Weekly Online Discussions

Here’s an example of ONE WEEK of a good online (D2L) discussion from a past course of mine. Follow this example and the discussion guidelines (separate document) to make the most of the discussions.

Differences between your class and this class

The assigned posts for the class where this discussion is from (the first ones labelled “opener,” “responder,” “closer”) are supposed to be about three paragraphs or 300 words. But they don’t worry about typos, and they’re not afraid to type a short response out.

For your class, there are no “opener,” “responder,” and “closer” roles. Start posting when you have read the reading and watched the course videos – or even before. And make sure to post about how the weekly quiz went for you!

Ways this discussion can improve (even this discussion can be better!)

1. Bring in outside sources, news articles, current events, statistics, etc. to address the topics brought up this week.
   a. Some excellent groups in the past have regularly posted news stories, or brought up something from another class that relates to the material under discussion.

2. Participating more evenly
   a. There’s a difference between participating more and participating better. But in general, you should try to participate early and often in the discussion. Take a look at the total number of posts and the number of posts read by each member of this group: (I’ve taken the names off of the posts, for anonymity.)
   i. Chris 11 posts (each day)  
   ii. Eliza only 4 posts (only 4/19, 4/20)  
   iii. Amanda 7 posts (4/20, 4/22, 4/23)  
   iv. Nick 7 posts (4/19, 4/21, 4/23)  
   v. Sean 8 contributions (several days)  
   vi. Tori 7 posts (only on 4/24)  
While Nick probably put in just as much effort as Chris, why didn’t Amanda and Eliza even read all of the posts? It’s possible – but very difficult – to post too much. Chris did not.

3. Giving everyone a good response
   a. Chris’ and Tory’s responses, at the end of the discussion, contain a lot of new information, responding as they do to new questions. But no one replied!

Best aspects of this discussion

4. They get to know and trust one another  
Just take a look at the opening discussion.

5. Goes beyond the class material in discussion – but they could do this more
   a. E.g., Al Gore (p. 3), U.S. Congress (p. 3), wildfire example (p. 4)

6. Goes beyond the prompting questions E.g., final paper (pp. 6-7), but could do more!

7. Involves regular contribution: Most people contributed almost daily.

8. Don’t “completely agree” with one another – find points to clarify or challenge

9. Don’t get hung up on grammar or length of posts
Print Module 12 Discussion Thread

Module 12 Discussion Thread
Created by Brian Slater Wassened on Apr 9, 2017 9:55 PM

Use this final module to discuss the long reading and your reactions to it, as well as the questions in the discussion assignment for this week. Don't let this final module be a weaker discussion; finish the semester on a strong note.

Posted Apr 18, 2017 4:30 PM

Hello everyone! I just like to start out this discussion by thanking all of you for your amazing discussions in the past few modules! Unfortunately, I wasn't as active in the last discussion as much as previous ones before, but I have been due to some unfortunate deaths in the family, but I hope that you all have enjoyed the discussion as much as I have.

As an opener, I am asked with the question of “What is the best argument for the claim that the Old River Control project was a serious mistake, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ought never to have been charged with stopping the Mississippi River from changing course?”

I would have to say that the best argument to claim that the Old River project was a serious mistake is the eventual failure of the system. Just by looking at how rivers actually work and the physics of liquids in “containers,” it is easy to see how the project is firstly redundant in the larger scope of things, and also it is extremely expensive to maintain and continue. As we saw in the video, the river itself changes course relatively quickly in terms of all of history. This is extremely important because unless constantly clearing debris in the river, there is no real way to control and be able to predict with 100% accuracy where the river will flow next. While the Atchafalaya is a reasonable prediction of where water may flow, there could be many other factors to account for that may change directions and paths of the river. For example, current environmental problems such as global warming may actually alter the amounts of water in the river. Since ice melts and is raising water levels, it would only be safe to say that there would be increased levels of water. This causes major problems because the floodgates and levees that are currently built are now incapable of adequate protection. Simply looking at this issue, there is a need either to increase the size and capabilities of these projects, or abandon the areas completely.

Additionally, nature obeys no man. This is a concept that is as old as time itself. Literally mountains and valleys are made by nature, in addition to other natural effects that cannot be controlled by humans. Understandably, there are very good reasons for the continuance of the project, however, I also do understand the circular logic behind the building processes and I personally think that there was very little actual though put into the process by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Instead, I think that the best course of action would rely on the solving of many other problems before this. Firstly, the issue of increasing water levels due to global warming must be solved. Other actions such as more efficient river cleaning processes and better technology are a few of the biggest issues to solve before creating a permanent route for the river to exist.

