



# Timely Tips for Canvas

## Teaching Beyond the Podium Podcast

### Micah Jenkins 00:06

Hello, my name is Micah Jenkins and welcome to the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. This podcast is hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida. And our guests share their best tips, strategies, innovations and stories about teaching. This episode's topic is on canvas. We sat down with James Kocher eLearning Support Manager at UF and he provided some tips, tricks, do's and don'ts for new inexperienced Canvas users. James has had a long and interesting journey into education that started in the US Navy when he was nominated educational petty officer. He eventually landed at us in 2004.

### James Kocher 00:40

I first started here at UF in 2004 2004 to 2007. I was actually designing online laboratories for the entomology department using Flash. what's kind of interesting is I'm still in contact with one of the instructors that I worked with back then, and they're still using some of the stuff I did was that 15 years ago, so I worked for public health, worked for College of Pharmacy College of Nursing and UF Online, and then this current position since February of 2019.

### Micah Jenkins 01:15

So why is Canvas such an important topic right now?

### James Kocher 01:18

Well, especially now everyone, in some capacity is using Canvas. And especially since we moved everything online, back in March of this year, we had people first time users never used an online system. Never wanted to use anything online, but you're kind of forced into it. So we had a lot of new users who really weren't sure what to do and tons of questions, tons of calls. You know, people were kind of in a panic with no, how do I do what I did in the classroom, in an online setting.

### Micah Jenkins 01:51

For many faculty moving online, especially as a result of unforeseen circumstances can be difficult. But James tries to ease new users in by first introducing helpful, easy to use features that will save you time. SpeedGrader, for instance, has easily won over many instructors.

## James Kocher 02:08

One of the first things I would always show them is the speed grader tool, it makes grading so much easier. And I would use that as my hook. I'm like, hey, check this out. Look how cool this is, and they'll be hooked into it. But I think if they come with an open mind, you know, I'm going to learn this new system and try to figure out how I can adapt my teaching or adapt my teaching to the system. You know, there's a give and take there.

## Micah Jenkins 02:31

It's really easy for users to get overwhelmed by all the tools and features in Canvas. In fact, even experienced users are always learning something new. For first time users James suggest starting with the basics, keeping it simple and starting small.

## James Kocher 02:43

Don't jump into the deep end. If it's your first semester using the online learning system, start with the basics. Don't make it harder on yourself, get used to teaching in an online environment. And then start to think about some of the more creative things you can do to make the engagement better. If you jump in and try and do this tool, this tool and this tool, you're gonna be overwhelmed especially if they're new tools to you too. So give yourself a chance to grow. Don't expect your first semester teaching and canvas to be perfect in to have all the tools that you want to use implemented. Give it time let it grow.

## Micah Jenkins 03:20

To help faculty get the most out of cameras at the beginning of the semester. James also has some tips that are helpful for both first time and experienced users.

## James Kocher 03:28

You do want to make sure your courses publishing for the first day of class. Even if it's just bare bones, you don't have all your modules ready, you can keep those unpublished but have something there for them to click on to least to see the syllabus and get an idea of your course structure. You do want to run the link validate. So what the link validator is, if you go to settings in your course, it's on the right hand side, what it will do is run through all of the hyperlinks in your Canvas course to make sure that they work. So it will find broken links for you. Show you

where they are so you can go fix them. Because nothing worse than you know midway through the semester, student clicks a link like it's broken. What do I do?

## Micah Jenkins 04:09

Save yourself and your students frustration with some of the easy to implement recommendations that James offers on setting dates and communicating through Canvas.

