



Alliant International University
Center for
Teaching and Excellence - Newsletter

April 2025

The Center for Teaching Excellence monthly newsletter provides information about events sponsored by the CTE as well as around the university and beyond. We also highlight resources available to Alliant faculty on the CTE site and elsewhere.

Dalia Ducker

Center for Teaching Excellence News



Searching the CTE Site

The CTE website is now searchable. A small magnifying glass icon has been added to the top right-hand corner of every page. It allows users to enter a word or phrase to search for a topic of interest. For example, a search for the word discussion yields the following results.

- [Facilitating Class Discussions](#)
- [Interactive Learning with Canvas Studio](#)
- [Writing Teaching Statements](#)
- [Introduction to Canvas Studio](#)
- [Course Ground Rules](#)
- [Teaching Students How to Succeed](#)
- [Teaching Tips for New Instructors](#)
- [SpeedGrader in Canvas](#)
- [Account Settings and Notifications in Canvas](#)

Upcoming Webinars



AI, Originality, and Accountability: Navigating Student Conversations

[Register Now](#)

Thursday, April 24, 2025

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. PT

Location: Zoom

By Diane Zelman, PhD, and Jeremy Bond, D.E.T.

Join us for an engaging and interactive webinar focused on strategies for facilitating constructive, respectful conversations with students when there are concerns about the use—or overuse—of AI tools in course assignments. Using real-world examples, we will explore how to approach these sensitive dialogues in ways that uphold academic integrity while fostering student learning and growth.

Designed for faculty members, this session will support the development of mentorship skills, encourage reflection on evolving perspectives about AI, and promote thoughtful accountability in students' use of emerging technologies.

Topics will include:

- How to introduce the topic in syllabi, class discussions, and one-on-one meetings
- Setting and communicating clear expectations
- Engaging students in dialogue about originality and learning goals
- Guiding responsible, creative, and informed use of AI tools



A Selection of AI Tools for Academia and Psychotherapy

By Steven R. Thorp, PhD, ABPP

[View the recorded webinar](#)

[View the webinar slides](#)

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been applied to business for several years, and in this webinar, Dr. Thorp will briefly describe AI, including potential benefits and points of caution. Participants will learn the policy of APA journals about AI, which can inform how instructors approach the tools. Participants will also learn novel ways in which AI could be used in coursework, preparing for licensure exams, learning academic and grant writing skills, teaching, and research. AI is already impacting the practice of psychotherapy, and some considerations about that use will be discussed. The webinar will include some examples to illustrate the use of AI tools, as well as specific apps that utilize AI.

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments with Canvas Accessibility Tools

By Jeremy Bond, Melissa Vervinck, Rhoda Olkin, and Iris Bell

[View the recorded webinar](#)

[View the webinar slides](#)

We invite you to join us for an informative and engaging webinar that will explore research highlighting the significance of prioritizing accessibility. This session will cover essential topics to enhance your understanding and effective use of accessibility features in Canvas and Canvas Studio. This session will cover:

- Learn how to make the most of the **accessibility features** available in Canvas and Canvas Studio to create an inclusive learning environment for all students.
- Gain insights from Dr. Rhoda Olkin's **research on the experiences of students with disabilities** at Alliant and learn about the implications for improving accessibility and support in educational settings.
- Meet Iris Bell and discover the valuable services offered by the Office of Accessibility to **support students with disabilities**.

Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your knowledge and skills in creating accessible and inclusive educational experiences.

Surviving "Online Discussion Fatigue" and Thriving Again!

By Jeremy Bond and Meredith Villa

[View the recorded webinar](#)

[View the webinar slides](#)

Join us for "**Surviving Online Discussion Fatigue and Thriving Again**", a dynamic training session designed to breathe new life into your online classroom discussions! Here's what you'll gain:

- **Spot the Signs:** Learn to recognize discussion fatigue in both students and you.
- **Break the Mold:** Discover creative formats like debates, storytelling, and multimedia to energize participation.
- **Power Up with Canvas Studio:** Create engaging video discussions, embed quizzes, and unlock actionable insights with analytics.
- **Build Community:** Foster connection and inclusivity while encouraging deeper peer-to-peer interaction.
- **Walk Away Ready:** Hands-on activities ensure you'll leave with tools and strategies you can implement immediately.



