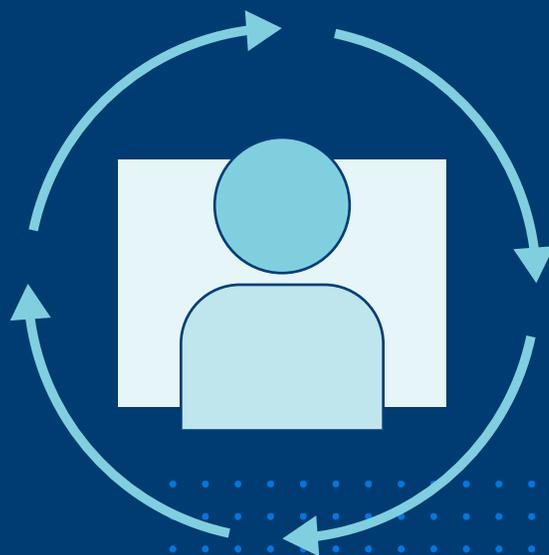


Caring for Students Playbook

Six Recommendations for Caring for Students



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Introduction

Over the past year our world has seen tremendous shifts in the way we interact, work, and learn. COVID-19 has introduced us to phrases like social distancing, increased adoption of web conferencing tools, and forced us to think about how we might do things differently.

During this unprecedented shift, institutions of higher education have been tested to provide academic continuity and care for students' needs in the classroom and beyond. The pandemic has created challenges for effective teaching and learning as students, instructors, and staff navigate unfamiliar course modalities, new technologies, health concerns, economic stressors, disrupted home routines, and a tumultuous social and political landscape.

With instructors' work focused on interacting with students, they have found themselves at the center of these challenges — essentially acting as the glue holding the learning experience together. To support students and ensure their success, we must provide guidance to instructors in caring for the whole student. But, how can this be done in authentic and easily implementable ways?

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This playbook is a collaboration between the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), Achieving the Dream (ATD), and the Every Learner Everywhere Network. It is designed to provide instructors with concrete strategies that can be implemented to support students during this exceptionally challenging time in their lives and beyond as we enter a post-inoculation world.

We would like to thank the contributors who helped to guide the initial work on this playbook — Dr. Lynette O’Keefe and Ms. Kate Lee McCarthy. We would also like to extend a thank you to those who reviewed this playbook and offered their feedback to make this a useful and actionable guide for instructors across the globe — Tia Holiday, Rachael Durham, Laurie Heacock, Kelly Delaney-Klinger, Patricia O’Sullivan, and Tynan Gable.

Finally, we are incredibly grateful to Vickiana Supriana and Ariana Castro, as well as [Digital Promise’s](#) contributions from many students across the United States, for providing feedback and contributing their student voices and inspiring perspectives throughout this playbook. Their insights helped shape this into a playbook that truly supports the student experience.

Citing this Playbook

Adams, S., Bali, M., Eder, Z., Fladd, L., Garrett, K., Garth-McCullough, R., Gibson, A. M., Gunder, A., Iuzzini, J., Knott, J. L., Rafferty, J. & Weber, N. L. (2021 June 8). *Caring for Students Playbook*. Every Learner Everywhere. <https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/resources/>

How to Use this Playbook

This playbook has been designed to provide instructors with examples to support putting student care into action. While the impetus for this playbook was the COVID-19 pandemic, the information and resources provided represent high standards of student support regardless of the environment.

In this playbook you will find detailed recommendations broken out into six sections. Each of these Six Recommendations for Caring for Students provides practical recommendations, concrete strategies, and resources to support instructors in operationalizing equity-focused, inclusive teaching strategies that put student care into practice by acknowledging student challenges while identifying student assets.

Getting Started with Key Terms and Challenges

Before exploring the Six Recommendations for Caring for Students, we also recommend that you explore our resource on [Getting Started with Key Terms and Challenges](#). An excellent tool for educators of all experience levels, the document provides an overview of key terms (i.e., diversity, equity, and inclusion), challenges (i.e., academic, financial, and socio-emotional), and approaches (i.e., culturally responsive teaching, trauma-informed teaching, and universal design for learning, or UDL) that are integral to caring for students. This resource is also intended for educators who may be new to some of the concepts on centering student care that are presented in this playbook, giving historical context and empirical evidence as support of the Six Recommendations for Caring for Students offered here.

Usage by Audience

This playbook contains resources that can be used by individual instructors or by institutions seeking guidance for incorporating caring for students into their campus strategy and instructional development programming.

For Individuals

Instructors will find best practices in this playbook that they can utilize to design and deliver their courses with student care at the center. Instructors should not feel pressure to adopt every strategy they see in this playbook. Instead, as you read the different recommendations with their related strategies and resources, make notes about aspects that resonate with you and your courses. Then, use these aspects to create your own caring for students strategy!

For Institutions

At an institutional or academic program level, this playbook can be utilized by instructional designers, instructional development professionals, and administrators. The recommendations, strategies, and resources can be powerful tools to:

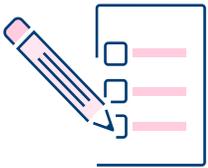
- Consult with instructors who would like ideas to better support their students;
- Create professional development opportunities; and
- Develop institutional strategy for supporting student retention and success.

Six Recommendations for Caring for Students

This playbook is organized into six recommendations that are accompanied by concrete strategies and related resources to support the implementation of caring for students into teaching practices.

These recommendations include:

1 Reimagine Your Syllabus Content



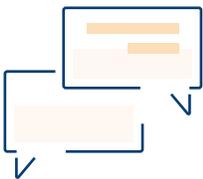
2 Review and Revise Your Course Content



3 Assess Your Students With Care



4 Develop and Enact a Communication Plan



5 Integrate Institutional Supports



6 Take Time for Self-Care



About the Playbook

While many of the recommendations detail formative actions and methods that you would complete while preparing for facilitation in the course design stage, you will also find a series of just-in-time recommendations that can be enacted as you are interacting with your students directly. Each section also provides a list of concrete action steps that you can take in commitment to an ongoing practice of caring for students, with recommendations listed as a road map for what you can do right away and what you can work towards in the long term:

ACTION ROAD MAP



The steps listed in the **Action Road Map** summaries at the end of each section support the Playbook's recommendations for caring for students as an ongoing practice within your course design, teaching, and support processes.

NOW

Critical steps that you can take right away

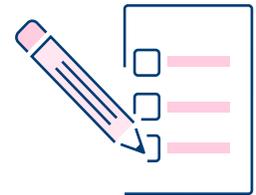
NEXT

Concrete actions that you can plan for next

LATER

Sustainable practices that you can work towards

1 Reimagine Your Syllabus Content



The syllabus is an essential component of any course and it is often the first course document students encounter when the semester begins. It establishes student expectations, provides a first impression of the instructor, and leaves a lasting impression with learners.

DRIVING QUESTIONS



As you review the recommendations within this section, we invite you to consider the following key reflection questions and use the answers to help develop a concrete road map of actions to take right away, in the near future, and as an ongoing practice:

- **Is the language and tone of my syllabus welcoming and inclusive?**
- **Do I implement policies that serve as barriers to students?**
- **Do I provide learners with a space to ask for clarification on content?**

GETTING STARTED WITH KEY TERMS, CHALLENGES, AND APPROACHES

Refer to the following section in the [companion resource](#):

Consider flexibility in your syllabus and co-create whenever possible. (p.18)

Develop your syllabus with inclusivity at the center

When you develop a syllabus for a course, consider it to be more than just a document that outlines a course schedule, a grading schema, and institutional policies. An inclusive syllabus has a welcoming tone, carefully selected content that is culturally responsive and relevant to the student population, as well as options for how students demonstrate their learning. In the following sections, we offer three resources that you can use to ground your syllabus in a spirit of inclusivity. Most colleges and universities have a Center for Teaching and Learning or professional development committee that can provide support as you examine and reimagine your syllabus content. We encourage you to take advantage of these supports on your campus as you explore these resources:

Social Justice Syllabus Design Tool

The language of a syllabus is an element that can foster a sense of inclusion and create a welcoming climate in a course. Syllabi can be perceived as legal contracts by students if they are very instructor-centered and include language that focuses on policies and rules. Taylor, et al. (2019) propose the use of a [social justice syllabus design tool \(SJSTD\)](#) which was created to assist in the reflection of placing social justice into how information is conveyed as well as what content and readings are selected for the course. This helps align the course to real world issues making its content more relevant and meaningful to students.