Let me know what you all think!

Posted Apr 19, 2017 9:58 PM

Sean, I’m very sorry for your loss.

I really enjoyed your post and think we make similar points when it comes to the fact that it’s impossible to control nature indefinitely, and I completely agree that bigger issues need to be acted upon in order to get to the heart of the problem. My question is; how do you think rising sea levels and land loss should be confronted in the meantime? Do you think this calls for a continuance of innovative projects?

Posted Apr 22, 2017 9:39 PM

Unfortunately the only real way to get permanent results when it comes to rising sea levels is to change an entire human race’s consumption of materials that are causing the rising levels as it is. For this reason, it’s a bit tricky to actually find a short term viable method of damming up the land in hopes that the water does not over flow the populated areas around it. I think innovative projects may be a good start, but ultimately there is concern when the alteration of nature and effectively the elimination of floods is successful. What I mean by this is what happens to the natural environment if we as human do not allow the water to move in any way. Personally, I am nowhere near as qualified as engineers to come up with some kind of structure to halt flooding, but if I were, I would have to consider many many other factors before I could attempt to solve the problem short term. For example, environmental and natural problems with damming and creating levels and then solving where the excess water should actually go after successful damming projects.

Additionally, the problem in this case with it flooding straight into the ocean is that water levels are increasing there too, so the Mississippi river may actually be less of a concern than sea levels raising.

Posted Apr 19, 2017 10:04 PM

Hi Sean. This is Chris. Sorry for your loss and thanks for your great post. I think one of the most important point from your argument is the cost to build and maintain the whole system, which actually makes sense as some experts at the same time, it occurs to me that people started this project in order to live there and this is a very basic need for life, no matter for humans or animals, because all of lives struggle to have a living. Compared with these fundamental needs for a lot of people around Mississippi, I think these costs are worth taking. Besides, no only for human, for animals, they might benefit from these process of making the whole process as well, although which is not the focus of this module.

Posted Apr 19, 2017 10:07 PM

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Hi Chris, interesting thoughts you present. Unfortunately it is true that people created the project in order to live in what naturally is not a great place to live without technology. This may have been the initial problem to begin with. People decided it would be a good idea to terraform the land in order to make it inhabitable, now as we see with over consumption and use of resources, it is becoming harder and harder to try and keep and the river where it is. In terms of nature minus mankind, I don't know if it is actually benefiting animals and the environment for the river "not" to move. In other words, it may be completely possible that there are some plants and animals that survive and thrive with an ever changing water system. Like the trees in the video that grow in the water and survive in the water may otherwise die if the water does not flow over them.

Unfortunately I think that people living there are already there and established and therefore need to sustain the project. However, it may be beneficial for people to manually change the course of the river slowly and over time so as to avoid disaster while still keeping pressure low in the Mississippi system.

Hi Sean, it is true that we cannot say that the system "definitely" does not harm the environment or even benefits it. However, considering from the situation today, I think it achieves a slight balance between human and nature, which actually is a great result.

Sean, I am so sorry for your loss and my thoughts are with you.

Thank you for your (aways) thoughtful and informative post. I like the point that you made about the costliness of this project to maintain. Also, thank you for your point on focusing on the deeper issues at hand, such as global warming. How do you think the best approach for shedding light on this problem would be? Perhaps education on the issues of global warming and its effect on water level, and lobbying congress.

In terms of shedding light on the issue, think that people first of all need to accept the scientific evidence to global warming. Yes, it baffles me too but there are people who still think it is all a hoax created by Al Gore in the 90s. There is photographic evidence of rising sea levels from water once contained in the ice caps. Once people are able to agree on the problem then they can try to come up with a solution to the problem. I think in the short term, funding needs to focus on the maintenance, update and repair of the current project that causes the Mississippi to flow in the consistent way that it does the day in age. After that there needs to be a more long term maintenance on the warming aspect of our environment. Congress is only lobbied by people with money so organizations need to be able to successfully fund raise and pay for the project costs (or lobby well enough to have it come out of state/local taxes).

Great ideas, I think those steps would be especially efficient in shedding light on the issue. It is shocking to me, too, that people still think global warming is a hoax. It keeps us from much needed progressive legislation and action towards fixing these issues.

Amanda,

Sean did present an interesting point when discussing the cost of the project. This can be brought back to our discussion from last week regarding the culling of elephants. Many organizations and companies choose to go with methods that cut down on cost and energy regardless of the possible moral outcomes. This is another example of projects and the cost they take to maintain and why this idea changes the course of many peoples (companies, etc) decisions.

