

Building Community and Reducing Isolation in Asynchronous Classes with Yellowdig

Introduction: Why This Is Important to Teaching

Research shows that online students often report feelings of loneliness and lack of interaction, which can negatively affect their engagement and performance (Bowers & Kumar, 2015; Ali & Smith, 2015). Traditional Learning Management System (LMS) discussion boards are often static and uninviting, limiting meaningful interaction. Yellowdig, designed to resemble familiar social media interfaces, encourages organic conversations and collaboration. This makes it an effective tool for helping students connect with each other and the material in asynchronous courses.

In my experience, Yellowdig (Philadelphia, PA) has become an invaluable resource for addressing these challenges. By providing a dynamic and interactive space for students to engage with peers, it transforms the online learning environment into a more supportive and collaborative community.

Procedure: How to Implement Yellowdig

Yellowdig functions similarly to popular social media platforms like Facebook (Meta; Menlo Park, CA), offering students an interactive space to post questions, share resources, and comment on one another's posts. Unlike the standard LMS discussion board, which can feel impersonal and structured, Yellowdig promotes natural, engaging interactions that promote collaboration and collective learning. Students accumulate points by participating in various ways, such as posting new ideas, commenting on others' posts, or using reactions like emojis. Instructors can set weekly point goals and customize how points are awarded, motivating students to stay involved. Additionally, Yellowdig integrates with most popular LMSs, such as Canvas, Blackboard, and Moodle. This integration allows students to access Yellowdig directly from the course page without the need to download any additional software. Once inside the platform, students can post, comment, and interact just as they would on a social media site, all within the familiar context of the class LMS.

Our university provides a subscription to Yellowdig, making it easy to incorporate into my asynchronous course. The platform is typically subscription-based, and institutions or departments often arrange for access. Yellowdig accounts for 5% of the students' final grade. I encourage students to post questions, share ideas, and comment on their peers' contributions. Each post must include a tag, allowing students to easily search for relevant posts by unit or topic.

I use Yellowdig to "pin" important posts, such as a day-to-day plan for completing weekly tasks, and I regularly showcase excellent student notes and posts to motivate others.

Yellowdig also offers a user-friendly platform for students to connect beyond academic topics. By organizing posts around searchable topics, students can quickly find peers with similar interests. For instance, some students may discover shared personal experiences, such as attending the same high school or having common hobbies. These connections often provide a foundation for more meaningful engagement with course materials and foster a stronger sense of belonging. This mirrors the goals of creating opportunities for student connections, as outlined by Whiteside (2015, 2017), where personal and academic relationships enhance the learning environment.

Assessment: Why Yellowdig Works

The most surprising and rewarding outcome of using Yellowdig has been the way students use it to share their notes and study tips. I have documented this behavior by reviewing posts tagged as 'Study Notes,' where students upload summaries, annotated lecture slides, or links to collaborative Google Docs (See Figures 1 and 2). In a face-to-face classroom, students typically take notes during lectures. However, in an online setting, many students tend to forget or overlook this critical activity. Yellowdig provides them with a platform to compare notes, ensuring they haven't missed important concepts. For example, students frequently share detailed notes, which spark conversations about note-taking strategies, such as the Cornell method, Google Docs, or converting handwritten notes into searchable digital formats.

