

I have been really gratified by the depth of engagement I've seen from most of my students since we went on line. I am teaching two courses, both of which were designed to be discussion courses. One has 19 students and the other 17. When we went on line, I decided to do the same thing in both courses. Three times a week, I record a 15-20 mini-lecture on Collaborate: one on Friday afternoon as a preview for the next week, alerting the students to issues I want them to be thinking about and giving them some guidance in the reading I've assigned; then I put up lectures for them to listen to on Monday and Wednesday mornings covering the material assigned for those days. The students are then required to post on the discussion board by Monday and Wednesday afternoons responding to the readings and the lecture. Finally, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I post a longish response addressing as many of the issues that came up in the student posts as I can. It is not a particularly imaginative way of teaching, but almost from the start I was impressed by how seriously most of the students were taking their posts. I've used the Blackboard discussion board many times before, mostly having students post before class. The posts I am getting now are way better than what I used to get. When I asked the students in one of the classes for feedback, one suggestion was that I divide the class so that each day one set of students is posting and another set is responding to their posts. We have been doing that for the past couple of weeks and it has worked very well.

Is this creating a sense of community or belonging? I don't know. But it is producing engagement, for both the students and me. It's really helped to keep me going!