

# IS340 Introduction to IA – Fall 2009

M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP, Assoc Prof of Information Assurance  
School of Business & Management

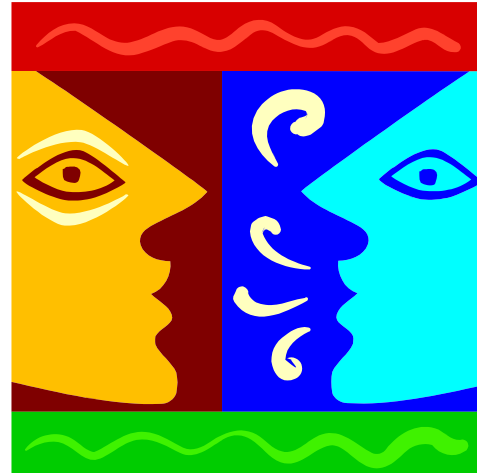
## **Online Discussion Guide**

### **Weekly Discussions (up to 10% extra on final grade)**

IS340 features an online MOODLE classroom, in addition to the traditional classroom. Beginning in Week 1, the instructor will lead online discussion by presenting one or more discussion questions to which students may respond. The weekly topics may follow the previous week's in-class topics but may also include topical subjects from recent news.

### **Optional – Extra Points**

Participation in the online discussions is encouraged but not required. However, students find these great fun as well as providing a means of increasing their final grade by up to 10 extra points. For comparison, the value of the quizzes and of the mid-term exam is 10 points each. The final exam is 15 point. Thus an extra 10 points could easily make the difference between a *B* grade and an *A* grade. More important, the discussions offer an opportunity to exchange views with fellow students and with the instructor in an informal, enjoyable medium.



### **Discussion Schedule**

Each discussion topic opens on Monday at midnight (00:05 Monday US Eastern time) and closes at the end of Sunday (23:55 US Eastern time). The instructor will evaluate contributions after discussion has closed.

### **Grading of Discussions**

Starting in Week 1 and continuing for until the end of Week 15, the discussions are given 1 point for each acceptable contribution up to a maximum of 4 points per week. At the end of the course, the instructor will compute a score that will contribute up to 10% of the final grade based on a maximum possible score of 60 points per student. The instructor's evaluation is necessarily subjective and final and will not be explained in detail unless the instructor choose to do so in exceptional cases, entirely at his discretion.

The instructor will reward contributions that stimulate thought, present a new viewpoint, and that respond constructively to the question presented. To attain higher grades, you should be digging into the subject matter; e.g., providing deeper analysis of issues and of other students' (or your professor's) (or your own) previous comments – or perhaps additional valuable summaries and references to materials beyond your assigned readings. Although you are permitted to post simple opinions, they usually don't count for much unless they are substantiated with reasoning or evidence. You don't *necessarily* have to provide references to back up your opinions, although in that case you should be clear that you are posting opinions. However, if you use someone else's *ideas*, you

## Guidelines for Online Discussions

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*must* use appropriate standards of scholarship in providing accurate reference to the source of the ideas. If you use someone else's *words*, you must *quote exactly*, showing elisions or changes in the normal manner.

The following list goes into expectations and grading in more detail. You should be able to achieve 4 points on weekly discussions by following these general guidelines:

- You should compose your contribution through research and thought. It is suggested that you take the time to draft a response before reading other contributions to the discussion. Once you have drafted your response, you might then consider reading other contributions and then revisit your initial response and expand as you wish to address points or perspectives expressed in those contributions. This habit leads to interesting and productive insights from many different perspectives and stimulates productive discussion.
- Post your *substantive contribution* no later than Tuesday (“I agree” and “That’s funny” do not count as substantive postings). The instructor may take up to one point off the total grade for that week postings after Thursday. Late postings of contributions do not stimulate discussion as much as earlier ones and they are harder to write because you may end up repeating what other people have already written – annoying for them and embarrassing for you.
- Discussions are meant to be stimulating and fun; they are not intended to be huge research papers requiring hours of work per submission. Give and take is part of the fun and quick response is helpful in keeping the ideas flowing. Therefore, your responsiveness to questions from fellow-students and from the instructors contributes to higher grades.
- Post a *substantive, thoughtful, and well reasoned contribution* to the discussions to achieve the full grade. You are encouraged to make more than one contribution, although only one response is required. At the instructor’s discretion, bonus points may be awarded for additional contributions. Additional bonus topics may also be posted periodically.
- A reasonable posting might be 50-100 words long (these are by no means absolute limits: substance is far more important than word-count). If you really get into the discussion, you are welcome to post more, but you won’t be penalized for being brief and to the point as long as your contribution is worthwhile.
- You gain credit through the thoughtfulness, relevance, originality and clarity of your contributions to the subjects under discussion.
- Evidence of research (whether original or by searching the Web and other resources) is always welcome but not strictly required. Referring to your assigned readings or textbooks is acceptable but does not carry weight for grading.
- Your helpfulness to your colleagues is much appreciated and will be rewarded (e.g., if a colleague makes an error of fact or interpretation and you can help clarify the situation *nicely*, that counts for something towards your full grade). On the other hand, nastiness may get your posting pulled from the discussion. In general, nastiness is unprofessional and unproductive.

## Guidelines for Online Discussions

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- Posting *unsubstantiated, unexplained* opinions, although tolerated, contributes nothing towards a grade. However, your personal experiences and analysis can be significant contributions that transform unsubstantiated opinion (“I think <assertion>!”) into a worthwhile, *substantiated* contribution (“I think <assertion> because <reasons / observations / evidence / argument / experience >.”)
- Posting unexplained agreement or disagreement devoid of content (e.g., a message consisting *entirely* of the words “Yes! I agree!” or “YAY! GO FOR IT!”) is tolerated but not rewarded. Such exclamations can contribute to a friendly atmosphere and are not punished, but they don’t add points.
- The instructor will avoid posting a *flood* of comments in the pre-assigned discussions because extensive instructor intervention can easily squelch creativity and spontaneity among students. Sometimes the instructor will post no comments at all during the discussion period; however, the instructor may comment at will on the general nature of the discussions or on specific points that have been raised.
- Don’t consider disagreements from the instructor as attacks or allow them to stifle your own responses – on the contrary, take advantage of the opportunity to engage in stimulating explorations of different points of view.

### **Summary: the general pattern for grading discussions is as follows:**

- The substantive contribution by any student should be posted before the end of Thursday. The instructor may take up to one point off the total grade for that week for *first* postings that start on Friday; thus postings that could have warranted a 3 if they had started Tuesday might end up with a 2 if the same material started on Friday.
- A substantive contribution to the topic including personal experience or references to the literature (other than the assigned readings): 1 points. Length of the contribution is not a strict determinant of value; for example, one paragraph of brilliance could outweigh a page of pap. The adjective “substantive” may mean thoughtful, original, analytical, creative, provocative, stimulating and so on.
- A substantive contribution without either personal experience or references to the literature: 1 point.
- Substantive engagement (response to) with other students’ and instructors’ contributions: 1 point.
- Each additional useful contribution, even if relatively short: May warrant additional ½ points.
- A simple pointer to a useful reference (e.g., “FYI, see <URL>.”): may warrant ½ point
- Unsubstantiated opinions, short agreements such as “Yes, I agree” or “Bravo” are not penalized but they are not awarded points.