

Killing Me Softly with Canvas

The Laura Gomez Edition

With Canvas being live for its second semester, now is a good time to refresh instructors on some general Canvas tips and reminders as courses are being built. We've gotten plenty of feedback from instructors and students on what works best for both in Canvas, so most of this information is based on that selective feedback.

General Navigation

Most of you are familiar with Canvas navigation overall, but there's a few things to be mindful of when revisiting Canvas this semester:

- **Teacher vs. Student View:** Try to step into student view regularly after making updates in your course. This will help identify some or all gaps in linking pages together, ensuring easy access to materials, and catching any issues before students do.
- **Sidebar Navigation Visibility:** Depending on what you want students to access easily or see first, think about how your left side navigation is laid out. Are there links that are only helpful for the instructor and not the student? Think about hiding some links that might not be relevant in your course so students have less to sift through. Some common links to include are grades, syllabus, modules, announcements, etc.
- **Mobile View:** While there is no way to switch to a "mobile view" in Canvas, one thing we recommend when trying to mimic mobile view is to squish your Canvas browser in as much as the screen will allow so you can see how the pixels reformat into a smaller window. While it's not a fully accurate view of what students see on mobile, it's helpful to see how much it shifts the desktop navigation.

If you are uncertain what your course layout will be at the start of the semester, it's ok to build slowly and only include what students need immediate access to at the start of the semester. There's nothing wrong with building as you go, but we encourage you to have a general navigation plan as soon as you can to ensure your courses aren't cluttered with too much information that's hard for students to navigate.

Course Analytics

Many instructors ask how to view analytics for their students, and there are many ways to filter the data you're trying to gather for any given course. These analytics are especially helpful for fully online courses that likely require more engagement than face-to-face courses.

Ways to use analytics:

- A simple way to check login activity for your students is by clicking the "people" tab in any given course, and a chart appears with each student enrolled in your course, and the last time they logged into that course. There is also a "total activity" column that shows the time they've spent logged into your course.
- To go more in depth with analytics, choose one of your courses, which should open up to your homepage of that course. From the homepage, click "course analytics" on the right side list of the page. This will bring you to a few different tab options of data analysis:
 - **Course Grade:** Shows the average grade for your course. This can be displayed as a graph or a table view.
 - **Weekly Online Activity:** Shows an in-depth view of how frequently students are accessing your course, on average. There is the option to break down that data by individual students rather than the entire class only. This data includes which resources (pages, documents, assignments, etc.) they're visiting in your course, how many page views within those resources, and participation in those resources. As an example, participation could mean the amount of students submitting work to an assignment in your course.

- **Students:** This breaks down specific data for each individual student, which includes: Grade by percentage, attendance statistics (if using roll call/attendance tool), last participation in Canvas, last page view, amount of page views, and total participations.
- **Reports:** These are downloadable CSV files that can generate the following: Missing assignments, late assignments, excused assignments, class roster, and course activity.

Most of this data is downloadable as well if that information is ever needed for accreditation, institutional data, or archival purposes.

Building Pages & Modules

When working on pages and modules in Canvas, try focusing on the overall navigation and design as to make any important class materials easily accessible to students. Here's a few examples of how to structure your courses:

- Use the provided templates by duplicating to save time. This also helps by having an existing design flow that you don't have to fully create from scratch.
- To make custom pages, use the html editor and AI for improving your pages.
- Using the "Copy To" feature works great, as all of the copies are linked to the original resource. However, if changes need to be made to customize each page, using "duplicate" is your best option.
- If the page you have built is not visible in "View as Student," it may need to be assigned. To do this, go to Pages > View All Pages > Click the three dots > Click Assign to, then select Everyone.
- A common student complaint is the amount of "scroll work" it might take to find something in a given course. As mentioned in the navigation section, try to prioritize timely resources at the top of your modules page, making it one of the first things they see. This can be adjusted throughout the semester as well based on shifts in priority or hiding past resources that are no longer needed.

Gradebook

The gradebook is a complex tool of its own, so here are some common mistakes we've seen in Canvas since the start of Spring semester:

- The gradebook in Canvas does not match what is in the syllabus, causing confusion for students. Try to make your gradebook a priority as most students rely on getting regular grade feedback.
- Extra grade items and groups that are not meant to be in there. Ensure you have the correct grade items in the proper category as it's very easy to create gradebook items in Canvas that don't end up being utilized.
- The "Do not count this assignment towards the final grade" setting in many assignments has defaulted to checked due to the K16 migration.

Here's a few general tips to consider:

- Use the filters to help isolate what is being worked on in the gradebook so your view isn't too clouded with information.
- Use the "Message students who..." tool to reach out to students that might be struggling or had difficulty on one particular grade item.
- Move the "Total" to the first column in the gradebook.

Attendance/Roll Call

When first activated if the setting **Do not count attendance toward final grade** is not checked, it will add an assignment and the points will default to 100. To edit the point value it will need to be accessed through the Assignments tab. The points will be averaged over the number of times attendance is taken.