

First4Weeks

Faculty tips to help students start strong and have a successful semester

The first four weeks of each semester provide an experience that can set students up for success. Even seemingly small gestures can make an important impact on a student. You are a critical part of helping them get off to a great start, and keep going strong.

Many of the ideas below are common practices used by our own faculty, and have been identified as research-based Achieving the Dream (AtD) best practices. Using these tips will help new faculty get off to a student-focused start, ensure that we all keep student success top of mind, and provided a forum for faculty to continue sharing ideas and tactics.

Keep Building on Success

Although the AtD Best Practice is titled First4Weeks, many of the steps can be incorporated at any point in the semester to help students succeed. Use them as a springboard, customize them to make them your own, and expand on them through conversation and collaboration.

Adding one or more of these tips in the first four weeks (and throughout each semester) can create a student-centered environment inside our classrooms and throughout Columbus State.

Action Steps:

1. Select at least one strategy from each category to carry out in your classes.
2. Email cougarsuccess@csc.edu and ask to be added to the First4Weeks Blackboard Organization.
3. Be sure to assess the impact of the strategies you have implemented.

Build Relationships and Connect

Create a sense of community and belonging for all students.

- Personalize your BlackBoard course materials so your personality comes through—Digital Education and Instructional Support (DEIS) can help you. (Email teaching@csc.edu or call 614-287-5991.)
- In the first class, ask students to introduce themselves and share why they are in the course or something else about themselves. Consider posting this as an early assignment using the Discussion Board in BlackBoard.

- Start class by taking attendance. This helps connect student names and faces (and reinforces the expectation of students coming to class, which is a critical factor in success!).
- Strive to learn students' names in your first class. Making a seating chart with notes about each student and reviewing it several times can help. Make a point to use their names in subsequent classes.
- Share something about yourself and your passion for your discipline and the course content.
- Encourage students to tell you about specific concerns they have. You could do this by creating an assignment or including a syllabus statement that lets students know you are interested in them and able to connect them to additional resources.

Engage and Encourage

Promote active learning and build technology skills.

Active Learning

- Communicate the “why” behind assignments to help students connect with the big picture for the course.
- Perform at least one Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) every week, such as minute paper or muddiest point. (See the First4Weeks BlackBoard Organization for tips.)
- Engage students in at least one active learning strategy every week. Ideas include link-pair-share, QR code creation, clickers, jigsaws, magic moment or service learning. (See the First4Weeks BlackBoard Organization for tips.)
- Consider a syllabus quiz, small group discussion, polleverywhere.com, or other activities to engage students.

Technology

- Take note when students are not accessing BlackBoard regularly. Email them to make sure they are comfortable with the technology, and ask if you can be of assistance.

- Always demonstrate any new technology or skill that will be used in the class as part of an assignment.
- Upload/add Blackboard's "how-to" YouTube videos to your course, and make students aware of open computer labs in Moeller Hall on the Delaware Campus and the Center for Technology and Learning (TL) on the Columbus Campus, where technology help is available. They can also contact the help desk at (614) 287-5050.
- Create an early assignment that asks students to log into BlackBoard, as well as update their contact information on CougarWeb.
- Let students know the importance of having up-to-date email, phone, and address information on file. (Remind them that you can't help them if you can't reach them!)

Communicate, Celebrate, and Inspire

Inspire students with your high expectations and belief that they can meet them.

- Keep the mindset that your goal is to help students learn, and that assessments, assignments and exams are tools to help you do that.
- Always incorporate positive feedback on graded materials, beyond check marks, deductions, and final score.
- Create rubrics that clearly define grading criteria for each assignment and provide these to your students when giving the assignment.
- Early feedback is important, so strive to return graded papers quickly, especially in the early weeks.
- Discuss what students need to do to be successful in YOUR course. Let students know that you have high expectations—and that you believe in their ability to meet them.
- In the first week, have students complete a short in-class writing assignment or class quiz worth very few (or no) points. Grade and return this assignment the next class, including helpful suggestions as to how to improve performance.
- Celebrate the good stuff and share inspiring stories! Focus on progress. Congratulate students who make significant progress in their work.

- Share your path to higher education to inspire them. It is important that students know you struggled, too.
- Build opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. For example, ask students, "What were your biggest challenges with this assignment?"

Support and Collaborate

The best instructors know there can be outside factors creating barriers to student success. Collaborate with student support services and provide students with information and referrals to support your students in their academic, career, and financial goals.

- Build your knowledge of campus resources to support student success. Use the resource sheets, the First4Weeks Blackboard Organization, and the website to direct students to programs, workshops, and other resources.
- Integrate learning about campus resources into class assignments, for example:
 - Create an exercise that includes having students use tutoring services, NetTutor, or the Writing Center.
 - Create an exercise that connects students to Student Engagement and Leadership, Counseling Services, Career Services, the Library, etc.
- Customize a resource announcement for your course in BlackBoard that links students to campus resources. (Resource links can be found at csc.edu/services.)

FIRST 4 WEEKS

*Recognized as a best practice by
Achieving the Dream.*

