Example Welcome Announcement

Hello everyone,

Welcome to Best Practices: Engage Students in Your Online Course! This is a reminder that this TILT short course begins Monday in Canvas, CSU's learning management system. (If the course doesn’t appear in your list of courses Monday mid-day or you are having trouble logging into Canvas, please let us know so that we can resolve the issue.)

Please:

- Watch the Welcome to the Course video, and read Meet Your Facilitator.
- Go to Modules on the Course Menu to view the course contents.
- Be sure to reference the Syllabus as you complete each module’s activities.

Should you have any general questions about the course, please post them to Discussions > Coffee Shop forum where your facilitators and fellow classmates can respond with answers so that all may benefit. Questions of a more personal nature can be emailed to your instructor by selecting Inbox from the left of the Canvas navigation and clicking on the “Compose a new message” icon.

So that you can get the most out of this course and begin building a sense of community, you should log in at least once a day to see if anything new has been posted.

Now that we’ve gotten some of the “housekeeping” out of the way, we wanted to share Ten Ways to Overcome Barriers to Student Engagement Online [Web]. It's a quick read and not only notes some of the anxieties instructors feel about engaging students in an online course but also touches on several of the engagement strategies we'll be talking about in this class. If you have a few moments, check it out! You might also take a minute to examine the wordart on engagement above. What comes to mind when you consider student engagement?

Looking forward to spending the next three weeks with you online and hope that you learn a lot and enjoy the experience.

Example of an Announcement Heading into the Weekend

Hello Everyone,

Reading through the posts this morning, someone wrote, "This is a lot to think about!" Yes, it is. I've been thinking about the connection between the three modules we have worked through so far, and to me, the idea of 'belonging' stands out most. Not that course maps, expectations, etc. are not important, but the idea that everything we do as instructors has an impact on students, makes me think about my role as instructor differently. From the language we use in our syllabus to how we ask students to spend time in our classroom, the more intentional we are about our plans before students arrive, the more we can ensure that all students feel this sense of belonging, so they can produce their best work. Thank you all for your engagement with this content.

This week’s assignments include:
• **Module 3 Assign: Develop a Positive Classroom Climate** which includes a four-page reading and questions to consider. It also provides ideas on building classroom rapport.
• Responding to colleagues on the **Classroom Norms** and **Video and Discussion** threads
• If you have not yet turned in the one-paragraph doc. for **Module 3 Assign: Sense of Belonging**, please get that in as soon as possible.

Have a wonderful weekend!

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**Example of a Facilitator Responses to Welcome/Introduction Forum**

*Student 1 response to the initial discussion prompt:*

Hello there!

My name is Catriona. I teach Linguistics and TEFL/TESL undergraduate and graduate classes in the English Department. I'm taking this course not only because of what happened in the Spring, but also because I taught online over the Summer last year and I felt like students and I were disconnected somehow. Since I'm teaching online again this Summer, I'd like to change that. I've had good and bad experiences regarding engagement in online courses but, of course, the bad ones stuck with me. It was an experience just like the one mentioned in the introduction to this module. An interesting thing about myself is that I speak English, Portuguese, and Spanish.

*Facilitator response:*

Hi Catriona, Welcome to the course! As instructors, we tend to remember the negatives and embarrassing moments. I encourage you to remember or even jot down a few positives and keep them in view in your working space as a reminder of the positive impact you have on students every day. So glad you've joined us for these three weeks :)

*Student 2 response to the initial discussion prompt:*

Hi everyone,

My name is Hanna and I'm a new Assistant Professor here at CSU. I created and instructed a Political Ecology course for the first time this Spring. I also have to develop 2 other courses.

I am taking this course because student engagement is a major priority in my teaching. Going online this Spring was not too bad with a small class, but not ideal since Political Ecology is theory heavy and discussion based. Using zoom for virtual class meetings was a success- students appreciated connecting through the platform. I still need to develop this course as fully online and want training that will help me improve my online instruction strategies.

Like Catriona, I speak English, Portuguese and Spanish :)  

*Facilitator response:*

Hi Hanna, Welcome :) I'm glad your course went well this spring! Classroom climate and engagement are a priority for me as well - learning is a social process. These three weeks should provide you with some ways to continue to develop your online course.

And it sounds like you and Catriona need to have coffee together sometime :)
Example of a Facilitator Encouraging a Student to Share in a Discussion

*Student response to the initial discussion prompt:*

This semester I tried something new in the classroom to motivate student performance and attendance. I challenged them to treat this class as a professional development series, to prep for their career. I'm their team boss, so 1) anytime they miss work (class), I need an email ahead of time; and 2) focus on creating better quality written assignments or speaking up in class more, whichever is their greater weakness.

This approach has been surprisingly successful! Attendance improved and almost all students have emailed me ahead of time if they do need to miss. Classroom participation also increased. I'm hoping to make this into more of a 'contract' with the class next semester (this is a contracts course), as a first practice on Day 1 to read a contract together and then modify it per classroom input.

