

Mercy College

Guidelines and Best Practices for the Use of Virtual Platforms in the Classroom for Faculty and Students

I. General Use of Virtual Platforms

This document is intended to provide faculty with guidance on how to manage and improve the student classroom experience while using virtual platforms, such as Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate. Should faculty or students have questions about privacy concerns relating to virtual classes, they can refer to the College's [COVID-19 Privacy Statement](#). If students have questions about receiving an accommodation relating to virtual classes for a disability, they should refer to the College's [Policy on Reasonable Accommodations](#) or contact the Office of ACCESSibility. For technical questions regarding the use of Zoom or Collaborate for your class, please refer to the [Mercy Online Guide for Using Zoom or Collaborate in Blackboard Courses](#) or contact the Mercy Helpdesk.

A. Setting Expectations with Students

It is important to have procedures in place and set expectations with your students at the outset of the class. One strategy is to place the Virtual Etiquette Guidelines from the Student Handbook (see B below) in the Blackboard course shell. Another strategy is to share the Virtual Etiquette Guidelines via screen sharing on Zoom at the start of your first class. If issues arise, you can share again at a subsequent class to remind all students of what is expected of them in the classroom.

In addition, faculty might want to consider collaborating with their students to create ground rules and expectations for the class to abide by together at the start of the term.

B. Virtual Etiquette Guidelines for Students and Faculty

1. **Students.** The Virtual Etiquette that is found in the Student Handbook include the following guidelines:
 - Be on time for class or a meeting, just as if you were attending in person.
 - Turn on your camera for the full class, which simulates an “in-class environment.” Your professor will explain why the camera needs to be on. If there are extenuating circumstances where you do not feel it is appropriate to keep the video on during one or more classes, please contact your professor, or your mentor or advisor regarding your concern 24 hours in advance. If you need of an accommodation relating to your video, please contact the Office of ACCESSibility as soon as possible. In addition, if you are having *wi-fi* bandwidth issues, you should let the professor know and should then turn off the video.
 - Display your first name or your first and last name. Do not

use unidentifiable names (such as iPhone, etc.), and, if using a nickname or preferred name, make sure the faculty member is aware that it is you.

- If you do not respond to questions posed by the professor, it may be assumed that you are not attending that portion of the class. Participation grades may be reduced at the professor's discretion. Students are responsible for any content missed during class.
- If you experience technical difficulties, let your professor know, then contact Mercy's IT Help Desk for assistance.
- Appropriate attire should be worn when virtually attending a class or meeting, as if you were attending class in person.
- During class, remain as quiet as possible when not speaking. Unless directed to unmute, mute your microphone when you are not speaking to reduce background noise. Avoid typing or making other noises when you are not on mute.
- Remain focused during the class: avoid watching videos, reading other emails or text messages on your computer, phone or tablet. Avoid walking, driving, or traveling while class is in session, as doing so could be distracting and even dangerous.
- To protect your privacy, consider setting a virtual background or blur your background.
- Do not record classes or meetings unless provided explicit instructions or permission from a faculty or staff member.
- Do not use any distracting, obscene, discriminatory, or offensive content as a real or virtual background, profile picture, in a virtual message or live video feed.
- Do not share offensive content in the chat area, which is meant to be used for class-related discussions only.
- Do not use inappropriate language that would be deemed vulgar, or that would constitute verbal abuse, or threat of violence, or physical harm against any person or property when communicating virtually.
- Do not use screen capture to capture the image of other students or the faculty member.
- Failure of students to abide by these guidelines (in particular the previous five bullets) could result in code of conduct infractions and lead to disciplinary sanctions.

2. **Faculty.** In addition to guidelines directed at students, faculty may want to consider the following guidelines for managing their classroom:

- Keep your camera turned on while you teach.
- Remind students to turn on their cameras and explain to them why it is necessary, including to simulate an “in-class environment.”
- Make sure students can hear you. Sit close enough to the microphone or use a headset, as necessary.
- Look at the camera in order to make eye contact when students are talking.
- Help maintain a focused learning environment. This may mean muting students’ microphones when they are not contributing (if they have not done so already themselves), disabling the chat feature for private messages other than for the group and limiting the use of the chat feature for class-related purposes only.
- Review these Guidelines for Virtual Etiquette for Students at the start of the semester with your class. Remind students privately as necessary.
- Be firm but flexible. You may require students to keep their cameras turned on, but if a student contacts you privately to explain why they are more comfortable with the camera off, try to use professional judgment and be accommodating. In addition, if they request an accommodation for disability or religious reasons, refer them to the Office of ACCESSibility.

