

Faculty Toolkit: Effective Course Practices

Canvas Shell Considerations

All courses, regardless of format, will have at least a basic set of elements housed in Canvas. Students are encountering an increased level of complexity and demand as they navigate courses where more content is delivered online and virtually. Clear, predictable, and easy access to course information and materials will reduce complexity and provide efficiencies and will support a higher quality instructional experience for students.

The minimum recommended Canvas elements include:

- posting the **course syllabus** in a screen reader-friendly format (not pdf) for accessibility
- a **main page/home page** that includes a course orientation, information on links to any outside platforms, and instructions on how to get started in the course

Effective Digital Teaching and Learning Checklist

This checklist provides a roadmap to developing a high-quality course beginning with the syllabus and continuing with course design/organization, aesthetic design, interaction and collaboration, effective use of technology and assessments. In addition, the course design strives to ensure universal access for all students. This tool is designed to help you think through critical elements of your course. Use this tool to support your teaching and learning goals.

Section 1: General Canvas Features

Below are elements of Canvas that can enhance student success in your course.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Syllabus is posted in Canvas				
Welcome/orientation page				
Assignments are posted in Canvas generating a to-do list calendar for students				
Scores on assignments are communicated using the Gradebook feature in Canvas (CU Denver's FERPA-compliant approach)				
Use of Announcements for information the whole class needs				

Section 2: Course Information

This section refers to the online course syllabus and course information including objectives, student learning outcomes, course requirements, and academic integrity.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Course catalog information is provided: Description, units, prerequisites				
Instructor contact information is available				
Instructor office hours are available (online)				
Required and supplemental textbooks, reading lists, and course materials are listed				
Open educational resources are used when possible				
Learning objectives are clearly stated				
Course student learning outcomes are stated				
Course communication instructions/guidelines are stated (i.e., instructor email guidelines)				
Grading policy is clearly stated				
Attendance and participation policy are clearly stated				
Directions are CLEAR and easy to understand for tasks/assignments				
Academic integrity policy is clearly presented				
Specific technology requirements are stated (if needed)				
Late and make-up work policy is clearly stated				

Section 3: Course Design and Organization

Course Design and Organization refers to elements of instructional design in an online course. This includes: the structure, instructional strategies, and the overall course set-up or course classroom.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Content is made available to students in manageable segments or “chunks” (e.g., organized by weeks, units, chapters)				
Content is appropriate for student learning of course objectives				
Course schedule (calendar) is summarized in one place and clearly identifies overall plan of the course				
Accessibility issues are addressed: color compliance and screen readability				
All links used in the course are accurate and up to date				
A timeframe is stated for modules, activities, and assessment				
A weekly rhythm is established for modules/activities				

Section 4: Aesthetic Design

Aesthetic design refers to the overall appearance of the course and includes visual aspects such as color, typeface, images, and other elements key to presenting the course material and enhancing accessibility for all students.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
A course banner (image) is used to identify the course				
Color and texture do not overpower the course information				
Sufficient contrast between text and background makes information easy to read				
Design keeps course pages to a comfortable length with white space				
Images are used in course design to support course content				
Images are accompanied by text descriptions (alt text) or captions for images that require a more complex description				
Typeface is easy to read. Documents are created using Sans Serif fonts (e.g., Calibri, Arial, or Tahoma) with a size of 12 point or higher				
Styles such as titles and headings are used to format the document				
Data organized in rows and columns are put in a table				
Spelling and grammar are accurate				

Section 5: Interaction and Collaboration

Interaction and Collaboration refers to the extent to which there is student-instructor, student-student, and student-content interaction. Exemplary courses should integrate many different ways to interact and collaborate in the online environment.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Student participation requirements/expectations are clearly stated				
Instructor provides announcements/reminders				
Instructor email response time is clearly stated				
Regular feedback about student performance is provided in a timely manner throughout the course (e.g., discussion board posts, assignments, quizzes, etc.)				
Course promotes an active discussion area which encourages students to reply to each other				
Co-construct course community norms with students				
Provide structure and opportunity for students to connect with one another and work together				
Contact is initiated with students in a variety of ways: (Select all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> Announcements <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Phone conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Video messages <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Chat sessions <input type="checkbox"/> Voice enabled messages <input type="checkbox"/> Breakout rooms <input type="checkbox"/> Participation in discussion board <input type="checkbox"/> Face-to-face meetings (when appropriate) <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____				
Communication/collaboration tools used in the course: <input type="checkbox"/> Emails <input type="checkbox"/> Chat <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion board <input type="checkbox"/> Whiteboard <input type="checkbox"/> Student presentations <input type="checkbox"/> Video messages <input type="checkbox"/> Polling <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____				
Active learning exercises used in the course: <input type="checkbox"/> Think-pair-share <input type="checkbox"/> Annotations <input type="checkbox"/> Skeletal note-taking <input type="checkbox"/> Jigsaw <input type="checkbox"/> In-video quizzing <input type="checkbox"/> Reflections <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____				

Section 6: Effective Use of Technology

Effective use of technology refers to the successful integration of technology into the course and its use in a variety of formats that help students achieve course goals and objectives.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Course uses multiple online instructional tools				
Course materials are presented using appropriate formats compatible across computer platform				
Audio materials are accompanied by a transcript				
Videos and screencasts are closed-captioned				
What Canvas tools are used in the course: (Select all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Course Image <input type="checkbox"/> Quiz tool <input type="checkbox"/> Calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Gradebook <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Conferences. <input type="checkbox"/> Conferences <input type="checkbox"/> Outcomes				
What external tools are used in the course: (Select all that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Chat <input type="checkbox"/> Journals <input type="checkbox"/> Calendar <input type="checkbox"/> Surveys/polls <input type="checkbox"/> Videos <input type="checkbox"/> Graphics/images <input type="checkbox"/> Wikis <input type="checkbox"/> Animations <input type="checkbox"/> Blogs <input type="checkbox"/> Whiteboard <input type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Quiz tools <input type="checkbox"/> Podcasts <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations <input type="checkbox"/> Portfolios <input type="checkbox"/> Databases <input type="checkbox"/> Other:				