*Facilitator response:*

This is awesome, Chris! If you have a second and wouldn't mind sharing, I'd love to see how you set this up this semester--for example, was it just something you did verbally in class, was it on the syllabus, a separate handout, etc.? It seems like something many of us would be able to tweak and implement in our own classes--especially as we try to prepare students for real-world expectations.

Example of a Facilitator Encouraging Communication between Participants in a Discussion

*Student response to the initial discussion prompt:*

Case studies are always good. I am thinking to have students investigate historical events and write an analysis essay. But my concern is that engineering students do not like writing that much. So how to motivate them is important. I'd like to hear from all of you on suggestions on implementing similar approaches.

The idea of helping students create their own class community is attractive to me. I like to know what they really want than purely guessing what would work for them.

*Facilitator response:*

Carrie, look at Deion’s ice breaker below. It is easy and involves just a little writing; enough to jot down what they learn about their partner. This might help for making a more comfortable social climate when group projects are due. Deion, would you be willing to answer any questions that Carrie might have about implementing this in her own class?

Example of a Facilitator Asking Questions/Providing Guidance in a Discussion

*Facilitator response to student’s initial post:*

Hi Juanita,
I like the “Tips on Thriving in This Course” section of your syllabus. What if you ask your students this semester to write these tips for students next semester. Something you might consider. And good information to gather from students to inform your teaching.

Student response:

Hi Kim,

Having students write tips for next semester is a great idea! I found sometimes it is hard to get good information from students. I am teaching a challenging course this semester. I know that the students have difficulties to grasp some material, for example, the derivations of math are hard for them. But they do not know how to ask the specific questions and I don’t know which part is confusing them. I tried to ask some students after class to point to me which part they do not understand, which helps but I am not sure if I get a whole picture of their problems. Do you know any more effective ways to gather student inputs?

Facilitator response:

Hi Juanita,

I think it depends on the type of input you want to gather. If you want input about a specific topic like derivations, you can ask students individually like you did after class. Without knowing how you approach this topic during class, it’s difficult to answer your question: Do you ask students to write out their step by step process sometimes (and collect it), so you can see where they are struggling? Since I’m not sure what the process looks like, it’s difficult for me to know what to suggest.

As for input from your students for next semester’s students, you might consider a short survey with some of the following questions:

- What strategies did you use to do well in this course? During class? at home?
- Which topics did you find most challenging? What advice about these specific topics can you give to students who are in this class next semester?
- What advice would you give to a future student who feels they are falling behind in this class?

You can word these questions so they sound like you, but I think you will get valuable information to give to next semester’s students on your syllabus. You can take this strategy one step further and ask your students for feedback after the first exam with questions like:

- What is going well in this class so far? during class? with assignments?
- What are you finding most challenging? Are there any suggestions you can offer to help all students with these challenges?

If you tell students you value their feedback and are asking these question so they will be successful, most students will be kind and helpful. You might get a few who are not so kind, but if you’re ready for that, you can ignore them. This is a lot of information, so please let me know if you have any further questions.

Example of a Facilitator Sharing Resources in a Discussion

Student response to the initial discussion prompt:

I like the idea of story telling to get students engaged and interested in talking more about their experience (internships mostly) to foster an interactive climate with respect in the classroom. This is
something I always want to create, but have struggled to effectively implement in my own classroom. I think I struggle with how to create this in a course with more technical or STEM content.

Facilitator response:

Hi Logan,

You might find this article useful.


Examples of Facilitators Providing Feedback on Assignments

[Note: The feedback examples here are paired with rubrics that include built-in remarks that show students where they’ve scored and with more specific comments on the student assignment/document submissions themselves.]

Example 1:

Thank you for this reflection, Henry. We're glad you found the module helpful and that you have a way forward despite not having a lot of control over your course outcomes and assignments. I really appreciate this statement: "What I do have control over is how well students understand the course outcomes and are able to track their own growth towards achieving them." We will be interested to hear how students respond once you ask them about the new practice you're implementing.

Example 2:

Great idea for a paired assignment, Mitsuki! Nice job incorporating student-to-student engagement here. I especially like the writing guide as it provides a lot of helpful information as students work on this project. My one suggestion might be to provide some guiding prompts or conversation starters to give students a nudge toward the type of feedback you're looking for in their discussion conversations. You might also consider having a discussion rubric and exemplars of good/poor feedback at each stage. Overall, well done!

Example 3:

Coda, first off, kudos for replacing your exam with this type of exercise, and nice job of incorporating student-to-student engagement. If students don't find a group on their own, will you place them in a group? Allow them to work alone? You do a great job of scaffolding the assignment--would you provide feedback on submissions 2 and 3 so students have an opportunity to refine what they are doing? I would recommend supplying students with a rubric and perhaps exemplars to guide them in this assignment. Will students have an opportunity to rate or provide feedback regarding how their teammates performed the work/remain involved in the assignment? Last, you could also create groups for the students so that they have a space within Canvas to work with their teammates.