**Keys to a successful Blackboard course**

1. **Organization, organization, organization**  
   - **Tips:**  
     i. Be sure your course is well organized and easy for students to navigate. Have a colleague look at your course organization and provide feedback.  
     ii. Consider including a “Start Here” link on your Course menu and place your syllabus and introductory documents within the “Start Here” link.

2. **Create a thorough syllabus** with explicit details regarding how you want your student to use Blackboard.  
   - **Tips:**  
     i. Considering including your syllabus in a “Start Here” link on your Course menu.  
     ii. Include course objectives, policies, due dates, schedule, text book(s), etc.  
     iii. Provide specific steps for how students will find information on Blackboard (e.g. “Click on the Assignments link on the left Course menu to get assignment instructions and submit your assignment, etc.”).  
     iv. Provide links to college resources, like the Writing Center, Library, e-Learning, etc. within a link on the Course Menu entitled “Resources” or “Helpful Links”.  
     v. Establish communication expectations (e.g. “I plan to focus on this course on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. If you email me on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday or Sunday, don’t fret if you don’t hear back from me until Monday, Wednesday or Friday”).

3. **Include your voice in the course.** Use the discussion board and/or lecture notes to insert your experience and perspective on the course content you’re covering.

4. **Provide students with an expectation** as to how long it will take for you to provide them feedback (i.e. grades, etc.).

5. **Mass communicate.** When one student asks you a question, chances are more of your students have the same question. Appropriately share the answers to common student questions on the discussion board or via an announcement.

6. **Try to anticipate student confusion** regarding your course and address it by modifying your course organization or through your syllabus, or by using an announcement or Content area text box.

7. **Use the discussion board to create a community of learners**

8. **Utilize the strength of the web to provide students with a variety of different ways to learn your course content** (e.g. images, text, video, audio, external website resources, etc.)

9. **Flexibility.** Technology is a complex and fickle thing and your students will likely have varied technology skill levels, so patience and flexibility are key to utilizing Blackboard.

10. **Allow students to practice with the Blackboard tools you plan to use throughout the semester.**  
    - **Tips:**  
      i. Have students email you their resume as an attachment the first week of class  
      ii. Have students post a self-introduction on the discussion board the first week of class  
      iii. If you plan to use the test or assignment tool, create practice assignments and tests  
      iv. If you identify a student or students in your class that have technical limitations, please feel free to refer them to our office for assistance ([Elearning@monroeccc.edu](mailto:Elearning@monroeccc.edu)).
As you are preparing your Blackboard course(s) for the upcoming semester, below is a list items to consider in your course preparations:

✓ Hide tools not being used to reduce student confusion.
✓ Organize the links on your course menu (see tutorial: http://www.monroeccc.edu/distancelearning/tutorials/BbCourseMenu_demo/BbCourseMenu_demo.htm).
✓ Ask a colleague to look at your course and provide feedback on how logical and intuitive your course is organized.
✓ Organize your content area with weekly folders or by chapter or module.
✓ Use content description test boxes for folders to outline the folder contents.
✓ If you’ve copied an old course into a new course, be sure and delete old discussions, announcements, blogs, etc.
✓ Use release date parameters for folders and content items so that students are not overwhelmed with seeing all the course semester content at once.
✓ Update all date sensitive information for the new semester.
✓ If you’ve copied an old course into a new course, be sure to spot check your content files (e.g. .pdf, .doc, .ppt, etc.) to ensure they open correctly. This was an issue with some classes last semester, however; the issue should be resolved for this semester.
✓ If you’ve copied an old course into a new course, be sure to go through your Grade Center and delete any unused columns and “Hide to users” any columns you don’t want your students to see (Remember, if you choose the option “Hide Column” instead of “Hide to users” your students will still see the column).
✓ **There are still issues with the virtual text box editor (VTBE)** in Blackboard. It is recommended that you and your student do not attach (embed) any files within the VTBE. Also, beware of formatting issues, especially with ordered and unordered lists in the VTBE. For more information on attachments and the VTBE, click here: http://mcccelearning.blogspot.com/2010/12/blackboard-vtbe-and-safeassign-issues.html
✓ In previous semesters, **some Blackboard instructors have experienced difficulty with images not appearing in their tests/exams.** Please be sure to spot check your test/ exam questions, as well as the other materials in your course, to ensure they are displaying properly. If you find that items aren’t displaying correctly in your course, please contact me.