

# FACILITATING YOUR ONLINE COURSE

Recommendations from The Office of Online Learning

May 2016

## PLAN AHEAD

**Consider valuable ways to teach the content. Identify difficult topics and plan detailed instruction accordingly.**

**Online:** 100% of course interaction and content is online. There are no face-to-face meetings.

## Remember!

Organization is a key aspect of managing an online course.

Create a folder structure for saving content that matches the structure of your Blackboard course. Doing so will prevent wasting time searching for any given item.

Specify subject line format. Tell students how to use the subject line of emails, course messages, discussion threads, assignments, and any other tools that have this space. Clear, consistent, and purposeful naming conventions make file storage easier.

Create FAQ and Resources areas in your course to update along the way. They become valuable tools that let students help themselves.

## Record Keeping and Communication Tips

- Provide students with written instructions for all aspects of the course.
- Type announcements, assignments, assessment, and all other course content in Word, save it for your records, then copy and paste to Blackboard. This will prevent loss of work in the event of technical issues.
- Create folders for incoming student emails and Blackboard system notifications (such as those for discussion board subscriptions), then set a rule to forward emails automatically to those folders. This will help you manage the time you dedicate to addressing course concerns because you will need to specifically check those areas, but it will avoid filling up your inbox until you chose to do so.
- Visit your course often to reduce the occurrence of an overwhelming backlog that grows while you are absent. Aim to check in once or twice a day.
- Use announcements for sharing course updates, reminders, and corrections at least weekly. Dates and times can be set to make their release automatic.
- Encourage student use of email or course messages for private matters only.
- Encourage use of the discussion board for non-private questions or concerns.

## Create Instructor Presence

- Check in often, provide feedback, post replies, and ask extending questions as well as share examples and experiences in order to demonstrate your active involvement in the course.
- Hold optional office hours online to provide synchronous opportunities to ask questions. This strategy works well when scheduled during times students are also working on complex assignments. Remember to keep attendance optional as not all students will have the same availability, especially those in other time zones.

## Consider Large Class Size

- Use automatic grading options for quizzes and exams.
- Use rubrics and work samples to proactively guide students from the beginning of an assignment in order to potentially reduce the amount of feedback you will need to provide.
- Facilitate asynchronous interactions, such as using the discussion board or commenting on blogs, in manageable ways by focusing on quality rather than quantity. For example: Instead of "post and reply to 2 other students," consider "post your thoughts and then read your classmates posts to find another student whose ideas resonate with you in a meaningful way - then respond to them explaining why their ideas stand out to you and expand on what they have to say in relation to the topic, the course, or your own experience." Model this in your own participation.
- Utilize think-pair-share activities online by sorting students into groups. First, assign a student moderator in each group. Second, have the groups complete the discussion in their group space for a set period of time. Third, have the student moderator post a summary of the group's discussion in the main course discussion board.