# On-line Learning: Best Practices for a Successful Semester

With the fall semester just around the corner, let’s take a look at some items to check off of your “to-do” list and share best practices for a successful start of the semester for you and your students in an online or blended course. If you are teaching an online course, remember to complete the [Ready for the New Semester checklist](#) before opening that virtual door to your classroom.

## Welcome Message

Have you welcomed your students as they walk through the “virtual” door of your classroom? Consider sending a “Welcome Announcement” to your students one week before the course begins to introduce yourself and provide an overview of course expectations. Entice your students to enter the course and get used to the navigation menu and overall layout. Encourage them to participate in an Introduction discussion forum where they can meet fellow classmates and begin to form a “community” of learners. Follow this [link](#) to learn about methods for welcoming your online students.

## Introduction Discussion Board Forum

Why not make “Introduction forum” the first assignment? Ask students to introduce themselves, give a little background information, and tell the class what their expectations are. Why not throw in some ice breaker questions in for fun and to further conversations! A few examples can be to ask your students to talk about their favorite hobbies, movies or activities. You may find that even though your students are not “face-to-face” they will soon be bonding over similarities, learning more about (and embracing) differences in a virtual, asynchronous environment. Discussion Board information can be found [here](#).

## Rollover Content

Have you rolled over content from another semester to populate the course for your students? Copying materials from one Blackboard shell to another is now available for instructors and the process is quick, easy and puts the power in your hands because you decide when and what gets placed in the new course. The power is in your hands! For instructions on how to roll over your content from one class to another, click [here](#) and learn just how simple this new course copy process is!

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COURSE LINKS, ASSIGNMENTS AND DATE BOMBS, OH MY!

Before opening your course to students, go through each week and make sure that all links are functioning and the assignment and/or assessment availability dates are accurate and match your syllabus. Visit here to learn more about date management in Blackboard.

SYLLABUS AND RUBRICS

Prepare your syllabus ahead of time and post it before the class begins to give students an opportunity to review and get to know course expectations. Consider building interactive rubrics in Blackboard and attach them to all assignments for clarity and guidance. Go a step further and provide students with copies of your rubrics within the syllabus. Giving detailed information for assignments will help your students meet course expectations. Here is more information about adding your syllabus along with tutorials on creating, attaching and grading with Blackboard rubrics.

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Consider utilizing the Blackboard “Contact” menu item to present your background and other important information about yourself. Throw in a fun picture to help students connect with you and encourage your students to add their own pictures to Blackboard profiles. Use this link to learn more about using the Blackboard Contact tool.

GRADE CENTER

Does your syllabus say that the course is worth 1000 points while the Grade Center reflects 1,673 possible points? The Grade Center is one of the most important communications tools in Blackboard and your students rely on its accuracy to keep track of their progress. It is imperative that the overall points in your syllabus match the points possible in the course. Access Grade Center tutorials here to learn more about managing your Grade Center.

TEACHER PRESENCE

Be sure to connect with students early and often. Create your own “introduction” within the initial forum and comment on your student responses. Always try to use first names when responding to add that personal touch and point out other student posts. As the course progresses, consider summarizing each week’s topics by way of an Announcement and/or within the Discussion forums. As you would in a face-to-face class, point out individual student contributions, highlighting exceptional work and new ideas or experiences. Read more about instructor presence here.
ANNOUNCEMENTS & NEWS

EAC COURSE EVALUATIONS EXPIRING SOON

ATTENTION FACULTY: Access to your EAC Course Evaluations in Blackboard from 2014-2017 will be removed September 1, 2019 from the Blackboard system. Be sure to download your PDF reports. From the Faculty/Staff tab, select Surveys/Course Evals (Instructor) in the Tools module. From here, download your course evaluation reports if you wish to save them.

REVIEW OF ONLINE COURSES AT LEWIS UNIVERSITY

Take a look at the Review of Online Courses (ROC) Report that was approved by the Faculty Senate in May, 2019. From now on, every online course section taught at Lewis will be reviewed on a 5-year cycle. A ROC review does not replace evaluations performed by your department or program, but it does use a rubric/checklist to confirm that your Blackboard shell has pedagogical clarity and is ADA compliant. In addition, a ROC review looks for evidence of weekly student-student peer cooperation and weekly faculty-student instructional engagement. The report explains these expectations in detail. View the ROC Report Here

NEW TUTORIAL VIDEOS AVAILABLE ON YOUTUBE & LEWIS TUTORIALS

Did you know that our Faculty Center has a YouTube channel and a tutorials website? Yes, it’s true that the Faculty Center has both! Faculty can view curated collections of tutorial videos and documentation created by our very own Faculty Center. New tutorials include Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Ally, VoiceThread, and ShareStream with more new tutorials to come in the near future. These tutorials are guaranteed to get you up and running from start to finish quickly. You can visit the Lewis University Faculty Center channel on YouTube to subscribe today. For additional support and documentation on our tutorials website by visiting, please visit our Weebly Tutorial Site.

BLACKBOARD OPEN LAB

Blackboard Open Lab is an excellent opportunity for faculty and staff to ask specific questions about Blackboard. Staff from the Faculty Center will be on hand to address your questions individually. We cannot provide an overview of Blackboard during the open lab sessions, but are happy to answer specific questions about using Blackboard. No advance registration required.

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BLACKBOARD ALLY

WHAT IS IT?

Blackboard Ally is a revolutionary product that integrates seamlessly into the Learning Management System (LMS) and focuses on making digital course content more accessible. Starting this Fall ‘19 semester, all courses will begin to operate with Blackboard Ally’s feature turned on. Once course content is uploaded, Ally gets to work. Ally uses machine learning and advanced algorithms to check Word, PowerPoint and PDF Documents for common accessibility issues.

