

# STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT TRANSFER STUDENTS IN ASYNCHRONOUS CLASSROOMS

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## Introduction

Undergraduate transfer students face unique challenges when moving between institutions. They are more likely to be nontraditional students who work part- or full-time, and they may opt to take asynchronous courses due to scheduling flexibility (Choy, 2002). Most transfer students at George Mason University (GMU) come from the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), which offers a wide variety of online courses, so there is a possibility that they will continue their education primarily through this course delivery method. Research has shown that online learning creates additional obstacles for transfer students and can negatively impact student success (Glazier et al., 2019).

As a primary point of contact for transfer students, faculty play a critical role in helping them successfully navigate and connect with their new institution, and this can be an especially difficult task in a virtual setting. Strategies outlined in this poster will help faculty facilitate the transfer process and foster positive experiences for transfer students in asynchronous courses.

## Facilitating Learning Management System (LMS) Literacy

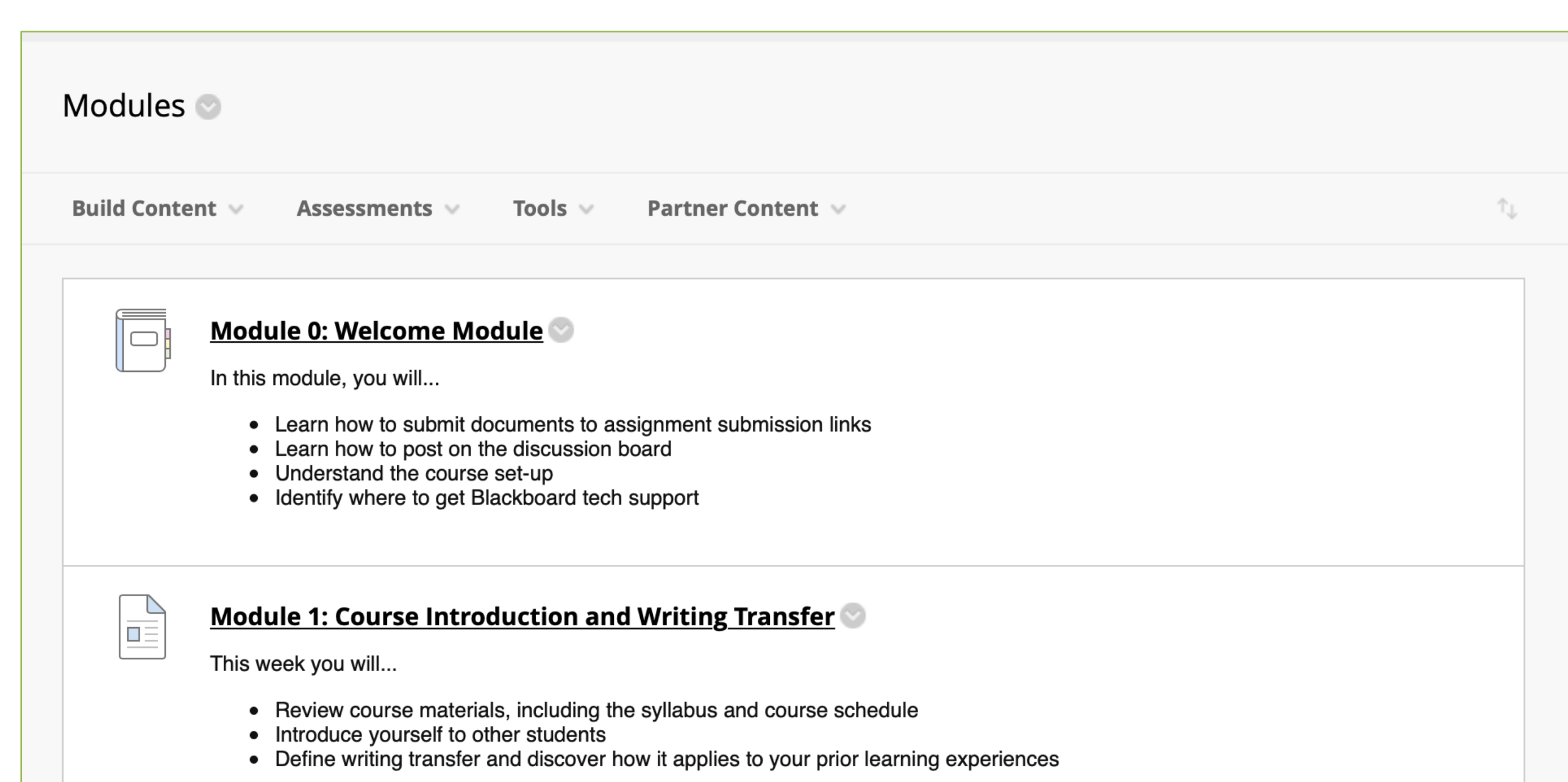
One of the biggest challenges for transfer students is learning how to use required technology, such as the LMS (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013). GMU's [transfer orientation](#) includes optional programming for Blackboard troubleshooting, but there is still a need for students to learn how to use this technology within the context of each course. Many transfer students from VCCS are familiar with Canvas, which is a more user-friendly LMS. Blackboard can be more difficult to navigate and it is less intuitive for new users. By facilitating Blackboard literacy, faculty can make transfer students feel more comfortable and confident.

