



## Ten Ways to Foster DE Learning Communities

Learning communities are built upon students' interaction with their peers as well as with the instructor, and thrive on engaging dialogue. Here are ten ways to foster learning communities at a distance:

1. Establish clear expectations and requirements for online activity.
2. State when and what students should expect from the instructor in terms of presence via feedback and interaction.
3. Make online discussions relevant; articulate outcomes and show their relationship to learning activities and course goals.
4. Actively model ideal discussion activity and techniques for furthering dialogue.
5. Provide examples of who was participating appropriately; if discussion is insufficient be sure to let the class know.
6. Use synchronous activity (e.g. chat) to negotiate meaning and spark personal connections.
7. Promote dialogue, not just speech; avoid online discussion prompts that call for a single, purely fact-based answer.
8. Focus on the academic nature of the dialogue; encourage students to include references in discussion postings.
9. Set up team projects, collaborative assignments, or peer review groups. Have student groups interact with other groups.
10. Mail a weekly announcement to the class as a group to wrap up a discussion, introduce a lesson, indicate due dates, etc.

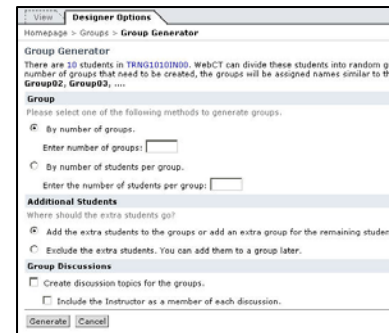
--Jared Stein, Instructional Designer

## WebCT Tip of the Day

Use the **Student Presentations** tool to group students into teams. You can add students to groups manually or randomly compose groups determined by group size or number of groups. The Student Presentations tool allows each group to post and share files, and can create a private Discussions topic folder for each group.

To generate new groups, add and enter the Student Presentations tool:

1. Click **Generate Groups** from the **Actions** menu.
2. Choose to divide the course by number of groups or number of students per group (**Figure 1**).
3. Choose how you wish to deal with any remainder students.
4. You choose to have WebCT create a private discussion topic for each group.
5. Click **Generate** to finish.



The screenshot shows the 'Designer Options' dialog box for the 'Group Generator' tool. The breadcrumb trail is 'Homepage > Groups > Group Generator'. The text indicates there are 20 students in TRN01010000 and that WebCT will divide them into random groups. The 'Group Generator' section has two radio buttons: 'By number of groups' (selected) and 'By number of students per group'. Below these are input fields for 'Enter number of groups' and 'Enter the number of students per group'. The 'Additional Students' section has two radio buttons: 'Add the extra students to the groups or add an extra group for the remaining students' (selected) and 'Exclude the extra students. You can add them to a group later.'. The 'Group Discussions' section has two checkboxes: 'Create discussion topics for the groups' (unchecked) and 'Include the Instructor as a member of each discussion' (unchecked). At the bottom are 'Generate' and 'Cancel' buttons.

Figure 1 Options for generating groups.

If you need more help with this tool, call Jared (x8929) or Nate (x8928).

## This Month's Training and Workshops

Our workshops and trainings are designed for Distance Education faculty, though all UVSC faculty members are welcome to attend.

For more details on these and other Technology Enhanced Teaching workshops visit our web site at [www.uvsc.edu/disted/faculty](http://www.uvsc.edu/disted/faculty)

Title	Date	Time	Place
WebCT: Managing and Editing Files	7/1	3-4pm	CS 615B
WebCT: Building Online Lessons	7/1	4-5pm	CS 615B
Zip! Zip! Using Zip Compression	7/7	12-1pm	CS 615B
Intro to Presentations with PowerPoint	7/8	3-5pm	CS 615B
PowerPoint Design	7/8	4-5pm	CS 615B
WebCT Rollover	7/14	12-1pm	CS 615B
Excel in a Nutshell I & II	7/15	3-5pm	CS 615B
WebCT Grades with Excel	7/19	12-1pm	CS 615B
WebCT Review	7/21	12-1pm	CS 615B
WebCT Intro I: Why Use WebCT?	7/22	3-4pm	CS 615B
WebCT Intro II: WebCT Tools	7/22	4-5pm	CS 615B

To reserve your seat e-mail Jared Stein, [steinja@uvsc.edu](mailto:steinja@uvsc.edu).

### Did You Know?

Not all learners embrace the idea of learning communities; you can motivate students to participate in collaborative activities by explicitly stating how such activities are relevant and relate to course goals and objectives.

### More on this topic...

Barab, S., Thomas, M., & Merrill, H. (2001). *Online Learning: From Information Dissemination to Fostering Collaboration*. *Jl. of Interactive Learning Research*, 12(1), 105-143.  
Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (1999). *Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.

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This newsletter was published for Distance Education by the Technology Enhanced Teaching Center at Utah Valley State College.

For more information on this newsletter or how you can contribute:  
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