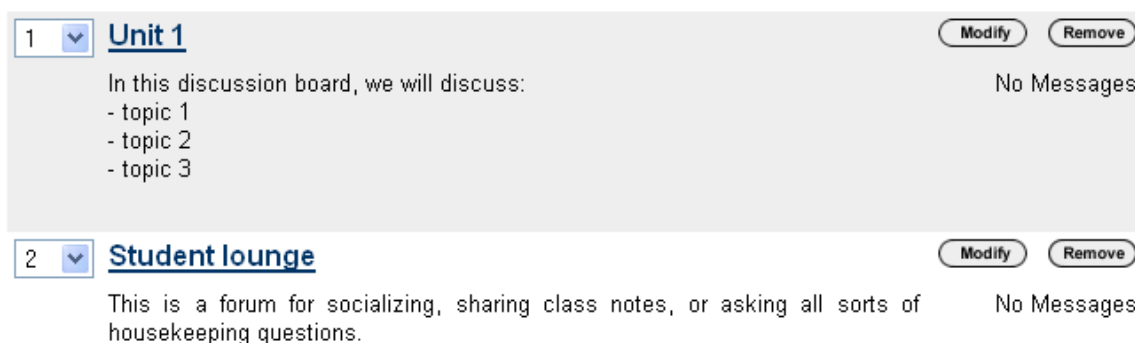## Managing Discussion Posts

Hi! This is Shiao-Chuan Kung with the Educational Technologies Group of ICIT. Welcome to this week's episode of Blackboard Tip of the week.

Last week, we talked about encouraging students to participate in discussion forums on Blackboard. Once you're successful at it, you may face the challenge of having to manage large numbers of postings. Let me suggest several strategies you could consider using.

Many instructors initially think that they need to respond to every student posting. Sometimes, however, it might be pedagogically sound to have students respond to each other and only intervene at key moments. For example, you could number them off and have all the 1's start the discussion. Then, you can ask all the 2's to post responses with questions and counterexamples. You could then monitor the discussions, step in to deal with major misconceptions or to ask prompting questions such as "Can you put it another way?" or "What would someone who disagrees say?"

Another thing you could do is to organize small group discussions and assign roles to different members. One of the students might be the person who keeps the group focused. Another could be the one who summarizes and shares the results with the class. Alternatively, you could ask small groups to propose discussion topics for the class, moderate the forum for a limited amount of time and then summarize the key ideas. No matter what you decide to do, it is important to let students know early on how often you might participate in the discussion board and what your role will be.

Using Blackboard, the simplest way to prevent discussion boards from getting unwieldy is to create forums to keep the discussions organized. You might want to have discussion forums for all major themes or units in your course. Then, within each forum you can create threads for the different topics of discussion. Remember that forums are the broader categories and threads are the subcategories within forums. You can allow students to create threads but you must create forums yourself.

You might consider creating, in addition to content-related forums, one called "water cooler" or "student lounge" for topics not strictly related to class content. That's a place where students can post messages for socializing, sharing class notes, or asking all sorts of housekeeping questions. Designating specific forums for certain kinds of discussions can help forums stay organized and focused.
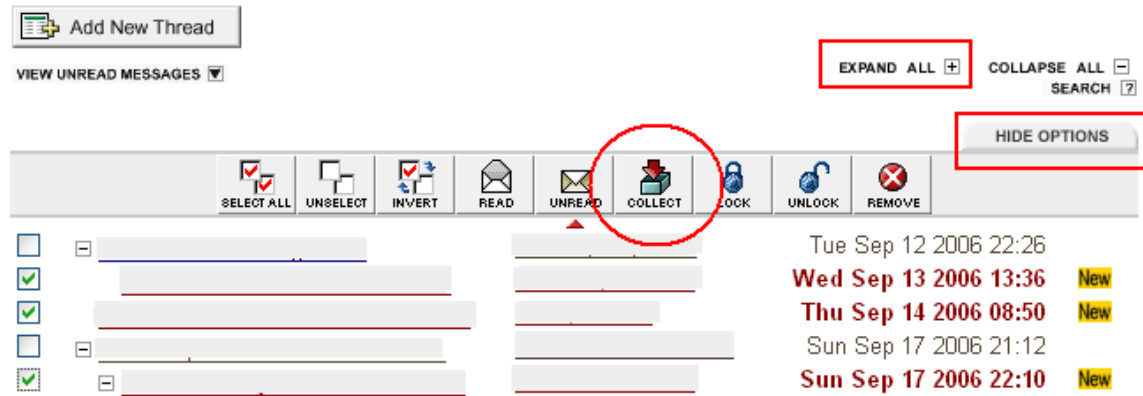
Another thing that might help when there are lots of postings in your discussion forums is to gather and view only the new messages. Blackboard allows you to collect messages and display them together. To do this, you would open a forum and expand all the threads. The postings you have not read appear in a different color. Click on the grey tab to the right of the screen called "show options" to access a series of tools. Put a checkmark in the box in front of all the messages that you have not read and then click on the "collect" button. Blackboard will then display all your unread posting on the next screen. This is a shortcut way to view all the unread postings without clicking on each one and opening them individually.

One last recommendation that might help you work with discussion boards efficiently is to renumber the forums so that the active ones appear at the top of the list. By assigning a current forum a small number like 1 or 2 makes it easier to find the discussions in progress.

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/icit/trc/workshops/index.shtml

In summary, consider handling large numbers of posts in discussion boards by defining your role and the roles of the student participants, by creating different discussion forums for different purposes, by collecting new posts and by renumbering the forums so that the most recent appear on the top. If you'd like detailed instructions about the tips mentioned in this podcast, please see the file attached to this podcast episode. You can also drop by the Technology Resource Center at C104 Hunter North or come to one of our workshops: Introduction to Communication Tools or Facilitating Online Discussions.

Do you have an idea for a Bb tip? Drop us an email at training@hunter.cuny.edu. Thank you for listening and please join us next time for a new Bb Tip of the Week.