

Guide to Managing CSU Subject Forums

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Overview

The *Guide to Managing CSU Subject Forums* (2003) is a tool to assist Charles Sturt University academic staff with their learning and teaching practices through subject forums. The University has in recent years sought to expand the use of Internet technology within its internal and distance programs with the principal aim of expanding its service to students as an assistance to their learning. Utilising electronic forums is seen as an integral part of this program.

Importantly, it should be noted that benefit to be derived from subject forums is not limited to students. When used correctly, forums can be a great asset to teaching staff.

This guide seeks to contribute towards benefits for staff and students by describing examples of effective use and management of subject forums.

The four theme areas canvassed are:

- Part 1: Outlines the potential benefits of forums, provides examples of how they can be used to enhance learning and teaching, and also presents various examples of forum use.
- Part 2: Discusses ways to increase forum usage and manage forum participation.
- Part 3: Describes how you might evaluate the use of your subject forum.
- Part 4: Contains references, a list of useful resources and additional relevant material in the appendices.

Prerequisites

The '*Guide to Managing CSU Subject Forums*' is not designed to introduce the reader to CSU forums, nor to provide technical instruction about forum use. However, as terminology and forum features mentioned in this guide assume the reader already has such knowledge, it is recommended that guides containing the relevant information be read prior to accessing this document unless the reader is already quite familiar with CSU forum operation and usage. If required, appropriate guides should be available within the Forum section of the CSU website (<http://forums.csu.edu.au/>).

Part 1: Using Forums

How forums can help learning and teaching

If used effectively, forums can be used to significantly enhance the learning and teaching experience of any course. Listed below are just some of the benefits to be derived from effective forum use.

Learning benefits

By using a forum, learners are able to:

- Interact with others involved in the subject – both students and academics;
- Interact with the material;
- Direct the learning that takes place;
- Suggest connections and enter discussions with others about the issues, the material, the skills and the processes that may be involved in a particular subject area;
- Participate in an intellectual community that risks presenting ideas, puts forward points, and challenges assumptions and views; and
- Be exposed to conflicting views, interpretations, understanding and ways of organising knowledge.

Teaching benefits

Academic staff can use forums to:

- Increase interaction between students and students/academic in a supportive and encouraging way, thereby actively contributing to the student-content interaction;
- Raise a range of issues or insights in a discussion;
- Suggest new avenues for exploration or discussion;
- Extend students' thinking, questioning, problem solving, analysing and synthesising abilities; and
- Raise issues and debates in a subject area and have students draw on their various experiences, world views and backgrounds to present their perspectives on pertinent issues and debates.

Ways that forums can be used

Using the forum as a tool for discussion

To actively engage students in discussion requires sound planning and management. If you merely intend to use the forum as a means of updating and informing your students of various curriculum oriented content, it may be unnecessary for you to engage students in lengthy debates. However, if your intention is to actively discuss and assess student understanding of subject concepts, consider using some of the following strategies.

Posing questions for recall of facts or specific information

- Pose simple questions that allow students the opportunity to answer without too much risk. A low risk question might only require that students find appropriate information (no analysis or synthesis required).
- If you intend to provide a lot of these recall type questions, it may be worthwhile considering using OASIS, CSU's Online Assessment Submission Information System to provide feedback on student progress.
- After a few postings of various simple questions you may like to lead into more problem based questions which require further analysis and understanding of concepts.

Posing questions that encourage higher level thought processes and promote discussion

- These questions require the student to research, think about a problem and post a response to the question or problem posed.
- Student responses should allow scope for further discussion and probing within the forum.
- It is important to thread discussion and tie all points together whilst promoting further discussion. This allows for easier management of posts and for students to see the relevance and correlation between various issues raised.

Brainstorming

- Brainstorming requires simple non-evaluated responses from students and all ideas should be encouraged and analysed.
- The results of the brainstorming then need to be synthesised and promoted for further discussion. This task could be completed by a nominated student, yourself or all students.

Critiques

- Students are asked to critique relevant articles and post the review on the forum.
- Students should restrict their comments to one or two pertinent points so that not all points are exhausted before all students can post.

