



Cultivating Connection: A Guide to Radical Hospitality and Proactive Communication for Week One

The beginning of a semester prompts many tasks and emotions for instructors and students alike. Establishing a warm and inviting atmosphere with clear expectations can help everyone connect and engage from day one. Building a sense of community and practicing radical hospitality is vital to achieving a solid learning community and student retention. Your efforts in these areas can significantly impact your students' academic success. Below are some guiding principles and implementation tips for your consideration.

1. Introduce Yourself: Connect Personally

Take a moment to introduce yourself, sharing a bit about your background, your passion for the subject matter, and any relevant experiences. Let them glimpse the person behind the instructor. Share a story, a passion, or an unexpected fact that reveals the human behind the professor. Make them curious about you. This helps students see you as approachable and relatable.

2. Course Unveiling: Engage Students

To provide a brief overview of the course, highlighting key themes, objectives, and what students can expect to gain from the experience; paint a vibrant picture of what awaits them. Make it relevant. Do not just list topics; weave a narrative about the intellectual journey they are about to embark on and how it will contribute to their professional and personal development. Spark their imaginations and ignite their thirst for knowledge.

3. Syllabus Link: Direct Students to the Roadmap

Share a direct link to the syllabus and guide them to the "Start Here" tab in D2L. This is their roadmap for the semester, detailing assignments, assessments, and expectations. You may even do a syllabus quiz or a Kahoot! game the following day to assess them on reading the syllabus.

4. Meeting Logistics: Make It Clear and Accessible

For online and hybrid classes, outline your plan for Zoom meetings, including links, and remind students to sign into Okta and to be current with Zoom updates. Use some "Zoom zest" to turn online and hybrid classes into vibrant spaces. Share icebreakers, play quick games, and use breakout rooms for interactive activities. Show them that online learning can be dynamic and engaging!

If your course is on ground, provide precise details about your classes' location, days, and times. Make the "brick-and-mortar" magic. Describe the classroom (or building), share its history or fun facts, and personalize the space with visuals that reflect the course theme. You may look into some SLU Trivia! Make it a place they want to be (and learn!).

5. "Student Hours" vs. "Office Hours": Reframe the Concept and Foster Inclusivity

Rename your office hours to "Student Hours." Emphasize that this time is specifically for them—to address concerns, seek clarification, or just connect. This small change can make a big difference in student comfort while reinforcing our commitment to their success. Make it a safe space for growth and connection.

6. Week 1 Tips: Navigate the Initial Transition

Offer tips or essential information to guide students through the first week. Give them a sneak peek, a taste of adventure. Briefly outline what they will encounter in the first week. This could include a brief overview of the first assignment, important deadlines, or resources they might find helpful. Drop a hint about a fascinating topic, a challenging, thought-provoking activity, a video they will watch, or a guest speaker they will not want to miss. Also, get to know them to promote active learning and camaraderie effectively. Keep them eager for more!

Additional Tips and Strategies

1. Welcoming Email: Extend a Personal Invitation

Send a welcoming email before the semester starts. Personalize it with your introduction, a brief course overview, and the link to the syllabus or "Start Here" tab. This sets a positive tone and helps students feel more comfortable.

2. Course Shell Announcement: Reach Them Where They Are

Create an announcement in the course shell, especially for students who might not check their emails regularly. Use this to reiterate your excitement, share important details, and reinforce your commitment to their success.

3. Streamline Your Communication: Use AI to Draft Announcements and Emails

Consider using AI to create a draft for your announcements. This can save you time while maintaining a welcoming tone. Here is a sample prompt: "Create a welcoming announcement for the first day of class, introducing myself and the course and providing important information for Week 1. Here are some key points to address in the announcement: [list specific items]."

Here is a template for your perusal:

"Dear students,

I hope this message finds you well and excited for the semester ahead. I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself and share my enthusiasm for the upcoming course. [Insert personal introduction]. As we embark on this academic journey together, please find the link to the syllabus or navigate to the 'Start Here' tab in D2L for a comprehensive overview of our semester.

[Insert additional course-specific details, meeting logistics, and encouragement].

Remember, 'Student Hours' are dedicated to you. I'm here to support your academic and personal goals. Let's make this semester a collaborative and enriching experience!

Best regards, [Your Name]"

4. Get to Know Your Students Right Away

Here are two examples of activities that may help you:

A. Prepare a Word document that students have to complete during the first day/week of classes and submit via D2L as part of their attendance. You may want to create a dropbox for students to submit the form. This can be done during class. For instance, you may request information and ask the questions such as:

- a. My name is _____. I go by _____.
- b. I am from _____
- c. I enjoy (hobbies, favorite pastimes) _____
- d. I learn best when my teacher (does/does not "X") _____.
- e. I am most likely to be engaged in class activities when _____.
- f. I struggle (with/when) _____.
- g. I appreciate it when my classmates _____.
- h. I appreciate it when my instructor _____.

B. Create a Padlet using a [map template](#). Have students introduce themselves, pinning their hometown and writing three things about themselves that they like to do and three things they do not like.

Promote Opportunities for Your Students to Get to Know Each Other

Here is an example:

Write up a survey using the information you gathered from "Getting to Know You" activities you've used. For instance, the "Find Someone Who ..." activity allows students to meet their classmates in the classroom. You may write prompts such as "Find someone who is not from Florida" or "Find someone who enjoys running." You may use this activity to raise students' metacognitive awareness and find peers who have the same learning preferences (e.g., Find someone who learns best when ____ [use information gathered in the "Getting to Know You activities"]).

Be Strategic

When creating these "Getting to Know You" activities, select items that are relevant to your discipline, teaching style, and, most importantly, that have the potential to identify students' strengths and struggles. You can use this information to strategize your teaching activities and to build a stronger community of learners. Specifically, identify items that will help you to (a) be attentive to students' needs and interests, (b) provide a more personalized learning experience, (c) gather information to guide them toward their academic goals, and (d) create a safe and close-knit classroom community where you can challenge students' critical thinking and set high expectations as they collaborate with each other.

Remember, you are not just delivering a course but cultivating a learning community. By practicing radical hospitality, you are planting the seeds for connection, intellectual growth, and student retention. So welcome your students and watch them blossom under your guidance!

Bonus Tip: Share this guide with your colleagues! The more educators who embrace radical hospitality, the more vibrant and impactful the learning environment becomes for everyone. Let's continue to build a university where students feel genuinely seen, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential thanks to the guidance of caring and committed faculty.

For additional ideas and resources, check out our [First Days of Class](#) resources

Best wishes for a successful semester!