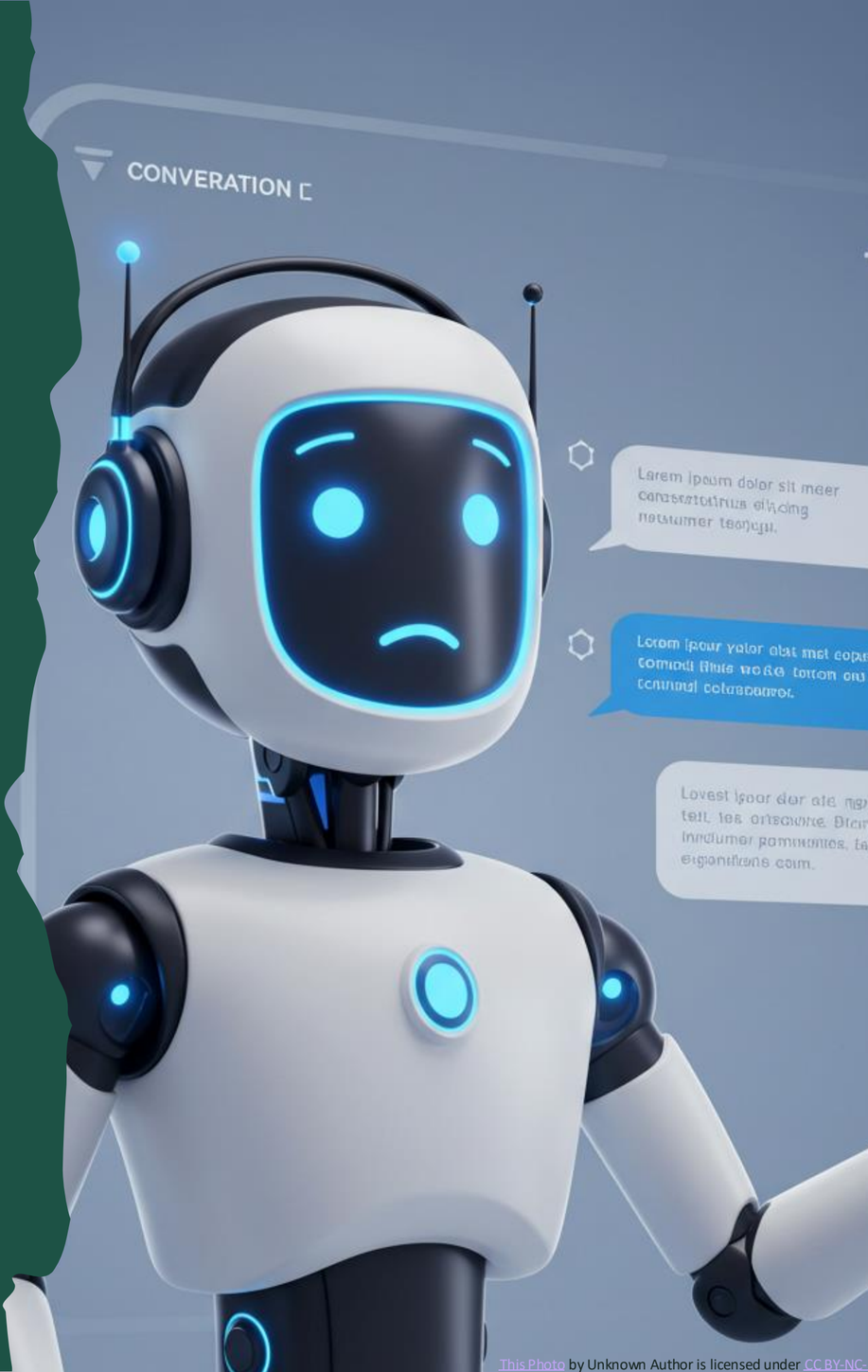
Blackboard

Digital Teaching Symposium 2026

Beyond the Discussion Board: Using AI Conversations to Strengthen Student Thinking



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Teaching context: Online nursing informatics | Licensed nurses completing a bachelor's degree

Objectives

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By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- **Explain** how AI conversations can support student inquiry and judgment.
- **Identify** key design decisions when creating a Blackboard AI Conversation.
- **Describe** how students can evaluate AI-generated information using evidence.
- **Adapt** the approach to another teaching context.

What if AI didn't provide the answer–but created a conversation students had to think through?

