ABE/FNFS STUDENT PREFERENCES SURVEY FOR VIULEARN

Understanding how to best structure course materials in VIULearn to support students for success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: The pivot to remote delivery in Spring 2020 required many faculty members to quickly develop an online presence for their courses in VIULearn (D2L). As remote delivery extended into Intersession and Fall 2020, many faculty members in Academic and Career Preparation (ACP) wanted more information about how to best structure VIULearn course materials to support their students.

In December 2020, students registered in Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Foundations for Success (FNFS) courses were surveyed about the organization and layout of VIULearn courses by providing examples and asking students to choose which options they preferred. The survey was centred on navigation and organization within VIULearn, with the goal of providing clear, actionable suggestions for faculty members.

Survey Tool and Response Rate: The survey was conducted using Vancouver Island University's (VIU's) Checkbox survey tool and was emailed to approximately 600 students. Two follow-up reminders were sent in December 2020. The response rate was 17%. Full text of the survey questions and graphical representations of answers can be found in Appendix A.

Results: Overall, most survey respondents indicated that **clear** and **consistent organization** of course materials in VIULearn was important to their success. The importance of accessible file formats and the location of information within VIULearn was also highlighted as important in the survey. All results can be found in Appendix A.

Recommendations: Specific recommendations from the survey include:

1) Attempt to provide PDF files as an option for students where possible, and do not prioritize converting content in Word, PDF, or other file types to VIULearn webpages
2) Review how Assignments, Quizzes, and Discussions appear in the tool menus (not just in Content) and consider adding action-oriented labels and internal links to instructions
3) Review module labels and organization in Content to create a consistent layout, including labelling or organizing required and optional materials
4) Feature key information clearly in the course Content, potentially pinned on the Course Home page

Limitations: The results of this survey are limited in scope. There may be opportunities to survey a wider student population, as the population targeted for this survey included ABE and FNFS registered students only. Future surveys may also wish to extend the scope of the survey to students in other programs and include other topics respondents indicated would support their learning.

Survey respondents also shared additional information beyond the scope of the initial survey, including ideas around structural supports (like checklists, lecture recordings, and faculty communication) and the potential use of other tools (like VIULearn Grades). These suggestions could be examined through additional surveys or other research projects that are interested in learning about supporting students.

Contents

SURVEY RESPONSE OVERVIEW

This survey was emailed to 632 students registered in ABE or FNFS courses between January 2020 and December 2020. The invitation for the survey was sent out to students twice: once on December 1st and again on December 11th, 2020. The final survey exports were collated on January 15th, 2021.

In total, 105 responses were received (17% response rate). No questions on the survey were mandatory, so some questions received fewer than 105 responses. The majority of survey respondents (88%) had used VIULearn for courses in the last year.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

The survey questions focused on how students navigate in and use VIULearn. Students were asked to choose between a variety of screenshots of possible navigation organization for most questions, and they were provided with the opportunity to give open-ended feedback at the end of the survey. All questions gave the option for "Don't know / No response", so reported percentages may not add up to 100% for all questions.

Full text for all questions, screenshots, and graphs of responses can be found in Appendix A.

FILE FORMAT PREFERENCES

Survey respondents tended to prefer PDF files (49.5%) followed by Microsoft Office files (23.8%). A minority of students had no preference (18.8%) or preferred VIULearn webpages (5.9%).

WHERE STUDENTS LOOK FOR INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

The majority of survey respondents (71.3%) indicated that they would look for information such as Zoom links and course schedules in VIULearn or on a course webpage. However, almost a quarter of respondents (23.8%) said they would look for this information in their email first.

Within the structure of VIULearn, the majority of survey respondents indicated they would use the navigation bar to look for and submit quizzes (71.7% said they would use the "Assessment" tab) and discussions (69.6% said they would use the "Communication" tab). A smaller proportion of survey respondents would look within the modules of Content (19.6% for quizzes, 12% for discussions) when searching for or attempting to submit activities.

NAMING AND ORGANIZATION OF MODULES IN CONTENT

Most survey respondents preferred the information to be organized in weeks (55.1%) instead of units (40.8%) in the Content section, but there was not a clear majority opinion.

A minority of survey respondents (16.8%) preferred materials within modules to be in a single list. The remaining survey respondents chose the option for materials to be organized by type of activity (42%) over being organized by topic (39.0%).

Very few survey respondents (11.7%) preferred files to be linked in the module description only. For the remaining responses, there was a slight preference for materials to be uploaded to the module only (43.6%) over the material being in both the module description and uploaded to the module (34%). Compared to other questions, more survey respondents indicated that they didn't know or had no preference for these options (10.6%).

