Discussions: the Online Discussion Board for Philosophy 104 Bioethics (Fall 2016)

This is straight from the syllabus:
✓ Discussions (3 points per Part x 15 Parts = 45 points): For each Part, use the online discussion board to make your own original post reacting to the target question by midnight Wednesday (1 point), your own ratings and acknowledgments of each original post of each student in your small group by midnight Saturday (1 point), and your own two thoughtful replies to any two original posts of other students in your small group by midnight Saturday (1 point). Details in ‘Discussions’ PDF.

This is not straight from the syllabus (please read these explanations very carefully):

To get point 1 of 3 for a given Part:

ORIGINAL POST (full compliance = 1 point; partial compliance = 0 points; no fractions given.)
First, for each Part of our text Contemporary Debates in Bioethics, you are required to make an original post to the discussion board sharing your own reaction to the yes-or-no question that is the focus of the relevant Part.

Each Part of our text has an interesting debate on target questions by two authors. You may lean towards agreeing with the answer given by one of the two authors even if you do not agree with his or her arguments. Or you may be perfectly neutral or undecided or "on the fence" about the target question after doing the readings.

Make your original post for this target question as a comment in the relevant Blackboard ‘Discussion’ Forum as follows. On the main menu under ‘COMMUNICATION’ click on ‘Groups’, then ‘Group #’ (where # = your group number), then ‘Group Discussion Board.’ [Or, at the bottom of the main menu click ‘My Groups’ then ‘Group #’ then ‘Group Discussion Board.’] Click on the relevant Forum. Click “Create Thread.” (Do not merely hit ‘Reply’ to an existing post and put in your new title, since that will not display your message as an original thread in the list of original threads for your classmates and I to view it and/or respond to it). Click on the “Subject” line. Type a title for your original post that begins with a single digit number from 1 (which represents "Yes, for sure!") to 9 (which represents "Yes, for sure!"). The number 5 represents being perfectly undecided or "on the fence," not leaning even slightly towards a 'yes' answer (like 6, 7, 8, or 9) or a 'no' answer (like 4, 3, 2, or 1).

Please remember to include a bit of text in your title after the initial number to distinguish your title from other people's titles. This makes it easier for everyone (including you) to see who you have and have not already replied to. (It’s harder for everyone if the only thing visible is that you have replied to many original posts with an original title of "5" because then all your replies have the same title "Re:5"...)

In the Message box, explain your answer to the yes-or-no target question in 200-300 words. Then click ‘Submit’.

**** (see next page)
Thoughtful Replies (minimum 2 @ 100+ words each): /-1 points

Ratings+Acknowledgments (minimum 1 per groupmate): /-1 points

To get point 2 of 3 for a given Part:

RATINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS (full compliance = 1 point; partial compliance = 0 points; no fractions given.)

Second, give each original post in your small group a rating by clicking on its “Overall rating” scale. Do not rate the post based on whether you agreed with it, but on whether it was satisfactory (=2 stars), unsatisfactory (=1 star), or the very best post (in your opinion) of your entire small group for this Part (= 5 stars). Give each post exactly 1, 2, or 5 stars (no 3s, no 4s, no zeros). Only give one ‘5-star’ rating for each Part. Only give a ‘1-star’ rating if the post was too short (< 200 words), late (= after midnight Wednesday) or shows lack of effort (= the person clearly did not read the texts or did not put original thought into their post).

All students can see what average “Overall rating” any given post has at any given moment. But no student can ever see what individual rating another student gives to any given post. (And you cannot rate your own post.)

The professor uses these Overall Ratings to monitor online group discussions and to give extra credit. The top-rated post from each small group is put into a ‘Discussion Superstars’ forum under ‘Discussions’ so the entire class can view them (if there are ties for a group’s top-rated post, a content-neutral tie-breaking rule is used). The professor then picks what he thinks was the best-written post in the entire class, gives its student author 1 point of extra credit, and gives each member of that student’s small group .5 points of extra credit for selecting him or her.

Please think about this when you rate your small group members, and cheer on your small group members as they “represent” your small group in the Discussion Superstars. If you don’t want your original post to be shared with the entire class—even if your post gets the highest ratings from your small group—just signal that with an asterisk (*) at the very start of the text of your original post.

Now click ‘reply’ to make either a short “acknowledgement” or a longer “thoughtful reply” (see below) to the original post of each person in your small group. An “acknowledgment” indicates that you have read their original post. It needs to be at least one sentence long, unique, and related to the contents of their original post.

****

To get point 3 of 3 for a given Part:

THOUGHTFUL REPLIES (full compliance = 1 point; partial compliance = 0 points; no fractions given.)

Third, each week make at least two “thoughtful replies” of 100+ words to two original posts of others in your group. These can be respectfully worded agreements or disagreements, questions, add-ons, clarifications, counter-examples, considerations that the student may not have thought of, or other forms of thoughtful contribution to the discussion board. (They must be longer and more significant than the one-sentence acknowledgements. Each thoughtful reply will count as an acknowledgment, but no acknowledgment will count as a thoughtful reply.)

****

The Wednesday midnight deadline for original posts, and the Saturday midnight deadline for everything else, will be enforced by Blackboard’s time-stamps or by a discussion forum becoming temporarily unavailable. So submit your original posts, your ratings/acknowledgments, and your thoughtful replies on time.

****

Here are several short announcements about discussions that I want to share with you at the very start:

1. Some of you may want to click on the field in your Grades view that shows the feedback I gave you when I was grading your discussion board contributions. When I review your discussion board participation, every person’s ‘Feedback to Learner’ field in my discussion board grading screen gets the following text posted in, with additional scores and comments added as appropriate:

Original Post (200 words minimum): /-1 points
Ratings+Acknowledgments (minimum 1 per groupmate): /-1 points
Thoughtful Replies (minimum 2 @ 100+ words each): /-1 points

****
2. I sometimes notice some people are only doing the ‘Ratings’ but are forgetting to do the ‘Acknowledgments.’ These are easy points to earn; please remember what I wrote above to see how to earn them (hint: it is just a one or two sentence reply for each group-mate that you do not write a ‘thoughtful’ reply to).

3. You only need to rate the original post of your group-mates. Please do not rate their replies.

4. When you reply to someone, it is a really good idea to start off your reply, whether it’s a ‘thoughtful’ reply or just an ‘acknowledgment’ reply, by addressing the person you are replying to by their first name (as they want to be addressed—see the Introductions to your small group if in doubt). It does not have to be formal. “Hey J--” might work as well as “Dear James,” or “Jimmy,” if “J” is what James wants to be called.

---

Here is an example of how the scoring might work as well as “Dear James,” or “Jimmy,” if “J” is what James wants to be called.

---

Here is an example of how the scoring would work for a given Part for a group with exactly 12 members in it (named A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and L) when the following events unfolded...

...11 of them made their original post on time (A was late)...
...11 of them hit the word count on the original post (E was <200)...
...11 of them made a decent effort to write a relevant original post (G showed a lack of effort)...

...11 of them rated and acknowledged all the (on-time) posts of others (rating/replying to A was entirely optional because A’s original post was late, but C failed to rate and acknowledge the other 10 students [besides A and C] who did actually make their original posts on time [C neglected to rate and acknowledge D])...
...11 of them made their rating and acknowledgements on time (F made a late rating/acknowledgement)...

...10 of them made two thoughtful replies (J made none, K made just one)...
...9 of them hit the word count on their two thoughtful replies (L made two but one was <100 words)...

...and all 12 of them got some form of extra credit (B was selected as the highest-rated post in the group, *and also* was picked as the best in the entire class (but student Z, not listed here, almost edged her out for this).