Standards and Support for Online Teaching at Thomas University

Common Goals

1. They should function like good classroom classes.
2. Students should not fear online courses — address their intimidation.

Approachability

1. Let students know: “If you don’t hear from me, something’s wrong. Check back. I want you involved.”
2. Send that message everywhere – syllabus, announcements, etc.
3. Encourage frequent communication – give multiple contact options.
4. State clearly your time frame for response.

A Community of Learners with Instructor(s)

1. Ask students to post introductions on a discussion board.
2. Use groups to create more familiarity.
3. Convey your personality — teacher/mentor tone.
4. Always reply/give feedback on efforts in a timely way.
5. Be a part of the course; you offer more than just content.

Manageability

1. Don’t make requirements too sparse but also don’t let them mushroom beyond reasonable expectations.
2. Gear activities to "1:20 min" period as gauge — so that it’s manageable within that time frame.
3. Know and communicate to students your learning objectives and how you are measuring learning; do this weekly in regard to a manageable amount of material.
4. Avoid posting all assignments/materials at the start of course; bring it up just in advance of the next week’s topic.

Valuable Activities

1. Make "class time" more than reading — outside texts are the usual homework, not part of online "class time." Presentation of content and interactive activity with it will feel like a "learning unit," clearly geared to establish learning in that class period.

Testing/Evaluation

1. Don’t let this mushroom.
2. Use timed tests.
3. For written exams or exam questions, establish clear limits — e.g. number of pages, number of examples.
4. Use best practices for securing tests and controlling the testing environment to thwart and discourage cheating.

Guide on the Side

1. The "guide on the side" is still a guide. The text is a source of information and a reference, but not the guide. Find ways to deliver information, perspective, connections through PowerPoint, voice-over narration, video streaming, and feedback on assignments and discussion boards.

Revised 10/10/13
Specific Policies and Procedures for Online Courses

(Policy statements that must be included in course syllabi are asterisked)

Communication Policy

Professors of online courses are expected to check their course site and e-mail frequently.

When a student communicates with you regarding a question or concern through e-mail, the course site, or by telephone, you should respond to indicate receipt of the communication within forty-eight hours (during the work week), even if you are not able to resolve the student’s situation in that time. Student concerns should always be fully addressed in a timely manner consistent with the concern. Professors of online courses should publish clear contact information, options for student communication with the professor, and the following policy:

**I will check the course site and my e-mail frequently, and I will respond to your communication of questions or concerns within forty-eight hours during the work week.**

All syllabi should include the following information regarding contacting Thomas University professors:

**If students cannot reach their professor, they should call 1-800-538-9784, ext. 1000 for an administrative assistant in Academic Affairs to relay a message to the professor regarding the need to contact them.**

*Attendance, Participation, and Netiquette Policies*

Attendance:
A student in hybrid and online courses is expected to be present in all online classes each week. Presence in the online classroom is assessed through logging in and participating in class activities each week as specified in the course syllabus. Failure to meet these expectations for any unexcused reason will result in a recorded absence for the week. Recorded absences equaling 20% or more of the length of the semester/term may result in an administrative withdrawal or receiving an “F” for that course at the instructor’s discretion. A student in an online course is responsible for logging onto the course by midnight of the first day of classes. Otherwise, the student may be withdrawn. It is the student’s responsibility to officially withdraw from class in the event that they choose not to complete the course.

Participation:
Online students are expected to log onto the course website at least twice a week. You may wish to log on more often since many tips and possible bonus questions may appear at any time. Quizzes, tests, and other assignments should be completed by the due date on the course schedule.

Assignments:
Students are expected to complete all assignments by the posted due dates. A 10% penalty per day will apply to late electronic submissions in cases where Thomas University technical issues are not a problem. In such cases where technical errors or shortcomings with any submission are as a result of the student’s limited technology skills, the student will be penalized a flat 10% if the cases are brought to the instructor’s attention within a few days to a week of the assignment due date or within a few days of the grades for a particular assignment being posted if that is what spawns the realization of the error.
Any unexcused missed or late postings will result in a recorded missed class day. Recorded missed class days equaling 20% or more of regularly scheduled classes may result in an administrative withdrawal or receiving an F in the course. Note the attendance policy above.

Netiquette:
Polite online behavior is called “netiquette.” Postings to the discussion boards or any method of online communication require a polite behavior or the learning process breaks down.

**Emotions - Do not be rude**
- Watch how you express your emotions and humor within the mail [discussion board, and/or blog].
- Due to the lack of vocal and nonverbal clues to our speech here, we often need something extra to read into a message what was intended.
- Cultural and ability differences impact the online group.
- Don't get involved in flame wars. Neither post nor respond to incendiary material.

