

# Four things to do before the semester starts

A new semester is starting in just a few days and there's so much to do! Where do you start? What's your priority? What will students need right away?

## 1. UPDATE YOUR SYLLABUS

Your first priority and the easiest place to start is updating your syllabus.

- Review your contact information and dates/times of your office hours. Consider adding a [webconference online option using Zoom](#).
- Use the [Faculty Senate Syllabus Checklist](#) as a guide to make sure you have the required elements listed in your syllabus. This checklist contains important wording you can add to your syllabus.
- Review your semester dates. Use the [UAF academic calendar](#) to make sure you list the dates that are most important to students as well as due dates for class interaction and assessments. If you are using Blackboard for submitting assignments and keeping track of grades, use the [Set Grade Center Due Dates](#) tool or the [Date Management](#) tool to adjust due dates and display dates for a course copied from a prior semester.

## 2. ENSURE ACCESSIBILITY

Your second priority should be to review your course material for [accessibility](#) and to ensure these materials adhere to [universal design standards](#).

- Are you using Blackboard or another website to host your material? Do you:
  - 1 images have alternative text?
  - 2 videos and audios have [captions](#) or is a transcript provided?
  - 3 text documents use heading structure and are searchable -- try out this [accessibility checker with Google Docs and Grackle](#)
- Take a look at your accessibility score in Blackboard by accessing the [Accessibility report in your Course Tools panel](#).
- If you are using online resources from a publisher or other provider, have you read the accessibility statement provided by that entity? Are they proactive

about making their material accessible or do they only respond upon request?

- Consider reminding students to contact UAF Disability Services to request accommodations that can help them be successful. The earlier needs are identified, the easier it will be to plan for alternatives.

## 3. IF YOU ARE USING BLACKBOARD, YOUR THIRD PRIORITY WILL BE TO VIEW YOUR COURSE FROM THE STUDENT VIEW.

Here is how to go into [student view](#).

- How does your sidebar menu look? Do your menu items appear in a logical order?
- Verify that items you plan to share with students are showing and are not hidden.
- Pay particular attention to the Grade Center or My Grades and the "Total" column. Are all of your assessments showing? Have you updated due dates?
- Take a look at the total column. By default the "Total" column is set to calculate a "[Running Total](#)". Running total means the Total column is based only on the assignments the student has submitted up to that point (i.e., a snapshot). The overall total only represents the total points for what has been submitted and not the cumulative total points for the course. We have an [example of this on iTeachU](#).

If you are teaching an online course, you will find the "[Are you ready for a new semester?](#)" checklist helpful in planning your updates.

## 4. ON OR BEFORE THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS, MAKE SURE YOUR BLACKBOARD COURSE IS AVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS!

It only takes [three steps](#).

If you'd like help with any of these items, visit [UAF eCampus for an open lab](#).

See other [Blackboard FAQ quick tips](#).