Figure 1: Examples of Student Notes Posted to Yellowdig

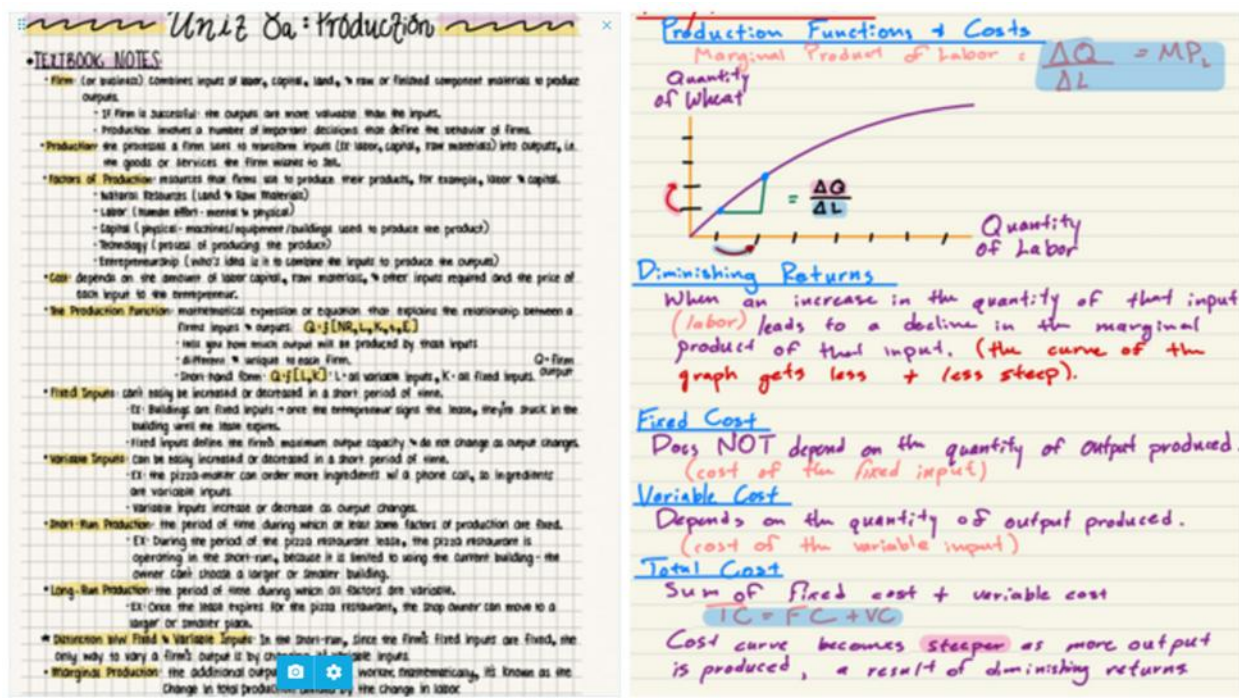
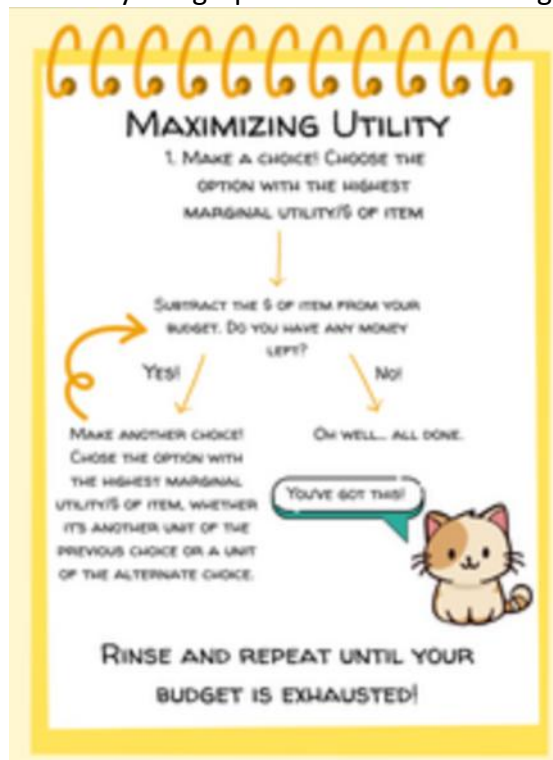


Figure 2: Example of Student Study Infographic Posted to Yellowdig



By observing how their peers approach learning, students are inspired to refine their own habits. This peer-to-peer interaction builds a sense of collective growth where everyone benefits from

diverse strategies. Anecdotal data from students further supports this observation. One student commented, “Using Yellowdig made me feel less isolated and like I had others to reach out to for help when I needed it. It really felt like a supportive classroom community.” Another wrote, “Seeing how others organize their notes helped me improve my study habits and made me feel like I wasn’t tackling the material alone.” These reflective posts suggest that Yellowdig not only enhances academic collaboration but also provides a sense of belonging and mutual accountability among students.

Moreover, research aligns with my findings. Studies indicate that peer interaction and collaborative activities in online environments can improve engagement and reduce isolation (Richardson, Maeda, & Swan, 2017). Yellowdig’s interface and features support these goals by encouraging ongoing, informal interactions that traditional LMS tools often lack.

Conclusion

Yellowdig transforms asynchronous learning by providing an interactive space for students to connect with their peers and engage with course content in meaningful ways. Through note-sharing, active participation, and informal discussions, students build academic skills while reducing the isolation often associated with online classes. The sense of community and mutual support cultivated through Yellowdig helps alleviate feelings of loneliness and anxiety, fostering a healthier learning environment. By integrating platforms like Yellowdig, educators can not only enhance student success but also promote mental well-being, which is critical for long-term engagement in online learning.

References

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