**Spelling and Punctuation**
- College level communication skills are expected in all messages.
- Use correct punctuation and spelling. Use spell check for messages.

**Manners:**
- Do not assume that others are interested in the same TV, geographical jokes, etc. Keep postings to the point.
- Keep your comments relevant to the topic of discussion.
- Validate other members’ ideas and efforts. Messages that contain “Way to go” “Right on” or a simple “Wow!” require a lot of time to download and do not contribute to the group process.
- Comments mentioning why something is appreciated are more valuable
- Do not use instant messaging abbreviations in any of the formal communication you submit for this course
- Discussion Boards/Blogs and/or group emails are not the appropriate place to ask someone out on a date. Save that for face to face conversations.


**F1 Visa Student Policy for Online Courses**

F1 Visa holding students must notify the professor at the beginning of the semester of their status and complete mandatory on-campus activities specified by the professor. Failure to complete the on-campus activities, with your physical attendance documented, will mean that your immigration status is jeopardized.

**Security Policy**

*Online Assessment Proctoring Service:*
To ensure the academic integrity of online courses as well as to meet federal requirements to provide proof of enrolled students’ identity in online courses, an online proctoring service will be used for courses offered completely online. ProctorU will provide live monitoring of ONE assessment per online course. The assessment may be a quiz, exam, or written assignment that is no less than 20% of your total grade in an undergraduate course. For graduate-level courses, the proctored assessment will be no less than 10% of your total grade. This 24/7 proctoring service is done through your computer and webcam, so you can continue to take exams/assessments at the time and in the place most convenient to you.
Please prepare ahead of time by having access to a computer with fast and reliable internet connection, webcam, headphones or speakers connected to the computer, and a working microphone (often connected to the computer or webcam). Your professor will indicate on the course schedule which assessment will be monitored by ProctorU and which dates the assessment will be available. You must schedule an appointment with ProctorU within the time frame designated by your professor. Appointments must be made at least 3 days in advance by going to www.proctoru.com/thomasu. If you have any questions before the assessment, you may call ProctorU at 205-870-8122 or email help@proctoru.com

This requirement is ONLY for those courses taken completely online. Hybrid and classroom-based courses do not utilize this service.

*Guidelines for Students to Minimize Issues or Concerns*

- Always use TU email and the instructor contact information provided in your course syllabus.
- Always attempt to resolve questions or concerns by communicating with your professor. If a matter cannot be resolved, your next communication should be with the Division Chair supervising the course in which you are having a difficulty. If you need assistance identifying the appropriate Division Chair to contact, call 1-800-538-9784, ext 1000 for an administrative assistant in Academic Affairs to assist you.
- Save all of your course email, communication, and confirmation pages when you submit assignments.
- Conscientiously submit all assignments by established due dates.
- Contact your professor immediately if you become aware that a technical breakdown may have impacted your submission of an assignment.
- **Students having questions or difficulty with Blackboard, Hawklink, Online Library Resources or email access/functions should contact the TU Technical Support Help Desk at 229-227-6958 or by email to tuhelpdesk@thomasu.edu during the following hours:**
  
  Monday through Thursday 8 am to 9 pm  
  Friday 8 am to 5 pm  
  Saturday 10 am to 2 pm  
  Sunday 4 pm to 9 pm

  Calls and emails will be returned within 75 minutes during Help Desk open hours. During "off-peak" hours, calls/emails will be queued.

  If the problem impacts an imminent assignment deadline, email or call your professor to notify him/her that you are having trouble.

**Note: Thomas University does not provide technical support for computers not owned by Thomas University.**

**Online Course Technology Assistance for Instructors**

The first-line contact for instructors having difficulty with TU email, Hawklink, or Blackboard is the TU Technical Support Help Desk. Secondly, they may contact the Academic Technology Specialist via email, desk, or cell phone. Online course technology support staff follow this protocol:

1. When a student contacts them regarding a problem, they assist the student using limited Blackboard and Hawklink Administrator privileges as needed.
2. If the problem is quickly resolved, no contact with the professor(s) is required.
3. If the problem cannot be resolved within the initial contact, they will notify the Blackboard Administrator for Blackboard ticket issues and/or the Director of IT for local issues.
4. If resolution of the problem involves necessary changes within the course site (such as reposting a document, altering a format, etc.), they will contact the professor immediately.
5. If the problem is system-wide, they notify all instructors and provide updates until the issue is resolved.

Additional Expectations of Syllabi / Course Design

Online Courses

- evidence of in-depth presentation of concepts/content (equivalent to traditional classroom lecture/presentation)
- evidence of class interaction (through discussion boards, groups, field experiences, etc.)
- evidence that instructor’s “voice” will guide the course content and students’ progress
- logical progression/sequencing of course content
- course elements presented in manageable segments
- a clear advance schedule of topics and due dates
- evidence that students’ work will be assessed at regular intervals (rubrics, comments, etc.)
- an explanation of online etiquette expectations
- evidence of a method for verifying student identity (use of multiple written assignments/parts of assignments, use of video, use of test center, etc.)