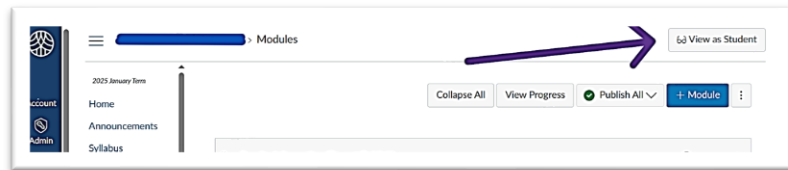
Beyond the Basics: 5 Canvas Features You Might Not Know

By Melissa Vervinck, DET

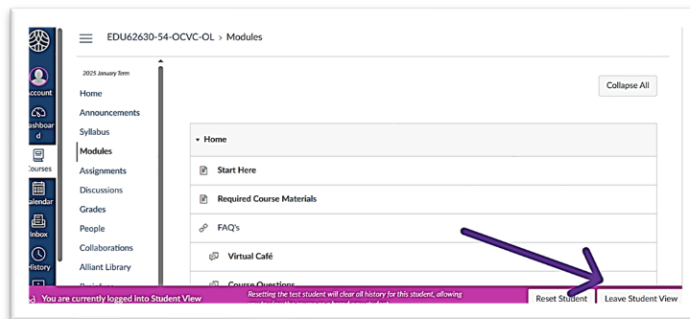
As an online instructor, you are familiar with the basic functionalities of Canvas. Nevertheless, there are many additional features within the platform that can enhance both teaching and learning that are not as well known. Let's look at five of these lesser-known Canvas features and how these can optimize your teaching efficiency, improve student interactions, and elevate your instructional methods.

Student View

This feature enables you to view the course from a [student's perspective](#). It helps you ensure that the content is accessible and experience the course navigation as your students do, allowing you to identify and address any potential issues they might face.



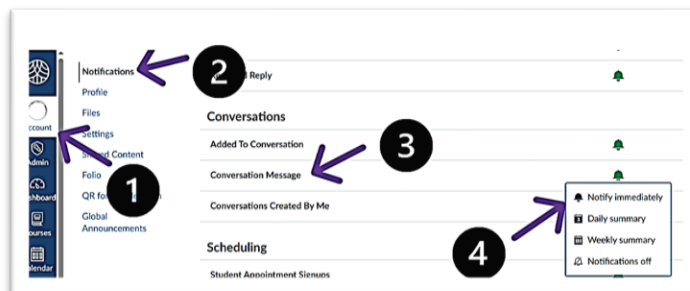
1. Select "View as Student" from any page to view course pages as your students do.



2. When ready to return to your instructor view, select "Leave Student View" at the bottom of any course page.

Forwarding Canvas Inbox Messages to Your Alliant email

By enabling this feature in your [notifications](#), you will receive messages directly in your Alliant email, ensuring you never miss important student communications and can respond promptly.

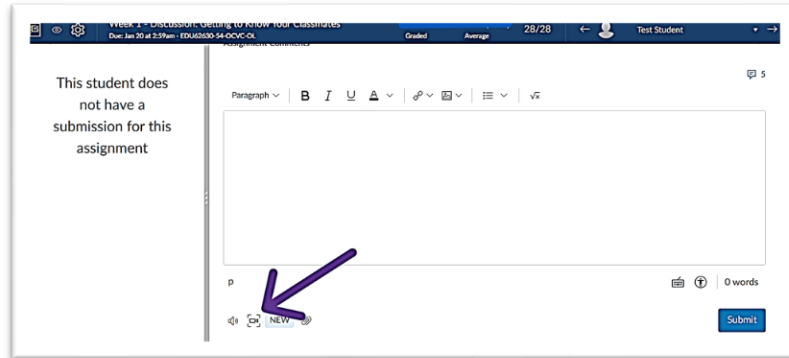


1. Select Account
2. Select Notifications
3. Scroll to "Conversations" and find "Conversation Messages"

4. Choose how often you wish to receive your Canvas Inbox messages. We recommend you choose “Notify Immediately” and if so, a bell icon will be displayed.

Recording Audio or Video Comments in SpeedGrader

This feature lets you give [feedback](#) via audio or video comments, making the process more engaging and easier for students to understand. Personalized messages foster connection and empathy, showing that you care about your students' progress. You may notice that students respond promptly and in greater detail to video messages, especially kind reminders regarding missing assignments or other concerns.



