

Grade for Student Success: Student-Centered Grading in Canvas

Kelly Gildersleeve, Assistant Director, Center for Teaching & Learning

Viktoriya Oliynyk, Director, Academic Technology, Office of Information Technology

Rebecca Kallemeyn, Program Manager for Academic Technology Initiatives, Consulting & Training, Office of Information Technology

Jacob Henry, Academic Technology Professional, Office of Information Technology

On behalf of the **Canvas Grading Initiative team**



Access these slides

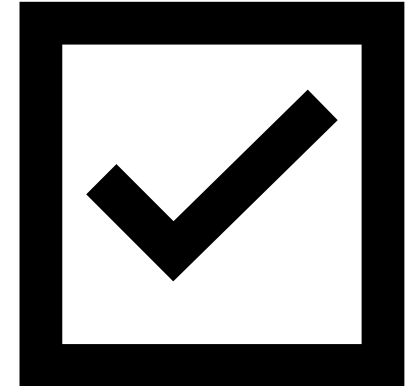
<https://tinyurl.com/GSS-2026>



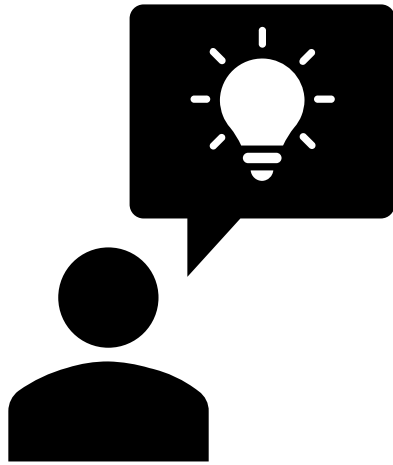
University of Colorado **Boulder**

Outline

- **Icebreaker**
- Background and objectives
- Approach for developing Grade for Student Success
- “Tour” of the Grade for Student Success guide
- **Activity**
- Assessment findings so far
- Ongoing assessment and promotion efforts
- Key takeaways
- **Discussion and Q&A**



Icebreaker: Reflect & Share



- **Reflect:** Pick one of the two questions below to reflect on independently.
- **Share:** Then, discuss your response with someone near you!

Reflecting on when **you** were a student...

1. What's an experience you had with a particular assessment or grading practice that **supported** your success?
2. Alternatively, what's an experience you had with assessment or grading that **impeded** your success?



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Background

- A typical CU undergraduate is enrolled in **5 Canvas courses** per semester
- Canvas is a **central hub** where students access course syllabi, keep track of assignments and due dates, and receive feedback and grades
- Easy access to grade information in Canvas **empowers students** to plan ahead, manage their time, and seek out support as needed
- Meanwhile, instructors often report that grading in Canvas is **inefficient and lacks customizability** for their course-specific needs
- Canvas is a **key intervention point** for supporting student success, but leveraging it will require better supporting instructors who use Canvas

