Communicating in an Online Learning Environment

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Agenda

- Guiding principles
- Best practices and strategies
- Questions
Guiding Principles
Provide reassurance and be present

- **Imagine yourself in your students’ place**
  - Sudden, unexpected transition to remote learning
  - Broader context of the coronavirus pandemic

- **Consider what your course represents to students**
  - An important step toward achieving their educational and professional goals
  - Relationships that connect them to the Suffolk community

- **Frame your course as a safe harbor**
  - Combat feelings of uncertainty by offering reassurance
  - Fight feelings of isolation by being present
Model resilience

- **Imagine yourself in your place**
  - Sudden, unexpected transition to remote teaching
  - Broader context of the coronavirus pandemic

- **Brace yourself**
  - Teaching online is typically more time-intensive than teaching in-person
  - Expect that teaching remotely will not always go as planned

- **Cultivate a resilient mindset**
  - Be kind to yourself
  - Embrace strategies that enable you to teach effectively *and also* efficiently
Best Practices and Strategies
Establish clear expectations

- **How will you communicate with your students?**
  - Consider using the Announcements page in Blackboard
  - How will you provide feedback on student work?

- **How would you like students to communicate with you?**
  - Do you prefer email, phone, text, or other methods?

- **When should students expect to hear back from you?**
  - Timeframe for responding to emails or other student inquiries (eg, within 24 hours)
  - Timeframe for providing feedback on coursework (eg, within 7 days of due date)

- **Communicate these expectations to your students—and try to follow them**
Guide students through the wilderness

- **Provide a new roadmap for your course**
  - Describe how the course experience will be different online
  - Explain any changes in the syllabus (e.g., updated assignments or due dates)
  - Describe your plan for the first remote class meeting
  - Encourage students to be flexible: You may need to make additional changes

- **Orient your students to the online learning environment**
  - Describe how the course materials and activities are organized in Blackboard
  - Create a “course tour” video
  - Direct students to their next step: “To get started, log in to our course in Blackboard and click on….”

- **Communicate immediately when plans change**
Prefer broadcast messages to one-on-one

- Make sure all students have access to the same information about the course
  - Rather than responding to individual students, send a message to the whole course
  - Reduce the number of individual communication threads you need to manage
  - “I have been getting good questions about this week’s assignment, so I want to clarify for everyone”
  - “If you have additional questions, please post them in the Course Questions discussion board. I will answer there for everyone to see”

- Exception: Keep private communication private
  - Offer feedback directly to individual students (eg, not as responses within discussion board)
  - In the Course Questions forum, respond to private matters by email
  - “Thank you for your question. Since this is specific to your experience, I am going to respond to you directly by email”
Now more than ever: Be clear

- **Invest time in communicating clearly**
  - Anticipate questions and offer clear, detailed information
  - More is not always better. Be concise and consistent
  - Have someone read class-wide communications before sending

- **End every communication by welcoming questions**
  - Remind students about the Course Questions discussion board
Elicit student questions

- **Normalize uncertainty and encourage questions**
  - “This is new for all of us. I expect you to have questions”
  - “I want to do everything I can to make this course a positive learning experience. Hearing your questions helps me understand how I can accomplish that”

- **Create structure for asking questions**
  - Students may not see a “natural” opportunity to voice questions in an online environment
  - Add a “Course Questions” discussion board in Blackboard
  - Tell students how to navigate to the Course Questions discussion board and how to use it
  - “Please post questions about the course that could be relevant to other students. I will respond to all questions posted here within 24 hours”
  - Subscribe to the Course Questions discussion board to get notified when a new question is posted
Be prepared to respond to concerns

- **Respond immediately to show that you are taking care of the issue**
  - Describe what students have reported in simple, non-technical language
  - Let students know when they can expect you to follow-up about the issue
  - “A few students have reported problems accessing this week’s video. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I am working on a solution and will be in touch by the end of the day with an update”

- **Allay concerns about grades, graduation, or other outcomes**
  - “Please rest assured that this issue will not negatively impact your grade in the course”

- **Stay in touch with students until you have a solution**
  - Follow-up as promised, even if it is to say that you are still working on a solution
  - Resist over-communicating about problems. Allow students to focus on their coursework while you problem-solve
Questions?

Visit https://sites.suffolk.edu/ctse/ for continuity of learning resources and events