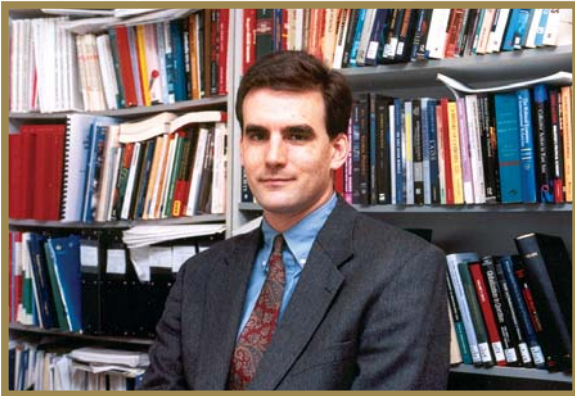# Prof *Greg Felker*

Prof Felker's innovation uses technology as a lever to promote active learning, peer learning, student-student interaction and student-faculty interaction. Specifically, he uses web-based asynchronous forums and synchronous text-based chat rooms within WebCT to conduct online discussions and simulations. The simulation involve students role-playing political groups in an international political crisis and presenting their positions through the online forum.

The high level of student participation generated through these active learning tasks and the students' positive attitude towards online learning has inspired other faculty to take up this innovation.

Prof Felker sees the success of the online forums as mainly coming from three factors:

- the instructor being online a lot so that students received prompt responses;
- allowing and fostering informal communication which fits the online culture students are used to (e.g. from ICQ); and
- making the online environment (WebCT) the authoritative place for course related information so that students 'feel' the medium to be an essential and integral part of the learning environment along with the classroom.

Prof Felker highlights a couple of tensions in supporting and sustaining online interaction:

- deciding when to intervene and when not to, i.e. which questions students had the knowledge to answer and which they didn't - if you answer too early, this may shut down communication as students will wait for the 'authoritative answer' rather than post;
- deciding whether or not to require participation – requiring communication may guarantee postings but it tends to reduce spontaneity