**Planning Worksheet for Inclusive & Equitable Teaching Online**

With each issue of the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter Summer Series, you’ll be provided with a planning worksheet so that you can apply the tips and best practices for inclusive & equitable teaching presented in the newsletter issue to your online course plans. In each planning worksheet, we suggest some best practices as possible examples for you to use in your online course. The list of examples is not exhaustive and we encourage you to try one or more of these examples when planning your course, or use them as a jumping off point for your own further research.

**SUPPORTING YOUR ONLINE STUDENTS**

***Download this document to use it for your planning!***

Reflect on the challenges and needs of your online students, including contemporary students and first-generation students. You then will identify practices & plan activities that you already use or that you wish to explore to support your online students: what they need as learners, what they need in their online courses, and what they need to be successful online.

| **Reflection Questions for Supporting Your Online Students** * How can you support the learning needs of contemporary students online?
* How can you support the learning needs of first-gen students online?
* What are **your** online students’ needs? How can the practices presented in this Planning Worksheet apply to supporting all online students?
 |
| --- |
| **Identify & Plan for Inclusive & Equitable Teaching Online*** View the listed examples of best practices for online learner support on the following pages. Then consider & plan various ways you can (1) support online students as learners; (2) support online learning in your course; and (3) support online learning success of your students at Mason.
 |

| **What Do Online Students Need?**In the table (below), you’ll see what research has shown is needed by contemporary & first-generation students for online learning support & success. In the Online Teaching Coaching Newsletter, ***Supporting Online Students***, we already presented this table, and we’re sharing it again here for handy reference for this **Planning Worksheet**. Please review the table and think about: How do these needs reflect what your online students need? How do you address their learning needs in your online course and online teaching? On the following pages, we share teaching practices which you may use to address needs of online learners. Practices are organized in three categories: Examples of Practices to Support Individual Needs as Learners; Examples of Practices to Support Learning in the Online Course; and Examples of Practices to Support Academic Success. You’ll also find many of these practices (and more) detailed in the Stearns Center Digital Learning’s “*Quality Assurance Checklist and Guidelines for Online Courses”* (available by request from Stearns Center). We encourage you to try one or more of these examples when planning & teaching your online course, in order to better support all online students!  |
| --- |

| **Examples of Practices to Support Needs of Individual Learners**  |
| --- |
| *These practices address individual online student needs to feel respected, heard & valued; for flexibility; to feel included & part of learning community; to ask questions; and to learn in a supportive atmosphere which supports well-being.* |
| * **Create a welcoming environment for all students.** Demonstrate and require mutual respect of everyone in the class. Include a [**diversity statement**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/purpose-and-mission/mason-diversity-statement/) and [**netiquette**](http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html)expectations in your syllabus.
* **Avoid stereotyping**. Don’t assume that students will automatically do well or poorly in your online course, due to variables such as their age, ability, gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status. Use the practices presented in [**Planning Worksheet: Getting Started**](https://gmuedu-my.sharepoint.com/%3Aw%3A/g/personal/dsmucny_gmu_edu/EfM1d0Zk1tRIuynrTrOVk8QBs7kwpdxU8F8d1KnyHYZHjQ)to get to know your individual students and their learning needs.
* **Address individual learning needs in an inclusive manner**. In your syllabus, make sure to include information for how students obtain accommodations for disabilities, with a link to [**Disability Services**](https://ds.gmu.edu/). Let your students know that they may talk with you to discuss their individual learning needs.
* **Learn more about your students’ lives, priorities and learning needs**. At the start of the semester, ask students to share with you some of the challenges/concerns they have about learning online (*e.g.,* access to technology, affordable textbooks, etc.). Also ask students to share the priorities, duties, and responsibilities in their lives, besides their studies. This information will give you a better idea of how to support the contemporary students in your class. The [**Feedback Tool**](https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/how-to-use-feedback-box-with-blackboard/) in Blackboard could be used as an option for students to anonymously share information with you, if students fear being judged as “not a serious student" because they also have jobs, families or other personal or professional obligations.
* **Be flexible.** Provide opportunities to promote a growth mindset. Allow students to make mistakes and fail in a safe environment, where they can submit an assignment again (*e.g.,* taking a quiz multiple times; rewriting & resubmitting a paper), applying what they have learned in the process.
* **Provide a space for your students to develop and engage as an online learning community.** This may include a class introduction forum at the start of the course; other resources or activities intended to build a sense of class community throughout the course, such as ice breakers, “Water Cooler” forum or “Ask Your Instructor” forum.
* **Address student questions (without judgment) and seek out student perspectives and feedback.** Throughout the course, solicit student questions & their constructive feedback on course design, course content, course experience, and ease of online technology. Consider getting anonymous feedback from students. Make sure that you review their feedback and act on it, as appropriate.
* **Promote student health and well-being.** Share [**well-being resources**](https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/resources/well-being-resources) from [**Mason’s Center for the Advancement of Well-Being.**](https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/)
 |