Utilising the WWW

- Being online allows the flexibility of providing links to websites that contain information relevant to current discussions or subject content.
- You can direct students to websites you have identified and ask them to post one or two points about the value or lack of value of the site.
- You may have students search for relevant websites and critique them. This may also assist you in your search for quality information on the web whilst developing the analytical research skills of the students.

Encouraging reflection

- Ask students to reflect on subject concepts and indicate areas they found to be either perplexing or enjoyable (asking for both reduces the degree of 'risk' for students posting to the forum.)
- Once you have elicited a few responses you may then like to weave the discussion and promote one or two points for further examination.
- This method also allows for student evaluation of the subject content, and how it is written and presented. Areas of misunderstanding may need to be revised prior to the next teaching session.

Using guest lecturers

- The use of a guest lecturer can provide valuable insight into subject content.
- A guest lecturer could be an expert in the subject from anywhere in the world.
- Ensure that students have plenty of time to prepare questions and research the topics to be discussed.
- Ask the guest lecturer to post messages that are likely to elicit discussion since students will seldom ask questions without prior prompting and information.
- The guest lecturer will require a CSU username and password, which at the time of printing can be obtained through the *ad hoc* access form (IT Services) which is accessible and able to be completed online via '*my.csu*'.

Using the forum for feedback and support

- Students can post questions and receive advice regarding various issues such as assessment, concept clarification and residential school. If the number of postings regarding support issues becomes very large it is easier to develop an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document (see pg 16) which can be either published online or added as an attachment to your initial posting (see pg 10).
- You should carefully monitor student postings to assess the degree of student understanding. By doing so, students who seem to be having difficulty can be identified early and additional support can be administered.

Using forums for assessment

Forums can be used for both formative and summative assessment tasks. For reasons concerned with access and equity, it may be wiser to use formative rather than summative assessment activities.

- One of the great advantages in using forums for assessment lies in the capability of the medium to allow students to engage in 'thinking work' and to revisit, rework and reflect in their postings.
- There are many ways forums can be used in formative assessment, among them:
 - Collaborative group reports to the forum;
 - Summarising issues for the weekly topic of study;
 - Conducting debates with the teacher as facilitator; and
 - Posting reflections on what has been learned.
- Common feedback on assignments can be posted to the forum for the benefit of the class.

Modes of forum based activity, a summary

Table 1: Summary of possible communication using current forum format

Scenarios	Prepared computer-based materials delivered on the forum	Computer-enhanced tools e.g. forms, databases, problem solving tools	Asynchronous interactions
Teacher student relationship:	Teacher led	Student led	Teacher or student led
Individual/group oriented:	Individual	Individual	Group
Examples of activities:	Reading, questioning, drill and practice, simulations	Problem-solving, project method, experiential or action learning	Discovery method, group discussions, team projects
Development:	Pre-prepared	Pre-prepared or collected	Situational
Communication mode (media):	Prepared text, film, audio, hypertext, simulations, exercises	Collected and referred text, film, audio, hypertext, conferences	Asynchronous exchange of text, film, audio
Best suited to:	Measurable cognitive goals particularly recall of facts, comprehension and application	Practical and problem solving skills particularly analysis and syntheses of elements of problems	Convergent team skills and problem solving requiring development of ideas and plans
Role of the teacher:	Developer and manager of instruction predetermining learning outcomes, activities and assessment	Locator and organiser of resources	Facilitator of group interactions, provider of resources
Role of student:	Reading, practice, receiving feedback	Self-directed learner	Team member

Tips for effective forum use

Communication issues

- The lack of both verbal and visual cues in the online forum environment can cause misunderstanding between the lecturer and the students and between students.
- Forum messages should be written succinctly.
- Instructions should be explicit, without need for further clarification.
- To write effective messages, forum users need to develop skills in analysing and phrasing questions in order to elicit the sorts of responses required.

Note: see Appendix 4 for examples.

