

Student Engagement

Well-designed interactions can come in a number of different forms. They key is to have students interested and active in these interactions. It is also important to set your expectations and standards.

Getting started

A good place to establish your expectations and interactions with students is at the beginning of the course. The following are examples for establishing expectations and building connections.

Syllabus

The syllabus is great place to detail your expectations for student interactions. There are many ways to interact with students ranging from discussions, wikis, blogs, journals, emails, announcements, assignments, feedback and some more advanced tools. Using all of these tools would likely be ineffective and poor design. Thus you might want to comment on what tools you do use in your class and set the expectations for each. Detail for students what you will do and how you will be involved. Then detail your expectations of them. You can provide rubrics and exemplar samples for each.

Welcome

In addition to the syllabus, a welcome area or welcome announcement is another way to establish expectations. Some faculty members have created a specific area that walks a student through “How to take this course.” You can list expectations and rubrics as mentioned earlier or create audio or video recordings on this subject. A simple welcome recording with your voice speaking to this is easy to do and adds a “personal touch” to the class.

A personalized welcome can also be established by creating faculty a screen capture video detailing how to effectively navigate the course.

Faculty Information Area

The Faculty Information area allows faculty to establish initial contact with students and also acts as a great landing place to detail your expectations and means of interaction. In addition to providing basic information to the class, you can provide a bio and introduce yourself to the class on either a more personal level or a deeper professional level, depending on your preference. Here you can also point to any of the important items for success in the course.

Announcements

* Announcements are a quick way to relay a message to your entire class and engage with your students. It can be used as a tool to establish a presence with your students. Faculty can use this tool to:
  + - post major announcements
    - introduce a week or manage the transition from one week, module or unit to the next
    - close a week and post summary comments
    - maintain regular contact during the week
* The announcements page or the home page is the systematic, default landing page for each class. Students also see announcements at the “My Blackboard” level. They can see and easily access announcements from their main or most common blackboard interfaces. They also have the availability to customize their dashboard notification settings for announcements. This tool is simple to use and can easily connect faculty with students.
* If you are going to use this tool, it is worth mentioning it in the syllabus and clearly detailing its importance. A sample statement could be, “During the semester, I use announcements to communicate with you as students on a regular basis. The announcements are not a substitute for regularly accessing and participating in the class, but rather another important piece of our interactions as a learning community.”
* There are a few customizable features within the Announcements tool. One of these features is to have a copy of your announcement sent to the students email accounts. Many students have a regular process for checking their emails, more regularly than taking the time to access Blackboard. For example, students may have emails forwarded to a mobile device. Thus, this feature puts the connection or message in two places for them to see it. Simple but effective.

Email

* Email is another simple and easy way to connect with your students. Having said that, it is important as the instructor to mention your intended use of email. This can be done as described in the “Getting started” area on the home page of this website.
* Email can be an effective way to connect with individual students, the entire class as whole or selected groups within the class. In an online class, emails are often a first line of communication. Having said that, email can be overwhelming at times. Too many emails may turn students off or cause them to miss an important message. This again speaks to the importance of establishing your standards of interacting with students as the faculty member.