Technology Best Practices to Engage Learners

01 NAVIGATION

Research has found consistent and easy to use navigation helps users concentrate on the course content and interaction with instructors.

Create navigation to maintain a logical flow, and focus on guiding learners through a course. Simplify navigation for learners so each click moves forward to expected information. Refrain from listing everything on the main navigation menu; rather, use top level categories and nest content (or sub-folders) one level deeper. This approach allows for content to be reached using logic instead of guesswork.

02 ORGANIZATION

When each week, segment or section is laid out the same way, learners intuitively navigate to the section of the course to find their resource or assignment.

Organize a course to stop the guesswork. A well established layout and organizational structure leads a learner through a course with confidence and expectation. Determine what the entire course should look like by outlining the objectives and outcomes. Divide your course into “chunks” and build out the first module. Once completed, duplicate it across the remainder of a course using outline you created. The goal is to put together materials with purpose and relevance. If an item doesn’t fit, it shouldn’t be there. Focus on making a clear path for learners to follow and succeed.

03 MODULES

When content is “chunked” in manageable segments and organized well, it allows learners to easily locate resources, assignments, activities and assessments for a particular topic in one place.

A module is a generic term and could be renamed to week, topic, chapter, or unit. Creating chunks of content in a module keeps the course organized for learners and focuses them on coursework. Tools associated with modules allow for various deployment methods such as timed release, user-specific access, and access based on completion to name a few.

Modules are flexible in that they can be reordered, copied to other courses, and/or hidden as needed.

04 CAMPUS CONSISTENCY

When surveyed, learners prefer to have consistent navigation and layout throughout all their courses. When learners know exactly where to find common elements throughout all their courses it eliminates confusion and frustration.

Three areas that are part of every course are syllabus, coursework, and grading. All Blackboard courses have a default template and navigation that links learners to these areas. Keep navigation to those areas consistent and updated to benefit our learners. 1) Course Documents: Contains syllabus, contact information, and resources about the course expectations. 2) Course Modules: Put the bulk of actionable coursework here. Organize content, presentations, assessments however you see fit, but stay organized 3) My Grades: Keep grades in a notebook, spreadsheet, or wherever you want, but learners look here for grades and context about how they are assessed. Keep this area updated throughout the semester.

05 MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

When guidelines explaining required levels of participation and communication are clearly defined, learners participate at a higher level, with fewer questions and greater understanding of expectations.

Be very descriptive in expectations for learners. Assignments, content, and activities should have a description. Web based materials exist 24/7 and having added context reminds the learner what they are supposed to do with the material when they engage. If there is a discussion, give a few interaction examples of what constitutes a good answer. Longer written assignments and large projects should have a rubric. Files attached in the system should have a description or topic sentence that lead the learner into the attached resource.
**06 Regular Feedback**

Feedback refers to not only the grade for an assignment, but additional context on positive performance and/or areas that need improvement. Timely feedback on their coursework empowers the learner to change behaviors or mistakes they are making in time for the next assignment.

Blackboard offers a robust set of tools to annotate and grade papers digitally. This helps with the logistics of grading many assignments and gives specific areas to provide feedback. The Grade Center allows for quick comments on manually entered grade columns. The assignment tool allows inline grading for the instructor and tools to annotate on learners work. Rubrics can be created and associated with many Blackboard assessments to provide a framework for learners to follow, and instructors to grade and comment with detailed context.

**07 Presence in Course**

When instructors lead by example and actively participate in communication activities, it communicates to the learners that you care about who they are and the questions and concerns they have. It shows that you are prepared for the mentoring and challenge that teaching is all about.

Make visiting your course a habit. Post announcements, stay active updating the Grade Center, and always look to improve course organization throughout the semester. Participate in course discussions when learners need a push or guide in the right direction. Associate due dates with items and the Blackboard calendar will automatically update for learners.

**08 Turnaround Time**

Setting clear expectations as to when you will be able to communicate back with the learner on their question, or provide feedback for their assignment is very helpful. The learner knows what to expect for communication from their instructor.

Communicate in your syllabus or through your course a time frame at which you will answer emails, or grade assignments. Stick to it and do your best to answer within your designated timing. Answer questions multiple learners have with an announcement or in forum so the remainder of the class can reference common Q&A.

Giving learners timely responses and feedback increases their ability to make the changes needed to be successful. Leveraging Blackboard communication tools will help you be efficient and effective.

**09 Not the Tool, How You Use It**

When tools are used in ways that transcend traditional teacher-centered instruction it not only enhances the pedagogy in a course, it increases learner engagement, decreases the labor of learning and creates a sense of community.

Tools are just that, a tool. They are most powerful when used right. Blackboard has a baseline of tools available for instructors to use. Innovative use of tools rely on assignment creation that pairs well with a particular tool.

Blackboard is the common entry point for CSU-Pueblo learners. Instructors should look to find and use tools that better suit their discipline within their course. Once mastered, instructors should explore beyond Blackboard and onto the internet to find amazing tools and information that can be linked into a course.

**10 Master a Tool**

When instructors are familiar with the use and management of a tool it helps both instructors and learners use the tool with ease. Instructors can anticipate issues and how to problem solve with confidence and this allows learners to focus on the objective they are trying to accomplish.

Keep it simple and don’t take on too many tools at once. Trying to tackle several new technology tools at one time can be overwhelming for both instructors and learners. Choose a tool, learn it well and master it before trying something different. This allows you to be comfortable with it and guide the learner through usage, expectations, and glitches. To get started, take a look at the course tools section of Blackboard.