

Ed Discussion Survey Report

Results of UW's Spring 2021 Pilot

In spring quarter 2021, 23 instructors from UW's three campuses utilized Ed Discussion in their courses. Instructors and students were invited to provide feedback on their experiences with Ed Discussion via an end-of-quarter survey. Twelve instructors responded, as well as 261 students (from nine courses).

Overall impression of Ed Discussion is good

Instructors

Nearly all the instructors who responded to the survey had experience with other discussion boards before using Ed Discussion. Two-thirds (8 of 12) instructors reported using Piazza previously, and 83% (10) had used Canvas discussion. In general, instructors rated Ed Discussion favorably, with 10 of the 12 rating it "good" (6) or "great" (4) as an educational tool. The remaining two instructors rated it as "fair."

Asked to elaborate on their ratings, instructors described what they appreciated in the tool and what they found problematic, summarized in the table below.

Liked	Did not like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ability to endorse student posts (2)Ability to type LaTeX in-lineThreaded capabilitiesEmojisAbility to view multiple courses on same page	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Notifications were delayed/inconsistent (2)Inability to send push notificationsStudent replies to instructor comments were not obviousSuperscript or subscript available only in equation editor

All of the features worked well, though there were some things I found challenging with staying organized on the site. In particular, students replying to my replies were not very obvious in the list of posts unless I had flagged the post. I wished that new responses would show up in my unread posts. It was also a bit tricky to read a message and flag to myself that I needed to come back to without flagging it to other students.

Much better experience than Canvas discussion board!...One annoyance - the only way I could find to do a superscript or subscript was through equation editor. Chemists need an easier way to handle superscripts and subscripts.

It integrated well with Canvas and it had all the features I was looking for in a discussion board. Easy to use and flexible.

Students

Among student respondents, half (50%) had used Piazza and 46% reported using Canvas discussion previously. Eleven students also reported using other tools for discussion, including Ed, Slack, Discord, and Microsoft Teams. On the whole, instructors rated Ed Discussion more highly than students. A combined 29% of students gave the tool a rating of “poor” or “fair.”

Students’ elaborations on their ratings often referred to Canvas and other discussion tools if they had prior experience. Their likes and dislikes are summarized below.

Students:	Liked	Did not like
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simple, easy-to-use interface• Categories, good organization• Support for coding and LaTeX	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inability to track number of contributions made (9)• Inability to reply to a post anonymously (7)• Not receiving notifications• Lack of a mobile app• Having to use a tool outside of Canvas• Having to log in more often than with Piazza

Some students’ frustrations seemed due to how the tool was used in their courses, not from the tool itself (one student mentioned that TAs did not always answer questions in a timely manner, and several wrote that they thought mandatory posting deteriorated the quality of questions). Many students whose instructors used other elements of Canvas (e.g., announcements) were confused by the need to use (yet) another tool for discussion.

It's easy to navigate and has features like code snippets and latex formatting that Piazza and canvas don't have.

This is my first time using Ed. I think it is generally good, but sometimes the announcements are not sorted based on their dates and I personally prefer to see new announcements on the top so they are more obvious.

The problem with EdDiscussion in contrast to Piazza is anonymity; You can make posts/questions anonymously if you check the option that's shown below the textbox. However the option to be anonymous isn't given when we want to reply to a post.

Very similar to piazza in terms of commenting and posting but has less features compared to piazza, ie: contribution stats.

