

# Redesigning for Efficiency: Adding a Homepage to Canvas Courses

Alexandria Gombas, Ameer Hosein, Jessica James, Abrielle Otero, Olivia Roa, & Barbara Chaparro

Department of Human Factors and Behavioral Neurobiology

**Abstract:** With the increase in online learning, learning management systems (LMS) such as Canvas are increasing in importance for disseminating information from professors to students. In an effort to help students create a clear mental model of a Canvas course, we developed a template homepage that contains a main navigation menu including an FAQ, Course Resources, Start Here, Grades, and Syllabus link. We are currently evaluating the new design in terms of efficiency and student perceptions. Our hypothesis is that the homepage design will help students get to the information they want faster and provide a better overview of the course than the traditional home page design.

## Introduction

The Research in User Experience (RUX) Lab facilitated focus group discussions to gather students' thoughts and opinions about Canvas homepages. This was done because of the increase in virtual learning after COVID-19 began. It was found that students used Canvas frequently but were experiencing levels of frustration with the vastly different ways professors used the platform.

This research addresses the general question of whether a structured homepage enhances the user experience of a Canvas course, especially in terms of students' ease of access to relevant course materials and activities. A template was developed that could be applied to any course in order to provide a level of consistency. This study is still in the preliminary stages.

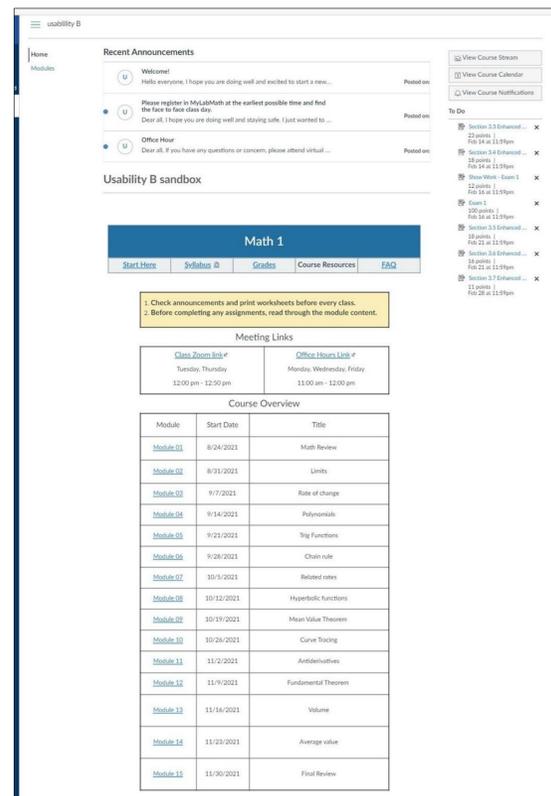
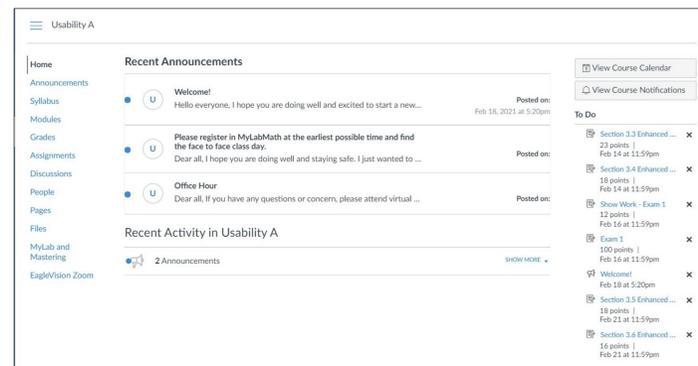
## Development of Template

To develop the homepage template, we:

- Searched for current literature on learning management systems. This literature revealed that students appreciated a more standardized learning management system homepage, specifically one that reduces the amount of clicks when finding necessary information
- Examined what characteristics students and faculty enjoyed about current Canvas homepages and what aspects brought them difficulties
- Gathered example images of Canvas homepages that worked well for students both at ERAU and at other schools

Through iterative design and discussion with the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE) we created a new homepage. The proposed design creates a minimalist menu, with:

- Main navigation bar with access to syllabus, grades, FAQs
- Links to Zoom meetings/office hours
- A course overview with a schedule
- Easy access to modules from schedule



TOP: The default design for Canvas homepages  
BOTTOM: The proposed homepage

## Proposed Studies

### Study 1: First Click Test

- Provide insights into a users' mental framework as well as which homepage results in more consistent, efficient, and accurate clicks
- Participants will complete a series of tasks related to finding information on the homepage
- First click locations as well as time on task will be collected

### Study 2: Semi-Structured Interviews

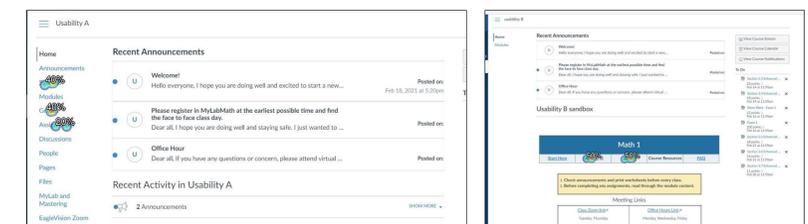
- Receive student and faculty feedback on new structured Canvas homepage
- Understand how proposed homepage influences a student's ability to find the information they need
- Understand how easy proposed homepage is for a faculty member to create and maintain

### Study 3: Usability Study

- Compare task success, perceived difficulty, efficiency, and perceived usability between original and structured Canvas homepages through the completion of scenario-driven tasks
- Assess user experience of course navigation, user understanding of course structure, and overall user satisfaction of structured homepage

## Preliminary Results

- A pilot study of the First Click Test was conducted.
- Nine tasks were completed on each homepage version, where click location and time on task were recorded. Preliminary results with the structured homepage appear to be more consistent for some tasks.



LEFT: Traditional homepage  
RIGHT: Proposed homepage