Reflect on how these strategies (Taylor et al., 2019) are currently enacted in your syllabus and where you might improve your syllabus further:

1. Provide clear expectations of success
2. Reduce jargon
3. Appeal to and motivate students
4. Include communal language and learning-focused language
5. Promote a growth mindset
6. Use personal and less legalistic language
7. Point out professional and personal relevance

The Syllabus Review Guide: Placing Equity at the Center

[The Syllabus Review Guide](#) developed by the Center for Urban Education at the University of Southern California also offers sound advice regarding the importance of inclusive language in a syllabus. It provides examples of both welcoming and unwelcoming language.

STUDENT VOICES

“Language in a syllabus is important! I use it to guide me on whether or not I want to be in that instructor’s class. I think it’s also important to keep in mind power dynamics. An instructor can encourage or discourage students from learning. In the past I had a teacher determine my capabilities for me, rather than allow me to demonstrate my abilities. Needless to say, I stopped trying in class because of how the teacher treated me. Students rise to the expectations of the instructor. When they expect a lot from me and encourage me, I rise to their expectations.”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Compare the language examples on the following page from the Center for Urban Education at USC – are there ways that you might improve the language in your own syllabus to make it more welcoming?

Reimagine Your Syllabus Content



	WELCOMING	UNWELCOMING
Office Hours	<p>Office Hours: 233 Jones Hall MWF 10:00–10:50AM; TR 9:30–10:30AM jsmith@hotmail.com I welcome you to contact me outside of class and student hours. You may email me, call my office, or contact the department and leave a message.</p>	<p>Office Hours: 233 Jones Hall MWF 10:00–10:50AM; TR 9:30–10:30AM jsmith@hotmail.com If you need to contact me outside of office hours, you may email me, call my office, or contact the department and leave a message.</p>
Course Goals	<p>Some of the specific skills I hope you will obtain in this course are listed below. Being a critical consumer of information about mental processes and behavior is important; all of these activities will help you become one, and it is my hope that you will use the skills in your daily life.</p>	<p>Some of the specific skills you should obtain in this course are listed below. Because you are not yet a critical consumer of information about mental processes and behavior, all of these activities will help you become one, and if you are motivated enough, use the skills in your daily life.</p>
Attendance	<p>You should attend every class but extenuating circumstances arise that can make this difficult. If you cannot attend a class, please let me know. If circumstances make you miss more than 3 classes during the semester, you may be overextended. I ask that you come see me to discuss your options.</p>	<p>I expect you to attend every class. If you cannot attend a class, please let me know. If circumstances make you miss more than 3 classes during the semester, I will drop you from the class roster in accordance with the college's attendance policy.</p>
Class Participation	<p>All of us in the class, you, me, your peers, have a responsibility to create an environment in which we can all learn from each other. I expect everyone to participate in class so that we can all benefit from the insights and experiences that each person brings.</p>	<p>Come prepared to actively participate in this course. This is the best way to engage you in learning the material (and it makes the lectures more interesting).</p>

Adapted from Harnish et al. (2011)

Six Guiding Principles for Developing an Inclusive Syllabus

The Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst [outlines 6 guiding principles for developing an inclusive syllabus](#). This useful resource offers multiple strategies for syllabus development including short videos on each of the following 6 principles.

Reflect on how these strategies from UMass-Amherst are currently enacted in your syllabus and where you might improve your syllabus further:

1. Make the syllabus learning-focused
2. Use essential questions and big themes to organize your course
3. Align the syllabus with UDL principles
4. Use inclusive language
5. Design supportive course policies to help students be successful
6. Ensure your syllabus is accessible

These six principles can increase student motivation and support their success by helping them be seen and set the stage for a learning experience that meets their learning needs.

Explore different ways to structure your syllabus

The structure of your syllabus can also play a role in setting the tone for your course and ensuring that the information is presented in a clear manner. Whether you use an interactive syllabus, a FAQ syllabus, or a liquid syllabus, it is important to create an asset that will be accessible.



The Interactive Syllabus

A quick Google search reveals that there can be multiple interpretations of an interactive syllabus. Some describe it as a document with links to navigate through the syllabus. Others say that an interactive syllabus is more like a front page of an entire website devoted to the course, with all course requirements and content being easily accessed from that page. Others underscore the idea of using multimedia to help make the syllabus more engaging. Regardless of the various definitions, the salient characteristic of an interactive syllabus is that it has links to help students easily navigate syllabus content and locate information when needed.

On their blog, The University of Arizona's Digital Learning team proposes [a series of useful steps to build an interactive syllabus](#) and they provide some suggestions for which tools you might consider when creating video and incorporating interactivity into the digital asset.



The FAQ Syllabus

FAQs can have various benefits like improving the user experience, providing quick information when needed and reducing the time to answer simple questions. With that in mind, another way that you can structure your syllabus is by designing it as an FAQ document. Eric Loepf, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, shares his ideas on the [benefits of using an FAQ syllabus](#). He points out the following advantages:

- The navigation is quick and simple. Students can easily locate the appropriate section of an FAQ syllabus to find answers to their questions.
- It's easy to embed links to web pages or other documents. For example, students can access homework assignments, research sources, contact information for campus services all in one place.
- It's a living document where answers to questions that emerge during the semester can be added.

Even if you decide not to design your syllabus as a full FAQ document in the Learning Management System (LMS), having an FAQ section in the course is a very good idea because you can repurpose the FAQ section for common questions that come up each semester.



The Liquid Syllabus

[Dr. Michelle Pacansky-Brock recommends creating a “liquid syllabus”](#) which is an open, web-based course syllabus rather than a downloadable document that is only accessible within the learning management system. [Liquid content](#) originated as a marketing term to describe content that is highly shared and contains potentially “viral ideas.” One of the benefits of having a syllabus be accessible and open on a website is that learners can access the information more easily regardless of the type of device they are using. A recent Pew Research Center survey on mobile device use and broadband connectivity indicates that [smartphone users are now more likely to go online using their mobile phone than with some other type of device](#). As Pacansky-Brock points out in this short video, [Benefits of a Liquid Syllabus](#), you can develop a liquid syllabus on a web-friendly site like WordPress or Google Sites and embed an introduction video which will build your social presence in the course.

These syllabi structures offer a syllabus that is responsive, meaning it can pivot and adapt to the emergent nature of the learning experience. This invites a community of learners to become the curriculum and be a runway to building a thriving community of learning.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ready to develop your liquid syllabus? The following are some examples of liquid syllabi that will help spark ideas for your own syllabus.

- 📖 **Fabiola Torres – Ethnic Studies**
Glendale Community College
- 📖 **Michelle Pacansky-Brock – Humanizing Online Learning**
California State University
- 📖 **Stacy Anderson – English 102**
California State University

Apply UDL principles to your syllabus

In the companion resource to this playbook, [Getting Started with Key Terms and Challenges](#), we discuss how to leverage the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines in your course to develop expert learners. Now let's take a look at some tools and strategies that will assist you in evaluating your syllabus with a UDL lens.

The UDL Syllabus

[The UDL Syllabus](#), developed by CAST, examines the various components of a syllabus such as course objectives, course description, and course materials, and it provides examples of how you can develop these components with UDL in mind. For example, they suggest putting the Student Resources and Accommodations section of the syllabus at the beginning of the document to set the tone that you want to help them succeed in the course.

Stanford UDL Course Alignment Rubric

Stanford University has also created [a rubric to evaluate your course components for UDL alignment](#). This instrument looks at sections of a course syllabus and provides criteria for developing an enhanced and exemplary syllabus. For example, in the section about textbooks, an enhanced syllabus will list required and recommended textbooks with information about where the books can be purchased and why the specific textbook was selected. An exemplary syllabus includes access to electronic equivalents of the textbooks.

Creating a Collaborative Syllabus with Annotation

Once you have developed your syllabus with UDL principles, invite your students to [annotate the syllabus](#) by posting comments (e.g., on a Google doc or PDF) on elements they find confusing or unclear. Repeating this exercise again in the middle of the semester and toward the end of the course can make for a continuous experience of students feeling that they have a say in how the course is designed and implemented.