How to Increase forum participation

Strategies that may be used to encourage student use of forums include:

- Ask students to access the forum early in the session and post a message introducing themselves.
- Indicate that students can 'lurk' or actively post messages, but the goal is for students to at least access and read the messages.
- Pose problems that require student discussion.
- Encourage students to answer each other's questions rather than relying on the lecturer to do so.
- Monitor forum use so that any confusion that arises is quickly clarified.
- Provide information regarding supplemental resources such as the lecturer's online subject page where various online work sheets, trial exam papers, etc. may be housed.
- Disseminate information about the organisation of a residential school.
- Use the forum to contact students with up to date information which may be pertinent to their studies.

Part 2: Managing forums

This section focuses on effective strategies that you, the academic, can use to promote a quality learning forum. The structure and content of this section is guided by the work of Palloff and Pratt (1999) as shown below.

Building an online community

Palloff & Pratt (1999) suggest some basic steps to help build an online community using the forum:

- ❖ Clearly define the purpose of the group;
- ❖ Promote effective leadership from within;
- ❖ Define norms and a clear code of conduct (protocols);
- ❖ Allow a range of member roles;
- ❖ Allow for and facilitate subgroups; and
- ❖ Allow members to resolve their own conflicts (given that this process does not interfere with the teaching and learning process).

Purpose of the Group

The Initial Posting

To effectively manage and operate a forum certain guidelines need to be established in the initial posting.

- You should post a message to the forum before or within the first week of the teaching session.
- This message should indicate to the students how postings will be conducted, when you will review postings, and why the forum will be used.
- The type of language used, particularly in early forum postings, has a large influence on how students respond to forum activities, thus you should try to convey a sense of enthusiasm on the forum.
- Sometimes a photo of yourself or a link to your personal website may be a valuable tool for setting up a non-threatening environment within the group.
- It is important to leave students with a task e.g. the initial posting could ask students to indicate their location (in order to form study groups), or could ask students about current work and life experiences that may relate to the subject.

Hint: Academics can use the *email all* function in the management tools to ensure that all students are notified of the initial posting.

Note: see Appendix 1 for examples of initial postings.

Leadership

Foster (1993: 200) describes leadership as championing a vision, making decisions, selecting teams, developing and motivating and ensuring good communication. These have perhaps been difficult for lecturers using traditional distance technologies especially those centred on text because the full personality of the lecturer is difficult to convey in writing. The use of forums provides greater opportunities in these areas because it is possible to be responsive to students and because a variety of media can be applied rapidly. For example, should students find the going tough during their course, a short encouraging talk from the lecturer can be videotaped and distributed to all students in a short time without expensive production and distribution facilities. As with face to face teaching, lecturers can respond to student concerns with humour, compassion, sadness, or with earnestness as the circumstance demands.

The outcome of good leadership is a robust conversation among students where innovative and dissenting views are encouraged and subjected to analysis. Such analysis applies to individual messages and the search for themes and relationships and patterns across messages.

Code of conduct

Lecturers depending on the discipline and outcomes sought will need to set guidelines for students which balance robust debate with good manners and consideration for individuals. Some standards (Driscoll, 1998: 111, 117) that could be considered include:

- Spelling and grammar;
- Use of non-discriminatory language;
- Respect for others;
- Avoidance of non-subject related uses particularly harassment;
- Conciseness and completeness;
- Size of files transmitted and ability of others to read file types, e.g., video, animation and graphics files; and
- Descriptive titles.

It is also useful to set policy on collaborative activities. Such policy could address:

Messages:

- Ownership and permission;
- Intellectual property;
- Confidential information and privacy.

Behaviour:

- Inclusiveness;
- Disruption to other learners;
- Misrepresentation;
- Profanity and pornography; and
- Disputes/disagreements and conflict resolution.

Note: see Appendix 3 for Forum Manager: Rights as Subject Coordinators.

Possible member roles

Example 1 – Forums for student discussion

In subjects where the nature of topics raised is particularly pertinent and thought provoking, forum use may be quite active without extensive input from the academic. In many cases, students have ideas and opinions that they are willing and eager to share, the forum providing a convenient avenue through which students are able to discuss their ideas. Discussions tend to ‘roll-on’ or ‘snowball’, with students participating as they feel they have something to contribute, or a viewpoint to express.