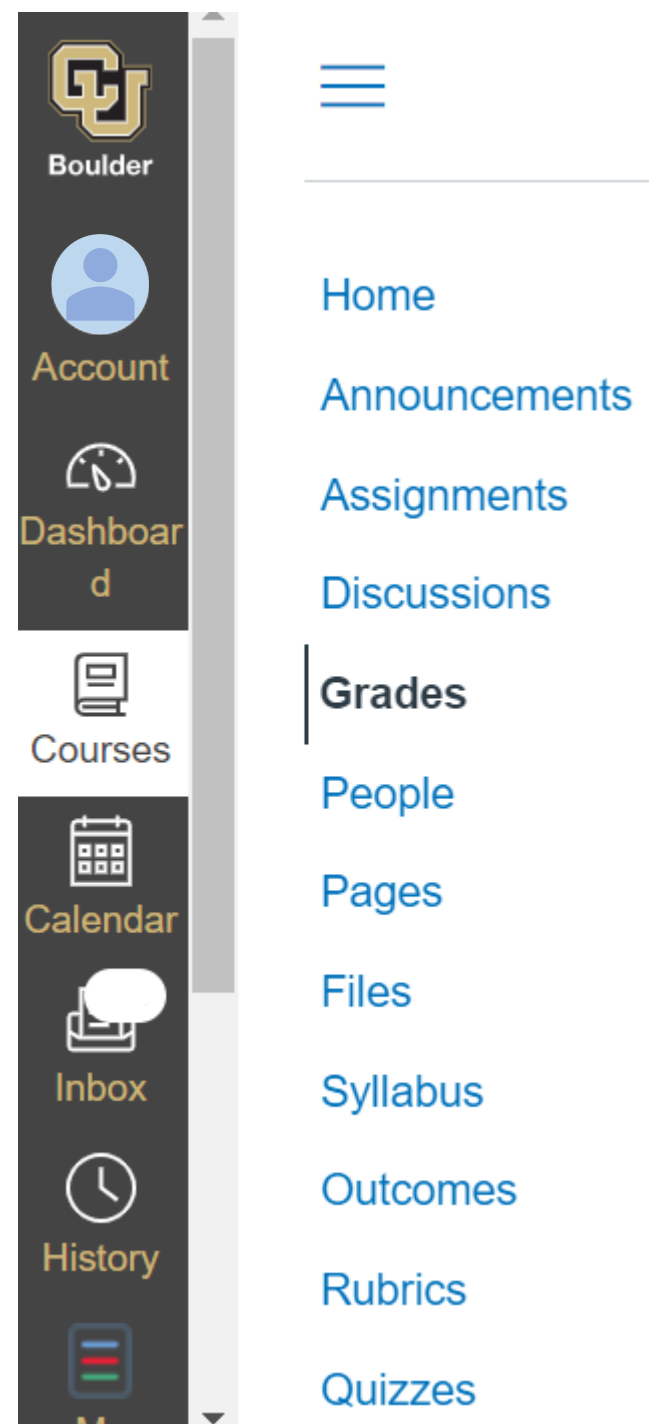


Transparency

- Core principle of equity-minded teaching and assessment (see free eBook: [Norton Guide to Equity Minded Teaching](#))
- Extent to which expectations and norms have been made clear, explicit, and accessible to all students
 - Unpack the “hidden curriculum”
- Increasing transparency—especially in assessment—reduces student uncertainty and anxiety, which may otherwise contribute to procrastination (reviewed in the [Norton Guide to Equity Minded Teaching](#))
- Students can “dive right in,” rather than lose time guessing what is expected of them

Objectives

- Make grades in Canvas more transparent, accurate, and timely so students know how they're doing in class
- Make grading in Canvas more customizable and efficient so educators can spend more time on teaching and learning
- Make student grades more available for learning analytics, early alerts, and other student success efforts



The image shows a vertical navigation sidebar from the Canvas Learning Management System. It features a dark grey background with white icons and text. The top section includes the University of Colorado Boulder logo and a hamburger menu icon. Below this are icons for Account, Dashboard, Courses, Calendar, Inbox, History, and a partially visible 'More' icon. To the right of these icons is a list of navigation links: Home, Announcements, Assignments, Discussions, Grades (which is highlighted with a white vertical bar), People, Pages, Files, Syllabus, Outcomes, Rubrics, and Quizzes.

- Boulder
- Account
- Dashboard
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Approach: Background Research

Spring 2023: Reviewed results from prior relevant studies (recap below) and conducted new grading-focused [interviews and data analysis](#) to identify faculty and student pain points in Canvas gradebook.

Analysis of Faculty Grading Experience 2018

- Studied the faculty grading experience and how OIT can best support faculty
- Analysis of LMS evaluation survey, Canvas support tickets, observations, and focus groups
- Review of grading applications used on campus
- Two major gaps: formula grade items, and statistics and analysis features

Canvas Course Consistency Study 2021

- Sought to gain insights into student feedback on inconsistent use of Canvas.
- Faculty and student interviews, review of Canvas courses, user testing.
- Confirmed significant variation in course organization and feature use from course to course, resulting in student learning task failure.

Academic Technology Survey 2021 and 2024

2021: Many comments about difficulty finding materials and assignments due to inconsistent course design.

2024: open-ended "Do you have suggestions to improve Canvas?"