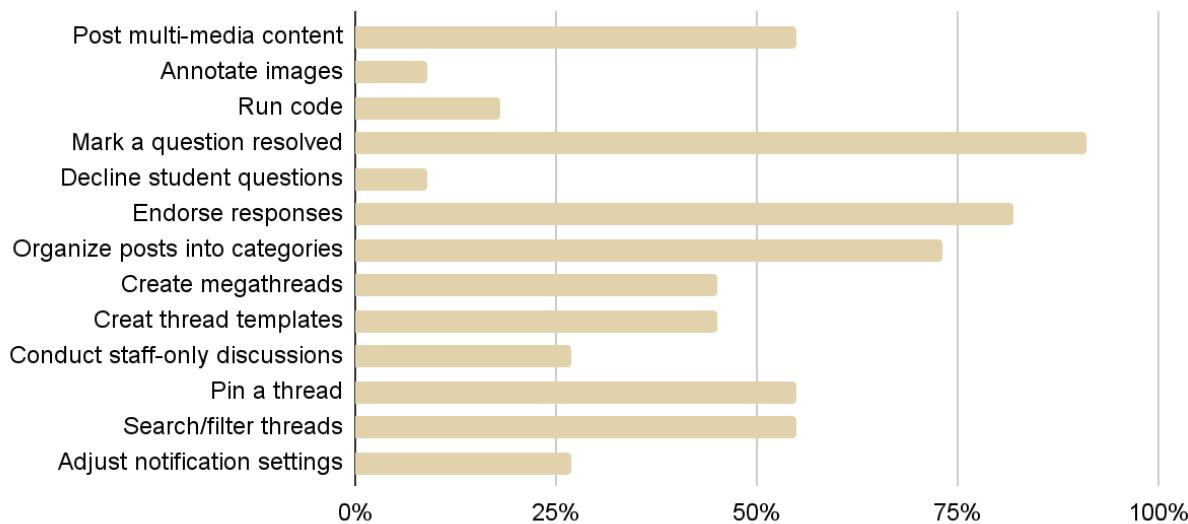
It is good, but seems like an unnecessary extra step. Like, there is nothing wrong with it. But using the Canvas discussion board is simpler and accomplishes the same goal.

Use of Ed Discussion features varied widely

Instructors

Eleven instructors responded to the question asking them to indicate what Ed Discussion features they used during the quarter. The number of features selected ranged from one to ten, with a median of five. Selected most frequently were the basic Q&A features – “mark a question as resolved,” “endorse responses,” and “organize posts into categories.” Six of 11 instructor respondents (55%) also reported that they posted multimedia content, pinned a thread, and searched/filtered threads. Several instructors noted that they did not have time during spring quarter to dive deeply into the capabilities of the tool and hoped to use more features in the future.

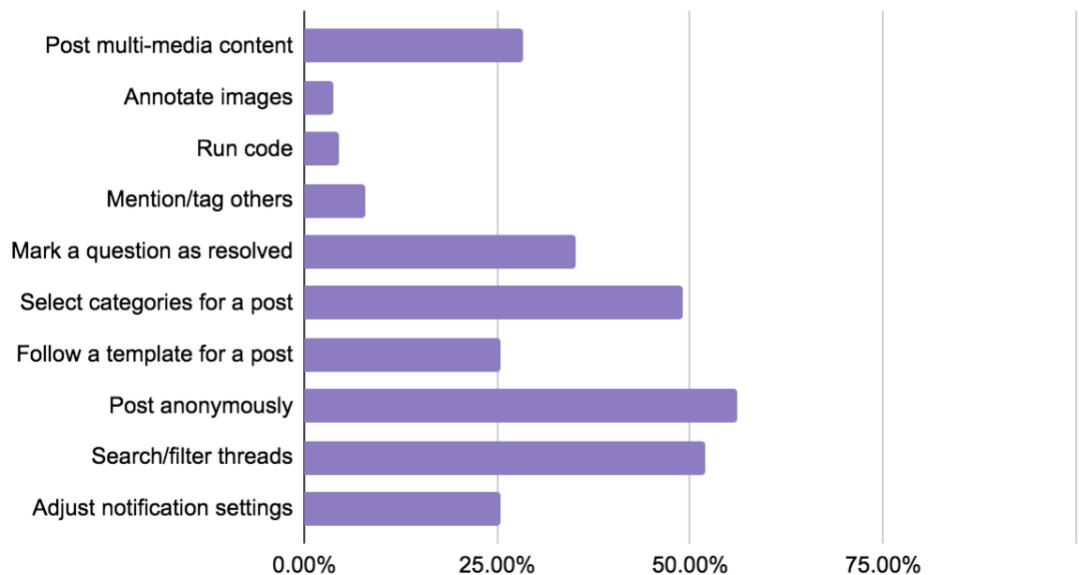
Ed Discussion Features used by Instructors (N=11)



Students

Top among the features students reported using were the ability to post anonymously (56%), search/filter threads (52%), and select categories for a post (49%). Remaining features were selected by significantly fewer student respondents.