NAMING OF FILES AND ACTIVITIES

The majority of students preferred for files to be labelled with actions (Read, Watch, Post, Submit) (55.9%), and another quarter preferred labels to show the file or activity type (PDF, PowerPoint, Discussion, Quiz) (24.7%). Some survey respondents preferred no labels at all (11.8%).

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS – WHAT IS WORKING AND WHAT IS NOT WORKING WITH VIULEARN

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents indicated consistent organization throughout the course was something that supported their learning. Some comments indicated they would like more consistency across courses as well, especially courses within the same subject group.

Clear labelling of activities and instructions was a common theme of responses. A few responses indicated important items like Zoom links could be difficult to find in Content. Some survey respondents mentioned that finding assignment folders and instructions in different locations was extremely challenging. Several respondents also indicated there be a clear separation of required materials and optional/extra/support materials, as this was important to their success and reduced the feeling of overload. A few comments indicated this may be an area for improvement for some courses.

Many survey respondents indicated structural supports (to-do lists, checklists, reminder notifications and emails) was an important support for them. Others indicated they wanted to see more of those kinds of supports in their courses.

While some survey respondents indicated they wanted all materials visible at the beginning of the semester, more respondents indicated week-to-week posting reduced the sense of being overwhelmed with materials.

Grades and feedback in VIULearn also came up in a few comments. Most survey respondents indicated this was something that worked well for them or flagged this was something they wished all their instructors did. Some comments indicated that there were challenges accessing feedback in VIULearn.

Finally, inconsistent notifications (for Announcements, Grades, and Emails) were seen by numerous survey respondents as frustrating.

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS – OTHER COMMENTS NOT DIRECTLY RELATED TO VIULEARN

Some survey respondents mentioned there should be recording of lectures, and many indicated these recordings were useful or that they wanted to have these made available.

Accessing textbooks (and catching up when access was delayed) was brought up by a few survey respondents as a major challenge for taking courses.

A few survey respondents also flagged that clear direction on how to contact instructors was extremely useful to them. Frequent email communication from instructors was also seen as a positive support, and some respondents indicated they appreciated the opportunities to meet with instructors "live".

File format challenges were flagged by some survey respondents as something they felt impeded their learning. Video files and requirements to hand in or write on PDFs came up as common issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) ATTEMPT TO PROVIDE PDF FILES AS AN OPTION FOR STUDENTS WHERE POSSIBLE, AND DO NOT PRIORITIZE CONVERTING CONTENT IN WORD, PDF, OR OTHER FILE TYPES TO VIULEARN WEBPAGES

Given that almost half of survey respondents preferred PDF files and most major productivity software can export to PDF for free, this seems like a "quick win" item to improve accessibility of course materials for some students.

Since there was a low percentage of students with a preference for VIULearn webpages, if instructors are considering changing/updating materials, time is likely better spent ensuring the content they are providing is accessible to screen-readers and other text-to-speech programs over creating the content in VIULearn pages.

2) REVIEW HOW ASSIGNMENTS, QUIZZES, AND DISCUSSIONS APPEAR IN THE TOOL MENUS (NOT JUST IN CONTENT) AND CONSIDER ADDING ACTION-ORIENTED LABELS AND INTERNAL LINKS TO INSTRUCTIONS

Given that the majority of students look for these kinds of activities in the course navigation bar, making sure the activities are labeled clearly and in the correct order within the tool itself is recommended. This should hopefully allow students to find activities more easily. Action-oriented labels ("Submit", "Post", etc.) may help more hesitant students with searching for and completing these kinds of activities.

Based on some comments, it is likely instructions for some activities are in Content, but students are not seeing those instructions when accessing the activities from the tools directly. Adding a link to the Content instructions in the activity description could help students who find navigation challenging. This

would allow them to access activity instructions while not duplicating instructions in multiple locations or introducing potential inconsistencies.

3) REVIEW MODULE LABELS AND ORGANIZATION IN CONTENT TO CREATE A CONSISTENT LAYOUT, INCLUDING LABELLING OR ORGANIZING REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL MATERIALS

Most questions regarding module layout and labelling did not have a clear direction from students, but some form of consistent organization was preferred over a simple listing of materials. This was mentioned repeatedly in the open-ended comments as well. This implies that whatever method is most appropriate to the materials and the instructors' preferences should work for students, if it is applied <u>consistently</u> throughout the course.

A number of responses underscore the feeling of being overwhelmed with the number of items within courses. While this cannot be avoided in some cases, clarity on what students must read, watch, or complete was consistently flagged as something students were looking for. Another method of providing this clarity may be through the use of structural supports like to-do lists and checklists.

4) FEATURE KEY INFORMATION CLEARLY IN THE COURSE CONTENT, POTENTIALLY PINNED ON THE COURSE HOME PAGE

Comments in open-ended questions often suggested that key information, like Zoom links and instructor contact information, can be difficult to find in the Content section. This information should be clearly labeled in Content and potentially pinned on the Course Home page so students can more easily find it, particularly when they are stressed.

