Tips for Organizing and Managing an Asynchronous Course

1. **Organize your course into modules**. You may already think of your course material as units or modules. In an online course a module contains all the content a student needs to work with a particular concept or topic, in the form of lectures, readings, websites, videos, ect. It also contains activities such as a discussion board, quizzes, and assignments. Everything is presented in the sequential order in which you want students to work with the material. This kind of framework is important to help students stay organized and stay on task. Blackboard modules can be created using the content area tool [link] or the learning module tool [link].

2. **Establish a timeline**. It's very common for students in online courses to feel disconnected from a traditional schedule. In an onground course, a student might be in class from 10:00 to 10:50, three days and week, with work to do in between class meetings. In an online course they can't always self regulate and understand how much time they need to spend in the course, and when, unless you spell it out for them.

   You might have modules organized around a week's work or one concept. An example of a weekly timeline is to always open new modules at 10:00am on Tuesdays, with assignments being due at that same time the next week. (If you have a major assignment that takes more than a week, be sure to explain that in detail.) You might have modules open for a longer or shorter period of time, but you should still try to establish a pattern of when new modules are available and old modules close.

3. **Establish a mid week deadline in your timeline.** It's human nature to prioritize and procrastinate. If students see that all the discussion board interaction and assignments are due at 10:00 am on Tuesday in your class, some of them will wait until that morning to try to do a week's worth of work. This allows no time for reflection, deep reading, and a real conversation on the discussion board. Establishing a mid-week deadline, worth points, encourages students to begin working early. An example for a course where new modules open at 10:00 am on Tuesday, might be by 10:00 am on the following Friday for a student to make an initial discussion post, or take a short quiz over reading. If a discussion board is worth 10 points total, weigh it so that some for the points are for the initial post and the rest are for responses. Setting up a discussion board to be graded creates a column in the grade center and gives you a fast, scannable

way to make sure students make the deadline. [link]

4. **Set a schedule and routine for yourself and communicate that to students**. It is important that you log in to your Blackboard course often, not just to make sure students are on track, but to establish a teaching presence. If you only log in once or twice a week, you're conditioning your students to do the same. They need to know you are there, leading them. There are some techniques you can use to prevent this from taking over your life. Create a communication policy that blocks off days and times that you'll be available online in person through a technology such as Zoom. Tell students how quickly they can expect a response to an email and an anticipated turn around time on grading. Use the Blackboard announcements tool [link] to both post an announcement within Blackboard and email it out to students.

   In relation to your schedule and deadlines, the most common deadline for assignments is 12:01 am or 11:59 pm. The problem with that is two-fold. One, you may not be awake at that time to troubleshoot and give advice and two, if a student is taking multiple classes, they may find themselves with multiple midnight deadlines. Consider what time you're most likely to be online when setting deadlines.

5. **Ask students what works for them.** You've done your best to set up modules and establish a timeline, but students don't seem to be working. This is probably the time to initiate a discussion with your students about changes you could make to timelines and due dates to help them better manage the course work. Perhaps they're in different timezones, or can't get on a computer until after children have gone to bed. Unlike a synchronous course in Zoom, an asynchronous course gives you the flexibility to time shift. Don't forget to just talk to your students.