- 55 comments requesting standardized course formats
- 91 comments noting inconsistent Canvas course design/use and/or requests for instructor training

Student Quotes – Gradebook

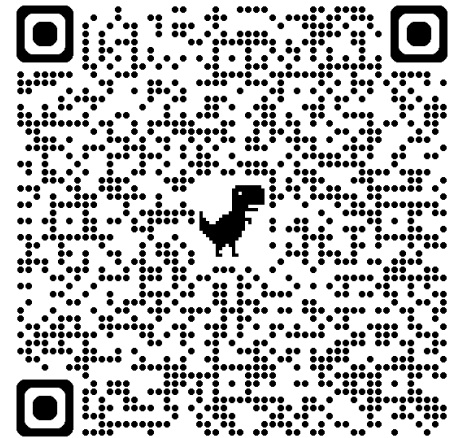
“Typically, I’ve taken four classes each semester and I think I’ve heard that Canvas isn’t accurate from, like, at least three each semester.”

“For some reason, in [one] class last semester, my instructor just hid the grade until the very end of the semester and that very much bothered me and everyone else in that class. No one knew what their grade was until the very end.”



Approach: Faculty Working Group

- AY 2023-24: CTL and OIT partnered with working group of 9 faculty who teach large-enrollment, first-year courses critical for student success
- Develop solutions:
 - [Grade for Student Success faculty guide to student-centered grading in Canvas](#)
 - 14 new Canvas video tutorials
 - 26 prioritized requests for enhancements to Canvas functionality



Faculty working group members

Bobby Benim	Applied Mathematics
Daniel Bolton	Physics
Al Bronstein	Mathematics
Ryan Curtis	Psychology & Neuroscience
Jessica Gorski	Health Professions RAP (HPRAP), MCDB & EBIO
Susan Hendrickson	Chemistry
Shaw Ketels	Psychology & Neuroscience
Sreesha Nath	Computer Science
Mark Valkovci	Student Academic Success Center and Economics





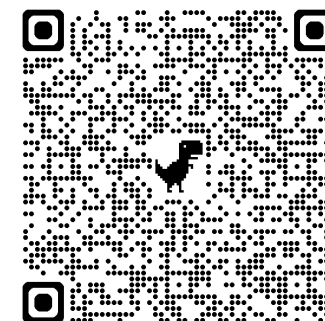
[Grade for Student Success](#)



Thanks to your hard work in and out of the classroom, CU Boulder celebrated record-high undergraduate retention and graduation rates in 2023. Grade for Student Success emerged from faculty recommendations, with the goal of supporting our campus community and enabling success for our faculty and students.

This collaborative effort has resulted in the creation of 16 comprehensive guidelines, 14 new tutorials and 26 Canvas enhancement requests designed to promote efficiency, consistency and ease in the important work you're doing.

<https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/grade-student-success>



The Canvas Grading Initiative Faculty Working Group

As part of the [Buff Undergraduate Success \(BUS\) Initiative](#), a working group of nine faculty members joined the [Center for Teaching & Learning \(CTL\)](#) and [Office of Information Technology \(OIT\)](#) to review problem statements from faculty and students about grading and propose solutions to improve the faculty and student experience with the Canvas gradebook.

+ Members of the Faculty Working Group

- Message from the Faculty Working Group

Dear Colleagues,

We hope your semester has been going well! As members of the Canvas Grading Faculty Working Group, we wanted to take a moment to share the resources that resulted from our work during the Fall 2023 semester to promote student-centered grading practices in Canvas. Our working group was part of the Canvas Grading Initiative, a collaboration between the Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) and Office of Information Technology (OIT) and endorsed by the Buff Undergraduate Success (BUS) Initiative.

Our working group discussed common pain points for students and faculty, and their solutions. These discussions were informed by our experiences teaching critical, high-enrollment courses for first- and second-year students in a wide variety of disciplines, and by what we learned from faculty interviews and student usability testing sessions.

We are excited to share two new resources: new recommendations for student-centered grading in Canvas and a set of faculty- and student-facing Canvas video tutorials to support the implementation of these guidelines. We hope these new resources will be helpful for your teaching (e.g., by making grading in Canvas more customizable and efficient), while supporting the success of all of our students (e.g., by ensuring their grades in Canvas are accurate, up to date and easy to find).

We encourage you to share these resources with your colleagues and discuss them within your department or unit.

If you have any questions or ideas to share, please contact the CTL@colorado.edu, whose team is continuing to work on the Canvas Grading Initiative and related initiatives to support CU faculty and students.