Q1. What file type do you most prefer when you download or print files from your instructors?
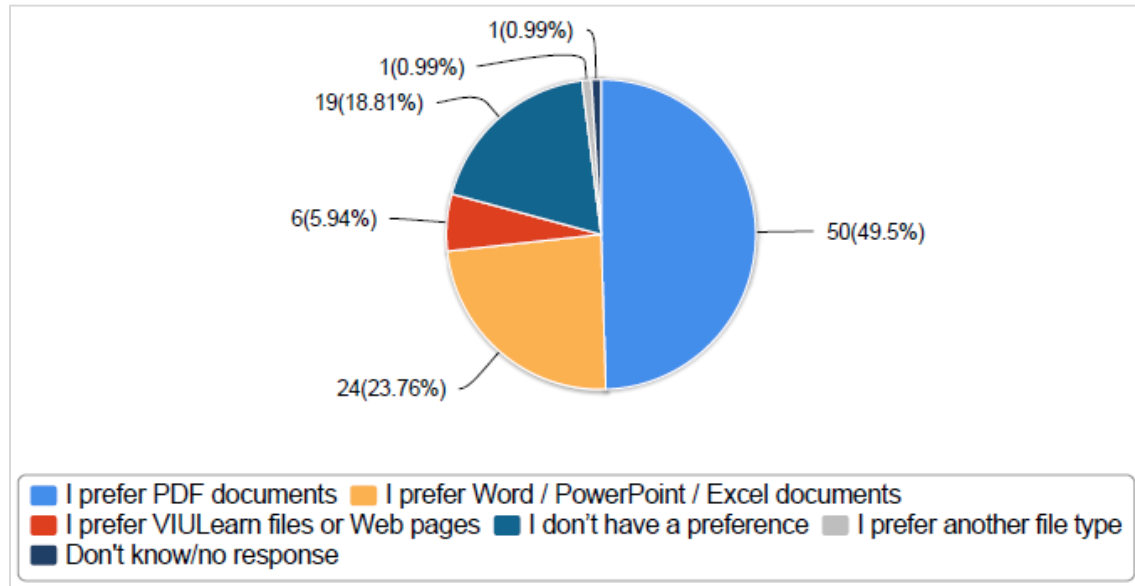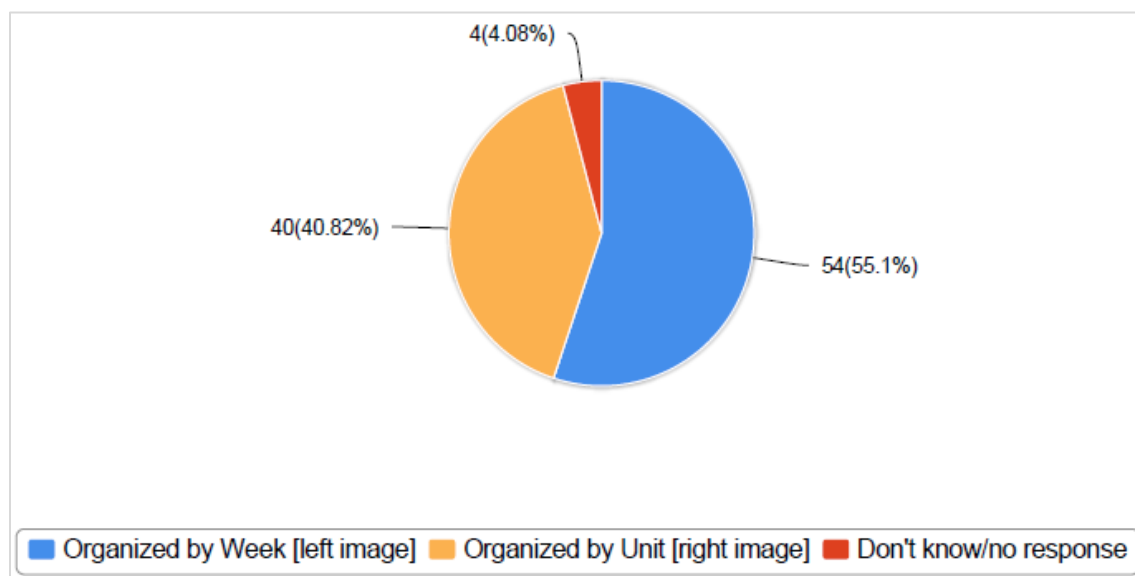