Reimagine Your Syllabus Content

STUDENT VOICES

“I had an instructor do this [create a collaborative syllabus with annotation] for a class and it made me feel included in the learning process. It benefited those of us who were taking the course and I liked that I had the opportunity to make the course better for future students, too!”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow



ACTION ROAD MAP



The following steps can be taken to help you reposition your syllabus as inclusive and supportive of student success.

NOW

Evaluate your syllabus using one of the checklists or rubrics provided in this playbook.

NEXT

Revise your syllabus language to center inclusivity, student agency and caring at the forefront.

LATER

Incorporate digital tools for feedback and annotation to turn your syllabus into a place for community connection.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Student Impressions of Syllabus Design: Engaging Versus Contractual](#)**
This study comparing student impressions of a text-rich syllabus to a graphic-rich syllabus concludes that although both are perceived positively, the graphic-rich syllabus was judged to be more visually appealing and was deemed more interesting.
- [The Irony of Inclusion and Accessibility Statements](#)**
In this Faculty Focus article Freya Mobus argues that “despite some excellent resources on this topic, the parts of our syllabi devoted to inclusion and accessibility remain somewhat, well, exclusive and inaccessible.”
- [It’s Time to Decolonize that Syllabus](#)**
An LA Times article by Yvette Dechavez argues that academia continues to uphold white men as the pinnacle of literature and advocates for indigenous and persons of color writers to be included more in the curriculum.
- [Syllabus Review Guide Inquiry Tool](#)**
A resource from University of Southern California that outlines the traditional purpose of the syllabus, answers questions about syllabi and offers examples of language for syllabi that support or hinder learners’ experiences.

2 Review and Revise Your Course Content



Course content is a staple of the learning experience. Between the content instructors create and the content they cultivate, it helps us tell the story of the topics in a cohesive way that meets the course’s learning objectives. But how can you make sure all students can engage with and feel supported with your content?

This section provides strategies, tools, and examples for ways you can ensure accessibility in content, make content more inclusive, and chunk content to support your students.

DRIVING QUESTIONS



As you review the recommendations within this section, we invite you to consider the following key reflection questions and use the answers to help develop a concrete road map of actions to take right away, in the near future, and as an ongoing practice:

- **Are all students able to engage with the course content?**
- **Do students see themselves reflected in the course?**
- **Am I providing content to my students in a way that supports their learning?**

GETTING STARTED WITH KEY TERMS, CHALLENGES, AND APPROACHES

Refer to the following section in the [companion resource](#):
Universal Design for Learning (p.20)

Ensure your content is accessible

An estimated 19% of undergraduates report having some type of disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). However, even this number can be misleadingly low since most of the data collection methods rely on individuals to self-disclose. Researchers estimate that 60-80% of undergraduates choose not to disclose that they have a disability, typically due to the negative stereotypes that are often associated with disability or because students are simply unaware of the services available to them at their institution. Therefore, it is highly likely that a student with a disability has taken your course before, even if you have never received a letter of accommodation. Applying the principles of accessible design will ultimately end up benefiting more than just students with disabilities, and it is important to proactively include these techniques during the initial design and curation of content.

To increase accessibility of content, try:



Using color with care. Foreground text should have [sufficient contrast](#) with background colors to help make it easier to read for students that are color blind or may have other visual impairments. In addition, while using color can be helpful for differentiation, color should not be the only way that information is conveyed. Provide additional identification (such as text labels on a graph) that does not rely on color perception alone. This practice is also helpful for students that might choose to print materials using black and white.



Including captions and transcripts with multimedia. While [providing captions for videos](#) and transcripts for audio-based material (such as audio clips or podcasts) is essential for ensuring your multimedia is accessible to students who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing, these resources also provide benefits to many other students as well. They assist non-native English speakers and those learning new technical or medical terms with comprehension, as well as help the majority of students maintain better concentration and retention of information (Linder, 2016).



Describing graphics and visual elements. [Alternative text](#) (or “alt text”) describes the content of images, graphs, and charts and should be added to every image that conveys meaning. This practice is essential for students who are blind or visually impaired and cannot otherwise see the image, but it is also helpful for when an image fails to load either due to a broken image or a student’s low Internet bandwidth. Similarly, there are also benefits to verbally describing any important visual information presented during your video lectures to help students that might be viewing them on a small mobile device or for those who might just be listening to the audio portion while driving.

STUDENT VOICES

“There have been times where I chose not to disclose. As a student, from personal experience, I do not always trust an instructor will be non-discriminatory. On the other hand, there are times I feel it is not necessary to share information because I think I can complete the course without accommodations. Students with disabilities do not want to take advantage of the system or be made to feel ‘other.’ So, incorporating things like captions or transcripts with media helps to level the playing field without the student having to ask.”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow



Determine ways to make your content an inclusive experience

A student who feels a sense of community in the classroom and is engaged with the content as well as interactions between fellow students and the instructor will be a more productive and positive learner (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). In subsequent sections, we will discuss the importance of community and instructor presence, but the interaction between learners, the instructor, and the course content is integral in caring for students. Being able to recognize the self in the curriculum through an inclusive class culture and curriculum fosters engagement and belonging. To do this, it is important to promote and center student voices, including amplifying the voice of historically marginalized populations in the online learning classroom (Williams, 2019).

GETTING STARTED WITH KEY TERMS, CHALLENGES, AND APPROACHES

Refer to the following section in the [companion resource](#):
Culturally Responsive Teaching (p.15)

STUDENT VOICES

“Having an inclusive class does offer engagement and belonging because it helps students feel motivated and confident in the course. When instructors create connections with students they break down barriers around things like shyness, allowing for more interaction in the course.”

Ariana Castro

Biology Major, Georgia State University

Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow



To increase inclusivity of content, try:

- Choosing course materials that offer differing perspectives or originate from diverse sources.
- Designing content and activities, such as case studies or branching scenarios, with a range of voices from differing socio-economic, racial, ethnic, origin-based, differently-abled, and gender identity and expression backgrounds.
- Cultivating images, visuals, and other multimedia that allow the learner to be seen as an individual while promoting a humanization of the content and the online learning environment through representation (Montelongo and Eaton, 2019).

There are several assessment tools that can be used to resituate your content in a way that is equitable and supportive. Developed by Peralta College, The [Peralta Equity Rubric](#) is a research-based course (re)design rubric that can guide instructors in designing online course experiences that are more equitable for all students. Consider using this rubric to not only assess your content, but commit to a practice of reflection and continuous improvement over time, making incremental changes to your courses as you teach them.

Apply Cognitive Load Theory to support student learning

Instructors can incorporate Cognitive Load Theory (Schunk, 2020) into their content to support their students as part of a compassionately designed curriculum. As students move from class to class, they take in information into their sensory memory before memories move to their working memory and, hopefully, end up in their long-term memory for storage and retrieval. Learners are flooded with information which sensory memory works to distinguish what is to

be filtered out and what needs to be processed. If the learner is overloaded with too much sensory information, then it is more challenging for the mind to keep the impression of what is intended from the content. An overloaded design, such as multiple sources of visual information which create a split-attention effect, can overwhelm the learner (Cierniak, Schieter, & Gerjets, 2009). Subsequently, too much information at once can overpower the capacity of the working memory, leading to a breakdown in the understanding of information and process moving the learning to long-term memory.

You can apply this to your teaching by employing the following design practices:



Organize your learning management system course site in a way that is easy for students to navigate

Limit deviations from your university’s standard template (unless integral to your course design) and leverage campus-supported tools to enable students to more quickly acclimate to your course site and related technologies. In addition, arrange your “home” page in a chronological order with headings for weeks or modules with content, activities, and assessments with due dates clearly articulated. Have students new to the institution in your class? Make a short tutorial video showcasing how they can interact with the tools you want them to use in your course site!