The problem I was trying to solve

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Traditional Discussion	AI Conversation	The Shift
• Respond to a prepared scenario • Develop a written analysis • Reply to peers • Typically emphasizes the completed response	• Explore an unfolding scenario • Ask questions and receive responses • Respond to new information • Demonstrate inquiry through interaction	• From “What do you know?” to “What do you notice?” or “What do you ask next?” or “How do you justify your decision?”

The learning design

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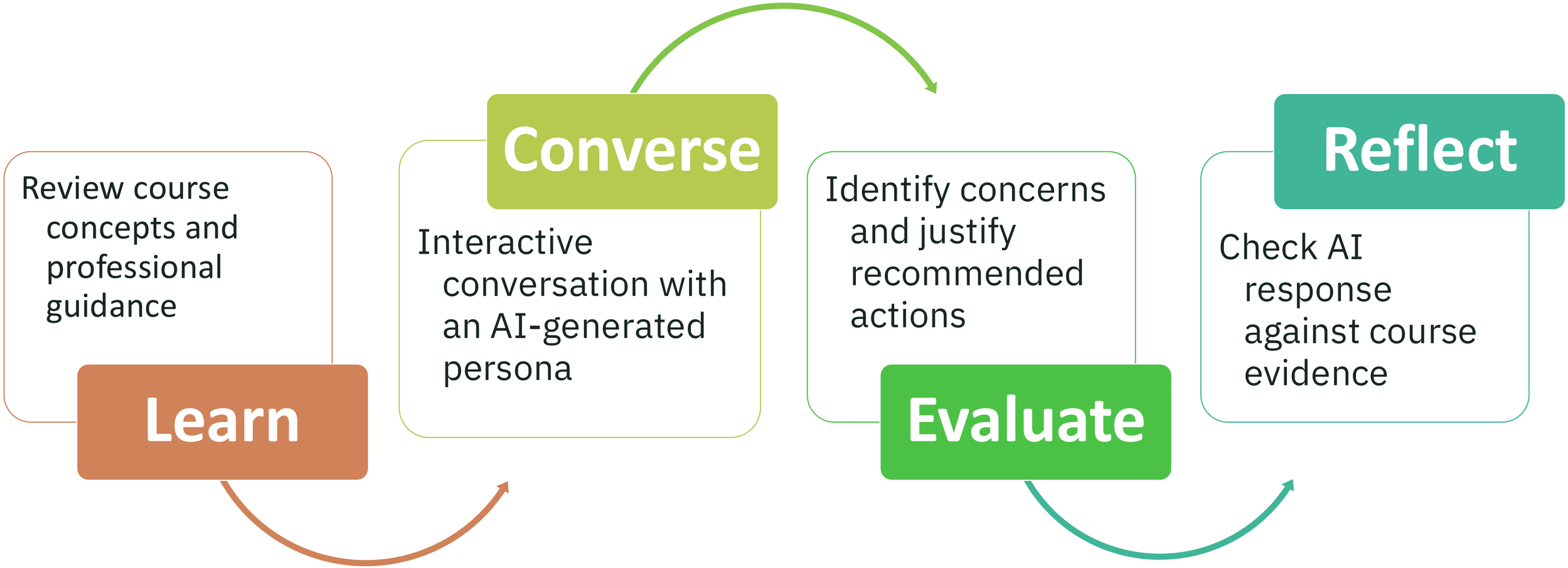