Section 7: Assessment/Evaluation

The assessment category focuses on the ways in which the student is evaluated toward achieving the student learning outcomes and the quality, type, structure, and security of the assessments used.	✓	N/A	REFLECTIONS	NEXT STEPS
Both summative (final, higher stakes to evaluate) and formative (ongoing, lower stakes to inform) assessments are used throughout the course (e.g., not just a midterm and final exam)				
Sample assignments are provided to illustrate instructor expectations				
Detailed instructions and tips for completing assignments are provided				
Academic integrity policies are included at the beginning of summative assessments				
Appropriate security measures are enabled when computer testing, such as:				
Time limitations are placed on exams given online				
Exams are password protected				
Exams are composed of question pools where possible to ensure online students have equivalent but different online tests				
Questions on exams are seen one at a time				
Students cannot backtrack				

Equitable Access During COVID-19 Policies

One issue that needs particular attention this upcoming semester is that of equitable access to the learning environment. COVID-19's shifting context may make it challenging for students to attend/participate at various points in the semester due to health issues, family situations, and/or living/transportation arrangements. Certain course policies (e.g., participation, attendance) may need to shift and be clarified to support equity in this context. Whatever policies you determine are best for your course, all policies should be explicitly stated in your syllabus.

Suggestions for course policies are provided below/ This is not a complete list. They are provided to support your thinking with the recognition that there may be some that are an even better fit for your course and context.

Given that students may contract the virus or identify the need to not come to campus for reasons related to the virus, suggested equitable elements for your **attendance/participation policy** are below. You can use this checklist to indicate which element(s) might be a good fit for your class.

- Allow full attendance credit for Zooming/live streaming into the on-campus course meeting
- Allow a number of absences without any penalty for any reason
- Allow students to receive full participation points for watching a recorded session
- Allow students to complete an alternative exercise/assignment for make-up of missed participation points if unable to attend class
- Allow students to participate in-class through a variety of methods (e.g., discussion during live class sessions, discussion boards, response papers, reflections, etc.)
- Other: (Please describe)

Given that students may have interruptions to their daily schedules due to COVID-19, suggested equitable elements for your **due date/late policy** are below. You can use this checklist to indicate which element(s) might be a good fit for your class.

- Allow students one 48-hour extension with no penalty for any reason
- Allow a 24-hour grace period around all assignments
- Allow late assignments but with a small (<10%) deduction in points
- Provide students with assignments due at regular intervals, from which they must choose a minimum number to get full credit
- Provide small extra credit opportunities for students to help recoup points lost on assignments that are late or missing
- Create a mid-semester check-in with students to discuss missing assignments, current grades, and what steps they need to succeed in the course going forward
- Other: (Please describe)

Given that students may have bandwidth internet issues, access issues to technology, and/or privacy concerns around privacy, suggest equitable elements for your **technology policy** are below. You can use this checklist to indicate which element(s) might be a good fit for your class.

- Survey students about their technology needs/concerns at the beginning of the semester to help guide class policies
- Provide resources in your syllabus and Canvas shell where students can go to get help with technology needs they may have
- Students are not required to have their camera turned on for Zoom sessions
- Students may have laptops and other electronic devices during on-campus class meetings.
- Accept use of the chat feature and/or discussion boards as counting toward real-time class participation
- Any Zoom sessions that will be recorded will be announced at the beginning of that session so students elect to turn off their camera.
- Not requiring algorithm-based online proctoring technology (e.g., Proctorio) that use facial detection technology
- Deliberately choose course technology requirements with students' range of financial resources in mind
- Deliberately choose course technology requirements with students' range of physical abilities in mind
- Other: (Please describe)

Learn More

If you would like to learn more about any of these effective practices in this document, The [Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning](#) has created a [self-paced, 10-module course](#) for anyone developing and teaching a virtual course for Summer and Fall 2020. This course is non-facilitated, meaning that you can work through the contents at your own pace, and based on your own needs and interests.

Select References Consulted

- Equity Toolkit – Drawing from evidence-based best practices (and feature CU Denver’s own Dr. Brenda Allen), the equity toolkit has resources on creating and maintaining a culturally relevant classroom community and designing and implementing an inclusive course.
<http://masterplan.highered.colorado.gov/equitytoolkit/equity-toolkit/>
- California State University – Chico’s influential Rubric for Online Instruction was developed to “develop and evaluate online courses” This rating system is now used throughout the California State University system as well as in other colleges and universities.
- The North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL) produced a document “designed to provide states, districts, online programs, and other organizations with a set of quality guidelines for online teaching.” That document, The National Standards for Quality Online Teaching consists of a rating guide intended to identify high quality online courses
- The seminal article by Chickering and Gamson, Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education has been used as a guide to good practice in thousands of college classrooms. Chickering and Ehrmann, in Implementing The Seven Principles: Technology as Lever showed how the seven principles could be implemented in a technology-rich environment <http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven>
- Quality Matters (QM) is a faculty-centered, peer review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and online components.
- Sunal, D.W., Sunal, C.S., Odell, M.R., Sundberg, C.A. Research-Supported Best Practices for Developing Online Learning. Journal of Interactive Online Learning.
<http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/2.1.1.pdf>