## James Kocher 04:18

Don't try to communicate with students using Canvas if your course is unpublished, or before it becomes active. You can't use the inbox tool until the course is published and active and you can't send out announcements you can however if you send an announcement with a delayed posting date, it will then become when that date comes up it will become active and send out to students. Don't forget to put an end date if you use the course override. So every semester we've got set open and closed dates for Canvas. So for like fall 2020 classes started August 31. They opened at midnight on the 31st students can have access. A lot of teachers want to have students access and doing stuff in the course before that date. So to do that, you have to set the date you want it open, and the date you want it closed. And then there's a little box underneath this, where it says students can only participate in these dates. So you click that, and then they can participate outside of what we've said is the default dates. Now, if you don't set a close date, the course stays open, basically forever, which means students can still go in and post on the discussion board. If they have the ability to retake quizzes, they can do things, they can still email other students using the inbox because it's not closed. And I think the biggest issue is we get calls all the time. Why is this course still showing active in my canvas dashboard when it was last semester, it's because the instructor put the override, but didn't put a close date. So make sure if you're going to override the term dates we have set in Canvas that you put that close date.

## Micah Jenkins 05:57

Group work and collaborations among students are immensely valuable. They contribute to the feeling of belonging and ultimately to the quality of the learning experiences students have, especially in the online environment. It can be challenging to implement these kinds of activities and experiences. But James describes two Canvas collaboration tools that can help faculty facilitate successful group interactions.

## James Kocher 06:19

So we do have the ability to create groups within Canvas, and you can have a group assignment. And you can have group discussions. So a group assignment is an assignment that you create and assign to a group set that's got student groups within it, the students will work together to produce one artifact, you know, like a paper or a PowerPoint presentation that they

will upload as a group. And when they get graded, they get graded as a group, when you think of group work, it's truly group work. A group discussion is just a discussion board that's limited to just those group members. So if I had 100 students in my class, and had a discussion open, I'd have 100 students talking back and forth, which can be a mess. If I put them in groups of five, same discussion board, but only five people are interacting, they'll only see their four peers in that group. So it creates a smaller group discussion, to probably get more feedback, more interaction. But if it's graded, you still grade them individually. So it's not they're not doing a group assignment. As a discussion, a group discussion just limits them the participants to that group.

## Micah Jenkins 07:24

James also wants faculty to be aware of their Canvas settings when working with group sets.

## James Kocher 07:29

So groups are kind of tricky, because if I set up group sets, and you can have multiple group sets, and of course, you have like maybe a discussion group, project group, by copy that course to another semester, those group sets go away. Which means any assignment or discussion board I had set to groups, we won't have a group set attached to it, it will actually still be a group assignment. And that can cause issues. If it's a group assignment. And there's no groups attached. There are some weird things, especially with speed grader. That happen. So if you use group sets, and you import your course content, make sure you recreate those group sets and potentially go through each group assignment or group discussion to make sure it's assigned to the right set as well.

## Micah Jenkins 08:14

While it can be tempting to jump right into the exciting options for group work that Canvas offers, James advises instructors to wait until after drop add to assign students to groups.

## James Kocher 08:24

What you don't want to do is start doing any kind of group work until drop add is over. Because what happens is, and usually see this with discussion boards, instructors will create a discussion board with groups and during drop add students are getting added to Canvas three times a day, if you've created your groups and someone gets added, they don't automatically get added to a group. So they're not assigned to a group being a group discussion, they go in the discussion board, they'll post something, but no one's going to see it because it's not in any group. So we recommend, wait until the end of drop add or make sure you're going through multiple times a day to assign new people to those groups.

## Micah Jenkins 09:05

When it comes to quizzing effectively in Canvas. James advises Canvas users to make sure that students can access any files they might need.

## James Kocher 09:13

And this is really been something that's exploded since moving to online classes back in March. So some of the things that we've noticed a lot is, you do want to make sure that your quiz images in files if they're being used are visible to students. So if you don't have the Files tab hidden to students, you can still hide it from them but make it viewable if you change it from published to viewable only with a link. So every file in Canvas has basically four states. It can be published. It can be unpublished and students can see it. It can be made viewable with a link which means students won't see it in the files. But if it's attached to something like images in an exam, they'll still be able to see it or you can set a viewability date range like viewable from until date. So the best thing that we recommend, especially with images is maybe create a folder, let's say exam one images. And if you set the folder to viewable only with a link, anything inside that will also be viewable via link. And then you can, you can do that. So what we see a lot at the helpdesk is students calling in like, I have this test, I can't see the images, and the images have been unpublished. So the instructor can see them when they preview the exam. But students can't because it's not published.