By the way, thank you all for the kindness and understanding as I go through these losses! All your hearts are made of gold!

Sean, I like the point you brought up about nature obeying no one. This idea has passed true in many discussions we have had over the course of the semester and is a main concept when dealing with environmental ethics. Humans may strive to plan, organize and develop nature but in the end it can fail because of the natural patterns and routines in nature itself. No man can control and contain nature in the long run nature seems to always surpass limits and attempts.

Sean, I am sorry your loss. Thank you for your post.

As far as the question you presented at the top of your discussion, I have mixed feelings. I could see how people would want to try and control the river. People are always wanting to control the flow of nature. But I also think that it may be better to let nature do what it will do.
Personally if I were living there, I would make sure it is short term and would be moving away from the area as soon as I could. With the current environmental situations of rising waters and changing landscapes, being as far from danger areas would be my own personal decision. I realize this is not possible for everyone living there today. For them, I would suggest creating local legal reforms to invest in constant research and improvement of the project. Because of this, taxes may have to increase, but if the overall benefit of survival and a way of life is important to the people there, the cost of taxes may be the least of their concerns. Unfortunately the total area of livable land is shrinking daily and looking long term, if no environmental problems are solved (global warming) people will have to move out of the area anytime eventually.

I posted April 19, 2017 12:14 PM

Hi Nick. This is Chris. Thanks for your post and I am totally with your idea. The initial starting point of the whole project was to help people around the river have a better life, and look back from now on, the target has been achieved perfectly, even though with several failures and modifications, which resulted from the limitation of technologies. Just as I replied to Sean, these costs are worthwhile compared to potential loss that might happen without the project, and people in the whole process struggled to do the right thing with the right way to make life better off.

Chris, thank you for your post. We are definitely on the same page. There is no way that the project should not have been taken on because of the fact that it was done to protect a large amount of people.

Like anything, people make changes through steps. When there is an end goal the only way to reach it is to continue to work towards it. Nothing is usually as simple as a one-time solution. therefore, I do believe systems succeeded through its failures. It may have not worked the first time around but has made up for it thorough the success it now has and the benefits it provides the current communities there.

Nick, I completely agree that if anyone else were in the same position as the people of the Mississippi Valley, they too would seek innovative solutions to protect themselves. I’d like to know if you think it is economically viable to continue protecting this area if technology continues to advance? Or do you think at some point nature, combined with climate change, will eventually become too relentless to control in this way?

Thanks for your post Nick.

I completely agree with your logic on how it is basically human nature to want to protect ourselves, our families, and our livelihood. Just because the project did not turn out as it was planned, does not mean it was not a logical step in protecting entire communities.

It makes me think of other natural disasters, such as wildfires. Communities that are in danger of wildfires work proactively to prevent them. So it is similar to attempt to prevent flooding. It is also hard to predict the force and quantity of water that ended up damaging the man made levees.

Hi Nick. Great post! You really bring some complex ideas together in a very nice and coherent way. I agree that I don’t think that having the Corps of Engineers was a bad idea. In fact, it hopefully would have been my first option when it comes to large industrial sized projects like the one discussed in the module. The more qualified, the better. My initial thought goes way back to the original settlement of the Mississippi area. How did those people live in the area with their limited technology and why? Seeing that it is a large port area for shipping, I can understand why it might have grown and stabilized to what it is today, but if the river’s benefits had outweighed the costs, it should be easy to see why the project is important. Additionally, I see no real “wring doings” of building the project (besides the engineering mistakes anyway) and that being said the only real issue would have would be the economic cost of constantly repairing the project. This cost should come from the people “down south” who want to live there. Unfortunately I assume as the US often does, they only picked up the project because of the economic value coming from the area at the mouth of the river. That said, it’s unclear from my research on the matter if the costs had come from the Federal government or from the local government.
Opener

“Is the best argument for the claim that the Old River Control project was a serious mistake, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ought never to have been charged with stopping the Mississippi River from changing course?”

There are many arguments for the claim that the Old River Control project was a mistake. One argument is that when the government took control of the river, it was clear that there were distributive challenges. Specifically, the benefits and burdens of a community would not only face were no longer randomized. Because the government had control over the river, conflicts that were not existent before were now parking challenges within a democratic society. I was now possible to choose who would be faced with benefits and burdens based on the river’s flow, and this could create tension between members of the community.

Another argument to the claim that this project was a serious mistake is the negative environmental impact it has caused throughout wetlands. Before this project, the Mississippi River was a meandering stream that could create swamp and with flooding, this enabled the wetlands to thrive. Because of the project, this wetland ecosystem has diminished by half of what it was. In addition to the size of the wetlands, the composition of the ecosystem has also become altered.