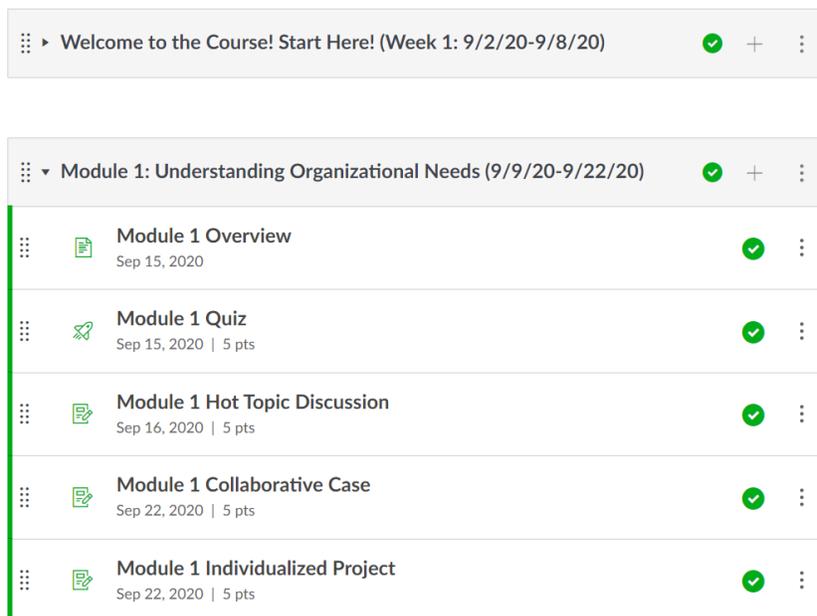


Image: A Canvas course site home page that is chunked into chronological modules with specific headings (e.g., Module 1: Understanding Organizational Needs), pages (e.g., Module 1 Overview with content information inside), and assignments (e.g., Individualized Project) to support students in their learning journey.



Guide students through their learning

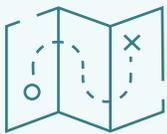
Students are new to the topics we are teaching them and may not understand how the content they are assigned all fits together. Make these connections explicit by utilizing pages in your learning management system to introduce the topic to students and explain what they should be looking for as they read and watch their content materials. Want to add a personal touch? Do this in a video!



Chunk content with space for reinforcement, practice, or a knowledge check

The practice of chunking content can lessen cognitive overload, reduce stress and frustration, and support learning and success (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2011; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Think about ways you can break up your content by having students engage with concrete examples, connect what they are learning to prior experiences and current events, apply what they are learning, or check their understanding with a quick quiz.

ACTION ROAD MAP



The following steps can be taken to help you reflect on your course content and revise the design of your course to make it more accessible and inclusive.

NOW

Identify a few new activities or course resources that will help to make your content more inclusive of diverse perspectives.

NEXT

Implement the Peralta Equity Rubric (or a similar assessment tool) to deeply examine and refine your course content.

LATER

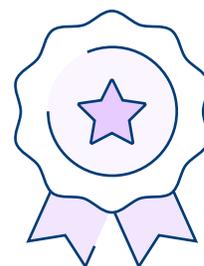
Determine whether there is instructional design support to help you implement a course redesign project centering inclusivity and student care.

Review and Revise Your Course Content

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

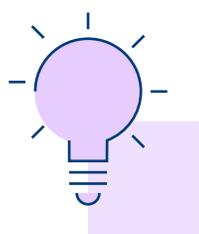
-  **[Seven Core Accessibility Skills](#)**
Implementing accessibility principles for the first time can be overwhelming. Start small by learning one of the seven core accessibility skills on this list.
-  **[The Microsoft Office Accessibility Center](#)**
This resource contains a plethora of resources including chunked video training for creating accessible documents, how to run the built-in accessibility checker, as well as access to pre-made accessible templates.
-  **[How Do I Make My Course Content Inclusive?](#)**
This resource page from Northwestern Distance Learning shares ideas on how to create more inclusive course content and how to create a culturally responsive curriculum.
-  **[Reducing Cognitive Load \(and Not Rigor\)](#)**
This resource from the University of California-Merced provides an overview on reducing cognitive load in your teaching by amplifying critical content, communicating concisely, using generative strategies, scaffolding, and increasing collaboration opportunities.
-  **[Cognitive Load theory and Its Application in the Classroom](#)**
This resource provides useful information particularly as it relates to introducing ideas within a topic and how to present information to minimize cognitive load.

3 Assess Your Students with Care



This recommendation encourages you to holistically examine your assessments within a teaching and learning context that places the success of your students at the center of your assessment design and implementation. This includes aligning assessments to both outcomes and student care, incorporating diverse assessment types, and building a culture of feedback and iterative improvement.

DRIVING QUESTIONS



As you review the recommendations within this section, we invite you to consider the following key reflection questions and use the answers to help develop a concrete road map of actions to take right away, in the near future, and as an ongoing practice:

- **Do students have multiple ways to demonstrate their knowledge during the course?**
- **Does the course provide students with opportunities to reflect on their learning with the use of assessments?**
- **What strategies am I using to provide students with feedback about their learning?**

Align Assessments with Needs and Care

Institutions and academic departments give instructors varying degrees of freedom with respect to how they can conduct assessments and design their grading schema. At a minimum, consider ways of assessing students that do not invoke anxiety. In any given semester or term, you likely have a few students for whom high stakes exams invoke anxiety; in times of crisis and disruption where students are learning online, not by choice, the numbers will likely be even higher.

Consider the ways in which [authentic assessments](#) are more likely to engage and motivate learners and make the learning more transferable to real-life situations after they graduate, and think about ways in which open book and take-home exams better mimic real life, where people can look things up on the internet, to even call up a friend, in order to solve a complex problem or conduct research, rather than be given a timed exam and proctored while solving it.

As you plan your course design, take time to reflect on the different types of assessments that you include. Consider the following:

- Are the assessment methods clear and understandable to the students?
- Are they relevant? Do they encompass the needs of the students as they relate to their current understandings?
- Are they integrated? Do they include initiatives that help create a holistic experience of the whole curriculum?

While thinking about the needs and care of students during a crisis or a period of disruption, consider whether proctoring and/or timed exams are necessary. As Dr. Joshua Kim points out in his Inside Higher Ed article, [5 Reasons to Stop Doing Online Exams During COVID](#), timed exams create stress and when our students are experiencing stress, learning is hindered. Furthermore, timed exams put more emphasis on how quickly students can respond to questions rather than focusing on their understanding of a concept. Proctoring online exams can have the same impact on students, as John Warner states in his piece, [A Teach-In Against Surveillance](#). There are discipline-specific instances when it is necessary for students to take a proctored exam, like when they are preparing to take a high stakes certification exam, but it is worthwhile to consider what kinds of assessment methods can be incorporated into your course to provide students with choices on how they demonstrate their learning.

Incorporate a variety of assessment types

Using a variety of assessment types allows you to assess different aspects of student learning. By having the right combination of different assessment methods, you create a more inclusive experience that provides students with options to demonstrate their learning. Keep in mind that assignments that promote self-assessment and self awareness also enhance student learning.

One way of classifying assessments is traditional vs authentic assessments. Traditional assessment refers to conventional methods of testing, such as standardized exams where students select a response. Authentic assessment asks students to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of what they have learned instead of asking them to recall information like in a traditional exam. They are also referred to as alternative or performance assessments.

Some examples of authentic assessment for the online classroom are:

- Peer Review
- Self-Assessment
- Experiment
- Problem Based Learning
- Discussion boards
- Roleplay
- Online Journaling

Traditional and authentic assessment are often used together to produce a holistic view of student learning. In order to receive your driver's license, for example, you must demonstrate that you understand the rules of the road, which are typically assessed through a written exam. However, it is also necessary to demonstrate through authentic assessment that you can safely operate a vehicle and perform certain tasks, such as parallel parking. The ultimate goal of authentic assessment is to present students with projects and tasks that are as closely related to the 'real world' application as possible in order to demonstrate relevance and immediate value to help sustain student motivation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Authentic Assessments

This handy toolbox by Jon Mueller provides definitions of authentic assessment along with differences between authentic and traditional assessments.

What are Inclusive Assessment Practices?

This resource from Tufts University explores inclusive assessment practices and advocates that students should be asked to demonstrate their learning through formative and summative assessments.

Assessment and Grading Toolkit

This resource, created by Intentional Futures, provides guidance on approaching assignments and grading, including offering assessments in turbulent times.

Incorporate Caring and Substantive Feedback

Providing feedback on student work is an essential aspect of an instructor's role regardless of the learning modality. Effective and timely feedback can improve learning outcomes and student satisfaction. Chickering and Gamson (1987) have identified the importance of prompt feedback as one of the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Timely feedback can keep learning on track and support student growth (Dawn, 2011).

