



UNIVERSITY OF  
**NORTHERN**  
**COLORADO**

Office of the Provost

### ***How to Use Canvas to Communicate with Students Before the Start of the Semester***

Federal financial aid guidelines require that students may only *participate* in class between the official start and end dates of the semester in which they are enrolled (for Fall 20 these are currently set as August 24 through December 13). While individual instructors cannot change these term dates, instructors can make the course available for students to *read-only* before and after those dates. There are two steps to do this

1. Make sure your course is set to allow “Read Only” access before and after the course dates.
  - Go to the course Settings
  - make sure that the box before “Restrict students from viewing this course before start date” is not checked.
2. Make sure individual content items you want students to be able to see right away are available (i.e., published and not date-restricted), and then *publish* your course. This will give students read-only access to all published content in the course that is not restricted by date. *Please note:*
  - If you publish your course early, the best practice is to provide useful student information on the home page (with links to other pages as appropriate).
  - If you have not yet designed a home page, you can set the home page to open to the syllabus. Make sure your course name and number is clearly identifiable at the top of the syllabus so students can confirm that they are in the right place.

#### Other options

- If you don't have content ready to publish in Canvas, you can also use the Canvas Inbox (aka Conversations) function for this purpose. This email-like function contains student distribution lists based on the current course roster that you can use to message students. You can compose a message (or attach your syllabus if you have it ready) and send the message to all students on a per course basis.
  - You must publish your course to access the course roster in the messaging inbox (so that your message sends to all currently enrolled students). Note that the message will only go to students who you can see on your “people” tab (currently enrolled students)
  - If you don't yet have content inside your course, you the best practice is to unpublish your course after sending the message. This will ensure students don't get confused by the presence of your empty shell.!
- You can also get email lists of currently enrolled students in each of your courses from URSA (just cut and paste the group list at the bottom to your preferred email client).

**Reminder:** IDD is sending all instructors a TEMPLATE-DEV shell that contains a 16-week Online Classroom environment. You can build your course using these templates. Once your course is built in the Dev shell, it is very easy to import all of the content, including the templates, into your actual teaching shell (the shell with your student roster). If you need assistance importing these templates into your teaching shell, please submit a help ticket at [help@unco.edu](mailto:help@unco.edu), and reference IDD for help with the TEMPLATE-DEV shell.