Q2. Imagine you are looking for information about your course schedule, like when you have Zoom sessions or when assignments are due. Where would you look for that information first?
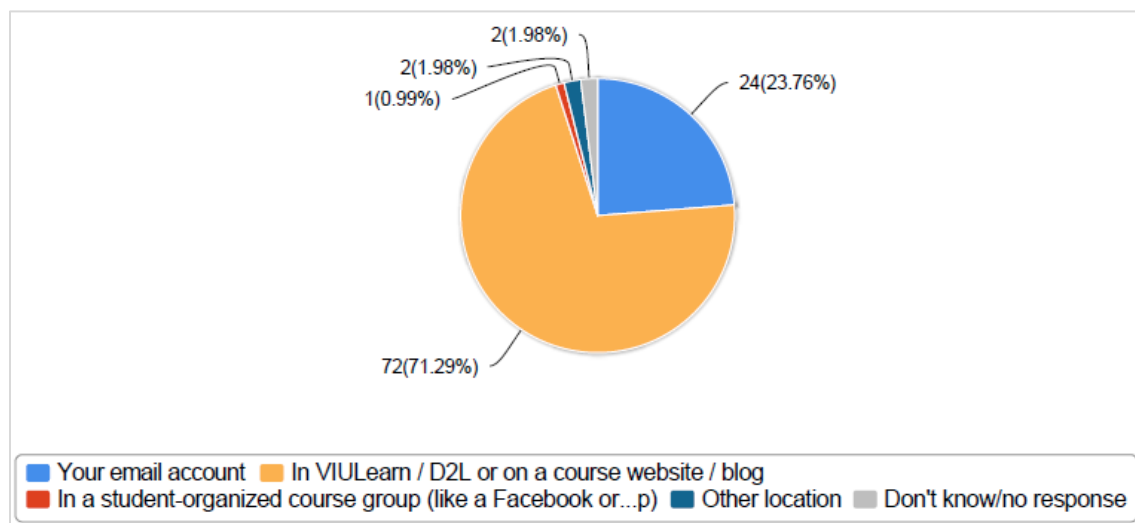
Q3. Which of the following names for the modules / folders in the course would make Content easier to navigate?
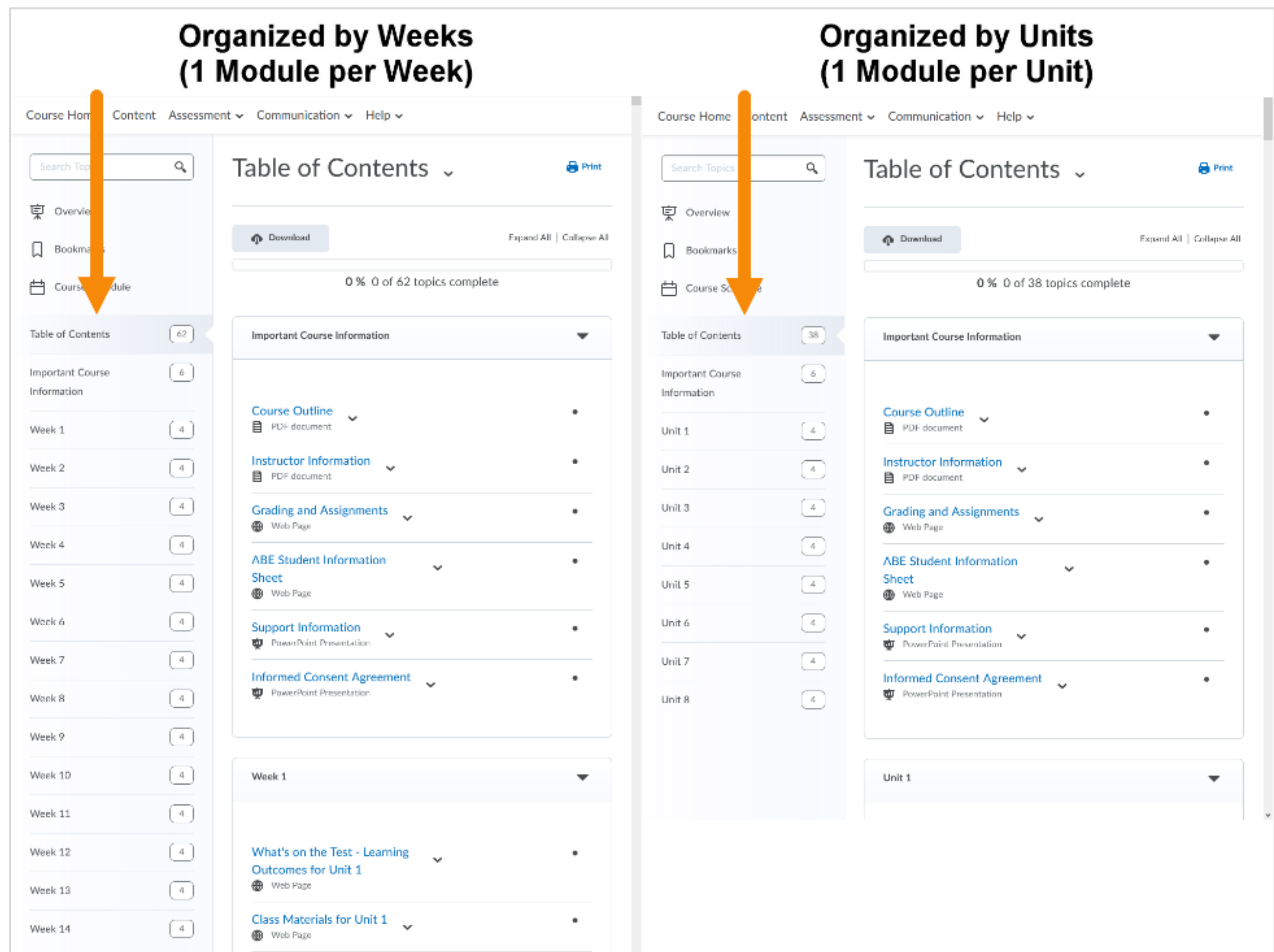
Q4. Which of the following ways to organize materials inside folders is easier to navigate?