FIDeLity for High Quality Feedback

Fink (2003) proposes the mnemonic FIDeLity which can assist in recalling the criteria that defines high quality feedback. Fink's actionable list of feedback characteristics includes:

- **F**requent: Give feedback daily, weekly, or as frequently as possible.
- **I**mmEDIATE: Get the feedback to students as soon as possible.
- **D**iscriminating: Make clear what the difference is between poor, acceptable, and exceptional work.
- **L**oving: Be empathetic in the way you deliver your feedback.

STUDENT VOICES

"I love the last part about being loving. For some students it is tough to do the assignment and once they turn the assignment in it shows the level of dedication and effort they put forth. Instructors need to be loving because giving rude feedback can give students insecurity in their work."

Ariana Castro

Biology Major, Georgia State University

[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Seven Principles of Formative Feedback

You may also consider the Seven Principles of Formative Feedback (Jawah et al., 2004) which builds upon Fink's recommendations for giving high quality feedback and includes encouraging positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.

1. Facilitate the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning
2. Encourage teacher and peer dialogue around learning
3. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards)
4. Provide opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
5. Deliver high quality information to students about their learning
6. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
7. Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape their teaching

Rubric Creation Tools and Resources

Rubrics are guidelines that identify how a learning activity will be assessed. They lay out the expectations for students regarding what they need to demonstrate in an assignment or test. Rubrics also makes it easier to assess an assignment in an equitable and fair manner. [Rubistar](#) is a free tool that provides both examples and templates for developing rubrics for project-based learning.

Jon Mueller, Professor of Psychology at North Central College also has a very extensive [toolbox on authentic assessment](#) which includes [a section devoted to creating rubrics](#). The American Association of American Colleges and Universities offers [a list of sample rubrics which includes rubrics for assessing intercultural knowledge and civic engagement](#).

Audio Feedback

Research indicates that feedback delivered in an audio format can have a positive impact on student satisfaction. One study on audio feedback (Keane et al., 2018) focused on surveying undergraduates who received voice comments on their written assignment (Keane et al., 2018). Roughly two-thirds of students surveyed preferred the addition of voice comment feedback over written comments alone. An earlier study conducted by Ice, Curtis, Phillips & Wells (2007), which focused on asynchronous audio feedback to enhance teaching presence and students' sense of community also indicated that there was an enhanced student perception of the instructor caring as a result of using audio feedback. If you take advantage of the benefits of audio feedback, be sure to include a transcript with audio recordings so that the feedback is fully accessible to all students.

Assess Your Students With Care

STUDENT VOICES

“Earlier this semester my instructor responded to an assignment I put a lot of effort into by giving video feedback. I was happy with the feedback, but it being delivered in a video made me feel special. I was able to see my instructor’s face while he gushed about the awesome work I did. It made online learning feel more personable!”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College

[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



ACTION ROAD MAP



The following steps can be taken to reimagine your assessments in a way that centers care for students:

NOW

Incorporate one or two new strategies in your course to increase the frequency and quality of feedback you offer students.

NEXT

Evaluate the assessments currently used in your course and determine whether they center care.

LATER

Collaborate with your institution to holistically evaluate the assessment practices and policies for their inclusivity.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Types of Online Assessments Toolbox](#)

A practical guide from Penn State that lists and groups online assessment methods according to assessment types.

[Equity in Assessment](#)

A list of resources from University of Colorado Boulder on Equity in Higher Education Assessment and Evaluation

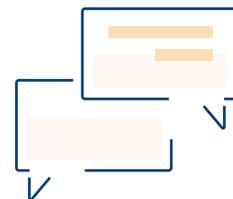
[Equity and Assessment: Moving towards Culturally Responsive Assessment](#)

This paper explores the relationship between equity and assessment, addressing the question: how consequential can assessment be to learning when assessment approaches may not be inclusive of diverse learners?

Assess Your Students With Care

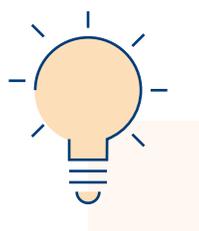
-  **[Transparent Assignment Template](#)**
from **TILT Higher Ed** (Transparency in Learning and Teaching)
A project that aims to “advance equitable teaching and learning practices that reduce systemic inequities in higher education.” This template provided by TILT can be used as a guide to create equitable assignments.
-  **[Classroom Assessment Techniques \(CATs\)](#)**
This resource from Vanderbilt University explains what CATs are and provides information on why and how they should be used. These techniques can easily be adopted in online courses as well.
-  **[How to Give Better Feedback](#)**
This article asserts that useful feedback should be formative, actionable, clear, timely and supportive, and takes a detailed look at each characteristic.
-  **[Seven Keys to Effective Feedback](#)**
In this article Grant Wiggins explores what is true feedback and how it can improve learning. After defining feedback he asserts that helpful feedback should be goal-referenced; tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly; timely; ongoing and consistent.
-  **[How to Give Writing Feedback That is Constructive, Not Crushing](#)**
In this blog post Karen Hertzberg shares tips on how to give good, straightforward feedback that’s helpful but not deflating.
-  **[Internet-Based Proctored Assessment: Security and Fairness Issues](#)**
This article by Thomas Langenfeld provides an overview of internet-based proctored assessment types with focus on security and fairness issues, advocating that organizations must strive to ensure that all students have the opportunity to test.
-  **[Online Proctoring – Impact on Student Equity](#)**
Francine Van Meter discusses the intrusive nature of online proctoring and advocates for authentic assessments instead.
-  **[Alternative to Proctored Exams](#)**
This resource from Kentucky Community & Technical College System advocates that proctored exams are not always appropriate and offers methods on how to use current exams in a non-proctored environment.
-  **[Embedding Equity into Assessment Praxis](#)**
Developed by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, this paper provides insights and reflections on equitable assessment practices as well as the challenges that exist in advancing equitable assessment work. This resource delves into different kinds of equity-minded assessment practices that you may consider such as culturally responsive assessment, socially-just assessment, and critical assessment.
-  **[How to Give Your Students Better Feedback with Technology](#)**
This free article from the Chronicle of Higher Education provides insights about how you can best leverage technology to give your students quality feedback.

4 Develop and Enact a Communication Plan



Authentic, consistent, and frequent communication with students in an online course fosters student engagement and develops instructor presence. Mitchell-Holder (2016) suggests creating a communication plan for your course prior to the start of the semester so you can be timely and meaningful with your communications.

DRIVING QUESTIONS



As you review the recommendations within this section, we invite you to consider the following key reflection questions and use the answers to help develop a concrete road map of actions to take right away, in the near future, and as an ongoing practice:

- **What instructional strategies will foster instructor presence in my course?**
- **How can I leverage technology to communicate with learners throughout the semester?**
- **What types of activities will help me create and sustain a learning community?**

Establish Instructor Presence

When building a communication plan for your course, consider strategies that will establish instructor presence from the beginning of the semester. Three communication strategies that are effective and easy to integrate are a Getting to Know You Survey, an instructor video, and office hours.

Getting to Know You Survey

The beginning of a course provides an opportunity to gather information about your students to better support them during the semester. You can learn more about their goals and aspirations through the use of a brief, confidential survey that is administered either before the course begins or during the first week of class. For example, if you hope to offer synchronous classes, remember to ask about students' home internet connectivity.

This example of a [Getting to Know You survey](#) includes questions you might use in identifying students' motivations as well as any concerns they may have about taking the course. You might also try including questions that make students feel comfortable sharing. For example, including a question that asks students to finish the sentence "[I wish my teacher knew...](#)" gives them space to share things they might not otherwise. Having this type of data about your students at the beginning of a course can help you in deciding what modifications might be needed to better engage students and facilitate their learning.

Instructor Video

Record a [welcome letter or video](#) for students. When recording videos provide a welcome and sign off. Greeting students in a warm way that is brief yet meaningful puts the viewer at ease and connects to the individual. Refer to something personal, yet appropriate, as this strategy increases teaching and social presence. Creating familiarity with students through such mediums decreases the distance between screens and increases a sense of connectedness and community (Borup, West, & Graham, 2012; Shea, Li, & Picket, 2006).

STUDENT VOICES

"When an instructor takes an extra step to make sure the initial introduction is a warm one it sets a positive tone for the rest of the semester which makes it easier to learn."