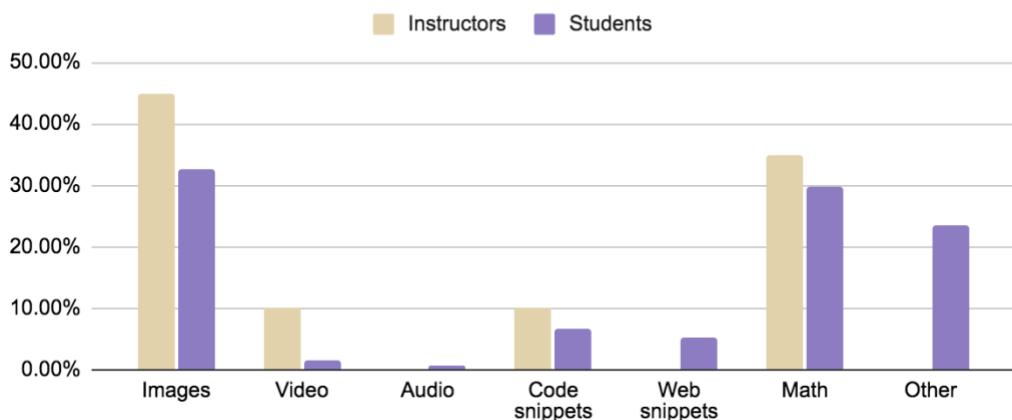
Ed Discussion Features used by Students (N=216)



Types of Media Posted

When asked about the types of media they posted to Ed Discussion, the top selection for both instructors and students (percentage of total selections made) was images, followed by math. Although one of the outstanding features of Ed Discussion is the ability to run live code, only two instructors and 16 students reported posting code snippets to their forums (see below). Fifty-seven students selected “other” for this question and wrote that they had simply posted a question (text) or that they had not posted anything in their class.

Types of Media used by Instructors and Students

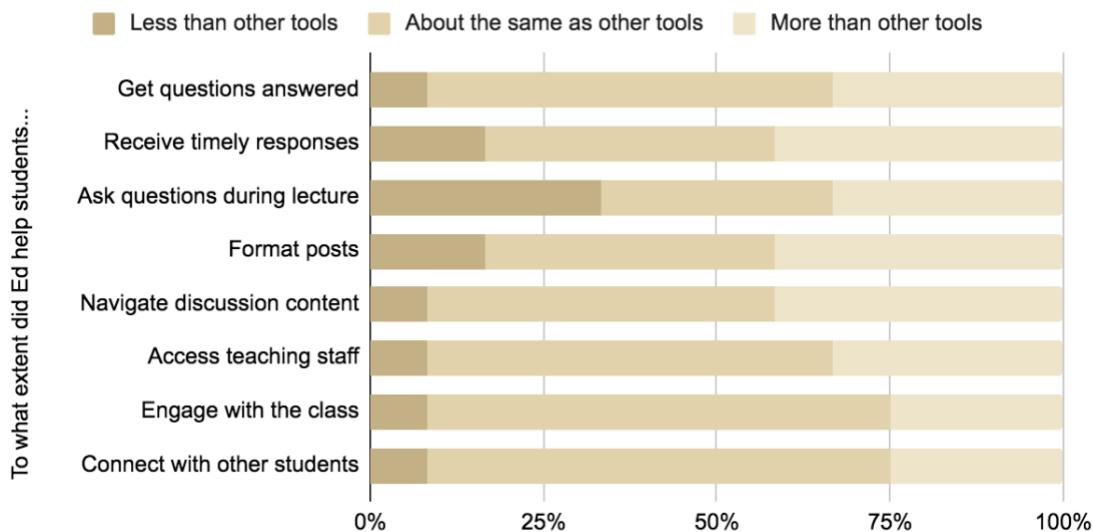


Ed Discussion is similar to other discussion tools for tasks

Instructors

When asked how well Ed Discussion helped their students accomplish relevant tasks/activities in comparison to other discussion tools, most instructors rated Ed Discussion “about the same as other discussion tools” for almost every task.