All material in one list

Subfolders organized by Topic (For example: Topic 1, Topic 2)

Subfolder organized by type of activity (For example: Readings, PowerPoints, Quizzes, Assignments)

2(2.11%)

16(16.84%)

40(42.11%)

37(38.95%)

■ All material in one list [left image] ■ Subfolders organized by Topic (For example: Topic 1, Topic 2)...e]
■ Subfolder organized by type of activity (For example: Readings,...e] ■ Don't know/no response

Q5. Which of the following ways to access files would make them easier to find?

Files Linked in Module Description only (shorter, but cannot bulk download or see completion)

Files Uploaded into Module only (longer, but can bulk download and see completion)

Course Home   Content   Assessment ⌄   Communication ⌄   Help ⌄

Search Topics 🔍

🖥 Overview

📖 Bookmarks

📅 Course Schedule

Table of Contents [6]

Important Course Information [6]

Unit 1

Unit 1   🖨 Print

In order to complete this work, first review What's on the Test - Learning Outcomes for Unit 1

To complete Topic 1, first complete the Topic 1 Reading and then review the Topic 1 PowerPoint. Finally, complete the Topic 1 Quiz when you feel ready.

To complete Topic 1, first complete the Topic 2 Reading and then review the Topic 2 PowerPoint. Finally, complete the Topic 2 Quiz when you feel ready.

When you have finished all your other work, complete the Unit 1 Assignment in order to proceed to the next Unit.

Course Home   Content   Assessment ⌄   Communication ⌄   Help ⌄

Search Topics 🔍

🖥 Overview

📖 Bookmarks

📅 Course Schedule

Table of Contents [13]

Important Course Information [6]

Unit 1 [7]

Unit 1 ⌄   🖨 Print

⬇ Download

12.5 % 1 of 8 topics complete

What's on the Test - Learning Outcomes for Unit 1
🌐 Web Page

Topic 1 Reading ⌄
🌐 Web Page

Topic 1 PowerPoint ⌄
📄 PDF document

Topic 1 ⌄
❓ Quiz
Quiz Instructions:
Time Limit:
Attempts Allowed:
Due/End Date:

Topic 2 Reading ⌄
🌐 Web Page

Topic 2 PowerPoint ⌄
📄 PDF document

Topic 2 Quiz ⌄
❓ Quiz
Quiz Instructions:
Time Limit:
Attempts Allowed:
Due/End Date:

Unit 1 ⌄
📋 Assignment
Assignment Instructions:
Due Date:
Formats Allowed:
Other Instructions:

10(10.64%)   11(11.7%)

32(34.04%)

41(43.62%)

