

# 2021 CAL Online Bulletin #8

## Faculty Office Hours:

CAL Online Faculty Office hours are held via [Zoom](#). Faculty can make appointments for **30 minute private help sessions** or you can use the **drop in hours** to get help, chat, share ideas, etc. Click link for [Zoom](#) site or use **Meeting ID 909 537 7104 Password: Spring2021**. Visit [Cal Online Teaching Resources](#) for other bulletins, videos & resources.

**Drop-In Faculty Hours:** Monday 12-1, Tuesday: 11:30-12:30 PM

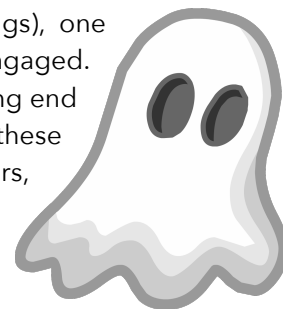
**Private Help Sessions:** Send an email to [tnelson@csusb.edu](mailto:tnelson@csusb.edu)

## Coping with Failure

This week's bulletin discusses a taboo topic: **What do we do with students who are failing our classes?**

### Here's the context:

I'm teaching two sections of a GE Foundations course- one synchronously (with Zoom meetings), one asynchronously. In both classes, there are many students who have disappeared, gone AWOL, not engaged. It's like I'm being "ghosted." ([Ghosting](#), per the Urban Dictionary: to suddenly and without any warning end all communication with a person they are dating- or, in this case, their instructor). And, although these students are enrolled in a GE Foundations class, students include sophomores, juniors and seniors, along with a majority of freshmen- so it's not just a matter of first-year students being unprepared to cope with remote instruction. A couple of the students haven't signed in to Blackboard in over a month. Some, weirdly, sign in quite regularly but never do anything.



I understand that current circumstances have created a tsunami of obstacles that are negatively affecting our students' ability to be successful. It's all very sad. I expect that many of you are seeing the same thing in your classes. And the situation has made for a **particularly difficult week** (beyond just the mid-term slump). Over the past ten days several students have contacted me to ask for help / extensions due to family crises (mostly related to COVID). Their stories are heart-breaking. But least they now have a plan and will get back on track.

However, this is also the week that I've also **sent an email to the students who are failing the class**.

**Here are the steps I've taken** to try and engage students in the courses up until the point of the dreaded e-mail. These strategies helped get a number of students back on board:

- I sent out two emails before classes began, welcoming them and giving them essential information such as the Zoom link (one class is synchronous, the other is completely asynchronous), the required textbook information and a description of the course.
- I set up a Course Introduction page and a Course "Tour" to show them how the Blackboard site is organized.
- I sent emails at least once (and often twice) a week encouraging students to sign on to Blackboard (with a link) and complete specific assignments.
- I posted videos showing students how to customize their Blackboard Notifications and sign into Slack (a communication tool).
- I posted announcements reminding them of homework deadlines and listing all of their assignments (this information is already in the Course Calendar).
- At the end of Week 3, I gave everyone an opportunity to make up missed work by extending the deadlines.
- I checked with an Instructional Designer to see if there was anything else I could do to the Blackboard site to make it more user friendly.

I share these not as a litany of my "good works" but to offer some ideas of approaches that can help to engage students. Some students, however, were beyond reach. They will fail the class and this weekend we finally reached the point of no return in the semester. Hence, the email.

\*\*

**Let's crowd-source our ideas and learn from each other!** I don't think I'm the only one being ghosted by my students. I'll bet you have some great ideas to share. And, if not that, maybe you've had some experiences that are similar so we can commiserate. Let's break the cycle of silence around this topic and help each other out.

**Here's a [link to a copy of the email](#)** I sent letting students know that they are not going to pass the class (I've posted the document in a non-CSUSB Google drive). This year I think it is particularly important because students may not be aware of the CR/NC grade option nor of the support services available at the university because they are not familiar with the campus. (As an example, I had one student who contacted me in February who didn't know he had to officially withdraw from the university. He thought if he didn't come to class, he'd get his money back.) In the past, acknowledging students, giving them resources/information and welcoming their return to one of my classes has usually created positive reactions (at least those who respond).

I failed a number of classes as an undergraduate and always had a feeling of shame that made me want to avoid those professors in the future. I eventually learned to acknowledge and accept what happened in order to move on. I think this same feeling of "shame" permeates the reluctance of faculty to discuss students who fail. I want us, as colleagues, to be able to get past that and support each other. That's why you can post comments on the letter and you have editorial access to a [second document](#) where you can share your own ideas, thoughts, comments and experiences. If you'd like to be an Anonymous Badger (etc.) on either of these documents, just sign out of your Google accounts (includes CSUSB account) before clicking on the links.