1. Open SpeedGrader
2. Scroll to the bottom of the Grade and Feedback panel
3. Select the “Record videos and audio” icon
4. Follow the prompts to record your feedback
5. When finished, select “Save Media” to post

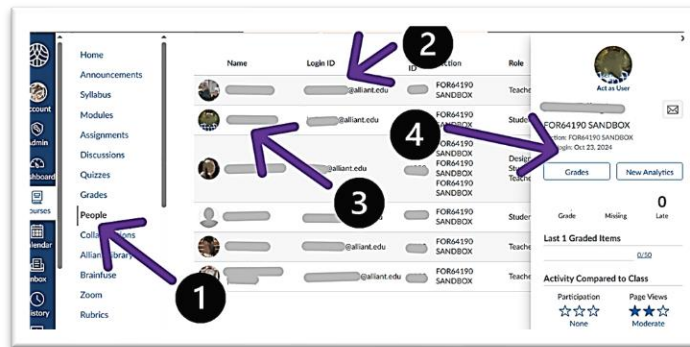
Student email Information in People

This feature allows access to students' email information in the People section of Canvas. Emailing a student enables direct communication, helping address concerns and provide timely assistance.

Access to Student User Information

On the same People page, you can open a student's [context card](#) by selecting their name, which will display a panel on the right side of the screen. This panel provides detailed information about the student, including their profile, grades, and course analytics such as participation levels and page views relative to the rest of the class. You can send messages to the student directly from this panel. This feature helps you monitor student progress and provide targeted assistance.

The People section simplifies finding a student's email and other important details on their context card if a Midterm Statement of Concern needs to be completed.



1. Select People from the Course Navigation Menu.

2. Email information for all people enrolled in the course can be found in the “Login ID” column.
3. To open the Context Card containing user information, click on a student’s name.
4. Review provided details or choose an alternative option from this card.

Try these features and let us know how they work for you. Canvas has many capabilities; share with us anything you'd like to do more quickly or efficiently, and we'll explore if Canvas can simplify it for you. If you have something that works really well for you that you would like to share, let us know. We would love to feature your idea in a future article. We look forward to hearing from you at OnlineLearningStaff@alliant.edu.

Teaching Tips



Academic Rigor

Although the term is used frequently, there is no universally accepted definition of academic rigor. According to a post on the MIT Teaching + Learning Lab blog, traditionally, rigor has often been equated with a highly challenging, inflexible curriculum with heavy workloads requiring extensive reading and studying. A blog entry from the University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching focuses on intellectual aspects of rigor, indicating that rigor in college teaching would, at a minimum, “involve thoughtfully chosen, clearly laid out learning goals, targeted assessments of those goals, and learning activities designed for students to reach those goals ...”

In recent the years, the issue of rigor has generated increased debate, leading to what has been termed the “rigor wars.” When, during the pandemic, some instructors reduced course demands to be compassionate and “give students grace,” critics complained that courses had become less rigorous. Now that the pandemic has ended, some have argued that instructors should return to pre-pandemic practices. Others, however, have questioned whether this is, in fact, the best course. According to Supiano (2022), writing in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, professors in the first group believe students need structure and standards. Their guiding principle is rigor. Professors in the second group believe students continue to need flexibility and support. Their guiding principle is compassion.

To shed light on these competing stances, Gannon (2023) has argued that courses can be difficult intellectually or logistically, and that instructors sometimes conflate the two, imagining that content and logistics are associated. He differentiated between two types of rigor:

- “Logistical rigor – characterized by strict deadlines and attendance policies, more assignments, examinations with a high number of questions relative to the allotted time for their completion, or grading curves aim at minimizing the number of A’s.
- Cognitive rigor – courses are made more challenging via course content and pedagogy. For example, students are asked to question their prior assumptions and engage with material that is sophisticated, complex, and theoretical.”

According to Gannon, some instructors believe that logistical changes will lead to cognitive improvements, that the key to creating a cognitively challenging course is to “overload students with work and grade harshly”. They measure rigor in relation to logistical issues (e.g., the number of pages that students must read for class each week or the or the number of writing assignments in a course), assuming they are posing meaningful cognitive challenges to students when they are “loading them up with work.” He argued that logistical rigor is not necessarily correlated with actual learning; rather, it creates logistical barriers to student learning. Flexible policies are intended to make students’ lives easier, but that does not necessarily mean students learn less. To facilitate student learning, which is the goal of teaching, instructors should strive for cognitive rigor and avoid arbitrary logistical rigor by creating a challenging yet supportive learning environments that foster growth without

imposing unnecessary barriers to student success.

