Center for Online Learning (George Mason University Center for Online Learning), *Elephant Strategies.* [www.george-mason.edu/academic/online-learning/strategies/](www.george-mason.edu/academic/online-learning/strategies/)
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln Online Teaching and Learning, *Best Practices: Ten and Ten.* [www.unl.edu/onlinelearning/strategies/](www.unl.edu/onlinelearning/strategies/)

**Selected Journals**

- Journal of Educational Change
- American Journal of Distance Education
- Adult Learning
- Adult Education Quarterly
- Journal of Educational Technology Systems

**Questions?**
Thank you!