## Micah Jenkins 10:36

Because technology doesn't always work the way we want it to. James suggests that faculty gives students extra time on quizzes as a buffer.

## James Kocher 10:43

You don't want to make your quiz time match the availability time. So if I've got, let's say a 60 minute exam, you want to give a little buffer there. Because if I set it to open at 8am, and close at 9am, if they have any kind of technical difficulty getting on, especially if using a proctoring service that's eating into their available time. So you want to give, you know, some little leeway. So if you start at 8am, maybe haven't go till 9:15. That way, especially if using something like honor lock, because they won't be able to start until 8am and has go through - and Proctor U the same- would go through scanning the room, you know, identify using your ID card or identify who you are going through all these steps. And if you've got that availability, matching the exam length, it's eating into their exam time. So you want to give students that full, whatever you're giving them 60 minutes, hour and a half, you want them to have that time in the test. So you give just a little bit of cushion. You know, because if you've got an we actually had this issue in spring with I think it was a chemistry course, they wanted everyone to take the test at eight o'clock at night. And they all logged in it really slow the system down, because they were using Honorlock. So students were freaking out, they were worried about losing time, give them a little leeway. If possible, open up your availability time 24 hours, there's still that kind of mentality of

Oh, this is the exam day and time we still need everyone to do that. But that's kind of the flexibility of using a learning management system is you don't have to have everyone start right on time. Given time to choose the best time for them.

## Micah Jenkins 12:27

UF offers two different proctoring services, Proctor U and Honorlock.

## James Kocher 12:31

So currently, we have two approved vendors, Proctor U which does live proctoring and Honorlock, which kind of uses an AI but also has live practice who will pop in if needed. So it's a it's recording them. But if it if the AI notices suspicious behavior, so like, if the test taker leaves camera, it's going to flag that as an incident. Or if they noticed, hey, they're going to a website outside of the exam and they shouldn't be it's going to flag that. If there's enough triggers attractor will actually come in to chat and say hey, I noticed you're not on camera view, can you please make sure you're in view of the camera. And then the instructor can go in afterwards and look at these reports. And see through that they'll see the entire recording of not only the camera but the screen, Proctor you does it with a live Proctor. And usually they've got I think five or six different exams going at once and you've got the kind of schedule that ahead of time, whereas with honor lock, it can be you know, you just click a button and you start there's no scheduling of your exam time.

## Micah Jenkins 13:38

To get the best results out of proctoring services, make sure to follow the instructions when setting up exams.

## James Kocher 13:44

So with Honorlock, when you enable one of your canvas quizzes as an Honorlock exam, it will create a password and put it in the quiz for you. What that does is ties Honorlock to that quiz. If you change it or remove it, then students won't be required to go through the whole Honorlock process. They won't even start Honorlock. So it even has in the password. There's big letters, no edit. So just Yeah, when I puts in that password, don't edit it, don't remove it. Because that's what ties that product to your quiz.

## Micah Jenkins 14:22

To avoid student frustration and technology snags on exam day. James suggest giving students a low stakes practice exam so they can familiarize themselves with the proctoring technology.

## James Kocher 14:32

We do want you to create a practice quiz for any proctoring service that you intend to use, especially for Honorlock. They even have a built in practice quiz to let the students go through the experience in a non-testing situation just to make sure everything works. I know Proctor U has a test my computer function on their site as well and some people are still using LockDown Browser and you can do a practice quiz in a lockdown browser. To make sure that students are able to access that quiz, because nothing worse for a student than to try a technology for the first time on a high stakes exam, and it doesn't work.

## Micah Jenkins 15:10

Every once in a while a quiz doesn't quite work as anticipated, and you need to make changes to your canvas quizzes. It might be easy to fix, but be sure to check with eLearning support before you do.

