SEMESTER START CHECKLIST

To make the semester progress easier, the Office of Online Learning presents a list of 11 tips and best practices to follow when setting up your course before the semester starts.

It is a good practice to review your course and make sure that everything is ready to go when the semester starts.

☐ **Tip 1: Copy Your Course:**

- **Copy from a previous semester or a development shell into the new course** by following these course copy instructions.
- **Perform a Technical Review:** Go through your course, and make sure all hyperlinks and resources for videos and images work and are updated. All hyperlinks should open in a new window and have a title to be accessible online. All images should have alternate tags and descriptions.
  - **Development Shell:** Before copying, perform technical review.
  - **Previous Semester Course:** After copying the course, make any changes and perform a technical review.
- **Double-check UTSA Library links and videos.** Recent updates by the Library may have changed the location of resources.

☐ **Tip 2: Clean up the default left navigation items after you copy a course**

- Follow these organize the navigation menu instructions. Notifications, Content, Discussion, Grades, Tools, and Help are default items in every course. When you copy, the copied content will be added below these default items unless the same name exists in the copied course. The copy process does not override, it only adds to the course. Rearrange, delete unused links, and ensure the navigation appears the way you want students to use it. Remember, the crossed through square means that link is hidden from students, and they will not see those options unless you select to show the link.
- **Organize your content for easy student access.** We recommend the use of folders to keep content organized. However, avoid placing folders within folders as this can cause confusion and increase the risk of a student missing the information they need.

☐ **Tip 3: Update Syllabus and Course Schedule**

- These documents should communicate the course expectations to your students based on the guidelines set by your department. Remove the old files and upload the new files. Keep current and relevant files in your course to reduce the possibility of linking to the wrong file and to improve the accuracy of search results. Having up-to-date files saves space and time as your file structure is less confusing and easier to manage.

☐ **Tip 4: Request Early Course Access for Your Students**

- All students have access to the Blackboard courses they registered for on the first day of class. Faculty can request students to have early access to a course before the official start date of classes. Send an email to onlinelearning@utsa.edu with the following information at least 5 business days before requested access date:
  - Course Access Date
  - Course Information – Subject, Number, Section, CRN, Term: (POL-1013-001-14840, Fall 2018).

☐ **Tip 5: Review the Course**

- Check the dates for assignments to ensure they are accurate. The Date Management Tool is helpful for checking dates.
- Write clear and detailed instructions for all assignments and tests. Immerse yourself in the student experience by using the Student Preview Tool and make sure everything is set up properly.
Tip 6: Grade Center

- Verify your Grade Center is complete and functioning correctly.
- Be sure to set up your Grade Center according to the grade scheme described in your syllabus. [Documents to help with the Grade Center are on our website.](#)
- Graded activities built in Blackboard automatically create a grade column in the Grade Center. Add manual columns only for grades you want to manually enter, such as attendance or assignments and tests turned in outside of Blackboard.
- Keep in mind that [Grade transfers to ASAP](#) need the proper set up in the Grade Center to work at midterm and semester end. If you have any questions or problems, contact Online Learning for assistance.

Tip 7: Add a Teaching Assistant or Grader if needed

- Students are automatically enrolled in courses through ASAP, but you may need to [add other types of users to a course](#) if your Banner Coordinator does not officially assign them in Banner.

Tip 8: Choose a Communication Tool

- **Choose to Use the Email or Course Messages.** If you do not want student to use these tools, you can [make them unavailable](#) in Course Management > Customization > Tool Availability.
  - The Email tool sends an email using your email application without opening it. You receive emails in your regular inbox, such as Outlook or Google. Blackboard does not store a copy of emails sent. *(Check spam and clutter folders, if you do not see emails from Blackboard.)*
  - The Course Messages tool allows you to send private messages within Blackboard only. You must log in to class to send or check messages. The benefit of using Course Messages is that a record of all course communications are kept within the course.

Tip 9: Set a Homepage for your course

- By default, students will see the Notifications page when they enter your course. You can [change the course entry point](#) to another place. Some instructors chose to have students see their announcements when they log in. Others send students straight to the content. Go to Customization > Teaching Style > and then assign the place you want students to arrive when they log in to Blackboard.

Tip 10: Use Student Preview

- **Use the Student Preview feature to check the way students see your course.** The [Student Preview feature](#) changes your view to that of a student. If you have content that is hidden or unavailable, you will not see it in Student Preview. You can navigate your course, submit assignments, post to the discussion board, and even take tests as the preview student. By setting your Student Preview to "Keep the preview user and all data", you are also able to mimic activity as a pretend student to populate grades. This is useful to check your Grade Center for accuracy.

Tip 11: Review Blackboard Tutorials:

- Get familiar with any features you are unsure how to use.
- Inside every course is a link for instructor help. It is listed at the bottom of the Course Management menu.