

8 Myths about Online Communities for **Student Engagement**



What is Yellowdig?

We are on a mission to transform classrooms to build through organic, student-centered learning communities. Yellowdig is not a bolt on or a tool, but a learning platform that powers better learning and high impact instruction, while saving faculty valuable time.

8 Myths about Online Communities for Student Engagement

Talking to instructors who are new to building an online community for hybrid or online classes, our academic engagement experts often find there are a number of misconceptions around student participation and the role of the instructor. We have compiled a list of 8 myths and debunked them with the reality that has been seen across many colleges and universities.



Students need prompts to create good discussions and focusing them on a single topic is the only way to drive good, focused discussion about course-related topics.

Reality - Prompting students too much kills conversations, constricts learning, decreases motivation to participate, and gives students deadlines, which typically increases procrastination.

Unprompted discussions create more natural, relevant, and valuable conversations and learning opportunities; focus more on students having back-and-forth conversations about content some of them have posted, not on everyone posting content.

- This framework successfully mimics classroom conversations. [You would not require every student to reply to the same question in a classroom.](#)
- Students are empowered to talk about things relevant to their lives and careers.
- Conversations are allowed to ebb and flow naturally.
- Course topics can be blended together, allowing for true integration across them.

Read more about un-prompted discussions: [8 Tips for High-Quality, Open Conversations.](#)

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I need to review and grade every post to make sure students are posting valuable content.

Reality - By adopting a gameful learning system with a platform like [Yellowdig](#), the point system can automatically reward students who start and continue good conversations and then by add additional recognition with comments, instructor accolades, and reaction points, students are encouraged to create high-quality content.

- Students who do not post quality content will be easily identified based on lack of interactions and reactions from others.
- Poor posters earn fewer points in community set up with gameful learning principles because peers will not engage with their content.
- Those who do lower quality work must create more of it to reach their point goals.
- You can always adjust points if you feel they are not deserved.

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Smaller groups will create a more intimate setting and increased engagement; Large groups will overwhelm students.

Reality - There is a clear trade-off for smaller groups in that less content is available for students to read and get interested in compared to large communities.

- In small groups students visit their communities less often to see what they may have missed, which hurts overall participation.
- When students are in large online communities they still only see one post at a time as they scroll down the feed. Though the content in total might seem overwhelming, students consume it more like social media in that they find something interesting, read it, and then talk about it.
- The only way large communities will feel overwhelming is if students think they have to try to consume everything, rather than just find something interesting and truly discuss it, which instructors should make clear by setting expectations.

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I am going to need to dedicate a lot of time to an online community to make this valuable to students.

Most instructors can interact meaningfully with students and let their presence be known by spending only a few minutes a day in an education community platform like [Yellowdig](#).

- Visit regularly and in short bursts and you can make a bigger impact on students while spending less time than you would grading discussion posts or other short-answer assignments.
- Sharing links to your favorite posts or bringing those conversations into a synchronous session is a fast and easy way to tie the best Yellowdig interactions into your course and supplement your teaching with things you know your students are interested in.

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Students are just never going to be motivated to actually have meaningful discussions.

Reality - Most students are actually excited and willing to engage with other students around topics that are relevant to the course.

- This myth results from the standard discussion board framework not meeting students' social or learning needs; nobody likes to waste time on things they don't think are valuable.
- Students have the freedom to tailor what they share to what is most important or relevant to them, so they will be more likely to have meaningful conversations.

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Adult learners will not like a community with a gameful learning approach or be motivated by it; only my young undergrads are going to like this.

Reality – The flexibility of the point system is valuable to adults with full-time jobs and busy lives, and they get it.

- Even if every student is not super-motivated by points, it does create incentives for most students to behave in ways that make the Community more valuable for everyone.
- Grading in general can broadly be grouped under a means of gamifying education. Not every student is motivated by a grade, yet every reputable college and university uses grades in every class.

Hear from a student: Pallas, who had a 10 year gap between her undergrad at Harvard University and pursuing a Master's of Public Health at the University of Vermont, [shares her interpretation of Yellowdig's point system.](#)

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The points system is going to encourage popularity contests and remove the focus on learning.

Reality – The point system encourages a quality contest not a popularity contest.

- Most often when a post receives no reactions or comments it is not due to a lack of "popularity", but instead a lack of quality content.
- Students react to a post or comment if they actually 1) read it and 2) thought it was enjoyable or useful; students who create and maintain good conversations.
- Students reply with a comment if there was something thought-provoking in the post, thus teaching students to put effort into their initial posts and practice how to communicate effectively.
- Instead of sending posts into a void, like on most discussion boards, points encourage commenting and reactions from other students, which are socially motivating above and beyond the point values.

8

Students are going to curse, verbally abuse each other, or not maintain professional communication on the platform. It will be hard as an instructor to monitor and address in real time.

Reality – Bad or unprofessional behavior is very rare, especially if you set clear community standards, and there are many safeguards in place for instructors who are concerned about unprofessional conduct.

- Only 0.05% of all posts in Yellowdig contain curse words (i.e., George Carlin's 7 dirty words). As of that analysis, more of those posts were given accolades by instructors (161) than were deleted by the instructor or student (53), which indicates that even many of these posts are meeting community standards or are probably at least not directed at other students.
- Safeguards to look for in a community platform:
 - Reporting posts that are inappropriate by all members can do this.
 - Banning words– instructors can ban words.
 - Revoking points– instructors can remove points from posts.
 - Disabling emojis– instructor can ban any and all emojis they want.
 - Edit and delete student posts– instructors can edit and delete all posts.
 - Users cannot hide identity from their instructors.

Online communities are key to creating a holistic learning experience. Don't let these 8 myths scare you away from the opportunity to create organic, student-led communities. Course communities in Yellowdig are shown to lead to better learning, increased student persistence, and energized faculty. There are many factors in communities that contribute to these outcomes, but it can all be summed up by the student agency leading to richer conversations that students and faculty feel like they are an important part of. Communities shape us every day, as an instructor you have the ability to create a community that leads to happy, better educated students.

About Yellowdig

We are on a mission to transform classrooms to build through organic, student-centered learning communities. Yellowdig is not a bolt on or a tool, but a learning platform that powers better learning and high impact instruction, while saving faculty valuable time.

Yellowdig's community platform, Engage does this by moving students from being receivers of knowledge to finders and creators of knowledge and providing a modern learning experience. This shift leads to a deeper level of student and faculty engagement, better academic outcomes and better student success outcomes.

The platform can be easily integrated within your existing learning environments for 1-click access for your students. For instructors and administrators, the platform enables realtime attendance tracking, learning analytics, and supports your compliance requirements like regular and substantive interaction.

Learn more at yellowdig.co

[Request demo](#)