🟦 Linked in module description (shorter, but cannot bulk download...e]
🟧 Uploaded into module only (longer, but can bulk download and see...e]
🟥 Both - linked in module description and uploaded into module 🟦 Don't know/no response
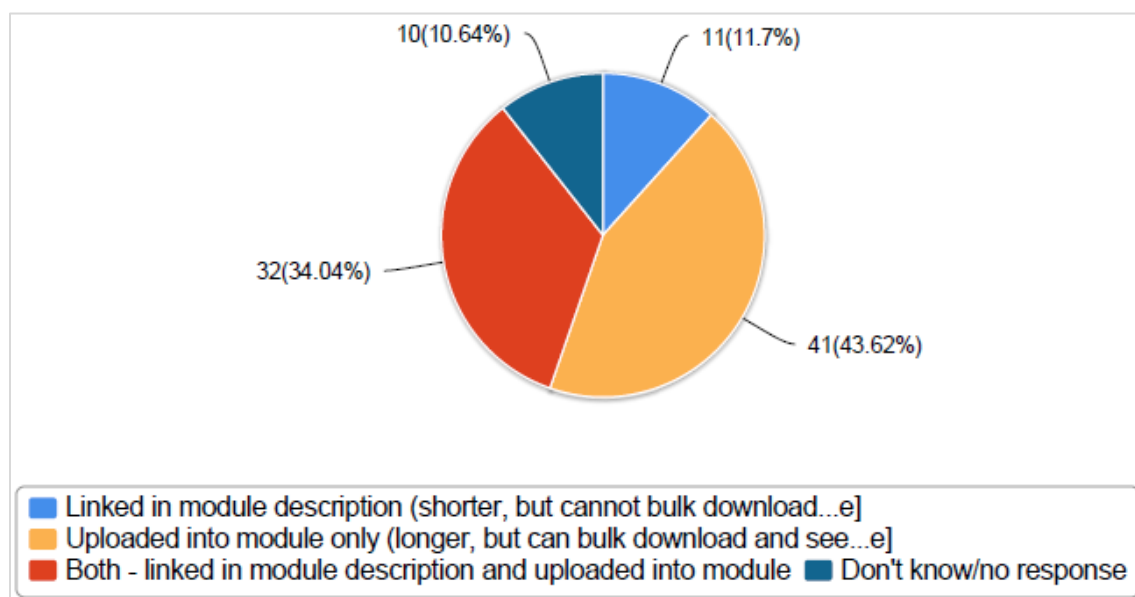
Q6. Which of the following ways of labelling files and activities would make finding them easier?

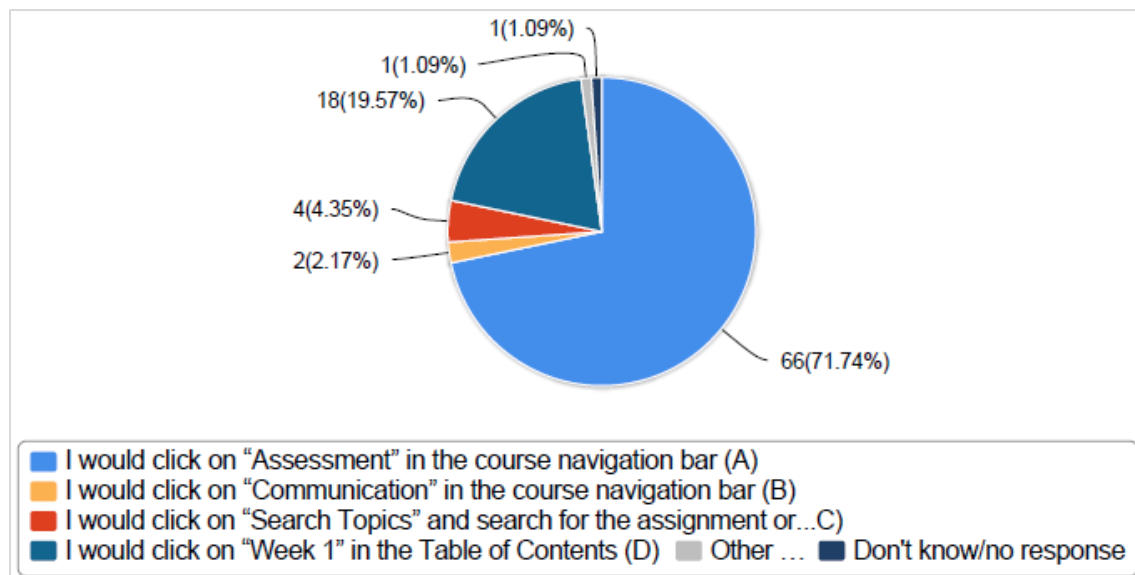| Plain file and activity names (No Edits) | Names show action needed (Read, Post, Watch, Submit) | Names show file or activity type (PDF, Word, PowerPoint, Discussion) |

7(7.53%)
11(11.83%)
23(24.73%)
52(55.91%)