Instructors' Comparison Ratings of Ed Discussion

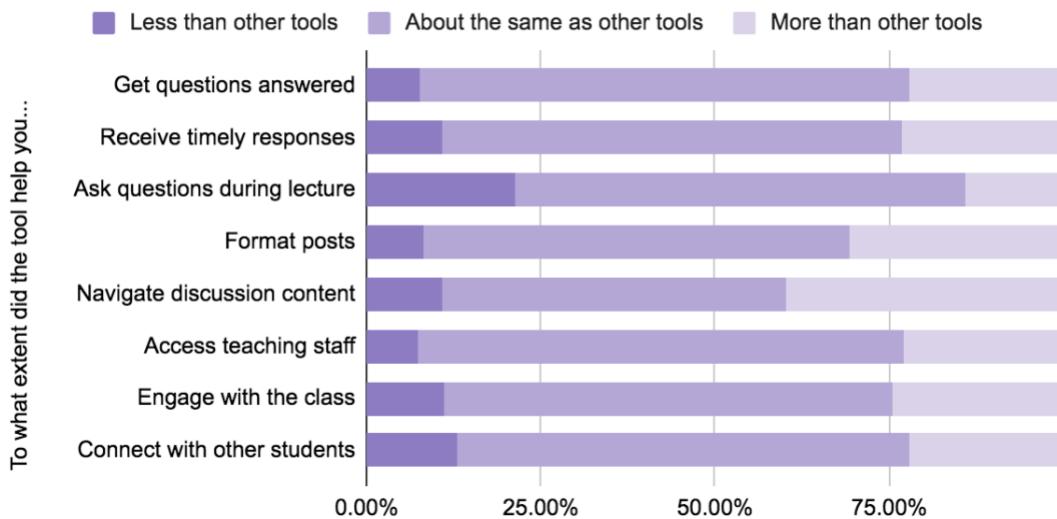


For two items – the tool’s ability to help students receive timely responses and to format their posts – five of 12 instructors rated Ed Discussion “about the same as other discussion tools” and another five selected “more than other discussion tools.” Only three instructors rated Ed Discussion on how well it helped students ask questions during lecture; their ratings were split evenly among the three answer options.

Students

Similarly, when students were asked how well Ed Discussion helped them accomplish several tasks in comparison to tools they had used previously, a majority rated Ed Discussion “about the same as other discussion tools” for every task. Students rated the tool somewhat more favorably for two items – navigate discussion content and format posts.

Students' Comparison Ratings of Ed Discussion



Ed Discussion is Easy to Use

Two-thirds of instructors and an almost equal percentage of student respondents (64%) rated Ed Discussion as “easy” or “very easy” to use. No instructors and only eight students (4%) found it difficult. Anyone (instructor or student) who rated the tool “neutral,” “difficult,” or “very difficult” was asked to elaborate on the difficulty. While one instructor noted that it was only a matter of getting used to a new tool, other instructors provided further insight into their experiences:

I did not particularly like having to navigate via the web interface, and found responding via email didn't handle formatting well.

It seems difficult for the class to sort through the different posts and see at first glance what was important from what was not.

I still don't quite understand the distinction between questions, posts, announcements and the subsequent options that arise.

Students also mentioned the need to get used to a new tool. For some students, this was not a problem, for others, it was a source of frustration. A couple of students mentioned that the tool required them to log in multiple times, which discouraged their use.

It is a different site!! That is just one more place for students to have to check regularly. This site makes sense for coding classes only - for a course that doesn't need the integrated code-checker there isn't much of an argument for it.

The site itself is overly simplistic, there is not much contrast in the buttons or what is happening in terms of the sites flow.

Navigating through all the posts can be a little more challenging.

Need for support

Three-quarters of instructors and over half of students (55%) said they did not need support with the tool. The remaining 25% of instructors and an additional 39% of students said they were able to get support if they needed it. Asked to rate the amount of tech support their students required with Ed Discussion, seven of 12 instructors (58%) reported that their students “did not need support” and the remainder selected “very manageable – required little support.”

Future Use

Nine of 12 instructors (75%) reported that they were either “likely” (2) or “very likely” (7) to use Ed Discussion for another course; the remaining three instructors were neutral on future use. When asked if there was anything they wanted to do with Ed Discussion but found they were unable to do, instructors indicated that they wanted

- An ability to schedule posts to go live at a selected time
- Push notifications
- Ability to message individual students or student groups (Instructors can message individual students in Canvas; groups in Canvas do not carry over to Ed Discussion.)
- A mobile app
- An emoji other than a heart for “liking” posts

Students were asked if they felt it would be beneficial for all of their instructors to use Ed Discussion; 70% of student respondents said “yes” and 25% said “no.” The remaining students selected “other” and used the option to express indifference or a preference for a different discussion board or for different practices (e.g., not requiring posts). When asked specifically about Ed Discussion in comparison to other discussion tools, just over a third of students (37.6%) indicated that they either “somewhat prefer” or “highly prefer” Ed Discussion over tools they have used in the past. The greatest percentage of respondents, 41%, said that they had no preference, and 22% indicated that they preferred other discussion tools.

UW-IT’s pilot of Ed Discussion continues through autumn quarter 2021. If you would like more information about the pilot, please contact help@uw.edu with “Ed Tech Pilots” in the subject line.