It is recommended for a forum such as this, that the lecturer views the forum at least twice a week. The forum is primarily student-centred, thereby allowing for a feeling of ownership. The lecturer comments on posts and poses probing questions to promote and guide discussion only where needed.

This style of forum use works well for subjects in which it is important that students develop discussion skills, and where the topics lend themselves to student interaction. Other subjects may require more lecturer input to encourage the flow of student discussion and probe for important concepts.

Example 2 – Forums for information exchange between on-campus and off-campus students

Some forums are primarily used as an information exchange site. This is particularly effective when on-campus and off-campus students use the same forum, and the lecturer is able to incorporate notes and presentations made by internal students to supplement the DE package.

The lecturer may also post tutorial notes to the forum for both cohorts, and internal students may be required to post summaries of their tutorial papers. Distance students may also have the opportunity of posting a summary of their tutorial papers. This strategy provides cross fertilisation between cohorts thereby enriching the overall learning experience for both on-campus and off-campus students. In one Faculty of Arts subject where this strategy has been used, students have noted the enormous benefit in accessing peer summaries and lecture notes.

Example 3 – Forums that supplement residential schools

Many subjects that are offered via distance mode include a compulsory residential school which students must attend for hands-on practical exercises. Particularly in this, but also in other types of subjects, forums have been used effectively by lecturers to:

- Post a (subject) fact of the week;
- Introduce the subject material for the week ahead;
- Direct students to relevant resources on the World Wide Web (WWW).

While most of this information may be available in the study guide, including it in a forum posting serves to remind students of the goals for the week and reinforces the key learning objectives.

In a Faculty of Science and Agriculture subject where such forum strategies were used, each forum message included a small piece of subject-oriented trivia which detailed bizarre and often unknown information concerning the subject. This strategy provided a non-threatening and enjoyable reason for students to regularly access the forum, and kept them up to date and well informed of the expectations of the subject. As in many such subjects, the forum was an important means of communication which allowed for interaction between lecturer and students and amongst students themselves to supplement the residential school.

When the educational benefits of these strategies were evaluated, students were extremely positive and appreciated the level of input, the explicit goals and the incorporation of supplementary learning resources. They also commented on how much they had enjoyed the forum trivia and how communicating with their peers on the forum had helped reduce their feelings of isolation.

Example 4 – Forum use with on-campus students

In relation to on-campus students, forum activities that focus on information exchange to stimulate and enhance classroom discussions and questions can be very useful.

- Students may be expected to download and read specific attachments that are posted to the forum prior to each lecture. This allows students to focus on lecture content without the need to transcribe notes.
- The forum may be used for exchanging and evaluating relevant websites.
- The incorporation of such forum strategies serves to facilitate discussion within the classroom as opposed to within the forum.

Forum Help

The aforementioned strategies are simply examples that can be refined to assist in the promotion of teaching and learning through the forums. You are encouraged to discuss these strategies with your School-based educational designer who will be able to provide further assistance with using the forums, promoting discussion, and utilising the management tools.

Facilitating sub-groups

Sub-forums

The creation of sub-forums is an organisational technique that can make the task of monitoring forum activity much easier and potentially enhance the teaching and learning experience. Sub-forums may be used as a means of decreasing the number of social messages posted in the main forum, or it may be designed to allow for special focus groups within the subject being able to focus on a topic of particular interest to them. Further valid purposes for creating sub-forums include the following:

- For segregating messages;
- To generate smaller study groups (e.g., students are organised into small groups for specific discussions where they may be more willing to contribute because it is easier to build rapport with the other members).
- For 'pyramiding' or 'snowballing', where students discuss a topic as small group work. This group is then expanded until everyone 'returns' to the main subject forum.
- To develop a social environment where students may post messages that are not related to forum tasks. Such a sub-forum should be clearly labelled (e.g., social) and students should be encouraged to post all social messages to this sub-forum.

Note: It is recommended that the generation of a sub-forum is completed early in the teaching session to prevent any confusion.