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Office Hours

Make it easy for students to come to your office hours. Offer spaces with open office hours that students can attend together and also for students who prefer to book a private office hour. Consider inviting students to visit you individually or in small groups (e.g., that are working on a small project together) in your office hours just so you can get to know them personally and they become accustomed to visiting you during this time period. Sometimes students assume that office hours are a burden on the instructor and they do not take advantage of them.

Build a Learning Community

[Community of Inquiry](#) (CoI), developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), is a popular theoretical framework that can be used to build communities online. As the title indicates, at the core of this framework are ideas of “inquiry” and community. Highlighting three main elements of cognitive, social and teaching presence, CoI asserts that effective online learning can take place with the development of an online community.

Feeling connected with one’s peers and the instructor within the online community has a significant impact on learning, but it becomes even more so during times of disruption and crisis. To build a caring community within your online course, incorporate exercises that enable connectedness and let everyone’s voice be heard. Create an environment where questions are embraced and active listening takes place.

Harvard Guide for Building Community

The guide [Build Community in Your Online Course](#) by Harvard University offers several ideas for cultivating a caring community for students:

- Create a space for them to check in
- Set and communicate clear expectations and norms
- Support them through an adjustment period
- Ask them to set intentions to be present and engaged
- Create ways for students to show care and concern for one another
- Give clear instructions
- Support students who need to attend using audio only
- Design your synchronous session to support student’s engagement and sense of belonging

Community-Building Activities

Try using community-building warm-up activities often, and participate in them with your students. For example, [Mad/Wild Tea](#) puts students in breakout rooms for short bursts and then switches the breakout rooms, like speed networking, and replicates what might happen in a face-to-face environment when people first walk into a space and start talking spontaneously to each other – only this activity takes a more structured approach. Another simple warm-up activity that is more reflective is the [Spiral Journal](#) where students draw a spiral on a piece of paper and answer a few questions privately, then share one thing with another person or two in a pair or trio breakout room.

Leverage the Unique Affordances of Technology to Communicate with Care

Instructional technology helps to create engaging and effective learning experiences by providing better access to information, more opportunities for collaboration and better capabilities for meeting diverse learners' needs. Technology can also be used to create a communication pathway between the instructor and the learner be it through email, instant messaging, text notifications, online bulletin boards, online forums or some other technology.

There are a few things to consider while choosing a communication tool for your online class:

- Does your institution have access to a campus-supported tool for communication? If not, is the tool you are considering free, or does it have a free version?
- Do you need to have an account as the instructor, and does the service offer instructor accounts?
- Do the students need an account; and if “yes, what kind of information do they need to provide?
- What are the terms of service and privacy policies?
- What is the accessibility statement for the tool, and are there accommodations needed in order to support all students being able to communicate with you and each other?

Weekly Announcements

Weekly announcements are another strategy that you can use to personalize the course experience and build your instructor presence. Weekly announcements can be delivered in multimedia formats or as text-based communications. It is preferable to use video or audio so that students can hear your voice, but a combination of text and multimedia can accomplish the same goal. This type

Develop and Enact a Communication Plan

of communication is ideal for incorporating information that is time sensitive and relevant to the current moment such as special instructions for uploading and accessing content or finding additional help with assignments. Consider including ongoing encouragement as well as reminders about due dates for assignments and summaries of discussions or assignments that students completed in the previous module. Weekly announcements are also an ideal time to remind students about office hours or how you can be reached if students need additional support.

Some examples of tools that you may consider for creating videos are:

- [Camtasia Studio](#)
- [YouTube Studio](#)
- [VoiceThread](#)

Modular Overviews

Modular overviews can be delivered in different formats like video or in the form of a podcast. These overviews are short in length (generally 2-5 minutes maximum) and serve the purpose of orienting students on the upcoming content and assignments. They are ideal for reminding students about graded work and due dates for any deliverables. Modular overviews can be prepared ahead of the semester if you don't anticipate making any changes to content or assignments once the course has begun. When you use video format for any component of your course, ensure that captions and a transcript are available, and if images and slides are included in these recordings, describe all visuals to make the content fully accessible to students with disabilities.

STUDENT VOICES

"I really love having overviews of upcoming assignments and content that will be learned in the week. My instructor uses this and it has truly helped me to feel like there is a connection between the instructor and the student."

Ariana Castro

Biology Major, Georgia State University
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Develop and Enact a Communication Plan

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR SYNCHRONOUS SESSIONS

For courses that have live meetings in a web conferencing tool, create a caring environment by:

- **Talking to Students About Recording Before You Record Sessions.** Always ask permission of students before you record, and reassure them that you will not share beyond the class, that you will delete after the semester is over, and remind them not to share with anyone outside the class, especially if there is sensitive content.
- **Thinking About Camera Requirements.** Not “forcing” students to turn cameras on, as this goes against a trauma-informed approach, while also ignoring possible infrastructure, social class, privacy and anxiety issues students may be facing. Remember that you can not assess student engagement by seeing their faces on camera, but you can by asking them to participate using their voice or typing in the chat, so create activities that encourage them to engage in these ways, and give them choice over showing their faces on camera. You may ask them to update their profile pictures on your videoconferencing tool or learning management system so that you can tie the names to the faces. In addition, asking students to update their pronouns and preferred names in the learning management system (e.g., Canvas) to support you addressing students in the way they prefer.
- **Having alternative work for students who miss sessions due to connectivity problems or other emergencies out of their control.** This may be to write a reflection when they miss a class discussion or watch a recording of the synchronous session and respond to it if you are recording. At the beginning of the semester provide clear guidelines (e.g., in your first week’s activities or syllabus) as to what constitutes an emergency and what students should do if they find themselves in an emergency or having connectivity issues.

STUDENT VOICES

“Yes!!! To be on camera I spend an hour or two prepping my appearance beforehand (natural hair can be a lot of work) and sometimes I don’t have the time or energy – especially if the call is early in the morning. Also, we all have those off days where we just don’t feel like being seen, so being allowed to just show a picture (where I look amazing) helps reduce stress and anxiety on my part.”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow



Develop and Enact a Communication Plan

ACTION ROAD MAP



The following steps can be taken to develop a communication plan that emphasizes authenticity and engagement:

NOW

Create or revise your course welcome video to help students get to know you better.

NEXT

Build new activities or assignments into your course that will increase social presence in the classroom.

LATER

Build a comprehensive plan for communication in your course that positions students within a community of inquiry.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Establishing an Instructional Communication Plan](#)

This resource from University of South Carolina is an example of a communication plan developed in case of a disruption.

[Designing a Community of Inquiry in Online Courses](#)

Published in the International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, this article describes a practical approach for implementing instructional strategies in order to build the Col into an online course. It not only reviews the framework but also provides a summary of instructional activities for Col.

5 Integrate Institutional Supports



This section provides guidance for instructors to be well-informed about their institution's support services for students and practical strategies for destigmatizing and normalizing their students' engagement with these supports.

DRIVING QUESTIONS



As you review the recommendations within this section, we invite you to consider the following key reflection questions and use the answers to help develop a concrete road map of actions to take right away, in the near future, and as an ongoing practice:

- **What support services are available inside and outside of the classroom for students at my institution?**
- **How can I break down barriers to using support services?**
- **How can I use institutionally-supported technologies to connect and support my students?**

GETTING STARTED WITH KEY TERMS, CHALLENGES, AND APPROACHES

Refer to the following section in the [companion resource](#):
Trauma-Informed Teaching (p.17)

Explore the services available to support your students inside and outside of the classroom

In his recent book *The Years that Matter Most: How College Makes or Breaks Us*, Paul Tough notes that:

“Academic pressures conflate with financial and psychological pressures, and they become impossible for students to disentangle. When you’re socially isolated and worried about money and struggling in all your classes, it doesn’t feel like three distinct problems. It feels like one big problem.”

Understanding that this is how students experience this array of challenges is critical as institutions develop a [holistic student supports approach](#). Below, you will find examples of three kinds of services that are increasingly available to students. While these services are designed to support students around academic, financial, and social-emotional needs, it is key that institutions provide these supports in an integrated way, since students often experience these challenges as being interrelated and perhaps cumulative in their effect. Most importantly, full-time and part-time instructors must know about these supports, understanding their purpose and their intended outcomes on student learning and success. [Amarillo College’s Culture of Caring](#) is one excellent example of what this looks like in practice, when all of an institution’s employees collaborate to connect students to these vital supports.

