Winning Strategies for a Great Semester Start

These are ideas shared by faculty who attended the January 22, 2016 Beyond the Podium Session. To see a list of topics and dates for upcoming sessions, visit teach.ufl.edu.
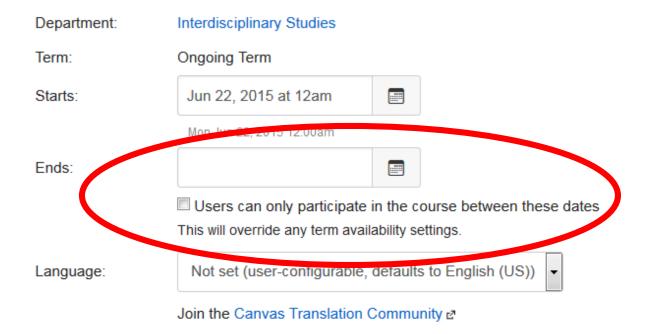
Prior to the start of classes

Send out the syllabus early. The roster loads into your Canvas course nearly as soon as the students start to register, so you can send them messages to let them know about textbook purchases or other preparatory information.

Send out messages to your students as soon as the roster becomes available:

- Who can "find the cheapest version of the textbook" game
  - Students appreciate that the instructor is trying to help them save money
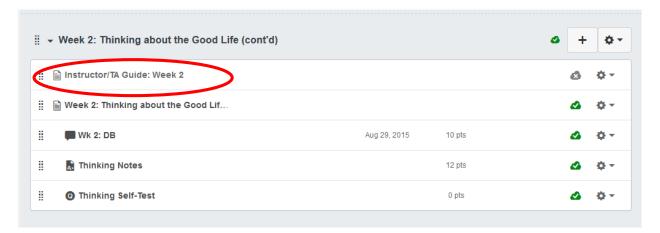 - Helps to build community before classes start

For online courses:

- If you want to open the Canvas course to your student early, set the start/end dates in **Settings > Course Details**
- Be sure to check the box, "Users can only participate in the course between these dates"
  - Otherwise, the course will not open until the starting day of classes

Canvas announcements are saved and copied over for the next term so you can save yourself some time by re-using them. They can be scheduled to be sent on particular dates.

If you are using Canvas, consider integrating instructions for TAs into the course site using an unpublished page at the start of each module

- This can be easily updated within Canvas when you discover things you may have forgotten to tell people
- As a "starter manual" you can import the IUF1000 Good Life Instructor/TA Manual from the Canvas Commons and then customize it to fit your needs
  - From your course homepage, **choose Import from Commons** in the right side
  - Type IUF1000 Instructor/TA Guide into the search window
  - Click the page that appears
  - Click the **Import Into Course** button on the right side

Ask a successful student from a previous semester to create a welcome note or video and share tips on how to be successful in this class. This can be done at the end of the previous semester and can be in virtually any format. Students seem to be more willing to take advice from other students.

If teaching online, be sure you have checked and double checked all of the content for the first two weeks—all links, assignments, everything. Remember that you only get one chance to make a first impression. Starting out with your "ducks in a row" will garner you points that will help you later if something goes wrong

If teaching online, publish the class at 8:00 a.m. on the first day of classes or earlier. If you publish earlier, check in to see if students have questions, or if you do not plan to check in, let the students know that with a notice on the homepage. You don't want students frustrated right off the bat because they could not find your course!

First Week

What do you do the first week with students coming and going due to drop/add?

- Use Canvas chat to get students to talk to each other
    - They may be able to answer some of each other's questions
- Have students do any technical setup that might be needed for the course
    - That way they can troubleshoot issues before they need to do assignments
- Introduce content during the first week, but deadlines are second week
- Syllabus quiz—students cannot move on until they have gotten enough answers correct
- Have assignments where a certain number will count, but not all (best 3 out of 5)
    - If assignments are being submitted in Canvas, you can dropped the lowest score or however many you wish
- Plan something of importance for the week after drop/add to get the stragglers moving
- Develop students' pre-existing knowledge
    - Use chat to help students "meet"

On the first day of class:

- Cover the culture and goals of the class.
- For classes with a good deal of partner and small group work, the first day activity can start with some individual task, then segue into sharing that task (or building on it) with a group.
- First day activities should be relatively "low risk" – don't ask students to bare souls on day one. And don't expect general discussion
- Having students doing something on their own (very low risk), then moving into a group discussion with neighbors (a riskier, but an accurate representation of class time!) works well

Provide your students with an opportunity to get to know you

- This helps with strong evaluations at the end of the term
- Take role by trying to remembering everyone's name (names on index cards shuffled)
    - Students will appreciate your effort as you stumble through their names
- Show students that you care for them
    - Poke students when you see they are not coming to class/logging in
        - Canvas analytics can help you identify missing online students
    - Personalize communication by using each student's name both verbally and in written messages
- For online: create a short video introducing activities for the week

Use, "What do I need to do to be successful in this course?" as a team activity

- What does the instructor need to do to assist?
- What do students need to do?

- Discussing it and writing it down makes it almost like a contract

Ongoing

Take advantage of the "sharing" mentality of today's students

- Share something good that happened (outside of the course)
  - Creates a positive dynamic for the class, students follow up with each other about their good events
- Ask successful students to write a note to future students about what they would do differently
- Students actually like talking about personal things

"Sell" any new techniques you use before you start the activity

  - Explain the value of what you are doing in the course (it may be self-evident to you, but not to your students)
- Use props to make a point and even inject humor into your class
  - Magic 8 ball
  - Don't forget about technology that may be able to help you

Ask students for feedback on the course and course activities

- Start, stop and continue
  - What should we start doing?
  - What should we stop doing?
  - What should we continue doing?
- Respond to feedback sincerely

Can it be just as important to know when not to do something?

- It may not be necessary to send an announcement to all based upon the issues of one or two students
- Analytics can help if you're not hearing from the students

Consider a midterm poll everywhere about what is working and not working with the course leads to discussion

  - Consider an auto-graded midterm grade-check quiz with three questions (extra credit?)
    - What is your grade thus fare in the course?
    - Are you satisfied with this grade?
    - If you are not satisfied with your grade thus far, what do you plan to do to earn the grade you want?

Move from being the classroom "controller" to being classroom "facilitator"

Resources

- Faculty Focus: http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/first-impressions-activities-for-the-first-day-of-class/
- Faculty Focus: http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/faculty-development/new-faculty-orientation-features-advice-from-students/
- Stanford University: Coursera A/B testing of instructor video
- George Mason University: Exploring the Impact of Video Feedback on Instructor Social Presence in Blended Courses
- Brigham Young University: Improving online social presence through asynchronous video
- Robert Morris/Strayer/DeVry Universities The Influence of Instructor Generated Video Content on Student Satisfaction With and Engagement In Asynchronous Online Classes.