Tip: Messages posted in the parent forum can be moved to the sub-forum using the management tools. This prevents students replying to that message in the parent forum and generating any further discussion.

Conflict self-resolution

“.....groups can work together to solve problems, argue about interpretations, negotiate meaning, or engage in other educational activities including coaching, modelling and scaffolding performance. While conferencing, the user is electronically engaged in discussion and interaction with peers and experts in a process of social negotiation. Knowledge construction occurs when students explore issues, take positions, discuss their positions in an argumentative format and reflect on and re-evaluate their positions.” (Jonassen, D. et al 1995)

Tips for managing forums

Time management

- Along with regular checking and filtering of messages, time management skills are important to effective forum management.
- Regular contact with students via the online forum is of paramount importance, otherwise students will think that their messages are not being received or attended to, resulting in students leaving the forum. However, you should not try to visit the forum every day, or reply to each posting as it appears.
- Allow students time to reflect on other students' postings, and they may be able to help their fellow students without your help, although you should monitor this in case students give incorrect answers or advice. (Foster, 1993:199)

Using the email notification

- The email notification option allows the user to be informed via email of any new messages posted to the forum or when a reply is posted to a pre-selected message. Teaching staff are advised to activate this option in order to save time accessing the forum to check for messages.
- The notification of a new posting via email also contains the message content, allowing teaching staff to assess the need to reply without expending excess effort or time.
- The *my.csu* web site also allows the user to rapidly access, and assess the number of new messages posted to any forum to which the user subscribes.
- When utilising the email notification option there is a potential for 'flooding' of email messages as discussion on the forum increases. If you receive excess emails, access the forums and de-select the email notification option.

FAQ's – Frequently Asked Questions

- It is a good idea to start developing a set of FAQ that can be posted as an attachment, or published separately on the Web.
- Students may find answers to some of their questions without contacting you.
- During the session, you may become aware of other FAQ that can be added to the list for the next offering of the subject.

Part 3: Evaluating Forums

How to check that your forum is working well

In order to answer this question, the work of Graham et al 1999, Flynn 2000 and Jonassen et al 1995 will be drawn on.

The evaluation of educational programs is often difficult, and analysis of the effectiveness of using CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) is no exception. The distinction between the evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning and the functionality of the medium is crucial as access statistics and the number of messages do not indicate student learning.

Care needs to be taken not to place too much emphasis on quantifiable outcomes such as the marks gained in the subject or the number of times students used the system. **It is the content of the messages that display students' understanding of the theory, and qualitative feedback from students which indicates the value of their learning experience.** With students' learning outcomes, benefits are both tangible, such as improved understanding of the material, and intangible, such as a sense of belonging to a group. While marks indicate ability to conceptualise introductory theory, they may not reflect the educational process through which students have progressed. (Graham, M. 1999: 43-44)

Flynn (2000) suggests that to effectively evaluate an online course “significant weight must be placed on the **level** and **quality** of participation” and that to ascertain such, purposeful questions need to be asked.

For example:

In reference to the ‘level’ of the contributions submitted, questions such as the following could be asked.

- Was the length of responses appropriate and as specified?
- Was the level of spelling and grammar appropriate and as specified?
- Were the academic protocols applied, appropriate and as specified?

In regard to contribution content, questions such as the following one can be formulated.

- Was there real depth to student response?

Criteria to help answer this final question are provided by Jonassen et al (1995).

Characteristics of cognitive thinking articulated through a message are:

- Offering up ideas or resources and inviting critique;
- Asking challenging questions;
- Articulating, explaining and supporting positions on issues;
- Exploring and supporting issues by adding explanations and examples;
- Reflecting and re-evaluating personal position.

Characteristics of interactive thinking are:

- Critiquing, challenging, discussing and expanding ideas of others;
- Negotiating interpretations, definitions and meanings;
- Summarising and modelling previous contributions;
- Proposing actions based on developed ideas.

To sum up the thoughts of these authors, forum evaluation should not be focussed on or restricted to quantifiable outcomes such as how many messages were posted to the forum. Rather, the evaluation of forums should be substantially qualitative in nature, focussing on evidence of learning contained within forum contributions.

