

# KEEP TEACHING

Spring 2021, No 1.

## FIVE TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR VIRTUAL CLASS

We talked to students, faculty, staff and administrators about what worked well in our virtual Fall 2020 classes. Here are five suggestions that may be helpful as you design your Spring 2021 courses.



For more information on these tips or for other resources that support online teaching and course design, please contact your faculty development team. Contact information is provided on the next page.

### 1. USE THE LMS (BRIGHTSPACE)

Avoid a proliferation of platforms and put as much of your course on Brightspace as possible. Brightspace course shells are automatically created for all class sections and students are automatically enrolled, simplifying access for both faculty and students. You can teach an effective online course with LMS tools such as Announcements, Discussion Forums, Assignments and Quizzes, and you can use the Gradebook feature to keep your students apprised of their progress.

If you choose to use publisher-provided platforms or technologies outside the LMS, provide relevant links and/or access instructions in the Brightspace shell for your course.

### 2. EXPLAIN YOUR COURSE STRUCTURE

Provide a text or video explanation of the course structure to help students navigate the course. Many Cal Maritime students had a hard time finding relevant content and assignments because of differences in the way courses are designed and taught. (One instructor may provide links to all assignments in the syllabus, while another may have students check the 'Assignments' tab in Brightspace.)

Consider organizing your course into weekly modules and provide module roadmaps to help students understand what is expected of them each week. A predictable rhythm helps students manage their time (Boettcher & Conrad, 2016).

### 3. EMPLOY THE BRIGHTSPACE CALENDAR WIDGET

Time management was particularly challenging for cadets in online classes. Faculty can help by posting due dates for graded and non-graded work to the Brightspace calendar. The calendar widget appears on the course home page. Once students learn how to use it, they can track assignments and verify due dates.

### 4. COMMUNICATE CONSISTENTLY AND FREQUENTLY

Cadets in online classes cited the lack of clear and consistent communication as one of their major pain points. In some classes, students did not hear from their instructors for several weeks. Communicate with your students frequently and in a variety of ways. As far as possible, stick to a schedule for how you communicate with cadets and explain:

## Contact Us

### **Nipoli Kamdar**

Faculty Development Coordinator  
[nkamdar@csu.edu](mailto:nkamdar@csu.edu)



### **Khaoi Mady**

Director, Academic Technology  
[kmady@csu.edu](mailto:kmady@csu.edu)



### **Samuel B. Pearson III**

Faculty Mentor  
[sbpearson@csu.edu](mailto:sbpearson@csu.edu)



### **Ariel Setniker**

Faculty Mentor  
[asetniker@csu.edu](mailto:asetniker@csu.edu)



- **When:** At the beginning of the semester tell students when they will hear from you with course announcements and updates.

Explain the timeframe in which emails will be answered (for example within 24-48 hours).

Check in with the class regularly to address questions and concerns.

- **Where:** Tell cadets where they can find relevant information. Use the Announcements tool in Brightspace because it allows students to easily return to messages for review.

To cut down on the number of individual questions, set-up a discussion forum for general course information (when is the next paper due, what chapters does the test cover, etc.) where students can post a question and get answers from the instructor or other students. Encourage students to go to this section of the course before asking the instructor.

- **How:** Explain what your course announcements/updates will consist of. Is this where changes to assignments will be shared, or is it a check-in to review upcoming work, or maybe a summary of learning from the week before?

## 5. CREATE COMMUNITY

Deliberately, consistently, and relentlessly work to build student-faculty and student-student relationships in online courses (Wehler, 2018). Many of our cadets, especially first-year students, struggled with feelings of isolation and frustration last Fall. They did not feel comfortable reaching out to their professors, or even their peers, when they had questions or concerns. A sense of belonging and community is critical to keeping students motivated, engaged and successful.

- Schedule regular online office hours, just as you did on campus. Even if students do not attend regularly, they appreciate knowing that the professor is available to answer questions.
- Survey students in Week 1 to get to know them.
- Personalize the course by sharing a welcome video or photograph of yourself and encourage students to do the same.
- Participate in online discussion forums, respond to questions, and provide feedback in a timely manner.
- Consider meeting briefly with students individually or in small groups during the first half of the semester.
- Plan activities and assignments that allow for collaborative work. Encourage student interaction through presentations or discussion forums. Use breakout rooms to facilitate group work in synchronous sessions or have students work on a project in small groups. When possible, provide informal time for students to connect before or after synchronous classes.

*\*Inspired by conversations with Cal Maritime's University Advisors with tips adapted from CSU Channel Islands, Student Virtual Learning Databrief, Vo.1, Issue 7.*