Using forums to answer student questions (rather than email)

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Background

We have a popular 3rd year module with 120-130 students each year. It's examined at the end of summer term. Lots of students want to ask questions. In the past students emailed one of us individually or came to our offices. We found ourselves repeating the same information – often important enough for all students (not just the questioner).

We also felt students were sending emails without thinking the question through properly (itself sometimes resulting in an exchange of email for clarification), or emailing without considering whether the information was already available online.

What did you do?

We answered questions only on Moodle!

We emailed all students to tell them. Then every time we received a question, we would post it on the module’s News Forum in Moodle and answer it there.

Everyone could benefit from the response
How it worked with students

The forum has been useful - it’s a good way to communicate. We received far fewer questions in general and students took more time to consider whether the question had already been answered, either on the News Forum or elsewhere online.

Students like the fact that they are notified by email each time a question or answer is posted.

Students like seeing answers to questions that they hadn’t thought of themselves.

In short: everyone gains!

Tips & recommendations

State at the start of the module that this is the way to communicate with lecturers on the module.

Stick to the policy of posting questions to the forum and not answering individually (unless it is personal or confidential, of course); otherwise, you’ll end up having two competing systems in place.

Next steps

- Use a forum that allows students themselves to post the questions on Moodle
- Remember to check for and answer questions quickly
- Can set up the forum to have students opt into subscriptions (receiving emails) or set to forced subscription so they will always receive email alerts.
Further information

How to achieve this

- Moodle Help – Forums

- Presentation (PDF version)