### PROVIDE AN INTRODUCTION VIDEO AND COURSE ROADMAP

- Include an introduction video on the home page of the Blackboard course. In the video, demonstrate where to find course materials, assignment submission links, or other course content.
- Develop a "roadmap" document that briefly explains the course set-up. This may include short descriptions and screenshots of each Blackboard content area. The "roadmap" can also be included as a section of the syllabus.

### CREATE A WELCOME MODULE

- Create a welcome module, or "Module 0" to orient students to the course. This module can be ungraded but instructors can use adaptive release to ensure that students complete it.
- Allow students to practice common tasks on Blackboard, such as uploading documents, posting to the discussion board, and playing embedded videos. This will set expectations and help students identify technology issues early on in the course.



Create a welcome module, or "Module 0," in the Blackboard course

## Providing Access to Online Student Resources

Though students are introduced to university resources during transfer orientation, they may still struggle to find and use virtual student services or other resources. For example, online services provided through the Mason Libraries are vital for undergraduate research, but students may not have transferable knowledge from their previous institutions about how to navigate library systems (Roberts, Welsh, & Dudek, 2019). The library has workshops for new students, but transfer students may not know about these programs without guidance. There are many ways that faculty can encourage transfer students to use these resources.

### MAKE LINKS ACCESSIBLE AND REDUNDANT

- Create a page or folder on Blackboard that contains links to student services and resources, such as the [Mason Libraries](#), [CAPS](#), [SSAC](#), and [The Writing Center](#). Many of these services include online support options.
- Design a flyer that directs students to the services mentioned above, and email it to students. Use both hyperlinks and QR codes for easy access.

### PROMOTE LIBRARY SERVICES

- Direct students to speak with subject librarians and provide a link to their [contact information](#) in an accessible location in the course shell.
- Request [library instruction](#). [Asynchronous options](#) are available for certain courses and departments.

## Fostering an Inclusive Environment

The transfer process can be isolating, and asynchronous courses can be perceived by students as impersonal and anonymous. It is important to make transfer students feel like they are a valued part of the GMU community, and faculty can accomplish this by facilitating the process of building relationships in the virtual classroom.

### ESTABLISH PEER-TO-PEER CONNECTIONS

- Start the course with a discussion board introduction post and encourage students to talk about previous learning experiences. This will allow transfer students to open up about their journeys to GMU and identify peers who have similar academic backgrounds.
- Create [discussion groups](#) on Blackboard using the [group function](#). If students feel comfortable, allow them to exchange contact information. By using consistent small groups for class activities, students will get to know some of their peers better, which will help them feel more connected to the course.

### BREAK DOWN COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

- Create informal discussion board forums where students can post questions for the instructor or for their peers.
- Use a scheduling tool, such as [Calendly](#), that enables students to book appointments. Transfer students are more likely to have work or family obligations, and this allows students to easily find times that work with their schedules.
- Integrate tools like [VoiceThread](#) into the course so that students and faculty can have audio conversations.

## References

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