Speaking at MIT, Gannon presented three essentials that advance student learning:

- **“Trust.** Learning is inherently social. Consequently, the student’s relationship with their instructor will affect how they engage with the course.
- **Transparency.** When instructors are transparent about how a particular course assignment relates to the course’s learning outcomes or concepts, student learning is advanced.
- **Compassionate challenge.** When students are provided with what Sarah Rose Cavanagh (2023) calls “compassionate challenge”— a safe learning environment where students feel a sense of belonging, engage in practices associated with confronting fears, and take intellectual risks in meaningful ways—it advances learning.”

The University of Florida Center for Instructional Technology and Training, like the University of Michigan CRLT, has suggested best practices for designing courses, activities, and assessments that are rigorous and promote learning:

- **Vary the challenge of the assessment:** Include a variety of questions or tasks so that students must practice higher-order critical thinking and problem-solving strategies in addition to lower-order skills such as recall or classification.
- **Set high standards and share clear performance expectations:** Provide students with a rubric that includes a detailed explanation of the type of work you expect.
- **Provide scaffolding for complex assignments:** Build intermediate stages into more challenging assignments or projects and provide timely feedback throughout the process.
- **Keep appropriate workload in mind:** Repetition does not necessarily equate to greater learning. Think about the type and number of activities assigned to students and balance their workload.
- **Include course elements that are interesting and relevant to students.**

For the references cited in this article and for more information on academic rigor, see [Academic Rigor](#) on the CTE website.

Other Resources



[The Cybernetic Teammate](#)

In his Substack, One Useful Thing, Ethan Mollick reported on the result of a pre-registered randomized controlled trial study on product development, carried out at a large corporation. The goal was to compare the performance with and without AI as a “teammate.” The researchers found that

- **AI boosts performance:** Teams with AI performed best overall although the difference between individuals with AI and teams with AI wasn't statistically significant. Teams using AI were significantly more likely to produce top-tier solutions. Both AI-enabled groups also worked much faster than non-AI groups, while producing solutions that were substantially longer and more detailed than those from non-AI groups.
- **Expertise boundaries vanish.** When paired with AI, both R&D and Commercial professionals, in teams or when working alone, produced balanced solutions that integrated both technical and commercial perspectives. This effect was especially pronounced for employees less familiar with product development.
- **Working with AI led to better emotional experiences.** People using AI reported significantly higher levels of positive emotions (excitement, energy, and enthusiasm)

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| | <p>compared to those working without AI. They also reported lower levels of negative emotions like anxiety and frustration.</p> <p>Dr. Mollick concluded that “Our findings suggest AI sometimes functions more like a teammate than a tool. While not human, it replicates core benefits of teamwork—improved performance, expertise sharing, and positive emotional experiences.”</p> |
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Shared Resources



Universal Design for Learning

The Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana publishes monthly [tips on Universal Design for Learning](#). This month they listed four myths about UDL:

1. **UDL is Just for Students with Disabilities.** While accessibility is a key component, UDL is broader in its scope because it is designed to benefit all learners by providing multiple ways to engage, represent information, and express understanding. For example, offering video captions doesn't just support students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing—it also benefits English language learners and students who prefer to read along while listening. UDL fosters learning environments that are flexible and adaptable and that recognize the variability of all learners, not just those with disabilities. It is important to remember, however, that while UDL strategies often reduce barriers to learning, they do not replace the need for specific accommodations, assistive technologies, and related supports.
2. **UDL Means Lowering Academic Standards.** Some also worry that implementing UDL will dilute academic rigor or oversimplify coursework. UDL is about removing unnecessary barriers, not reducing expectations. For instance, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding through different formats—such as a written paper, recorded presentation, or infographic—doesn't necessarily change the learning outcomes; it simply gives students greater flexibility in how they achieve them.
3. **UDL Requires Completely Redesigning Your Course.** While proactive course design is ideal, UDL can be implemented gradually through small, intentional changes. For example, starting by adding alternative text to images, or by providing a choice between discussion formats (written or recorded), or by using structured headings in documents—these are all incremental changes that can be made over time. Overall, incremental, accretive adjustments can have a significant impact on student engagement and comprehension without requiring a wholesale course redesign.
4. **UDL is Only About Technology.** While technology can certainly support UDL implementation, it is not a requirement. UDL is about flexible instructional approaches that can be applied in any learning environment. For example, an instructor might use storytelling, group discussions, and primary source documents to engage students in different ways, ensuring multiple entry points into the content and relevant learning outcomes. UDL is about providing meaningful choices and relevant scaffolding to support all learners.

Dalia Ducker
 Alliant International University
dducker@alliant.edu

