First4Weeks Remote
Tips to help students start strong during remote operations

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.

Columbus State staff and faculty have been using the St. Louis Community College First4Weeks model, an Achieving the Dream best practice, for about two years. This document shares tips for supporting students in a remote/virtual environment, based on student survey data and input from Columbus State faculty and staff.

Build Relationships and Connect
Students are looking for personal connections

- ☐ Set up one-on-one Microsoft Teams appointments to share documents and send clear instructions.
- ☐ Check in to see how students are doing.
- ☐ Share personal stories as appropriate (ex. if you were a first-generation college student).
- ☐ Reinforce that students are not a burden and do not need to apologize for asking questions.

- ☐ Share about yourself and use your photo.
- ☐ Get to know students by asking them to share favorite things, personal bios, etc.
- ☐ If you feel comfortable doing so, use pop culture and humor to connect with students.
- ☐ Demonstrate care and concern when students share challenges.

Communicate, Celebrate, and Inspire
Students want multiple means of communication

- ☐ When making referrals, use the "Three W's": Where? What? Why?
- ☐ On the phone, ask callers if they have pen/ paper. If yes, walk them through any next steps. If no, overview steps and send follow-up email referral.
- ☐ Encourage students to use the chat tools on cscc.edu.
- ☐ In chat, get context about each request to ensure the information the student is asking for is what they need.
- ☐ If you cannot resolve a student request right away, offer to follow up with information and additional contacts.
- ☐ Be thorough when asking questions and sending information — students don't know what they don't know.
- ☐ Personalize template language.

- ☐ Create and send a welcome announcement in Blackboard before the start of the term.
- ☐ Communicate a clear email policy.
- ☐ Log into online sessions early and stay a bit late
- ☐ Use virtual office hours and online appointment times.
- ☐ Keep a standard outline for weekly Blackboard announcements and PowerPoint slides to kick off class presentations.
- ☐ Add announcements regularly, including non-attendance reporting and follow up with individuals via email to address issues.
- ☐ Offer reminders regarding significant assignments or milestones.
- ☐ Use bullets when possible for easier and faster reading.
- ☐ Guide (rather than just give answers) to students so they can navigate systems when seeking information.

Engage and Encourage
Students want us to encourage and motivate them through difficult times

- ☐ Research issues and reply with clear direction.
- ☐ Ask students how they are doing and let them talk.
- ☐ Engage students in thinking about what's working and what could be improved.
- ☐ Lighten things up with humor.
- ☐ Encourage students to be proactive and acknowledge persistence and progress toward goals.
- ☐ Use other team members' strengths and make thoughtful handoffs when needed.
- ☐ Consider drafting an email template that can be modified based on student situations.
- ☐ Use a positive tone in emails and Blackboard announcements.

- ☐ Check up on students not attending class or submitting assignments.
- ☐ Share fun/inspiring memes or quotes throughout the semester.
- ☐ Encourage students to work ahead as their schedules permit.
- ☐ Add a meme or motivational quote as part of your signature line.
- ☐ Stay calm, reassuring, and positive during high-stress times.
- ☐ Remember, many students are new to online learning – some delayed starting college until this semester.

Support and Collaborate
Students want us to share information and assist with technology

- ☐ Walk students through new links/tools while talking with them.
- ☐ Blackboard Collaborate can be used for advising and acclimating students to technology used in many classes .
- ☐ Share links to Blackboard resources with students.
- ☐ Share links to support sites and post short how-to videos.
- ☐ Walk students through your Blackboard site during online session or pre-recorded video.
- ☐ Read updates from Lead Instructors.
- ☐ Create handouts of screenshots for common online course activities.

- ☐ Practice online skills as a class (chat, polling, breakout rooms, screen sharing).
- ☐ Resolve issues by seeking answers and cite sources to students.
- ☐ Create tip sheets for students.
- ☐ Use direct links in emails.
- ☐ Learn about College news and events by reading College-wide emails and the Update newsletter.
- ☐ Attend or watch recordings of First Wednesday, Third Friday, and other campus information events.
- ☐ Build confidence, but acknowledge that some anxiety is normal.
- ☐ Reinforce that it's important to find information and develop skills to be resourceful.

FIRST **4** WEEKS

Achieving the Dream
LEADER COLLEGE

Recognized as a best practice by Achieving the Dream.