CANVAS CONSIDERATIONS FOR LARGE COURSES

Canvas can be a great tool for managing large courses. When designing and building these kinds of courses, however, it is especially important to consider scale. There may be features you are used to using in smaller courses that do not work quite as well in larger courses. This document will provide you with information to help you optimize Canvas for larger courses.

EXAMPLE USE CASES

- Compliance training required for all members of a specific department
- Orientation materials provided to incoming classes

CONSIDERATIONS

As with all online tools, there are implications to be aware of when dealing with larger volumes, particularly with regards to load times and navigation.

Areas to be particularly aware of include:

- User Management (e.g. Sections and Groups)
- Discussions
- Gradebook
- Notifications

Canvas is not recommended for courses with more than 5,000 enrollments.

USER MANAGEMENT

If course sections have been merged into a combined course, consider leveraging differentiated assignments and due dates and targeted announcements to specific subsets of participants.

Exercise caution when utilizing Canvas Groups in larger courses. Group membership will be more difficult to manage in a larger course and should only be used if participants are expected to collaborate with one another.

Group membership cannot be managed via SIS Import and there are limited options for managing groups on a large scale through the user interface.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussions can quickly become overwhelming and unnavigable in larger courses. It is recommended to leverage this feature only when necessary with larger courses. In the event discussions are required for your use case, consider creating section-specific discussions.

GRADEBOOK

You may experience longer load times in the gradebook in larger courses and information in this view may become unwieldy. There are a few features you can leverage in the gradebook to mitigate some of these challenges.

- **Filtering**
  The gradebook can be filtered by Assignment Groups, Modules, Sections, and Student Groups. Use filters to create a more targeted view of what you are working on and to reduce load times.

- **Gradebook: Individual View**
  Consider setting your default gradebook view to Individual View. Setting this as the default would mean only one student would be loaded at a time rather than the entire course.

- **Complete/Incomplete grading schemes**
  If it supports your use case, consider configuring assignments to be graded as complete or incomplete. This will streamline the grading process in both the Gradebook and Speedgrader views.

- **Gradebook Policies**
  Gradebook policies can reduce the number of manual actions you need to take in the gradebook.

For example, an automatic grade posting policy will ensure that participants are notified of their grades as soon as they are entered, which can reduce administrative overhead. By default, Canvas courses use an automatic grade posting policy.

Additionally, late and missing submission policies allow you to establish criteria for late or missing assignments. For example, you could specify that all missing assignments receive a 0% grade, or that late assignments are deducted 10% for every day they are late.

- **Default Grades**
  Especially if you are grading assignments on a complete/incomplete basis, setting default assignment grades can be a great time saver.

NOTIFICATIONS

Keep in mind that administrative actions taken within the course may trigger notifications to participants. Understanding how Canvas notifications work will help you control your participants' experience. Information about Canvas notifications – including default settings – are available here. Some specific considerations to keep in mind:

- **Notifications and Course Availability**
  Participants will **not** receive notifications in the following situations:
  - The course is unpublished
  - The participant does not have an active enrollment
  - The date of the notification trigger falls outside the start and end dates of the course and students are restricted from participating or viewing the course outside these dates

- **User Notification Settings**
  Each Canvas user can configure their own notification preferences, so it is important not to rely solely on Canvas notifications to communicate important information to everyone in the course.

- **Assignments & Due Dates**
  By default, users receive a weekly notification report when due dates changed. This notification is also triggered by all newly created assignments. For this reason, it is best to make sure all assignments are set up with the proper due date before enrolling students and/or publishing the course.

- **Course Invitations**
  Participants will receive a generic notification from Canvas when they are enrolled in a course. We recommend emailing participants ahead of time from an email address they will recognize with information about expectations and logistics. If the course is optional, consider creating a self-enroll link and inviting participants to join the course that way.

BEST PRACTICES

The following best practices can help ensure that your Canvas site is set up as intended:

USE ANNOUNCEMENTS INTENTIONALLY

You are communicating with a lot of people and small mistakes like hitting the send button too soon can lead to confusion. Consider drafting announcements in advance and using the "delay posting" option, which will allow you edit the announcement before it is sent to students if you find a mistake. If you need to edit an announcement that has already been posted, keep in mind that participants will not be notified via their notification preferences. If you want users to receive the edited announcement via their notification preferences, you will need to create a new announcement.

ORGANIZE CONTENT WITH MODULES

Control the direction of the course by building the content into modules. For self-paced courses, module pre-requisites and requirements can be especially useful for controlling the order in which participants complete the course.

ONLY INCLUDE PUBLISHED CONTENT

Whenever possible, only include content that is ready to be published. With so many participants to manage, it is best practice to reduce the amount of content that needs to be managed, as well. Keep in mind that unpublished assignments, discussions, and quizzes will appear in the gradebook, which may already be challenging to manage with many enrollments.

USE THE "VALIDATE LINKS IN CONTENT" OPTION TO VERIFY STUDENT ACCESS BEFORE PUBLISHING

The Canvas link validator will search through course content and return invalid or unresponsive external URLs in both published and unpublished content. The link validator will also flag links that point to unpublished content and links that point to different Canvas sites. Eliminating any "broken" links will reduce participant confusion and potential support issues, especially in larger courses.

CONDUCT A COURSE REVIEW IN STUDENT VIEW

Before publishing a course that will be made available to many participants, do your due diligence to ensure that everything is set up as intended. It is recommended that you click through the course in Student View to test what participants will see. You may consider developing a course checklist to verify critical components for your specific course in Student View.

NAVIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

In larger courses, be especially cognizant of what is made visible to participants. Most of the "optional" items below can probably be hidden from participants, unless they are especially important for your use case. If your course is organized using Modules, rely on the modules view to surface course content, rather than the course navigation.

- Home
- Announcements
- Modules
- Syllabus
- Assignments (Optional)
- Conferences (Optional)
- Collaborations (Optional)
- Discussions (Optional)
- Files (Optional)
- Grades (Optional)
- Outcomes (Optional)
- Quizzes (Optional)
- ~~Pages (Hidden)~~
- ~~People (Hidden)~~
- *This is especially important for courses with large enrollments that may have FERPA and additional privacy considerations*

FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE, VISIT THE OFFICE FOR ACADEMIC INNOVATION'S TRAINING AND SUPPORT PAGE

Canvas Guides
Canvas Community: Large Course Management: Sections/Groups
Canvas Community: Best Practices for Large Courses in Canvas