One last argument and one I find to be the strongest is the idea that the government was blinded by their own hubris by trying to control a natural structure so formidable. The 1973 project has been viewed as over-optimistic and not built for longevity. In other words, the project was bound to fail at some point. Over time, the pressure for the Mississippi River to change course is only going to increase as sediment and silt build up. The course will continue to by and change so that water can flow properly. Another aspect to this is the fact that the course can possibly change somewhere else, so there is no guarantee that the location of the project will stop the Mississippi from course change. When looking at this situation from the logical standpoint, pursuing the project and development in the Mississippi Valley was likely never a smart decision. The economic and environmental negatives of maintaining the river’s course, combined with the conflicts and dangers citizens face clearly suggest that this project will ultimately fail in the long run.

Hi Eliza,

This is Chris. Thanks for your thoughtful post and some points in your post are truly give me more ideas and prospects to think this project. I agree with your idea of after control by the government, there will be distributive challenges, which I think might be an unexpected side effects from the project. From the very first beginning, the project was simply designed to make people have a living around the river. But with the time goes by and this issue appeared, I truly agree with you that from the perspective to look back, the project might bring more problems than benefits.

At the same time, in terms of the environmental impact, I think although it caused several damages at first, after the project, there would be ways to restore these ecosystems while maintaining people’s living near the river and these ecosystems.

Lastly, in the long run, with the technology development, people may find a better way to modify the whole system, or may have another way to restore everything when keeping people’s living. I think there would be a lot of possibilities. Right now, I think there are billions of people living near the river who have already gotten used to the system and its benefits. Therefore, from the most common point of view, the system is still successful to some extent.

Posted Apr 20, 2017 9:54 PM

Opener

I believe you brought up a great point that the system could be modified but not necessarily changed or replaced. However, many people have adapted to the system itself and are comfortable with the current situation so modifying it could create more problems.

As the saying goes, “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.”

Thank you for your post Eliza!

I believe the most negative outcome of this project are the environmental impacts, like you mentioned. The fact that it altered ecosystems and wetlands is something that could have been avoided. If the US Army Corps of Engineers did not lead the project, who do you think should have?

Posted Apr 23, 2017 7:01 PM

Eliza, you made great points in your post. I agree that there were distributive challenges and environmental issues associated with this project. Lastly, you state that the government was blinded by their hubris by trying to control a natural structure. Although these points are valid, the reason they took this project on in the first place was to protect the citizens living in that area and to preserve that region for many years to come. Overall, there was many challenges, but it was definitely worthwhile to take on this project.

Posted Apr 19, 2017 11:55 PM

Nick, I completely agree that if I were in the position of the people of the Mississippi Valley I too would support this project. I think I was a very innovative move that protected an economically powerful and culturally rich area from being damaged. However, I think that from a broader perspective, the people living in this area will inevitably face hardships. I don’t think nature can be controlled like this indefinitely, and with the acceleration of climate change, any advancements will eventually become overpowering.

Posted Apr 19, 2017 4:38 PM

Hi Eliza, I agree with your point that nature cannot be controlled forever. But with the climate changes, technologies and human’s ideas updates as well. Just as in last reply to your post, long run results cannot be predicted, and I think with the time goes by, maybe the system could be abandoned in some time, but there will be better ways to balance the problems now and people’s living.

Posted Apr 20, 2017 9:58 PM
Chris, I agree with that. Improving technology, we will eventually be able to permanently fix all the problems associated with the Mississippi River. As you said, only time will tell, but it is too late to abandon the project. There are too many people living in the area, and abandoning the project now would just result in a catastrophe.

Nick,

It is true that considering the situation now, abandoning the project will result in a disaster, and today the whole system offers a great balance between human and nature. But with great maintaining costs, I just want to see whether there is a better or more efficient way to improve it, just as you said, problems will be solved eventually.

Hi Chris,

I agree that over time adaptations need to be made to ensure that the system is still working smoothly. Nature is unpredictable and forever changing which provides many obstacles for those trying to control it, especially a powerful source such as water. In order to improve this system as a success, we must continue to check that the current (evolving) situations remain supported so not to run into a failure.

The Old River Control Project was necessary for many communities in the Mississippi Valley that were threatened by numerous floods. It was nearly impossible for long term and stable settlements to be created near the Mississippi. In order to facilitate development and stability in this area, communities came together and began to construct levees that theoretically would protect their homes and families. However, some areas did not have strong enough levees, or did not have levees at all. This caused enormous amounts of flooding due to the levees created upstream. To create a more cohesive levee system that aimed to protect all communities along the River, the US Army Corps got involved. They had the proper funding, manpower, and materials to attempt the enormous project. This project created an otherwise unimaginable economic boom in Louisiana for a period of time.

