

DIGITAL LEARNING

Instructional Strategy Guide

ONBOARDING
STUDENTS TO
DIGITAL
COURSEWARE

every learner
↔
everywhere

Achieving
the Dream 

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WHAT IS STUDENT ONBOARDING?

Student onboarding is the intentional orientation of students to the optimal use of digital courseware. Onboarding helps students understand the rationale for the learning technology choice, how it supports their learning, and how to use the features. Instructors can use various delivery options to communicate the courseware's purpose, learning data capacity, and technical features including an in-class demonstration, providing detailed instructions in the syllabus or sharing a screencast recording of the courseware navigation process.

Who does onboarding benefit?



Students

Students become empowered and gain more agency in their learning when they understand the intention of the technology used in their courses. They also gain the benefit of increasing their digital fluency, understanding how the courseware can support their learning in a variety of ways, and becoming aware of how to leverage the learning data to reach their learning goals.



Faculty

By onboarding students, faculty can support the successful use of digital courseware that sets the stage for students to engage in their own learning while also decreasing the time instructors will spend responding to common technology questions. Faculty also benefit by understanding the student-facing content and features to help support their learning experience.



Institutions

When students receive a comprehensive onboarding experience of technology, institutions can align these approaches across departments or a course series and connect academic support services offered campus-wide to give students a consistent set of supports for the same technology. Helping students with a strong start to their work along with increasing their digital literacy may likely lead to increased retention.

How to onboard students

CRAFT A SYLLABUS STATEMENT

that outlines the intended use of the technology, how it aligns with the learning goals of the class, and how to take advantage of its features and functions to complete coursework.

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FACILITATE AN IN-CLASS DEMONSTRATION

of the digital courseware and offer class time to complete an initial activity.

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PROVIDE A VIDEO SCREENCAST ORIENTATION

of the digital courseware or share one provided by the vendor.

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REGULARLY REFER TO THE INFORMATION

that the digital courseware provides. For example: if the technology provides learning analytics data, such as “65% of the students accessed the content for a minimum of 20 minutes”, periodically share relevant course-level data with students to help them understand that you are monitoring class trends and responding by creating teaching moves that support their skill development.

Craft a syllabus statement

An important step that helps students engage in the content effectively is giving them an explanation of why you chose the digital courseware and sharing how it will support their learning. We recommend that you place this statement near assignment explanations.

For example, in the case of adaptive learning courseware, faculty can explain that the courseware gives students feedback to help them move through content more effectively. It also potentially saves them time and can increase their motivation and completion of course tasks.

Adaptive Learning Courseware Example Syllabus Statement

The [Courseware name] platform you will engage in is designed to adapt to what you know and what you need to practice.

By answering initial questions and completing initial assessments, [courseware name] gives you information on concepts you have mastered and concepts you may need to practice.

Subsequent questions and activities will be personalized to match your mastery level.

The intention is for you to:

- learn at your speed
- study more efficiently
- increase your knowledge retention

This technology illuminates which content you understand and which concepts still need clarification, allowing you to actively engage in discussions and ask targeted questions.

The courseware also includes a “dashboard” to track your learning and self-monitor your progress.

Throughout the term, I will examine the dashboard to track progress and understanding. This will help me decide how best to use instructional time.

Facilitate an in-class demonstration

It is helpful to give an in-class demonstration by sharing your screen to give students an accurate orientation to the process they will use to complete their work. Digital courseware providers often include an orientation video that can be shared during a live session, or will perform a live demo on request.

You can also invite students to observe as you complete an activity using the digital courseware or give class time for groups of students to work together to complete a task allowing them to ask just-in-time questions.

Provide a video screencast orientation

Often vendors of digital courseware offer a video orientation that is a screen share of someone engaging in the courseware. If that is not available, you can record a screencast using software built into your computer or record a Zoom session with a screen share of you working through the courseware activities to help students understand how to complete tasks.

Regularly refer to the data that the courseware provides during class

Digital courseware often allows faculty to see student progress, time on task, and overall performance levels on specific topics. In the case of adaptive learning courseware, faculty can access a comprehensive dashboard of data on course objectives identifying misconceptions and areas of success. Sharing the overall class performance level on a given topic during a live class session can motivate students and help them understand how the courseware is leveraged to drive instruction and enhance their collective learning. To do this, review the instructor dashboard before class to uncover any learning analytics that reveal student successes or misconceptions. Consider shifting the in-class emphasis to topics students struggled with outside of class.