THE BENEFITS

For our Lewis students, the benefits are almost too good to be true! All learners will benefit from one of the several formats Blackboard Ally provides. Our audio learners will benefit by downloading the audio versions of your content while busy adult students will greatly appreciate the HTML or ePUB formats that will be easily read on phones and other devices. Finally, our ESL students will love the new feature that will translate content into one of the many language options currently available.

For the instructor, Blackboard Ally can help you build an inclusive learning environment by offering alternative formats for students. Students will be able to choose what’s best for their own personal learning style and focus on the content. Won’t that make them better students? We think so! And not only will you be a champion in the eyes of your students, but you will benefit greatly from Ally’s feedback and step-by-step instructions for making future documents more accessible. The in-browser preview of PDFs, Word documents and PowerPoint files will identify and highlight all areas for improvement. Ally makes it significantly easier for instructors to address concerns using this handy new tool in Blackboard. Join us today to learn more about Blackboard Ally!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Follow the links if you wish to learn more about Basic Accessibility Information or Instructor Feedback. To learn more hands-on training experience of Blackboard Ally and its features, join our “Blackboard Ally: Making Your Content Accessible For All Leaders” workshop on August 28! You can register here.

DID YOU KNOW?

Universal Design began as a movement in architecture and product development. The concept was adapted to education by applying advances in the understanding of how the brain processes information to the design of curricula that accommodate diverse learning needs.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

AUGUST

BLACKBOARD ORIENTATION WORKSHOP FOR NEW FACULTY
AUGUST 21  AUGUST 27  AUGUST 28
2 - 3 PM    9 – 10 AM   4 – 5 PM

The Blackboard Orientation Workshop for New Faculty provides an introductory overview of how to use the University Learning Management System, Blackboard. The workshop is offered in person or online at the end of each semester for faculty joining the University in the following semester. Attendees may join in person or through online conference.

BLACKBOARD ALLY: MAKING YOUR CONTENT ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL LEARNERS
AUGUST 28
10 - 11 AM

Beginning fall 2019, the Blackboard Ally feature will be enabled in all Lewis University courses. Join us for this comprehensive workshop to talk about how to use Ally, what the gauges mean and how to follow the step-by-step instructions to make your documents more accessible. Most importantly, you will learn about the great benefits Ally has to offer our students! In this workshop, you’ll learn how to turn your course documents into documents that can be accessed by students of all abilities.

CREATING BLACKBOARD RUBRICS WEBINAR
AUGUST 21  AUGUST 28
10 – 11 AM    10 - 11 AM

In this workshop, participants will learn how to convert a paper rubric into an interactive one in Blackboard Learn and attach that rubric to various assignments. Bring an existing rubric and we’ll get to work converting it for you!

REGISTER FOR ALL WORKSHOPS HERE
SEPTEMBER

BLACKBOARD ORIENTATION WORKSHOP FOR NEW FACULTY
SEPTEMBER 3  SEPTEMBER 5
9 – 10 AM  NOON – 1 PM

The Blackboard Orientation Workshop for New Faculty provides an introductory overview of how to use the University Learning Management System, Blackboard. The workshop is offered in person or online at the end of each semester for faculty joining the University in the following semester. Attendees may join in person or through online conference.

INTRODUCTION TO VOICETHREAD
SEPTEMBER 4
2 – 3 PM

Are you looking to incorporate lecture capture into your course? Want to create helpful tutorials using video for your students? Come learn about the basics of VoiceThread. No previous experience with VoiceThread is required to attend.

ONLINE TEACHING CERTIFICATION
ONLINE SESSION I:
SEPTEMBER 9 – OCTOBER 20

The Online Teaching Certification fulfills University requirements for faculty to teach online and blended courses at Lewis University. This session is completely online. There is no need to be on campus to take the online training as all coursework is completed on the Lewis University Blackboard system. Participants will learn the basic pedagogical approaches, design principles, and technological tools that facilitate online learning. Participants can expect to spend 3-5 hours per week completing coursework to meet weekly deadlines. An Online Teaching Certificate will be awarded to those who have successfully completed all required coursework.

CREATING BLACKBOARD RUBRICS WEBINAR
SEPTEMBER 12
2 – 3 PM

In this workshop, participants will learn how to convert a paper rubric into an interactive one in Blackboard Learn and attach that rubric to various assignments. Bring an existing rubric and we’ll get to work converting it for you!

REGISTER FOR ALL WORKSHOPS HERE
WORKFLOW TIPS FOR MAC USERS
SEPTEMBER 18
10 - 11 AM
SEPTEMBER 19
1 - 2 PM
This workshop will demonstrate the setup and application of often overlooked features included in the Mac operating system that can improve user workflow. Participants are encouraged to bring their Mac laptops and participate in the demonstration activities. Please perform all necessary software updates prior to this workshop (Note: We will be looking at features included in the macOS Mojave 10.14 operating system).

GRADING WITH BLACKBOARD RUBRICS WEBINAR
SEPTEMBER 24
10 – 11 AM
Did you know that Blackboard rubrics can be attached to assignment, essay and short answer test questions, blogs, journals, wikis and discussion board postings? Let us show you how to grade using a Blackboard interactive rubric.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: BUILDING BETTER LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
SEPTEMBER 25
10 - 11:30 AM
SEPTEMBER 26
1 - 2:30 PM
This roundtable workshop will address the benefits of increasing student engagement in the learning environment. Participants will be presented with new strategies and activities for creating a more engaging learning environment. Faculty will also have the opportunity to discuss and share strategies that they have used in their unique learning environments.

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