Unfortunately, this project did not work out as planned. Regardless, the idea was created to protect and facilitate development for people in the Mississippi Valley.

Hi Amanda. This is Chris. Thanks for your post from another perspective to support the project. I agree with your point that if we look back from now and from the perspective of economic boom in Louisiana and realize its initial target, the project is more than successful, which in my mind is a strong argument, because results can tell whether it is right or wrong. However, as Eliza and Sean mentioned, problems cannot be ignored. What’s your opinion to these problems or side effects from the project? Do you think these problems might be solved?

Hi Chris, thank you for your response. I think that the problems that have been posed by this project are important to consider. Although I believe that the initial implementation of the project was a necessary step, I do not think the project should proceed. It has proven to be expensive, dangerous, and ineffective.

Hi Amanda, thanks for your reply. Actually I agree with you that these problems should not be ignored. On the other hand, if the project was stopped, then all people living around would suffer a lot, and the country and the economic would suffer a lot. Although the project is ineffective to some extent, I still think there should be a way to improve it in the future, but not to abandon it.

That is a very valid point that I had not considered. I could cause more harm by stopping the project after everything that was investing in it.

What prompts are you going to think of answering for the synthesis essay?
Hi Nick, I might choose from the first two: “What sort of value is there in the natural world?” or “How important is public respect for the environment?”. But I am not quite sure by now. What’s your thought?

I think I am also leaning towards “how important is public respect for the environment.” It seems to be a prompt that can encompass a large majority of the concepts and readings from the past. I think one might be able to make a really convincing paper around something that ties in with land management, ethics and environmental health.

Hey Chris thanks for the response. I think I am going to do “how important is public respect for the environment”? I am favoring this prompt because I think the readings from the modules will do a better job at defending my points.

Hi Nick,

I also agree with you. When looking at the prompts, I think that the point involving respect and the environment seems to have the most information. With all of our discussions, I believe a common point touched on was public respect and decisions regarding the environment. Therefore, the evidence in the discussion can help all in our papers.

Closer

If you were faced with the decision of whether or not to go forward with the Old River Control project, what would you have done? What would you say to critics who might characterize your choice as wrongheaded?

Thanks for all excellent posts and discussions for this module. If I were faced with the decision of whether or not to go forward with the Old River Control project, I would still choose to implement it. The first reason in my mind is that the project is focused on human’s living, and based on that, I tried my best to keep the natural destroyed. Besides, looking back from now on, the project actually benefits amounts of people and the whole economic. Without the projects, then the area around the river would never be as prosperous as now.

Basically, according to the discussions this week, the critics of the project are the damage to ecosystem, the high building and maintaining costs. However, as I posted before, in terms of the damage to the ecosystem, at the very first beginning, the design was trying to minimize the damage as best as they can, and now, there is a balance between the ecosystem and human lives. In the future, there might be another ways to make the system perfect and restore the nature as much as possible. Furthermore, for the high costs, those years, due to the project, cities near the river actually create more benefits than these costs, and if we stopped the system now, the suffer for the citizens or the country would be too large to calculate.

Therefore, from my perspective, the project still needs to be implemented.

Closer

If you were faced with the decision of whether or not to go forward with the Old River Control project, what would you have done? What would you say to critics who might characterize your choice as wrongheaded?

If I were faced with this decision, I would choose to support the Old River Control project. I believe that its intentions were pure and aimed to protect and help the people of the Mississippi Valley. It was created carefully, even though it was not as successful many other ideas presented to try to control the water could have also failed. There was an idea in place that was certain to work because when dealing with controlling nature, there is not a set plan. Nature is constantly changing and evolving which creates unpredictable circumstances when people are given jobs to try and fix or control it through systems, buildings, and barriers.

The levees seemed like a good idea at the time and one of the only ones that could possibly solve the problems that arose in Mississippi. In order to save to make the land more stable, the levees needed to be put in place. Even though they had failed in the end, they had given more ideas to future projects in this area. It has commonly been said that people learn from their mistakes and it had taken a mistake as large as this for communities to figure out what could work for the area and be stable enough to stick. The system in general may not have seemed beneficial in the past when the levees caused chaos but they have solved more problems than not now. The bend is now outweigh the costs of the project and prove to be rewarding as the more current system is place is working.

Agreed with the point Chris makes above that the suffering and problems created by stopping the system now would reek havoc. Therefore, the project should remain active.