Faculty Perspectives on Grade for Student Success

In this video, faculty members share their perspectives on the benefits of implementing the Grade for Student Success guidelines in their own courses.



GSS WEBPAGE OVERVIEW



<https://vimeo.com/1040908436/693c333291>

Recommendations for Student-Centered Grading in Canvas

These faculty-recommended guidelines help you implement consistent Canvas grading practices that aim to provide greater success for you, our students, and the university. Please note some of the guidelines are more relevant to traditional than alternative grading approaches.

1. Developing Your Syllabus

2. Developing Your Canvas Courses

3. Setting Up Assignments in Canvas

4. Communicating with Students about Grades

5. Maintaining Your Canvas Courses Throughout the Semester

Maintaining Your Canvas Courses Throughout the Semester

1. **Keep the gradebook up to date.** Commit to ensuring the grades in the Canvas gradebook are as accurate as possible. Throughout the semester, enter all grades within one week of the deadlines to ensure students are receiving timely information about how to improve. If that is not possible, explicitly communicate to students when they will receive their grades. When assignments build on each other, make sure students receive feedback on one assignment before any subsequent assignments are due. The CTL, OIT and other campus units are developing resources to support instructors as they implement these practices.

 [Tutorial on Giving Feedback With Speedgrader](#)

 [Tutorial on Speedgrader for File Upload Assignments](#)

 [Tutorial on Quizzes in Speedgrader](#)

 [Tutorial on Using Quiz Fudge Points](#)

 [Tutorial on Speedgrader for Canvas Studio Submissions](#)

2. **Sync grades from external tools regularly.** Throughout the semester, regularly sync the Canvas gradebook with grades from any external tools or programs, such as Smartwork, Inquizitive or iClickers. Tell your students how often you will sync those grades.
3. **Replace blanks in the Canvas gradebook with zeros in a timely manner.** When setting up the gradebook, set them to automatically change grades for missing assignments from blanks to zeros once the deadlines have passed. You may need to also share these expectations with teaching assistants and/or graders. Do not leave grades for missing assignments blank unless you really don't want those assignments to count toward the students' grades, in which case you can use the "excused" feature to show you've intentionally left them blank.

 [How to Automatically Replace Blanks With Zeros](#)

 [How to "Excuse" Assignments](#)

 [Tutorial on Excusing Assignments](#)

How Helpful Did You Find These Guidelines?

 [Share Your Ideas Here](#)

Maintaining Your Canvas Courses Throughout the Semester

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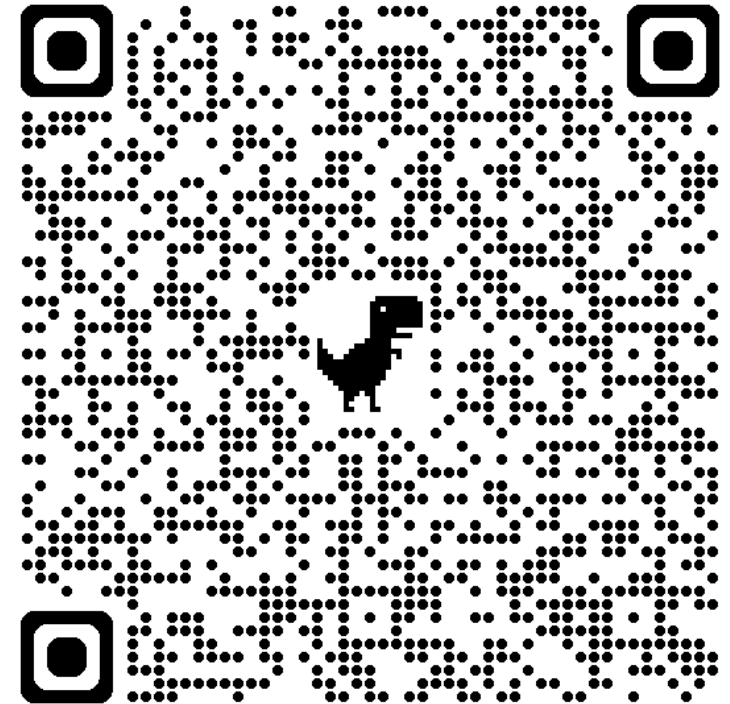


How Helpful Did You Find These Guidelines?

