

Instructional Design / Course Facilitation Tips

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Create a Home Page

The Home Page is what the students will see when they login to your course. Canvas gives you options for what to set as your home page but defaults to Recent Activity which is not the most welcoming choice. The Home Page sets the tone for the course and should be designed to give the student important information. The Home page should:

- Let students know they are in the right course
 1. Provide the course name/number
 2. Provide instructor name/contact information
 3. Include a graphic to make the page more visually appealing
- Tell them how to get help when they need it
 1. Provide directions for how to access Canvas Help, Midland College Help Desk, and other technical help directions if you are using other programs such as Pearson or Cengage Labs or websites
- Tell them how to get started, for example:
 1. Read the syllabus
 2. Review the course schedule and put important due dates on your calendar

3. Go to Modules and begin with the Getting Started Module

Organize Course Content using the Modules Tool

Using the module tool lets you organize your course by modules. You can create and name the modules based on how you organize your content (Week 1, Week 2, by lessons, by units, by chapters). A sample module format is provided below:

- Module Overview Page
 - Introduction to topic
 - Learning objectives for this module
 - Summary of assignments due / points possible / due date
- Instructional Materials for student which might include:
 - Assigned readings
 - Videos
 - PowerPoints
 - Lectures (audio)
 - Websites
 - Journal articles
- Assignments
 - Assignments created with assignment tool
 - Links to any Discussion Board assignment
 - Links to any publisher or 3rd party assignment
- Assessments
 - Quizzes
 - Assessments which may be created with the assignments tool

The main point of modules is that you organize all the content and learning activities for the students. The student finds everything they need by opening the module as opposed to going to different places to locate. I like to organize by modules and then hide the quiz and assignment links.

Communication is the key!

I've found that students are generally quite forgiving when you communicate with them frequently—especially students who are new to the online classroom.

- Announcements (Announcements Tool in Canvas)
 - Provide a welcome announcement which may include some of the information that is on the Home Page. It's ok to place the same information in multiple places.
 - I would suggest at a minimum providing a weekly announcement—maybe just welcoming them to week 9 (or whatever week it is) and saying something like “Module 8 is available now. This week you will be learning about students who are gifted and talented. You have the following assignments for this week.....If you have any questions or need my help, please let me know.”

- Provide announcements any time you need to alert the students to something new or changes that may be made.

The announcements tool in Canvas has a feature that gives the students the ability to reply to your Announcement. That feature can be disabled if you do not want students to reply. My preference is to disable that feature as I prefer students to contact me if there is anything in the announcement that is confusing or concerning to them. But it's your choice.

- Email
 - Canvas Inbox
 - The email feature of Canvas is Inbox. This is my preferred method for having students communicate with me. This keeps all course related communication inside of Canvas (sort of). I tell students that this is the way they need to contact me and I will respond no later than 24 hours—but it's rare that I take that long to respond. The “sort of” caveat is that Canvas does allow you to customize Notification settings so that Canvas Inbox messages can be “pushed” to your MC email, personal email, or phone. This allows you to check it and respond from there as well. I enable this feature so that these are forwarded to me at my MC email address too.
 - Email
 - I do provide students my MC email address as well; however, I tell them that I want them to use the Canvas Inbox as there is a good chance if they email me at my MC address and they are using a personal email account, that email may end up in spam and I might never see it or it just might get lost in the multiple vendor emails I receive daily.
 - Phone/Text
 - I provide students my MC phone number and ask them to leave a message if I am unable to answer. That message will appear in my MC email and I can listen and return the call. I only provide my personal phone number on an individual basis depending on circumstance. I am extremely anal with regard to monitoring and responding to student calls. If I am unable to answer their call, I call them back as soon as possible.
 - Google Voice. Allison Gibbons-Brown shared information on Google Voice (which I did not know about) in an email shared by Dr. Kennedy. This provides a solution for having to give them your personal phone number.
 - Cold calls. I am not averse to low tech. In a 16 week semester, I call every student who has not logged in by Thursday noon the first week. In a shortened semester, I would probably call if they had not logged in by Tuesday, noon. I just want to check in and make sure they know the course is open and that they are expected to login and get to work—it is not a self-paced course. I ask if they have had problems with trying to login. I also let them know about completing the first required assignment because it is an attendance verification requirement and if they don't complete it they will be removed from the course.
 - Discussion Board