- ■ Plain file and activity names (No Edits) [left image]
- ■ Names show action needed (Read, Post, Watch, Submit) [center...e]
- ■ Names show file or activity type (PDF, Word, PowerPoint,...e]   ■ Don't know/no response
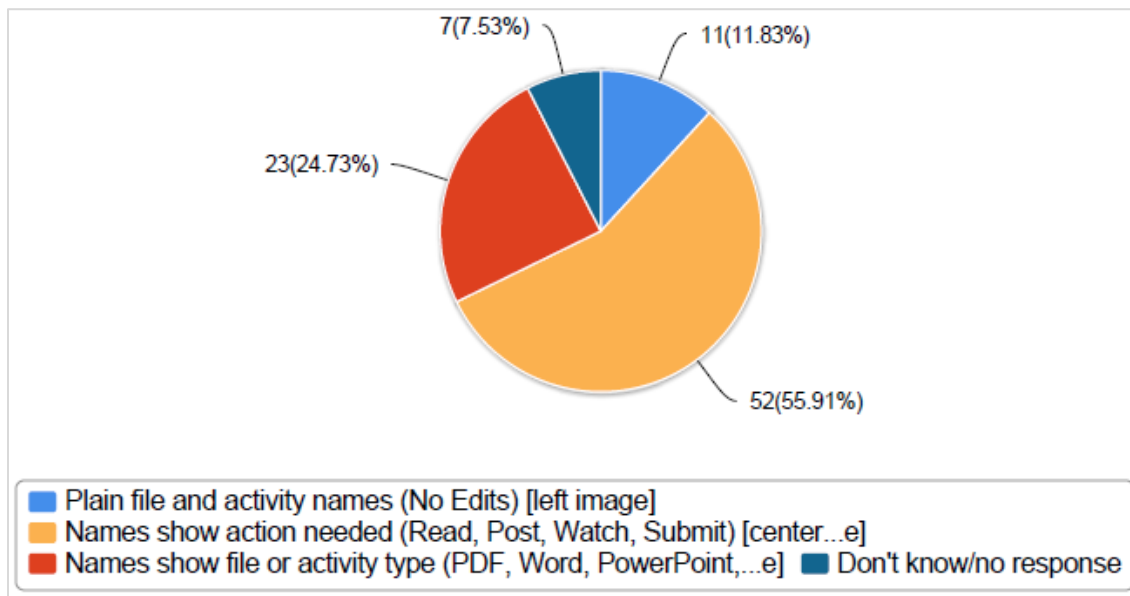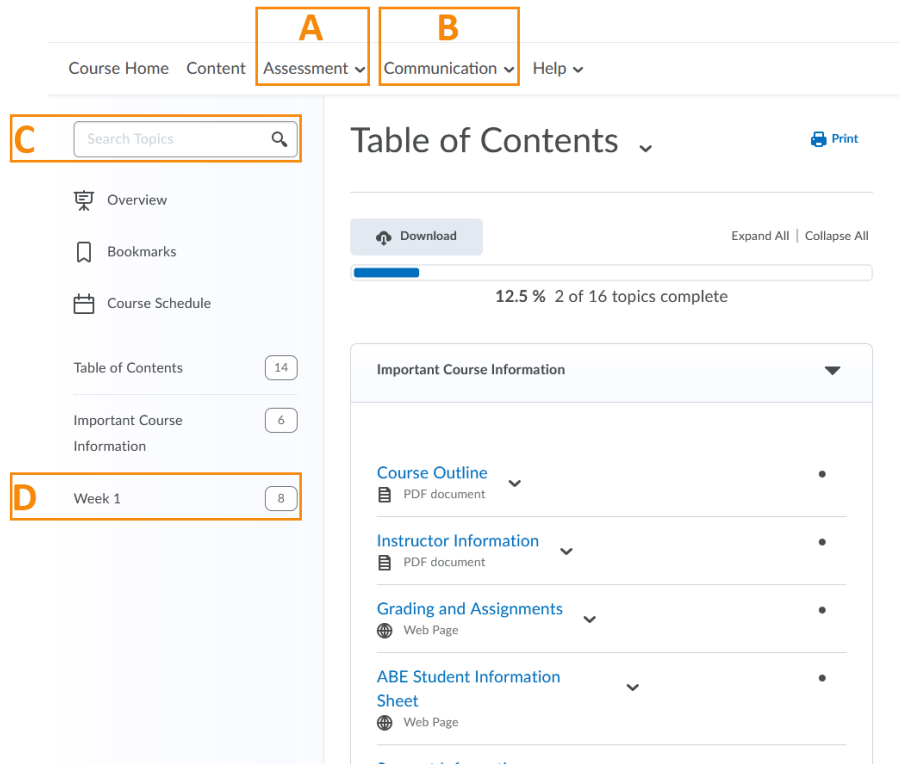
Q7. Imagine you needed to upload an assignment or take a quiz during the first week of your course. Where would you click first in the above image?