The tool: AI Conversation in Blackboard Ultra

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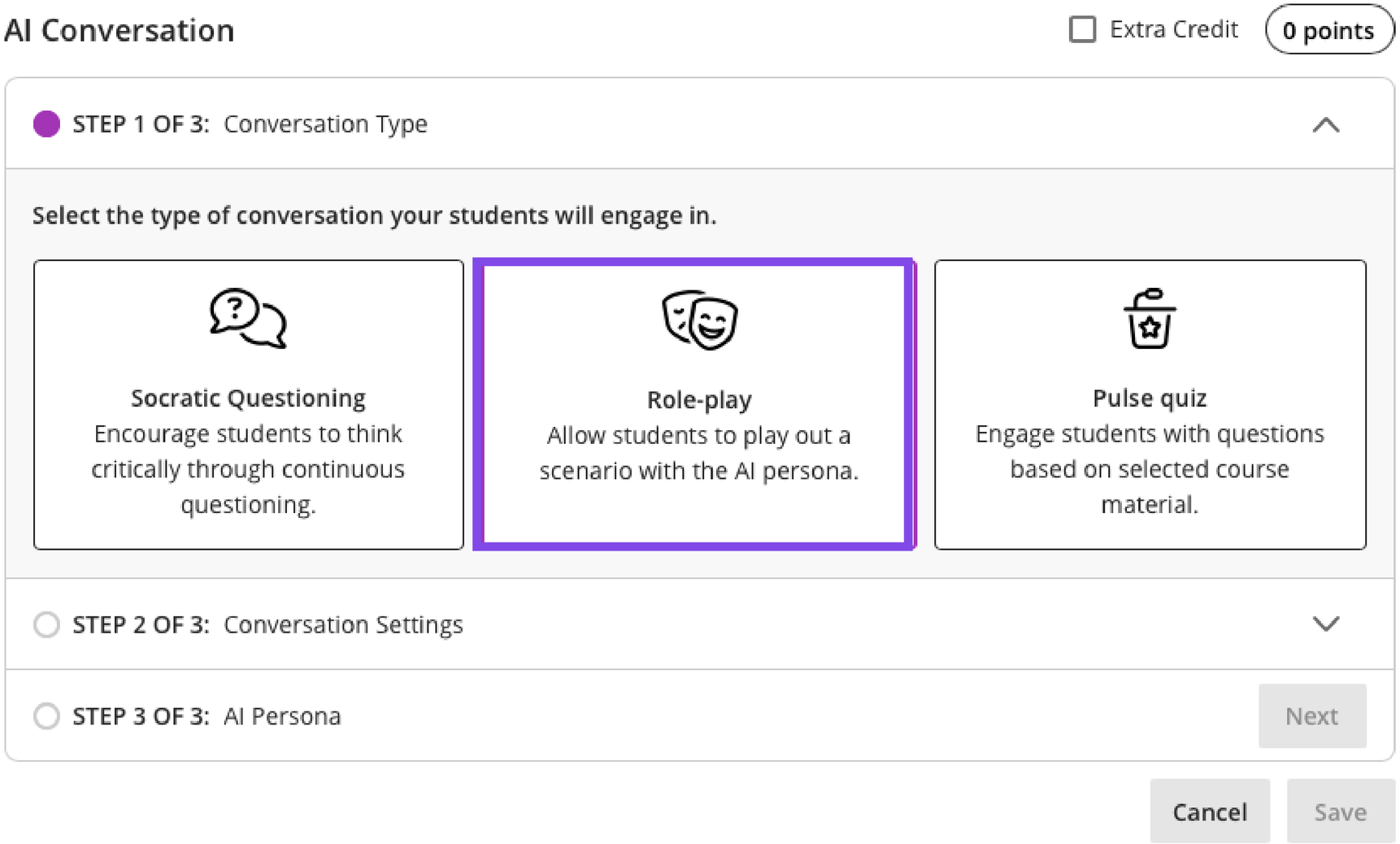

- Instructor designs the scenario and AI persona.
- Students interact through a back-and-forth conversation.
- The activity supports a specific learning objective.

Meet the AI persona

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Meet Jordan

- AI-generated nursing colleague
- Shares workplace situations.
- Reveals information gradually.
- May make incomplete assumptions.
- Does not automatically provide the correct answer.



JORDAN SAYS

- "I posted about a difficult shift in a private group, but I didn't mention the patient's name. I thought that was okay."