Part 4: References, Resources and Appendices

References

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- Johnston, R. B. & Brennan, M. 1996, Planning or Organizing: the implications of theories of activity for management of operations' *International Journal of Management Science*, Vol. 24, No. 4, pp. 367-384.
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- Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. 1999, Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Rosenberg, M.J. 2001, *E-Learning; Strategies for Delivering Knowledge in the Digital Age*, McGraw Hill, New York.

Resources

CELT brochures

- Centre for Enhancing Learning and Teaching, Charles Sturt University. 2001, *Introducing online forums*, CSU, Bathurst NSW.
- Centre for Enhancing Learning and Teaching, Charles Sturt University. 2001, *Getting started with online forums*, CSU, Bathurst NSW.
- Centre for Enhancing Learning and Teaching, Charles Sturt University. 2001, *Suggested activities for online forums*, CSU, Bathurst NSW
- Centre for Enhancing Learning and Teaching, Charles Sturt University. 2001 *Formative and summative assessment using online forums*, CSU, Bathurst NSW.

Other Printed Resources

- Ko, S. & Rossen, S. 2001, *Teaching Online: A Practical Guide*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Salmon, G. 2000, *E-Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online*. Kogan Page, UK.
- White, K. W. & Weight, B. H. 2000, *The Online Teaching Guide: A Handbook of Attitudes, Strategies and Techniques for the Virtual Classroom*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Online Resources

e-Moderating: the key to teaching and learning online.

<http://oubs.open.ac.uk/e-moderating/>

e-Moderators, Consultants in Online Distance Education and Training.

www.eModerators.com

Teaching and Learning Styles that Facilitate Online Learning

www.tafe.sa.edu.au/lsrcs/one/natproj/tal

Appendices

Appendix 1: Examples of Initial Postings to a Forum

The figures below provide examples of initial messages posted to subject forums. Compare Figure 1 with Figure 2. Which you would be more likely to respond to?

Figure 1: Initial posting to a forum by an academic.

