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Reflections on using online discussions in distance learning

Abstract

Providing facilities for online discussions helps to overcome the problem of isolation experienced by distance education students. In a course for archivists and records managers, an assessment in which students are required to use electronic discussion boards provides them with opportunities to engage in discussions of professional issues that they might encounter in the workplace. Discussions are most active when problems require students to make a choice and defend it and encourage students to search more widely for resources and examples that would justify that choice. This assessment strategy also provides an opportunity for individuals to gauge the quality of other students' contributions and thus benchmark the quality of their own work. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning through the discussions and comments have been favourable.