| **Examples of Practices to Support Learning in the Online Course**  |
| --- |
| *These practices address online student needs for engaging, relevant, flexible & accessible course materials & resources; instructors who are present and responsive; “real-world” assignments & assessments, self-directed learning; and opportunities to apply knowledge and experience.* |
| * **Make content engaging and relevant.** Incorporate multiple examples and perspectives to make specific concepts relevant to individuals with diverse characteristics such as age, ability, gender, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status. Use [**Culturally-Relevant Teaching**](https://higheredconnects.com/diversity-in-higher-education-creating-culturally-responsive-classrooms/) principles & practices throughout your online course.
* **Select flexible & accessible materials**. Use textbooks and other course materials that address the needs of students with diverse abilities, interests, and learning preferences. Consider the use of fully-online accessible digital materials (preferably [**open-access educational resources**](https://oer.gmu.edu/)**, OERs**). Contact [**Mason Libraries**](https://oer.gmu.edu/?page_id=966) for help with finding & selecting OERs for your online course. Check with Assistive Technologies Initiative to make sure that your course materials (documents, videos) are accessible.
* **Be present in your course!** Let students know that you are present and that you care about their learning. Students will be more engaged if they feel that you care about their learning. Maintain your teaching presence by responding promptly to student questions and postings. Establish your social presence by creating a friendly, engaging learning environment. Provide your managerial presence through your leadership, guidance and direction.
* **Assign authentic assessments**, such as projects, portfolios and creative assignments which allow students to apply their knowledge and experience to real-world scenarios and situations. Check out [**these tips for authentic assessments**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Ten-Tips-for-Planning-Authentic-Assessments_Student-Perspective_FINAL_APRIL-2021.pdf)from Stearns Center Digital Learning.
* **Offer “free pass” extensions or grace periods for submitting assignments**. [**Rethink your deadlines and late policy**.](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/rethinking-deadline-and-late-penalty-policies-again/) For a limited number of assignments, allow students a “free pass” extension. Students have flexibility to use their limited number of “free passes” as they wish..
* **Use more low-stakes, formative assessments.** Replace large, high-stakes assignments with smaller, more frequent assignments that allow students to track their learning more consistently throughout the course.
* **Include low-stakes, no-stakes self-assessments** to allow students to check their understanding of important concepts during the course.
* **Give your students choices.** Design learning activities that allow students to “customize” their learning by tailoring assignments to their personal and professional interests and needs (*e.g.,* choice of assignment format, project topics).
* **Provide sample test questions, models of exemplary work, and study guides.** Consider sharing sample test questions with answers and exemplary work of previous students, discussing how to study for course exams, and providing study guides.
 |

