

Unobtrusive Measure of Attitude in Online Discussions: Implications for Crafting Discussion Triggers

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The discussion forum constitutes an integral part of learning content and engaging students in higher order thinking in online courses, but can student attitude toward the course be revealed in those online discussions? If attitude toward the content makes a difference to learning, it is important to be able to assess students' feelings in honest, quick and unobtrusive ways. It is one thing to have a student respond to a survey indicating their great interest in a course, and quite another to determine underlying feelings based on words and action.

Introduction to Astronomy, a general education course at Penn State, is offered totally online and includes 5 discussion forums. The first is a typical introductory forum in which students introduce themselves, describe why they are taking the class, and describe why they are taking the course in an online format. The research team, consisting of educational researchers, astronomers/astronomy educators, and instructional designers, has developed a rubric to assess attitude toward science and the course from the discussion forums. The method for developing the rubric, its use and results will be shared with the group as best practice. The presentation will also share construct validity data from the comparison of the developed rubric and the Attitude Toward Science and Astronomy instrument also administered to the same group. Finally, a response to the question of whether attitude makes a difference in learning performance will also be shared.