



Support for
Online
Learning

Faculty-Student Engagement

Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez

Dean of Extended University

Dr. Cigdem Sirin

Director of the Center for Faculty Leadership and Development

Access to computers and hotspots

Some students are expressing a lack of reliable computer and/or Wi-Fi access.

- What to do: Provide information about Technology Support and the Helpdesk. Additionally offering more asynchronous options in the course may provide flexibility for students challenged with sharing computers, reliable Wi-Fi, and so on. See: <https://www.utep.edu/technologysupport/learningremotely.html>

Consistent structure across Blackboard

Students are expressing that some courses are confusing and there aren't enough directions.

- Usability, clear navigation, consistent labelling, and organization are important to effective online course design.
- Consistency across courses allows students to focus on the content and avoids frustration.
- Blackboard can be overwhelming and confusing when putting together a course.
- What do to: CID has a template that can be used for any course in Blackboard. Request that the template be added to the course shell prior to adding content. See also [Grab-N-Go: Universal Design](#).

Meeting at published locations and times

Students are frustrated because their course was supposed to meet on campus and isn't, was supposed to meet for synchronous sessions and isn't, or wasn't supposed to meet for synchronous sessions and is.

- What to do: Follow the published schedule. If faculty need help with planning fully asynchronous or hybrid course designs and/or with conducting synchronous sessions effectively, they can contact CID (instructionaldesign@utep.edu) or CFLD (cfld@utep.edu) for advice, assistance, and resources. See [Grab-N-Go: Synchronous Online Instruction](#).

Increased interactions with faculty

Students are expressing that their course doesn't feel like the teacher is present. That they are being asked to read on their own and then submit assignments...sometimes with little guidance or feedback.

- What do to: Encourage faculty to increase their instructor presence in the course. This can be done through announcements, videos, individual and group emails, online conferences and office hours, engagement in discussion boards, and so on. See [Grab-N-Go: Instructor Presence](#) and [Grab-N-Go: Online Office Hours](#).

Increased interactions with with peers

Students are expressing a desire to increase their peer-to-peer interactions in their courses.

- What to do: Flip the virtual classroom. Encourage faculty with scheduled synchronous sessions to use at least some portion of those times for break-out groups (lectures can always be pre-recorded). Even in fully asynchronous courses, peer-to-peer interaction can be achieved via discussion boards, cleverly designed team-based learning strategies, and more. Support for Online Learning periodically offers webinars on group work, and we also have an upcoming Grab-N-Go on this topic.

Help avoid procrastination

Students are expressing concern that because of the nature of online courses, it's difficult to keep up with the work in the ways they are accustomed.

What to do: Online course content should be stimulating and include a good mix of weekly exercises (such as reflection memos, discussion posts, practice quizzes) that motivate students to actively and regularly participate. Encourage faculty to check-in with their students on a regular basis, especially at-risk ones who seem to be falling behind.

See: [Grab-N-Go: Retention Strategies](#) and [Grab-N-Go: Retrieval Practices](#).

Help with stress and well-being

Students are experiencing an above-the-usual stress level.

- What to do: These are quite unusual times that call for flexibility and empathy. Encourage faculty to have low-stakes tests and assignments to prepare their students for high-stakes ones. Faculty should also refrain from assigning too much coursework and make students feel overwhelmed. Additionally, remind faculty to provide students information about [counseling services and other support](#) available. We have two upcoming Grab-N-Gos—one on maintaining personal and professional health and another one on humanizing online education, so stay tuned.

Resources

- [Support for Online Learning \(Sol\)](#)'s calendar of upcoming webinars and trainings
- [Grab-N-Go Series](#): Bite-Size Resources for Teaching Online
- [Center for Faculty Leadership and Development \(CFLD\)](#)
- [Center for Instructional Design \(CID\)](#)
- [Technology Support](#) / [Blackboard Central](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#)