

## **Building Community and Student Involvement**

Deborah A. Raines: Director of the Scholarship of Teaching and Professor  
Florida Atlantic University

---

From Faculty Focus: Focused on Today's Higher Education Professional  
<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/asynchronous-learning-and-trends/>

### **How to Engage Online Students in Meaningful Discussion**

**By: Rob Kelly in *Asynchronous Learning and Trends***

Student participation is perhaps the biggest challenge of teaching online courses, says Deborah Raines, professor and director of the Scholarship of Teaching at Florida Atlantic University. Part of the problem is that students often have misconceptions about what participation means. This is why Raines makes it a point, particularly during the first two weeks of a course, to model and encourage appropriate participation.

During the first week of a course, Raines communicates individually with each student. She makes her responses specific so that the students know that she read their posts.

Because many of her students hold full-time jobs and attend to their studies at night, Raines also logs on to the course at night to interact with the students. Although this communication is asynchronous, Raines' responses are timely and demonstrate her commitment to helping them. "If you're authentically there and responding to them with more than 'Good idea' or 'Nice suggestion,' but really asking a probing question that takes them to the next level, I think that gets them more committed to and involved in the whole process," Raines says.

To model the collaborative relationships found in clinical settings, Raines encourages her students to answer each other's questions and share information. This collaboration comes into play in regular discussions and those built around realistic nursing situations. Because these simulations evolve over the course of a week, Raines tells her students to log on and participate in these threaded discussions at least three days a week, even if it's for just 10 minutes at a time.

As the semester progresses, Raines tends to be less visible in the course, although she continues to monitor the discussions. However, she does come in at the end of each discussion to summarize the most important points. "At the end of the week, I usually take all the questions I asked them and write a paper that summarizes everything so that they get the right information, because we do get off-track sometimes. And sometimes those tangents are important even if they are not directly related to the initial question. By writing the summary at the end of the week, I know that they get the information that's most critical for them to proceed in the curriculum," Raines says.