DE sessions on Building Classroom Communities – summary notes
(see PowerPoint of the session)
Two Sessions (Wednesday, March 6, Thursday, March 7)
Present and participating: Karen Hastings, Ron Pine, Stacy Rogers, Mieko Matsumoto,
Cynthia Smith, Ross Egloria

Both sessions began with brief presentation of background information (see Powerpoint).

In response to topics covered and suggested strategies from the PowerPoint slides, the following points were discussed.

- Suggestions - try to use a specific Laulima Discussion forum (e.g. default setup of ‘Lounge’) to enable students to ask questions and interact with each other. They could post up questions to each other, or tips for success in assignments or preparing for the exam etc. Not clear if this can (or should) be set for privacy where the instructor cannot see what they write.
- During the first week – have as an initial assignment that they must post up on Laulima an introduction and their intentions for test taking (this way – ensure they know how to post, build community, and address problem of identifying where they are going for the exam all at once).
- Since students really want to know more about their DE instructors to feel connected to the class, could do this as a video introduction. Could work with ETC to tape parts of face-to-face classes – perhaps just the opening introduction of a class, to include in a web class so students see the instructor (and other students reacting to that instructor) as part of the effort to be more visible to students who want to know who instructor is.
- To maximize student engagement in discussions, best practice mentioned included the need to be very explicit on what is expected in a discussion post, - let them know the rubric or instructor measures for evaluating involvement e.g. number of sentences, number of points to be covered, whether they must post to and respond to the comments of other students etc.
- Some instructors provide extensive feedback on the discussion postings, especially the first ones, so students know clearly what is expected of them.
- Finding means to maintain steady, frequent communication was discussed including use of texts or tweets. The possibility of text blasting interested many.
- The ability to tape student performance and work in the form of a YouTube video was also discussed, and an area where folks would like some training so they can guide students in doing this. Additionally, there was interest in learning how to teach students how to build Wikis as a means of having students do group projects to build connections.
- The need for better training of students in terms of study skills was discussed.
- It was discussed that there many students are busy, are taking DE precisely to maximize limited time so have little interest in community building or group interactions so need to keep that in mind.