I would click on "Assessment" in the course navigation bar (A)
I would click on "Communication" in the course navigation bar (B)
I would click on "Search Topics" and search for the assignment or...C)
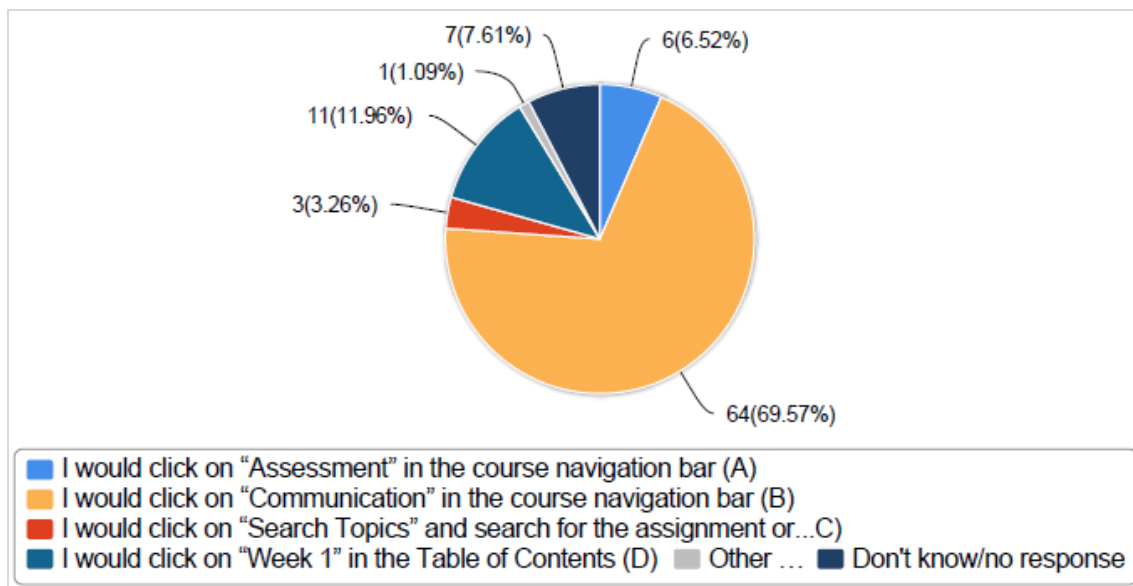I would click on "Week 1" in the Table of Contents (D) Other ... Don't know/no response
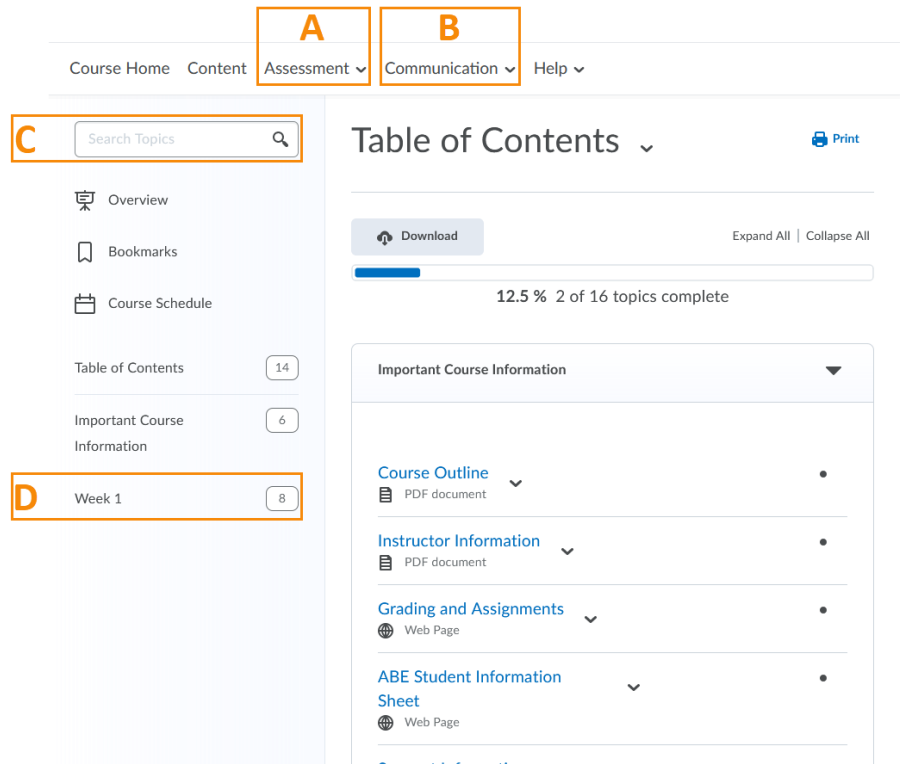
Q8. Imagine you needed to post to a discussion topic during the first week of your course. Where would you click first in the above image?

I would click on "Assessment" in the course navigation bar (A)
I would click on "Communication" in the course navigation bar (B)
I would click on "Search Topics" and search for the assignment or...C)
I would click on "Week 1" in the Table of Contents (D) Other ... Don't know/no response

Q9. What is working well for you in VIULearn / D2L that you wish all of your instructors did?

Q10. What is still challenging in VIULearn / D2L that you wish any of your instructors would stop doing?

Q11. Do you have any other comments you wish to share about the topics in this survey?