[WCET](#) mapped student support services across five categories that encompass many common areas of assistance:

- **Administrative Services** (e.g., course enrollments; fees and payments; financial aid)
- **Academic Services** (e.g., tutoring; library services; bookstores, technical support including hardware and software; assessment and testing)
- **Personal Services** (e.g., career services; military and veterans services; connection to on- and off-campus supports for mental health, child care, and other health care needs; connection to emergency aid; and referral to community-based support agencies that can assist with meeting basic needs, such as food pantries, SNAP benefits, unemployment, and shelters)
- **Communications Services** (e.g., social networking services; communication tools and messaging services)
- **Student Community Services** (e.g., student activities; online clubs; mentorship and volunteer groups)

To learn more about these services and prepare to connect students with appropriate supports, instructors should find time to connect with the various offices and programs at their institution that provide these supports to students.

Integrate Institutional Supports

These can include, but are not limited to the office of the dean of students, academic advising offices (sometimes referred to as success coaches), libraries, bookstores, student unions, and offices of student services/support.

Integrate institutional support services into your course activities to help reduce stigma

Colleges and universities have made great strides in recent years as they have come to more deeply understand the wide range of challenges our students face. Each of these challenges represents a potential barrier to student learning and success. As such, institutions increasingly take a holistic approach to the provision of support services designed to help students succeed in the face of these barriers. But these support services cannot serve their intended purpose if students do not know about them or are ambivalent about accessing them.

While navigating the landscape of support services available might be difficult, or even daunting for many students, instructors can serve as the first point of contact for students needing assistance, with the learning environment serving as a portal or a hub of information. This can help to mitigate issues of student trepidation in asking for assistance and better connect students to resources without stigma or fear.

Consider taking the following steps to help create pathways to support that make students feel more comfortable accessing critical institutional support services:

Create Pathways to Resources

Design a module or an area within your course and/or syllabus where you can list the support services that are available. Many instructors include basic needs security statements in their syllabi to emphasize that the well-being of their students must be ensured before students can successfully engage in the work of the course.

STUDENT VOICES

“This is great – especially for first year students who may not know about the resources available to help them succeed in my first year I was super lost and needed lots of help!”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



WHAT CAN INSTITUTIONS DO TO PROVIDE HOLISTIC ONLINE STUDENT SUPPORT?

If you are unsure of how to map the landscape of services for your students and then articulate them in your course, you might consider using an assessment tool as a way to gauge what exists and what might need to be created. The [OLC Scorecard for Online Student Support](#) is a great tool for holistically determining what students might need in order to be supported across all basic needs and securities, including assistance in areas that extend outside of the formal classroom that will challenge their ability to actively participate in courses.

Collaborate with Institutional Colleagues

In providing holistic support to students, it's best not to go it alone. Call on experts from the various offices at your institution that work directly to offer the support services that your students need. Oftentimes, these colleagues can serve as guest speakers in your course, making direct outreach to your students and letting them know that help is available if they need it.

Integrate Access to Services as Part of Course Activities

Many support services go unused by students, even after learning of their existence. Give students additional support in learning the benefits of the resources that are available by creating activities and assignments that require students to utilize individual services. Students will feel less hesitation to make use of the services in the future if they are contextualized as part of the work of the course and being utilized by their peers. If you are unsure of how to create activities around these services, reach out to your colleagues who provide them – groups like the Library, Tutoring Services, and Career Development often have staff who have created modules and lessons that simply need to be integrated into your course with no additional work needed beyond asking to use the curriculum.

STUDENT VOICES

“It is very important for students to have access to the Library, Tutoring Services, and Career Development to support their development. I have used tutoring services and it has helped me out during class with an extra level of clarity so I can fully understand the material.”

Ariana Castro

Biology Major, Georgia State University
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Leverage technology to connect and support your students

Digital learning tools provide unique affordances that allow students to easily connect to support in ways that are encouraging and reduce stigma and fears. These tools alone are not enough to create an inclusive and welcoming environment, but when centered on core values of inclusivity, access and community, can help to provide students with the support they need to be successful.

Building Presence in the Learning Management System

Establishing identity and presence can be difficult in digital learning environments, but are critical steps in centering care at the heart of the teaching and learning experience. Learning Management Systems (LMS) often have tools that can be leveraged to help students and faculty get to know each other, including profiles and community spaces. Consider building activities that allow students to establish their presence in the learning environment, including having students update their names, list their pronouns, and share who they are. Tools like [NameCoach](#) even allow students to share correct pronunciations of their name and the origins of their name, moving from the marginalizing act of mispronouncing names to a classroom culture that celebrates identity and origins.

STUDENT VOICES

“This will really help students who have unique names feel included and normal. Growing up by name was often mispronounced and it made me dread starting a new class as I didn’t like correcting the teacher. Sometimes my name was said wrong for the entire year. I’m fine with it now, but the experience can be a bit traumatic and leave you feeling invisible.”

Vickiana Supriana

English and Business Marketing, Valencia College
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Creating Connection Through Synchronous Communication Tools

Instructors can battle the isolation that online learning environments can present by building in opportunities for direct synchronous connections with students. Using communication technologies that allow for in time dialogue can help to alleviate fears and establish trust and rapport. This can include holding informal office hours and meet ups using web conferencing tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx, as well as allowing connections through chat apps like Slack. You can even encourage prosocial behavior amongst students by sharing how these tools can be used to connect students with peers through study groups or collaborative activities built into the class.

STUDENT VOICES

“Instructors must find a way to make the students feel like they are still communicating with their instructor. I have weekly meetings with my professor via Webex and it truly makes the transition from in-person to remote more comfortable.”

Ariana Castro

Biology Major, Georgia State University
[Every Learner Everywhere Student Fellow](#)



Leveraging Data to Identify Students in Need

Often student needs go unvoiced and unanswered in the digital learning environment, with no way for educators to intervene as necessary. Course analytics serve as useful data sets to support evidence based interventions that can be critical to ensuring that students stay on the path to success. Back in 2012, [Lone Star College-Online](#) received an OLC Effective Practice Award for creating a comprehensive student support unit that included an early alert system that would notify students, instructors and advisors of inactivity in the LMS and other indicators that spotlighted students in need of help. Now, most LMS include these course analytics as part of their basic functions, providing insights and reporting to key players in helping students succeed.

Integrate Institutional Supports

ACTION ROAD MAP



The following steps can be taken to better connect you and your students to the institutional support available within and outside of the classroom:

NOW

Schedule announcements to spotlight various services that students can leverage.

NEXT

Implement a new digital learning tool in your course to support authentic and meaningful connections.

LATER

Holistically measure the impact of your institution's student support resources using a rubric (i.e., the OLC Scorecard for Online Student Support).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

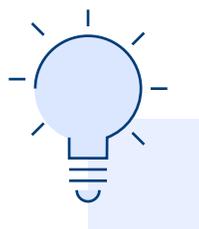
-  **[OLC Scorecard for Online Student Support](#)**
Remember that growing online programs means you will need to virtually support students through their lifecycle. Benchmark your institution's progress in comprehensively supporting students using this scorecard as a formative assessment tool.
-  **[Guidelines for Creating Online Student Services](#)**
This publication from WCET paints the landscape of online student services, and provides a call to action for how we must continue to evolve online student support such that it is inclusive of all learners and aligned to cross-institutional collaboration.
-  **[Basic Needs Security and the Syllabus](#)**
This post from Sara Goldrick-Rab builds on her work and research on student insecurities and acknowledging student needs as a critical first step. She offers suggested language for a syllabus statement that educators can use to address one of the critical conditions for learning.
-  **[Florida Atlantic University Student Resources Portal](#)**
FAU has designed a one stop portal listing the many resources available to students to ensure their success. Consider using their site as a model of the depth of services that can be articulated and shared with your students, and create a similar mapping for your own institution (if one does not currently exist!)
-  **[Online Student Services: What, Where, Who, When, How, and Most Importantly, Why](#)**
This post in the Educause Review by Kayla Westra offers key reflection questions that can help to guide your work collaborating on the curation of support services for your students.
-  **[Why Gender Pronouns Matter](#)**
This video examines the importance of using pronouns to show support, acknowledgment, and respect for one's gender identity.

