

Morningside College—Graduate Education Expectations for Online Courses

Taking an online class is different from taking a traditional face-to-face class. In many cases, students in an online class will never meet in the same place at the same time. Online classes are student centered. The student is responsible for his or her learning. It is up to the student to access the information and put new knowledge and skills into practice. The instructor is there to facilitate learning and to provide support.

Just like anything else new and different, an online course may make you feel uncomfortable and nervous. You may wish for a more traditional and comfortable teaching/learning format. You may feel that too much of the course is left up to you—that there is no instructor to help you. Often students taking their first online course are apprehensive and feel lonely and frustrated. However, most students begin to enjoy online learning after they become more adept at this delivery mode, and they realize that they learn a lot. If you start to feel stressed during the course, use the discussion board and e-mail functions to discuss your concerns with the instructor and peers; this is similar to discussing concerns in the hallway of a traditional classroom building. Your concerns will likely be shared by others who then may be able to offer ideas and solutions, and you will feel less isolated.

Your success in an online course is not accidental. The college has planned carefully for this learning environment and has selected course management software, Blackboard or Moodle, for online course delivery to ensure security of course content and student information. In addition, course supports such as electronic library access and technology assistance have been put into place. The Graduate Education program and your instructor have designed your course with activities that enable you to achieve the course objectives and graduate student learning outcomes. Your role is to plan carefully and work hard to be successful.

The following sections outline knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will help you be a successful online learner.

Learner Technology Access and Skills

- Be able to use the Internet, send and receive e-mail, send and receive attachments, save and copy files.
- Be familiar with your computer's operating system (Windows, Mac, or other) and with your Internet browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, or other).
- Use Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat to create documents for the course. Install free downloads of PowerPoint reader or Adobe Acrobat reader if necessary.
- Be able to perform Internet database searches at the Morningside College library Web site (<http://library.morningside.edu>).
- Handle problems such as losing a file, getting lost, having computer trouble, and becoming frustrated; know where to get help and ask appropriate questions; have a back-up plan for times when you experience computer problems because class activities will continue.

Learner Characteristics

- Be patient, persistent, prompt, and flexible.
- Be willing to work with others in online peer reviews and other collaborative work. Realize that although it is not always easy to work with other people on a project, you have to make

every effort to make group work effective and efficient. Don't keep people waiting if they are expecting to hear from you.

- Be honest and do your own work; respect copyrighted materials and use them within legal guidelines.
- Be self-motivated; develop academic and social support systems within your course such as participating in informal discussions and contacting other students by phone or e-mail.
- Write clearly and precisely since your reader must get your message from your words; there are no gestures or body language to give meaning. Write and edit assignments on your computer so you can check them over for both content and mechanics before you paste them into discussions or e-mails or before you submit them in the Drop Box. Save and backup all of your written work.

Online Course Expectations

- Be prepared to spend more time on the online course than a traditional classroom course as you will be expected to read, analyze, and synthesize materials on your own
- Understand that most courses are not self-paced; typically there are deadlines for assignments and activities and consequences for missing deadlines.
- While e-mail is great, please allow 1-2 days for responses. Don't expect the instructor to be sitting at his or her computer just waiting for messages to arrive.
- Follow the directions for e-mails and for submitting assignments.
- Participate with your peers in discussions. Your instructor will not respond to every thread you post in every discussion forum, just as your instructor does not respond to every contribution you make to an in-class group discussion.
- Use correct APA format for written assignments.

The Instructor's Role

- Provides a detailed course syllabus with clear course requirements and expectations
- Communicates clearly about instructor availability and contact information.
- Notifies students immediately of any changes in the course format or assignments or of times the instructor will be temporarily unavailable.
- Keeps the course Web site current.
- Reads e-mail and discussion board postings at least daily but does not necessarily post messages or send out mail daily.
- Responds to e-mails within 1-2 days.
- Evaluates assignments, posts grades promptly and provides appropriate feedback.
- Monitors threaded discussions and participates as appropriate
- Instructors may share your work with Morningside administration and other faculty if appropriate; however, they will not share your work with other students without your permission.

Additional Keys to Success

- Check the course homepage several times a week for announcements and read all course materials so you are familiar with the course outcomes, activities, and assignments.
- Review your e-mail SPAM location periodically to ensure that no class-related e-mails have been accidentally "spammed" by your Internet Service Provider.
- Submit assignments by the specified deadline and in the required format.
- Be prepared to work independently.
- Manage your time effectively so you don't fall behind in course activities.

- Actively participate in the course discussions.
- Practice “netiquette”: be polite and respectful in your postings (no “flaming” or posting/sending negative, hurtful comments to or about others); use good grammar and correct spelling; don’t write in all caps (it feels like shouting) or exotic fonts (they may not show up on everyone’s computer); use other students’ names in your posting if you are responding to another’s idea; sign your name.
- Ask questions if you don’t understand.
- Form a buddy system or support group and share e-mail addresses.
- Prioritize your tasks and responsibilities.
- Contact your instructor IMMEDIATELY when emergencies such as hospitalizations occur.
- Be aware of your own personal values and demonstrate respect for others, regardless of differing values and opinions.

Technology Assistance

- Use the technology help documents such as Using the Drop Box and Submitting to Discussion Forums found in your course Web site.
- Use the technology tutorials found on the Morningside College Web site at <http://www.morningside.edu/morningside/help/index.htm>. Note: Miller Hall is Morningside’s name for Blackboard.
- Contact Darby Young in the Graduate Office at 800-831-0806, ext. 5475, for questions about your online course.
- Note: The Safari browser that is standard on Macintosh computers has some compatibility issues with Blackboard. If you are using this browser, you should download the free Mozilla Firefox browser and use it for your online courses. It is available at: <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/>.