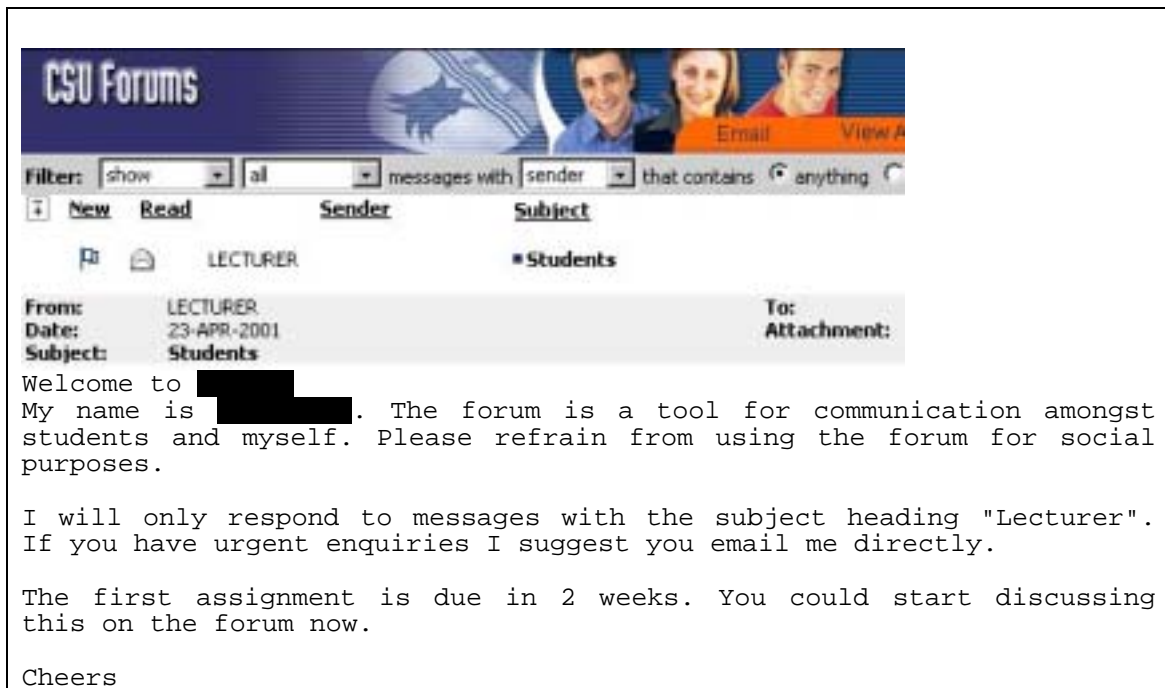



Figure 2: Another example of an initial message posted by a lecturer.



The screenshot shows an email interface for 'CSU Forums'. The header includes a search filter: 'Filter: show of messages with sender that contains anything this'. Below the header is a table with columns 'New', 'Read', 'Sender', and 'Subject'. A message is listed with 'LECTURER' as the sender and 'Welcome' as the subject. Below the table, the email details are shown: 'From: LECTURER', 'Date: 19-APR-2001', 'Subject: Welcome', 'To: Test', and 'Attachment: none'.

Welcome to [REDACTED]

My name is [REDACTED]. I have been teaching [REDACTED] for the last 3 years and have a general interest in incorporating technology and education. My current research interests lie in examining the role of UV-B radiation in inducing photo-protective mechanisms in plants. Sounds exciting :-)

Well how can we keep in touch?...

My consultation hours are Tuesday's 9am to 12pm during which times I will be in my office on phone XXXXXX for matters of a personal or urgent nature.

PLEASE use the forum to post questions and discuss any issues you desire, both subject related and social. I will check and respond to the forum at least twice a week on Monday and Thursday. Don't panic if I have not responded immediately. Try and reply to other students' questions if you can. I will monitor these responses and help out as well. I will post all responses to emails on the forum so please use this facility to check for previous posted answers and to communicate with me and more importantly amongst yourselves. I will also use the forum to discuss various contentious topics raised in the Modules. These will be a great opportunity to share your insights and interpretations with your classmates.

As we go along I will post some messages which will have some revision questions and supplemental resources such as web sites and various documents. If you find a great web site post it to your fellow students.

Well, enough from me. Let's hear from you. I would like you all now to post a welcome message indicating where you are from (you may be able to form study groups or assist in travel for the res school) and any current experiences which relate to this subject.

I look forward to meeting you at the res school.

The more open and friendly tone of Figure 2 reduces the anxiety felt by students attempting to post their own first message and the use of emoticons (☺) further enhances the open feeling of the message. A list of emoticons is found in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2: The Use of Emoticons

Due to the lack of verbal and visual cues when using computer mediated communications, such as the forum, an electronic *paralanguage* has been developed to assist in enhancing the visual emotional cues. The use of 'emoticons' can often clarify the intended nature of the message whilst adding individuality and personality. Emoticons are character-based representations of emotional status (e.g. :-), resembles a smile placed sideways).

The following table lists some of the more common emoticons.

Emoticon characters	What it means
;-)	Winking
:-)	Happy (smiling)
:-D	Very happy (laughing)
:-]	Silly grin
:-(Sad
(:-(Very unhappy
:-C	Shocked
:-O	Shocked even more
:-/	Uncommitted
:-	No reaction or scowling
@>-->--	A rose, for you
:!-(Crying
:-}	Wry
>:-(Grimacing

Appendix 3: Forum Manager: Rights as Subject Coordinators

You have the **right** to remove:

This refers to all data or material that falls within the categories described in points (i) to (v) below, and that which contravenes the CSU “Code of Conduct”.