- **Help Please**
 I create a “Help Please” discussion board for students to be able to post questions or problems they may be experiencing with the course. After checking the Inbox, I go to this discussion forum to respond to any questions that may have been posted there. Students are also able to post / reply to this board and will often answer questions posted by other students. I create a Module named Help Please and link this discussion board there. I keep this as the first module throughout the semester. If a student emails me a question that I feel might apply to everyone, I post the question/response in this forum so that I won’t have to answer multiple emails asking the same question.
- **Introduction / Icebreaker Discussion**
 If you are transitioning your course to online in the 16 week semester format, you will not need to do this as you already all know each other. If you are beginning a new course, you should include an Introduction discussion forum so that students can get to know each other and you can get to know more about them. I like to do this by telling them what I would like for them to share about themselves and then “modeling” that by posting my introduction. I make sure I respond to each student’s introduction with a personal note to let them know I read it.
- **Content Based / Graded Discussion**
 These are content related /graded assignments (addressing the objectives) that are utilized for student – student engagement and also, student - instructor. There really is an “art” to creating effective discussion assignments—otherwise they just turn into those dreaded weekly assignments with minimal student benefits. Here are some guidance suggestions:
 - Focus on open-ended discussion topics geared toward higher-order-thinking Bloom’s levels.
 - Since we are looking at a shortened format, create 1 or 2 well-crafted discussions and let them run across multiple modules or weeks.
 - Avoid the lower level Bloom’s “answer the question” prompts as once they are answered by one or two students—there really isn’t much more to discuss.
 - You really do have to be “present” in these discussions for students to take them seriously. If you aren’t showing that you take them seriously enough to respond/participate; then, students won’t either. At a minimum, you must monitor to make sure nothing inappropriate is taking place (bullying, etc.) and to make sure misinformation isn’t being shared. Discussion boards really can be your chance to “shine” as the subject matter expert and reinforce instructor presence.
 - Post netiquette rules. We live in a social media world in which cyber bullying is a threat and anyone with an opinion and minimal

keyboarding skills can share with the world. Students need to be reminded that discussions are not social media. This is an academic space and they must abide by certain rules. For most courses, this will probably not be a problem but I can see where some disciplines might be more vulnerable. Establish the rules / consequences so that if you need to address this, you have something to reference.

- Feedback
 - Students need and want your feedback. Grade any assignments that are instructor graded and return as soon as you can.
 - Tell students what the expected grading turn-around time will be. If you don't they will hit submit and then immediately email you to see you if got it and ask why it has not been graded. Set this expectation on what is reasonable for you.
 - If you ask students to complete an assignment, grade it and provide some feedback. There is no way students can know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve if you do not do this and do it as quickly as you can.
 - "I don't think students look at my feedback." There is no way we can control this. All we can do is grade, provide feedback and make sure students know how to access that feedback.
 - Provide rubrics. This helps students know what the expectations are. If you create them in Canvas or TurnItIn and attach to assignments, they really do make grading and feedback so much easier. Like discussion board, this is a topic that needs to be addressed as a separate item.

Video Tips

Video is a great tool to use to help students. There are many options for creating/sharing video if that is how you decide you want to provide content or connect with students. This is another topic that merits more attention than I'm providing here. The major point I want to make here is that videos need to be short—meaning at the most 10 – 12 minutes and probably under that. This means that although you may be used to lecturing for 50 minutes, if you want to record lectures to share with students online; then, these must be "chunked" to record.

- Canvas video tool
Canvas has a video tool feature. You will need a webcam. You can use this tool anywhere you have access to the text editor, for example in announcements, discussions, assignments, or feedback in gradebook. Students also have the option for using this.
- Screencasting
Screencasting is great when you need to show a student how to do something in Canvas or how to do something in Word or PowerPoint or anytime you need to show something that relates to the onscreen environment. Screencast-O-Matic is the tool that I use when I need to do this.
- Whiteboard apps

If you want to draw something, work a problem, or explain a PowerPoint slide, there are whiteboard apps that will let you do that. The one that I am most familiar with is Explain Everything.

- Document Cameras

There are some classroom document cameras that record. They pretty much do the same thing that the whiteboard app will do and more. You could possibly use the document camera to demonstrate a procedure.