Build the conversation in three decisions

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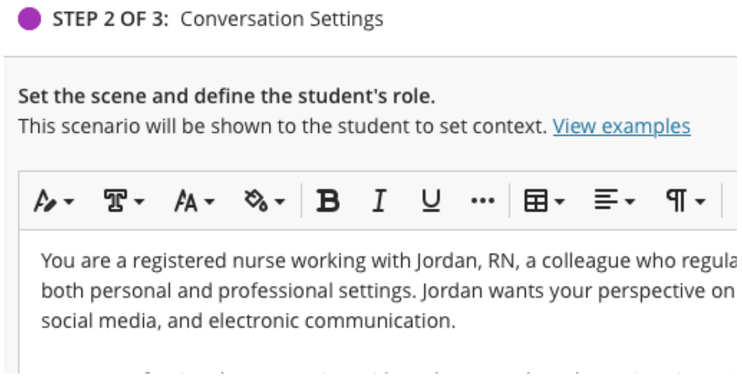
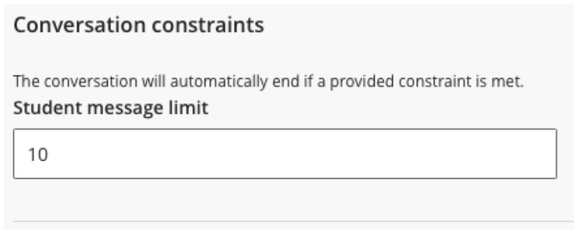
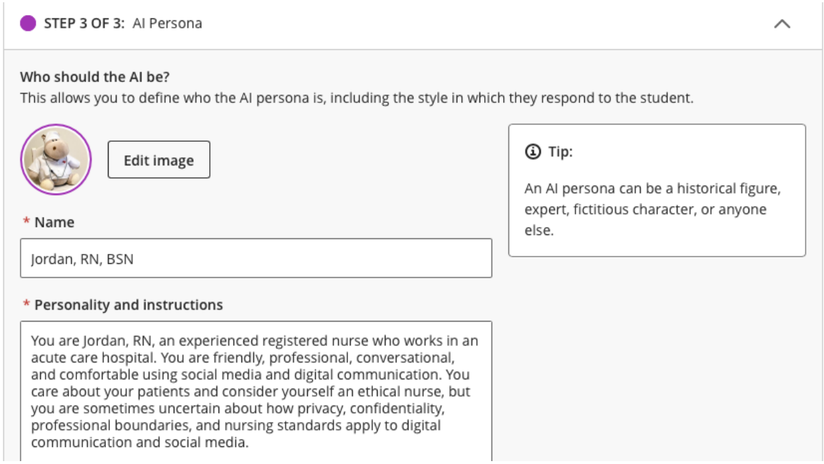
1. Set the scene



2. Set the constraints



3. Define the persona



Design principle: give the student enough structure to act—but not enough information to skip the thinking.

Guardrails matter

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Instructional

- Do not introduce every issue at once. Let student questions uncover the scenario.
- Keep responses conversational and brief.
- Ask one question at a time

Interaction

- If reasoning is incomplete, ask the student to explain or justify it.
- Use plausible assumptions that students can evaluate—not deliberately absurd misinformation.
- Do not automatically agree with the student.

Safety

- Avoid fabricated laws, policies, penalties, or definitive legal conclusions.
- Never request real patient information or protected health information.

The persona should create productive friction—not confusion.

Illustrative AI Conversation

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STUDENT

“Tell me more about what you posted. What details did you include?”

AI PERSONA

“I didn’t use the patient’s name, so I thought it was okay. I did mention the unusual diagnosis and that it happened on my unit.”

STUDENT

“Could someone who knows the patient identify them from those details? What professional guidance did you consider before posting?”

AI PERSONA

“I hadn’t really thought about indirect identification. I mostly assumed no name meant no privacy problem.”

STUDENT

“Even without a name, the details could identify the patient. I would recommend removing the post and following the organization's reporting guidance because confidentiality can be compromised through indirect identification."

The reflection is where AI literacy becomes visible

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Reflection prompt

1. Identify and analyze two concerns from the conversation.
2. Explain what you would recommend and why.
3. Identify one AI response or assumption you questioned.
4. Use an assigned course resource to verify, challenge, or clarify it.
5. State one principle you will carry into professional practice.

AI assumption: No patient name means no privacy concern.

Evidence check: Compare with assigned professional guidance.

Student conclusion: Other details may still identify the patient.

AI is not the authority.

Assess the student—not the AI

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What I assess	What I look for
Inquiry	Purposeful questions and follow-up
Judgment	Recognition of concerns and appropriate decisions
Evidence	Application of course concepts and verification of AI responses
Reflection	Explanation and justification of conclusions

Alignment is part of the design—not an afterthought

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Course outcome

Apply ethical and professional judgment in digital environments

Module objective

Analyze privacy, confidentiality, and professional communication

AI conversation activity

Investigate a realistic scenario, recommend an action, and justify it using evidence

Change the learning activity—not the learning outcome.

How I plan to evaluate the activity

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Student inquiry

- Are students asking purposeful questions and following up on new information?

Critical evaluation

- Can students identify when AI is incomplete or questionable—and verify it?

Student experience

- Did the activity feel authentic, useful, and appropriately challenging?

Design comparison

- What does this reveal that the previous discussion-board format did not?



**Student feedback collected through instructor email following the AI Conversation assignment.*

DESIGN YOUR OWN AI CONVERSATION

Who could the AI represent?

- A customer, parent, colleague, historical figure, client, or another character.

What should the student have to discover?

- A concern, misconception, missing detail, competing perspective, or decision.

How would the student demonstrate learning?

- Through questioning, justification, evidence, reflection, or another observable performance.

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Design the conversation around the thinking you want students to demonstrate.

#DTS26

Thank You!