Hybrid Courses

- evidence of a link between online content and classroom content
- evidence that out-of-class activities are significantly rigorous to constitute a “second class period;” something more than the homework that would be expected in both a traditional and hybrid class
- course elements presented in manageable segments
- a clear advance schedule of topics and due dates
- an explanation of online etiquette expectations
- a method of "in person" (in-class) assessment for verifying student identity

Standards and Support for Online Teaching at Thomas University

Overall Expectations

Online and Hybrid courses must contain the information required in the TU Syllabus Template that ensures optimal practices modeled on Quality Matters Standards and National Standards for Quality Online Teaching (NACOL).

All faculty teaching hybrid or fully online courses must complete TOP FLIGHT (Thomas University Optimal Pedagogy for Learning through Interactive Technology) workshops and have initial online courses reviewed according to TOP FLIGHT checklists by the Academic Technology Specialist and their Division Chair.

How do we assess faculty members’ competencies?

All faculty who teach hybrid or online courses need to demonstrate competencies. New faculty and current faculty who are newly assigned to hybrid or online teaching will need to demonstrate competencies. Experienced faculty are designated as evaluators and mentors.

Competencies are measured according to the TOP FLIGHT technical and pedagogical competencies checklist. Faculty new to hybrid or online teaching at TU must demonstrate competencies by having an evaluator review a course they have prepared at least one month prior to the course start date.
All online and hybrid courses/instructors will be evaluated through course evaluations tailored to assessment of the online learning environment as well as through assessment of relative grades and evaluations in traditional course and multiple course sections. The Director of Institutional Assessment assists in creating assessment tools.

**Training/Educational Opportunities Available to Develop Faculty Members’ Technical and Pedagogical Skills as Online Teachers**

Thomas University Optimal Pedagogy for Learning through Interactive Technology (TOP FLIGHT) Workshops:

In this program, all Thomas University faculty members receive support for creating high quality teaching and learning environments in the online classroom. During Fall and Spring semesters the Academic Technology Specialist will provide four two-hour workshops to 8-10 faculty members selected by their Division Chair for this faculty development opportunity. Each workshop will assist faculty members in creating or enhancing actual course sites. In addition to instruction, each workshop participant will receive a device to assist in course building – a digital voice recorder or flip video recorder.

1. The first of the four workshops will focus on elements of high quality course design and pedagogy and setting up courses in Blackboard that enable student learning.
2. The second session will focus on development of various learning materials that appeal to all learning styles.
3. The third workshop will focus on enhancing engagement and interactivity with the use of Collaborate and digital voice recorders.
4. The fourth workshop will focus on pulling it all together and putting final touches on course design.

**TOP FLIGHT Gold Certificate:**

While participation in the TOP FLIGHT Workshops is mandatory, participation in the TOP FLIGHT Gold Certificate program is optional. To earn the Certificate, a faculty member must

1. complete the four workshops;
2. complete the Online Teaching Proficiency Instruction and Assessment;
3. during a subsequent semester within a calendar year of completing TOP FLIGHT, receive a satisfactory review of a selected online or hybrid course by the Academic Technology Specialist and the faculty member’s Division Chair using the TOP FLIGHT rubric;
4. present to the faculty member’s Division or a larger audience some application of optimal teaching or interactive technology in the online environment OR serve as an Optimal Online Teaching Mentor to an adjunct faculty member for a semester.

When these requirements are demonstrated, the faculty member will be awarded Thomas University’s TOP FLIGHT Gold Certificate and a $100 stipend.

**General Support:**

- If the instructor needs additional support, the ATS or an experienced online instructor will serve as a mentor. With the mentor’s guidance, the instructor will engage in activities germane to his/her learning needs and prepare the assigned hybrid or online class(es).
- One month prior to the start date of the hybrid or online course the instructor is scheduled to teach, he/she must meet with an evaluator to demonstrate the competencies.
- The instructor will amend his/her preparation as needed to meet the competencies prior to the start of classes.
- The mentor and the Division Chair will check in on the Blackboard course site for the first several weeks of the semester to give feedback and assistance.
Additional Opportunities for Training/Learning:

- Individual and group training on use of online teaching tools and optimal online pedagogy with the Academic Technology Specialist.
- In-house Blackboard training sessions on basics and on more advanced tools and techniques offered each semester
- Peer presentations and discussions on online teaching tools and strategies
- Support for attending other colleges’ and universities’ courses in online education
- Mentoring
- Multiple links to other colleges/universities’ online instructional support sites