- Web cams, Ipad, Phone Video

There are so many options for creating video. One issue is the format compatibility with Canvas. I think Canvas converts video files to its format but it may not take all. Size of file is the second consideration. You must record or edit any long video that you want to upload to Canvas into short multiple segments. We do not have a media server and Canvas cannot handle large videos. It is recommended that you create a YouTube account and place videos there. Then link them in Canvas. This does provide an additional benefit of automatic captioning. Automatic captioning is not perfect but can be edited. YouTube does have video size restrictions as well but you can request an exception which will let you upload longer videos.

Instructor Presence

Online learning does not mean self-paced or correspondence learning. You are expected to be present in the course. How do you establish and maintain instructor presence in the online classroom?

- Post a welcome announcement and/or send a welcome letter/email
- Create an “Meet Your Instructor” page or video where you share some personal information (such as you would share in a first class face-to-face session)
- Create an introduction discussion and post and reply to each student’s introduction post (if this is a new start course)
- Respond as quickly as possible to any student email or post to the Help Please discussion forum
- Be present in any graded discussion forum
- Reach out to students anytime you feel there is a concern that needs to be addressed or if you see a student that is doing something exceptional (This would be in the form of a personal email or phone call).
- Grade assignments and provide feedback consistent with the timeframe you communicated
- Anything that you can do to let students know that you are logging in and being active

Hide Navigation Buttons You Aren’t Using

- If you aren’t using it, don’t make it available. It just clutters up navigation options for students.

Synchronous Connection/ Conferencing

This means that you are connecting at the same time students are for a “live” event. Some tools allow for recording and you can make the recording available for students who are not able to login for the

“live” session. There are tools (Canvas based and non-Canvas based) that will allow you to connect “live” with your students. Some instructors use this option to provide mini-lectures, just-in-time help, test prep help, or office hours.

- Please refer to our VP of IT email for the MC supported tool (WebEx?). This will allow you to meet in a virtual classroom which might be what some of your courses need.
- Canvas Conference Tool
This is the tool that Canvas provides for this purpose.

NetTutor

- NetTutor is our online tutoring service. Please make sure this “button” is available in your course menu if it is not.

Student View

There is a Student View feature in Canvas that is very helpful for troubleshooting. You can go to Student View and see the course as your students will see it. Your (instructor view) allows you to see everything even when it is not published or hidden in the menu. You may forget to publish an item or a module and if that is the case the students will not be able to see it. Not to worry though—students are pretty quick to let you know when they can see or find something and usually it’s a matter of not being published.

Syllabus Statements

There are three required statements which need to be included in your course syllabus.

- Disability Statement
Services will provide each student with a letter outlining any reasonable accommodations. The student must present the letter to the instructor at the beginning of the semester. For more information on MC special services see the web site:
www.midland.edu/admissions/StudentServices/StudentswithDisabilities or call (432) 685-5598
- Title IX Statement
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<http://wdcrobcop01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm> or call 1 (800) 421-3481.
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Garfield, PAD 104, Midland, TX 79705, (432) 685-4534, nmorgan@midland.edu. Para más información sobre estas políticas no discriminatorias , visite <http://wdcrobcop01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm> o llame al 1 (800) 421-3481.

- Online Attendance Verification Statement
Students enrolled in online courses MUST log in and actively participate by completing academic assignments required by the instructor by the official census date. Students who log in but do not actively participate in an academically-related activity will be reported as Never Attended and dropped from the course.

Publish / Unpublish

In order for students to access your course the course must be published. In order for students to see individual course items you have created, they must be published. In order for students to see course navigation links in the course menu pane, they must be made available. By default the course is not published, and items are not published. You will see a green check mark by individual items if that item is published. If you do not see that check mark, it is not available.

Help

- Through multiple emails you have been provided many resources.
- You have incredibly experienced and knowledgeable colleagues who have been teaching online for many years. They were once in your shoes. They will be happy to give you advice, etc. Any of them will be happy to help you if you just let them know.
- You have experienced professional staff who are available to help you as well.
- If you need help, please ask. My contact information is:
 - sgray@midland.edu
 - 432-685-5576 Please leave a message, if I am not in the office. The message goes to my e-mail and I will be checking email frequently.