 [Share Your Ideas Here](#)

Explore the Grade for Student Success guide!

- Please take a moment to skim through the 16 GSS guidelines
 - <https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/grade-student-success>
- Pick one you find particularly helpful
- Share with someone near you
- **General questions also welcome!**



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Rollouts of *Grade for Student Success*

- Conducted two major rollouts, with pre- and posttest surveys of instructors and students
 - Total of 70 courses and approximately 12,000 students
- Through A&S Grade Early and Often Initiative (GEO), piloted GSS practices in all A&S RAPs and certain Math courses in Fall 2024 and Spring 2025
 - Fall 2024: 34 courses (140 sections) with a total of 3272 students taught by 76 instructors
 - Spring 2025: 31 courses (133 sections) with a total of 3160 students taught by 70 instructors
- Separately, promoted the GSS practices to all instructors of large-enrollment, introductory courses critical for student success in Spring 2025
 - Spring 2025: 11 courses (46 sections) with a total of 5500 students taught by 44 instructors

Key Findings Across Rollouts: Faculty

- At pretest, nearly all faculty (91-100%) intended to implement “most or all” GSS practices
- By posttest, vast majority (85-94%) had implemented “most or all” GSS practices and reported no barriers to implementation
- Faculty generally agreed that “The GSS practices will promote the success of all CU students” (means ranged from 3.77 to 4.09 on a 5-pt Likert scale)
- Open-ended responses highlighted benefits to faculty and students, e.g.:
 - “The recommendations for setting up the Canvas gradebook and tips on communicating with students about grades are the most effective. They help instructors provide a more uniform gradebook experience for the students.”



Key Findings Across Rollouts: Students

- Students generally reported very positive experiences in Canvas (5-pt Likert scale):
 - Could trust grades in Canvas gradebook were accurate (means ranged from 4.14 to 4.36)
 - Typically received grades within one week (means ranged from 4.21 to 4.46)
 - Canvas gradebook helped them understand how they were doing in the class (means ranged from 4.28 to 4.35)
 - Could understand how final grades would be calculated (means ranged from 4.21 to 4.45)
 - Could understand grading policies (means ranged from 4.28 to 4.43)
 - Canvas helped them understand what was expected of them (means ranged from 4.29 to 4.42)



Key Findings Across Rollouts: Students

- Open-ended responses highlighted how increased transparency around grading practices and policies and timely grades and feedback support student success, e.g.:
 - “My teacher explaining how the grading system worked allowed me to understand what I need to do to be successful.”
 - “The most effective aspect of the grading practices was the quick and clear grading as well as updating everything to Canvas immediately. Many professors will not use Canvas effectively; however, this course was very clear and helped with my success in the course.”
 - “Grading was quick with feedback, allowing me to know how I did on an assignment and where I need to improve while it is still fresh in my mind. ”



Ongoing Feedback Collection in Canvas

Custom Gradebook feedback feature integrated directly into Canvas Gradebook, launched in Spring 2025.

- 250 faculty ratings and 149 comments as of 1/30/26
 - 32% rated 4 or higher; 68% rated 3 or lower
 - 66 comments requesting features
- 1337 student ratings and 180 comments as of 1/30/26
 - 66% rated 4 or higher; 34% rated 3 or lower
 - 83 comments about incorrect or delayed grade information

How was your experience using the Canvas Gradebook today?

👎 😐 😐 😐 😊

Please tell us more!

For help with the Gradebook, please contact the IT Service Center at 303-735-4357 or oithelp@colorado.edu

Submit



Snapshot of Student Comments

- Negative

- "One of the quizzes is still muted because the professor forgot to adjust the settings. Why is there not a standardized template for this among all classes already?"
- "terrible, was not notified about assignments and ended up with zeros. Missing 5 points costed me 1% of my grade"
- "Many assignments are not in and the final total is incorrect. My poor experience has more to do with the professors not turning on "what if" grades and not setting totals correctly."
- "Calculation of totals for my grade has been disabled since the beginning of the semester. I was hoping now that the semester is over I would be able to see my grade total."