6 Take Time for Self-Care



This section looks specifically at solutions focused on academic contexts and provides resources to help you reflect on your own practice of self-care, including what self-care looks like to you. This includes prioritizing tasks, leaning on our colleagues when we need support, and creating boundaries to protect our well-being.

DRIVING QUESTIONS



As you review the recommendations within this section, we invite you to consider the following key reflection questions and use the answers to help develop a concrete road map of actions to take right away, in the near future, and as an ongoing practice:

- **What are your energy levels, and in what ways are you currently taking time to care for your own needs? Are you able to take time to care for your own needs?**
- **Do you find yourself unable to be productive in the ways you need to be in order to feel as though you're doing well?**
- **Have your sleeping and eating habits changed, or are your energy levels lower than they used to be even as you find yourself working more?**

Make a List

In *Emergent Strategy*, Adrienne Maree Brown notes that “small is good, good is small (p. 30).” She also notes how “there is always enough time for the right work (p. 30).” So, how do we identify the right work? Lists are not magic, but they can help us navigate challenges a piece at a time and evaluate what is possible and what is not within the context of our physical, emotional, mental, resource, and safety constraints. We all have different contexts, privileges, roles, and resources. For each item on your list, consider:

- What is working, what is not working, and why?
- What must change in order for you to make progress, and what does progress mean?
 - What is reasonable to change? Sometimes, what we want to change, and what is reasonable to change are different things.
- Organize each item by priority. Maybe that priority is not simply “that which is due first” but also incorporates criteria such as “how much mental or emotional bandwidth do I have left in me to accomplish this task”
 - For each, make a note of priority but also make a note for “how long can I keep this up?” You may find the priorities do not agree, and you will find yourself making choices.

Find a Personal Learning Network (PLN)

COVID-19 has emphasized the importance of feeling socially connected even as we are largely physically separated. While instructors have adjusted to patterns of teaching from home, or from distanced, masked campus spaces they have also adjusted to different student needs, anxieties, and concerns. This type of upheaval is not only mentally exhausting, it can be socially isolating. One strategy for reducing the feelings of isolation and strengthening feelings of connection is to find a personal learning network (PLN). PLNs are informal learning communities where people connect around learning and growth in a particular topic area.

How to find a PLN?

1. Look to professional organization events and event tags

Organizations like the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) offer opportunities to meet new people and hear about how they navigate their work through hashtags specific to events (#OLCInnovate, #OLCAccelerate, and #WeAreOLC are a few examples) on social media (e.g., Twitter). Search for tags to find people who do work similar to what you do, and reach out with ideas, challenges and opportunities that are on your mind.

2. Look to LinkedIn

While it requires an account to access, LinkedIn can be excellent for meeting people who do work similar to what you do. It can also be a good place to share your thoughts and ideas for how you approach your own work, if you find yourself of a sharing mind. A caveat: it is also a place where “cold calls” and sales are frequent, so prepare your “thank you; but no thank you” or “I would like to hear more, but can I contact you?” messaging and have it ready.

3. Look to your institution’s internal and external professional development opportunities

Institutions often offer professional development opportunities, and the colleagues you meet in these workshops can be invaluable connections as you move from the learning that takes place in the workshop to the work of transferring what you learn to practice.

Some open and existing personal learning networks for you to explore:

- [Gather](#)
- [SquadGoalsNetwork](#)
- [Virtually Connecting](#)
- [Pedago.me](#)

Own your space

COVID-19 indelibly changed work-life boundaries as safety measures required instructors, staff, and students alike to adjust to a new normal wherein the workplace and the home space were one and the same. Throughout this difficult time, work patterns have been changed, and have changed household routines. [Female educators have been disproportionately impacted](#), and recent articles indicate that faculty in adjunct roles find themselves feeling more tenuous than before [1][2][3]. Furthermore, [COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities](#).

This view of self-care is much broader than restorative activities like meditation – while helpful, sometimes self-care is as simple as acknowledging, “I need to spend five minutes on this other activity” or saying to yourself “it’s ok to prioritize my list differently today than I did yesterday so that I can get myself to where I feel like I want to be.”

Take Time for Self-Care

This recommendation of owning your space is perhaps the hardest of the three to practice. As educators we want to help, and we often sacrifice our own well-being in order to do that. However, as speaker, writer, and scientist [Dr. Beronda Montgomery](#) frequently says in her work on mentoring and equity, living the purpose of others is a disservice to them and to ourselves. [Dr. Bettina Love's work](#) reinforces this point, as she reminds us that "If education is going to deal with trauma, we must recognize the trauma of our teachers (p. 75)."

Reflection questions to ask yourself when you receive requests asking you to do more:

1. Who does this serve? Will what I am being asked to do serve my students? Will it serve me? What will **really** happen if I say no?
2. How much do I have to dedicate to this request? Mentally? Physically? Emotionally? Resource-wise? Secondly, how much am I **willing** to dedicate to this request?
3. On the list of priorities I made in section #1 of this self-care section, where does this request fall? What adjustments (if any) should I make to accommodate it?

ACTION ROAD MAP

The following steps can be taken to attend to your own self-care:



NOW

Perform a self-check to prioritize the tasks in front of you, find assistance, and say no if necessary.

NEXT

Make a list of your commitments and prioritize these tasks for the short, mid, and long term.

LATER

Make a goal to build or expand your professional learning network and articulate concrete action steps.

Take Time for Self-Care

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

-  **[Self-Care and Avoiding Burnout in a Pandemic](#)**
A short handbook identifying symptoms of burnout and shares strategies to avoid it especially under circumstances due to the pandemic.
-  **[Self-Care Has Never Been More Important](#)**
An article from the American Psychological Association (APA), by Rebecca A. Clay underlining the importance of self-care during the pandemic and suggesting tips to ensure self-care.
-  **[Self-care for Educators in the Time of COVID-19](#)**
Written by Melissa Wehler, another article about self-care, this time focusing on the educators.
-  **[Digital Self-care During Break](#)**
Another quick read by Melissa Wehler offering tips on how to at least partially step away from digital devices during the winter break.
-  **[Job burnout: How to spot it and take action](#)**
The Mayo Clinic offers this resource on spotting job burnout and some general ways to take action.

Conclusion

“ A vaccine is not going to cure my anxiety and depression. ”

– student from the University of Mississippi

The pandemic has brought to the surface significant challenges for our students that have been steadily growing within higher education for quite some time. As we move out of the pandemic and into a new reality for higher education, it will be important for us to not lose sight of what we have learned.

At the center of the educational experience instructors have been working tirelessly to meet their students where they are, understand their challenges, connect them with resources, and provide them with flexible learning opportunities. This work should not fade and we should continue to put care at the center of our teaching. There is no going back to “normal” as we all will carry the effects of this pandemic with us in different ways. We must continue to move forward with empathy and putting into practice new strategies to reach and teach our students.

Thank you for the work you have done and will continue to do to respect diversity, enhance equity, and foster inclusivity in your courses. As we work to learn and enhance our teaching practices as a community, we hope that this playbook offered an opportunity for you to reflect on how you have already incorporated caring into your teaching and identify strategies that can amplify your efforts in easily implementable ways.

Let’s take this opportunity to continue putting caring for students at the center of our teaching.

About the Supporting Organizations



Every Learner Everywhere is a network of twelve partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work to advance equity in higher education centers on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institution practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org.



The **Online Learning Consortium (OLC)** is a collaborative community of higher education leaders and innovators dedicated to advancing quality digital teaching and learning experiences designed to reach and engage the modern learner — anyone, anywhere, anytime. OLC inspires innovation and quality through an extensive set of resources, including best-practice publications, quality benchmarking, leading-edge instruction, community-driven conferences, practitioner-based and empirical research, and expert guidance. The growing OLC community includes faculty members, administrators, trainers, instructional designers, and other learning professionals, as well as educational institutions, professional societies, and corporate enterprises. Learn more at onlinelearningconsortium.org



Achieving the Dream (ATD) leads a growing network of more than 300 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth, and economic opportunity. ATD is making progress in closing equity gaps and accelerating student success through a unique change process that builds each college's institutional capacities in seven essential areas. ATD, along with nearly 75 experienced coaches and advisors, works closely with Network colleges in 45 states and the District of Columbia to reach more than 4 million community college students. Learn more at achievingthedream.org and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

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