

ZMATH 2015c.00991

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Virtual discussion for real understanding: the use of an online discussion board in an introductory biostatistics course.

Technol. Innov. Stat. Educ. 7, No. 1, 14 p., electronic only (2013).

Summary: One of the challenges of teaching is engaging students in a subject they may not see as relevant to them. This issue is especially prevalent when teaching statistics to health science students as many do not consider statistics an important piece of their medical training. Additional difficulty is presented when teaching courses via distance technology or courses that are partially or completely online as the valuable class discussion component is lost. This paper focuses on fostering “discussion” about statistical concepts and how they relate to each student on an individual level. This paper describes the online discussion board as a tool incorporated to supplement classroom activities and not as one to be limited to the online class. Two activities where the discussion board can be utilized are described: one where students participate in a series of guided discussions through instructor provided, thought-provoking questions and another where students critique an article related to their field of study and post for discussion. The objectives are to enhance knowledge, develop critical thinking, gain an appreciation of how statistics is used in different fields, and provide opportunities for discussion outside the classroom. Students are able to discuss issues with classmates who can be in the classroom or abroad using a virtual environment. This approach has been successfully used in both purely online classes and in large graduate level biostatistics classes including both synchronous and asynchronous distance learners.

Classification: U55 K15 D45 M65

Keywords: statistics; university teaching; biostatistics courses; distance education; medicine; online courses; distance learning; online discussion board; online classroom conversation; student student interaction; communication; internet; multimedia instruction; critical thinking; inquiry information technology; media technology

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