| **Examples of Practices for Academic Support** |
| --- |
| *These practices address needs for academic support of online students by promoting respectful and pro-active communication; directing students to support services at Mason; providing guidance for academic integrity and online learning strategies.*  |
| * **Be approachable, respectful and available to your online students.** Welcome questions from your students and respond promptly. Encourage students to meet with you virtually, and maintain regular virtual office hours.
* **Help your students learn how to proactively communicate with you and with their other instructors.** Share this [**email template**](https://contemporary.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Approaching-Your-Faculty-as-a-Contemporary-Student.pdf) (designed by Mason’s Contemporary Student Services together with the Contemporary Student Advisory Board). This template provides guidance for students to be proactive in communicating their needs and multiple priorities with faculty if/when necessary. Support your contemporary students--and all online students--in advocating for themselves and normalizing their presence at Mason.
* **Post information about support services at Mason.** In your syllabus and/or posted in your Blackboard course, list URLs and other contact information for academic services such as [**Writing Center**](https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/), [**Mason Libraries**](https://library.gmu.edu/)**,** [**Office of Academic Integrity**](http://oai.gmu.edu)**;** and student services such as [**Disability Services**](https://ds.gmu.edu/)**, Assistive Technologies Initiative,** [**Contemporary Student Services**](https://contemporary.gmu.edu/),[**First-Gen Students,**](https://firstgen.gmu.edu/for-current-students/)[**Mason's LGBTQ+ Resources**](https://lgbtq.gmu.edu/)**,** [**Learning Services**](https://learningservices.gmu.edu/)**,** [**Counseling and Psychological Services**](https://caps.gmu.edu/)**,** [**Patriot Pantry**](https://ssac.gmu.edu/patriot-pantry/) (for food insecure students). Also see [**the list of resources**](https://masononline.gmu.edu/student-resources/) found on [**Mason Online website**](https://masononline.gmu.edu/)**.** Please let your students know that Mason services are available to **all** students, including online students.
* **Provide clear information as to expectations for academic integrity**. Define and discuss academic integrity and Mason’s Honor Code with your students, so that they are clear about expectations. Share links to Mason’s [**Office of Academic Integrity**](https://oai.gmu.edu/) and [**Honor Code**](https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/) in your syllabus.
* **Encourage your students to contact** [**Mason Learning Services**](https://learningservices.gmu.edu/online-learning/) for academic success resources including videos, workshops, and coaching.
* **Share link to Mason Online** [**Strategies for Online Learning Success**](https://masononline.gmu.edu/success/) **with your students**. Also include an informal, open discussion forum in your online course where students can share their tips and strategies for online learning.
* **Invite your students to be involved in Mason community.** Let them know about upcoming academic and co-curricular programs, activities and events at Mason. These include [**leadership education and development**](https://lead.gmu.edu/)**,** [**student involvement**](https://si.gmu.edu/)**,** [**student media**](https://studentmedia.gmu.edu/)and [**university events**](https://events.gmu.edu/).
 |

**Learn More!**

* Bussey, T. (2020, February 21). [**Understanding the challenges facing first-generation college students**](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/the-challenges-facing-first-generation-college-students/) *Faculty Focus,* Magna Publications.
* Center for First-Generation Student Center (n.d.) [**Why First-Gen?**](https://firstgen.naspa.org/why-first-gen) **from** [**The Center for First-Generation Student Success**](https://firstgen.naspa.org/), an initiative of NASPA and The Suder Foundation. Retrieved June 8, 2021.

# Crockford, J. (2021, February 26). [**Five tips to creating a more engaging online course for adult learners**.](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-student-engagement/five-tips-to-creating-a-more-engaging-online-course-for-adult-learners/) *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications.

# Kelly, R. (2015, February 24). [**Motivating adult online learners**](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/motivating-adult-online-learners/)**.** *Faculty Focus*, Magna Publications.

# Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2011). [**Research on adult learners: supporting the needs of a student population that is no longer nontraditional**](https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/research-adult-learners-supporting-needs-student-population-no)**.** *AACU* *Peer Review: Emerging Trends and Key Debates in Undergraduate Education*, Winter 2011, 13 (1): 26.

**Links to Mason Resources**

* Contemporary Student Services, George Mason University. [***Faculty & Staff Resources about Contemporary Students*.**](https://contemporary.gmu.edu/facultyandstaff/)
* First-Generation Students at George Mason University. [***Faculty & Staff Resources about First-Generation Students***](https://firstgen.gmu.edu/for-gmu-faculty-and-staff/)***.***
* Learning Services, George Mason University. [***Online Learning***](https://learningservices.gmu.edu/online-learning/)***.***
* Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning, George Mason University. [***Creating Inclusive Classrooms.***](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/student-engagement-classroom-managment/creating-inclusive-classrooms/)
* **Also make sure to regularly check** [**Stearns Center website**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/) **for** [**online teaching resources**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/online-teaching/)**, upcoming** [**webinars & workshops**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/programs/trainings/)**, and for** [**continuing professional development for teaching**](https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/programs/stearns-center-opportunities/continuing-professional-development/)**!**

| **Contact Us!** **Office of Digital Learning** | Stearns Center for Teaching and LearningPhone: 703-993-6200 | Email: **stearns@gmu.edu** Suite 412 Innovation Hall, Fairfax CampusGeorge Mason University |
| --- |

MY PLANNING NOTES