VILLANOVA INSTITUTE FOR
TEACHING AND LEARNING

Guiding Practices for Setting Up Your Course in an LMS
(for Online, Hybrid and Technology-Enhanced Courses)

Learning Management System (LMS) prepares us to rethink how to structure the traditional classroom by providing students with additional support, increased active and collaborative learning environment, ease of communication, augmented course content, and personalized and constructive feedback.

The following practices have been developed to help faculty plan effective technology-enhanced instruction using LMS (such as Blackboard); they are aligned with national standards for quality instruction and research in the practice of teaching in an online, hybrid or technology-enhanced learning environment. Although not all practices are required for hybrid or technology-enhanced face-to-face courses, they are still beneficial to help enhance both students' learning experience and instructional quality.

1. Course Overview and Navigation

At the beginning of the semester, it is important to provide sufficient information to set the tone for the course, let students know the expectations, and provide guidance to ensure they get off to a good start.

a. Provide course syllabus in front and center location; e.g., on LMS course landing page.

b. Provide welcome message, including focus of the course, and course navigation information on the course landing page.

c. State overall course learning goals clearly and measurably.

d. List instructor contact information, office hours and expected response time to students' inquiries.

2. Course Structure and Content Organization

Course structure signals how the course is organized. The content needs to be grounded in stated course learning goals and be organized into content segments/modules.

a. Structure the course to support the learning goals.

b. Arrange the course content in a linear, logical structure, and organize the content into manageable segments/modules.

c. Use consistent organizational structure, color scheme, and textual components throughout the course to help students navigate the course.

d. Provide course materials (graphics, media, documents, etc.) in accessible formats (ADA Compliance for Online Course Design).

e. Provide learning materials in different modalities (e.g., simulation, video, interactive learning object) to engage the students directly. When you select text-based materials, please consider what students need to gain from readings; e.g., use the discussion board to provide guiding questions to readings.

f. Consult with your subject librarian at Falvey Library on how to ensure the accessibility of your texts/ readings. Select cost-free materials that you may use in place of traditional course readings (Affordable Materials Project).

3. Learning Community and Student Engagement

Students often feel isolated and uncertain about how to engage with the LMS and/or ask for assistance; instructor presence is critical. Incorporate opportunities for student-to-student and instructor-to-student(s) interactions, and be present in the course.

a. Convey to learners the expectations (grading policy and etiquette) for learner participation and interaction (face-to-face and online activities).

b. Use different communication tools (e.g., discussion, announcement, chat, email) to model and promote interactions, and build a learning community.

4. Assessment and Feedback

Use a range of assessment methods to gauge students' performance, provide them with formative feedback to revise their work, and offer opportunities for students to self-assess their learning.

a. Align assessments closely with learning goals.

b. Provide varied assessments and peer feedback opportunities.

c. Post announcements to highlight upcoming activity (at the beginning of the week/module) and provide general class performance summary (at the end of the week/module) that gives immediate and detailed feedback on student performance.

d. Develop specific and descriptive criteria to evaluate students' work and participation, as appropriate. Ensure that grading criteria reflect the grading policy.

e. Provide students with clear directions on where and (technically) how to submit assignments and assessments.

f. Arrange for secure online testing and submission of written work, as appropriate.

5. Course Technology Tools

a. Select tools and media that support the learning objectives of the course.

b. Use technology as a means to support your students' learning experience. For example, why are you using online discussions? What kind of student learning do they support in your

course? How do they relate to other assessments?

c.   Provide access to all technologies required for this course.

d.   Offer explicit instructions (written, audio, video, or link to tutorial) on how to use the technology tools.

6. Learner Support and Resources

Provide students with access to technical and academic support services that are essential to their learning in the course.

a.   Outline how students can access and receive technical support.

b.   Link to academic resources, as appropriate (such as Office of Disability Services, Learning Support Services, Mathematics Learning Resource Center, Writing Center, Falvey Library).

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