## James Kocher 15:20

Yeah, so we say do contact us before making any changes. Because we've had this a lot this semester. It can throw off the grade, there are only a couple of things that can be regraded. So if you need to regrade contact us for, you know, any, any tips and tricks on those, we've had people remove questions. So the scores change. And so before making any big changes, especially after they've taken it, because it could necessarily affect the grade give us a call. Along those lines, a lot of people think they need to make copies of an exam for students with accommodations, which isn't the case. And we'll talk about this with the due dates here in a second. But you can give different availability dates and times to individual students and also grant them different time extensions on their quizzes. So you don't need to have multiple versions of the exam you can you can have those variables within within one test.

## Micah Jenkins 16:20

Faculty can also make changes to quiz due dates on the student level. But be careful not to erase other students' scores in the process.

## James Kocher 16:27

With assignments, with exams, you can grant and get set different due dates, to individual students to sections. And to do that, when you're in Edit for both of them at the bottom where it has a due date set. There's a little box that says plus add. And if you click on that, you get a brand new set of due dates you can you can give, you can type a student's name in if you click on the box, you'll get a drop down with a few student names. But it's best if you start typing in and then they'll pop up choose that student or students if you've got more than one who needs

that time, give them their own available from due date and until date, and then it will show up differently to them than it would for the rest of the class. And what happens is normally when you just have the due date, it says assigned to everyone, when you start adding in names and additional due dates, that everyone changes to everyone else, if you remove the everyone else, or if you just remove everyone and type in someone's name that no longer is assigned to those who weren't picked everyone else. So let's say the example is people taking an exam, they've got their grades, we have a student who we wanted to, you know, for whatever reason alone and take it after, if you go in and you remove everyone and just put that student's name in and hit save, you go to the gradebook, everyone else will now have a gray square with no grade in that column because basically, you've assigned it to them. The good thing is if you go back in, you click the plus and you type in everyone in Adam back those scores, the scores don't go away. But we see this often is like all these scores went away and we look and they remove that everyone and just added an individual student. So use that plus Add button at the bottom of assignments, the bottom of quizzes, to add those additional due dates, leave that leave everyone there, don't touch that one.

## Micah Jenkins 18:24

Want to learn more Canvas tips and tricks? You can attend ongoing trainings presented by UFIT.

## James Kocher 18:30

There's two trainings to take. There's one called eLearning at UF build and design, which is kind of really a Canvas basics. What I do in that course is go over the dashboard, and how to change your settings. And then we'll look at the course itself and settings and then go through how do I make an assignment? How do I create a quiz, the other one's called eLearning at UF facilitate and engage it takes you through alright, I've got my course, it's the first day class. What do I do? How do I put students in groups? How do I create rubrics? How do I grade? How do I use the speed grader. And then we take almost a whole hour in looking at the gradebook itself. So you can find those at [training.it.ufl.edu](http://training.it.ufl.edu) click on where it says look at search current offerings just type in Canvas and those both come up. We're also offering for the first time a one hour webinar on how to make sure your canvas gradebook is ready to be imported into one use.

## Micah Jenkins 19:28

One of my favorite tips is to experiment and be transparent. Try out new things in Canvas but let your students know and ask for their feedback to make it better. Your students will be a lot more patient and willing to share creative ideas if you do. James also has a few final tips to share.

## James Kocher 19:43

Don't wait till the last minute to do anything with your course. Whether it's requesting it, whether it's posted an exam, like oh, I've got an exam today at 7pm. I'm going to put it up today. You want to do it a couple days to give yourself a chance to make sure it's what you want, and give you a chance to preview it and make sure that everything's working. I know, as faculty, we experience students who wait until 1150. On the night, something's due at 1159 to turn things in, and because technology is the way it is, that's exactly when they're gonna have issues. So we don't want our students to wait to the last minute to do things, kind of the same thing. Pre plan, do these things ahead of time, give yourself that time buffer we talked about with exams, and of course with anything if you're not sure what to do, if something's not working, contact eLearning support for help. Our number is 352-392-HELP which is 4357. We're option three for canvas for faculty and staff support.

## Micah Jenkins 20:43

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