- Positive

- "5/5 because everything is working correctly and I was able to find the information I needed."
- "It was pretty easy to find everything I needed, as boxplot dropdowns and sidebar weighting analysis contained all additional information I might have wanted that wasn't inherent to my score alone."



AY 2025-26 Promotional Efforts

- GSS guidelines are incorporated in [Canvas Templates BUS Initiative](#): Canvas template builds in all GSS practices, with resources to support their implementation.
 - Since its launch for spring 2025, the Canvas template has been imported into 1103 courses, with a total combined enrollment of over 34,000 students.
- Presented on GSS at faculty orientation and CTL's Fall Intensive conference, reaching 200+ faculty in the week before classes started
- Continuing to reference GSS in dozens of OIT and CTL trainings and workshops
- GSS Tip of the Week: Posting weekly Grade for Student Success Tips of the Week as Canvas banners to roll out practices to all who teach in a way that is digestible and easy-to-implement





Boulder



Account



Dashboard



Courses



Calendar



Inbox



History



Commons



Studio

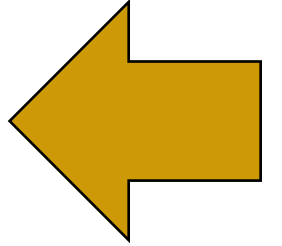


CU Book

This fall, Grade for Student Success with these simple Tips of the Week! ×

 To support campus educators in implementing grading practices in Canvas shown to support student success, the CTL and OIT are offering a new [Grade for Student Success Tip of the Week](#) throughout this fall. GSS Tip for Week 1: By the first day of class, share a syllabus with your students in Canvas that includes a complete list of assignments with due dates for the entire semester, as well as the percentage of the final grade each assignment is worth. This empowers students to set priorities and manage their time. For more support, set up a [course design consultation with the CTL](#) or a [Canvas consultation with OIT's Academic Technology Consultants!](#)

This is a message from **University of Colorado Boulder**



Dashboard



Published Courses (15)



PSYC 1001-004 SP 23 Gen Psy...

PSYC: 1001-004



PSYC 3111-100 SP 23 Gildersle...

PSYC: 3111-100 SP 23 Gildersle...

Grade for Student Success: Key Takeaways

- Given that a typical CU undergraduate student is enrolled in 5 courses in a semester, Canvas is a key intervention point to support student success
- GSS guide presents 16 straightforward practices for enhancing transparency around grading policies, practices, and student grades and feedback in Canvas
- Grounded in evidence from scholarship of teaching and learning; shown to reduce student anxiety, increase motivation, and promote learning and success of all students
- Designed to respond to faculty and student needs expressed in OIT surveys and interviews
- Developed by CU faculty for fellow faculty, with a focus on large-enrollment courses critical for student success
- Successfully adopted in Grade Early and Often initiative pilot and large-enrollment rollout courses, with faculty and students reporting positive impacts in feedback surveys



Grade for Student Success resources

[Grade for Student Success website](#)

[Grade for Student Success handout](#)

[Request a CTL group or department training on *Grade for Student Success*](#)

[Schedule a CTL one-on-one consultation](#)

[Schedule an OIT Academic Technology Consultant training or consultation](#)



Office of Information Technology
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Center for Teaching & Learning
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Grade for Student Success Core Team

Kelly Gildersleeve, CTL | Melinda Easter, OIT | Viktoriya Oliynyk, OIT

Rebecca Kallemeyn, OIT | Jacob Henry, OIT

Leadership Support and Partners

Lily Board, Assistant Dean for Academic Advising & Student Success, A&S

Erika Randall, Interim Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education

Kirk Ambrose, Founding Faculty Director, CTL

Elizabeth Romero Fuerte, AVP & AVC for Digital Experience and Technology for
Learner Success, OIT

Strategic Relations and Communications team

Audience Discussion

- Questions from the audience
- Questions for the audience:
 - What do you hear from students about consistency, ease of use, organization, etc., in their Canvas courses?
 - Do students understand their grades and course performance?
 - Are there resources we could create that would help implement GSS in a course or help support student advising?



Thank you!

Contact us:

Kelly.Gildersleeve@colorado.edu

Viktoriya.Oliynyk@colorado.edu

Rebecca.Kallemeyn@colorado.edu

Jacob.Henry@colorado.edu