- Prohibited data or material:
 - (i) describes, depicts, express or otherwise uses matters of sex, drug misuse or addiction, crime, cruelty, violence or revolting or abhorrent phenomena in such a way that they offend the standards of decency and propriety generally accepted by reasonable adults;
 - (ii) describes or depicts in a way that is likely to cause offence to a reasonable adult, a minor who is, or who appears to be, under 16 years of age whether the minor is engaged in sexual activity or not;
 - (iii) promotes, incites or instructs in matters of crime or violence;
 - (iv) discriminates against, harasses or vilifies any member of the public on the grounds of, sex, pregnancy, age, race, nationality, descent or ethnic background, religious background, marital status, disability, HIV/AIDS, sexual preference, homosexuality and transgender; or
 - (v) defames or could be reasonably anticipated to defame, any person, institution or company.
- fraudulent, unlawful, harassing or abusive, or offensive postings
- advertising
- off topic postings
- material highly likely to be misinterpreted
- students who use this facility to send private messages
- student who send messages that will not be of interest to other people in the group.

It is advisable for the Subject Coordinator to explain within the Forum, in broad terms, without identifying the student, the reason for a removal of a posting.

You have the **right** to identify to the University, but **not** to the Forum community, any student who posts using an alias if they post material that:

- is fraudulent, or unlawful,
- harassing or abusive, or offensive
- is threatening
- is in breach of any university regulation
- suggests they are suicidal.

You do **not** have the **right** to identify a student who posts using an alias on the grounds that:

- you just want to know who it is
- the student is making incorrect statements
- the student posts material negatively critical of others’ work or of the lecturer.

You do **not** have the **right** to provide additional information to the Forum community regarding a student who posts using either a correct name or an alias that:

- breaches a student’s privacy, i.e., identifies his/her employment, contact details, or marital status.

Appendix 4: Examples of Forum Communication


Figure 3: A lecturer has posted a weekly task for students to undertake. The instructions are not explicit but are open to a wide variety of interpretations, with the result that many students either do not post or do not meet the lecturer's expectations.



The screenshot shows the CSU Forums interface. At the top, there is a header with the text 'CSU Forums' and a navigation bar with 'Email' and 'View All' buttons. Below the header, there is a filter section with dropdown menus for 'show', 'all', 'messages with', 'sender', and 'that contains'. The main content area shows a message from 'LECTURER' with the subject 'TASK for Week 3'. The message text is: 'In this activity you need to find a web site that is related to 'microbiology'. Provide a critique of the site and post the URL to the forum.'

In this activity you need to find a web site that is related to 'microbiology'. Provide a critique of the site and post the URL to the forum.

Figure 4: Here the lecturer has provided excellent instructions for students, the result being concise postings carried out to the lecturer expectations. Note that the lecturer has also provided a statement regarding the relevance of the task.



The screenshot shows the CSU Forums interface. At the top, there is a header with the text 'CSU Forums' and a navigation bar with 'Email' and 'View All' buttons. Below the header, there is a filter section with dropdown menus for 'show', 'all', 'messages with', 'sender', and 'that contains'. The main content area shows a message from 'LECTURER' with the subject 'TASK for Week 3'. The message text is: 'Forum activity (relevance) The purpose of this activity is to share with the rest of the class, a list of websites that will be particularly useful for you in your career as a microbiologist. This task involves the following steps: (guidance) Carry out a search on the web (using any reputable search engine such as Altavista). Choose two or three promising sites and assess them in terms of: - relevance to this subject - ease of information gathering - how up to date the content is - quality and type of images - overall interest On the basis of this assessment post to the forum the URL of the best site you found, along with a short evaluation of the site based on the guidelines above. (reflection) Visit the sites posted by other students and see whether you agree or disagree with their assessment of particular sites. Post your observations to the forum.'

Forum activity
(relevance)
The purpose of this activity is to share with the rest of the class, a list of websites that will be particularly useful for you in your career as a microbiologist. This task involves the following steps:

(guidance)
Carry out a search on the web (using any reputable search engine such as Altavista).
Choose two or three promising sites and assess them in terms of:

- relevance to this subject
- ease of information gathering
- how up to date the content is
- quality and type of images
- overall interest

On the basis of this assessment post to the forum the URL of the best site you found, along with a short evaluation of the site based on the guidelines above.

(reflection)
Visit the sites posted by other students and see whether you agree or disagree with their assessment of particular sites. Post your observations to the forum.

Figure 5: Students have responded to a question posed. The lecturer monitoring the forum has noted an error in one of the replies and responded accordingly ('Close but...').