C. Other Features for Faculty Use of Virtual Platforms

This section provides some general guidelines for the use of virtual platforms like Zoom and Blackboard Collaborate. More specific technical details relating to these features can be found at *Mercy Online Guide for Using Zoom or Collaborate in Blackboard Courses*. For faculty seeking strategies on utilizing virtual platforms in a way that helps maximize a positive learning environment, refer to [Mercy’s Teacher and Learning website](#) for online tutorials and upcoming workshops on this topic.

1. **Taking attendance.** If you are using Zoom, consider taking attendance via Zoom. The attendance records can be found in the Zoom web portal, and you can generate a Meeting Participants report for any given meeting in your account. Reports can be run 30 minutes after the meeting has ended. In doing so, it is important to reiterate to the student the need for them to use their actual name as their screen name.
2. **Waiting rooms.** This feature allows all participants to be sent to the waiting room and allows the host to control when a participant joins the meeting making it more secure.

3. **Breakout rooms.** This feature allows the Faculty member to move groups of students into different rooms to facilitate discussions and collaboration on projects/assignments.
4. **Screen sharing.** Zoom and other virtual platforms allow meeting participants to share their screen from a desktop, tablet and mobile devices. Faculty can allow other participants including students to share screens when needed, but that feature should be used with caution. For the security of meetings, the default setting in Mercy Zoom will only allow hosts to share their screen. Faculty do have the ability to grant access during a meeting.
5. **Handling disruptive situations on Zoom.** Asking students to be mindful not to disrupt the learning environment can help eliminate any distractions for your teaching and instruction, though unfortunately it does not remedy all of the issues. Some tactics for handling disruptions might include:
 - Reminding students who are disruptive that they are still subject to the Student Code of Conduct even though you are in a digital environment.
 - Removing disruptive participants from a Zoom session may be necessary in certain situations.
 - Recording your Zoom sessions can help identify students of concern (see Recording Guidelines in Section II below).
 - Escalate offensive behavior to your Academic Unit Head and/or Dean just as you would in a face-to-face class. This also includes reporting sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination to the College's Title IX Coordinator/Equity Compliance Specialist.
 - Avoiding Zoom crashers. A practice referred to as "Zoombombing" occurs when an individual gains unauthorized access to a Zoom session and uses features within the application to display obscene pictures, exhibit inappropriate behavior or otherwise interrupt the class. Fortunately, you can mitigate this practice by enabling the Waiting Room feature so that the host can verify those entering the class. To maximize security, Mercy Zoom requires that all meetings have passwords configured. Incidents of Zoombombing should be reported to IT at the Help Desk as soon as practicable.
6. **Ending a Zoom session.** When ending a Zoom session, faculty should note the following:
 - Save the chat before ending the meeting or enable auto-save chat in the session settings.
 - Ending a meeting means that you (the host) can instantly close the session for all participants.
 - When ending the meeting, you should select "End Meeting for All" or the meeting will continue to run even after you leave.

II. Recording Zoom Sessions

The decision whether or not to record a class is up to individual faculty members. In many cases, there may be sound pedagogical reasons to do so. For instance, recording classes will enable students who cannot attend the live class due to time zone constraints to view the class at a later time.

A. Guidelines for Recording

1. **Notice.** While there is no legal obligation under New York law to obtain your students' consent before recording, it is required by other states, such as Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. As such, faculty must inform students in advance of recording. While Zoom provides a notification automatically when recordings are started, paused, and stopped, it is advisable that prior to the semester you consider sending your students an email stating that you will be recording the class and encourage any student with reservations to contact you. If you are recording an individual course session but not the entire semester's classes, send a written email prior to the class. Remind students at the start of the class that you will be recording the session. If any student writes to let you know that he or she does not wish to be recorded, allow the student to participate with their camera off and sound muted.
2. **Rationale.** Faculty should inform students of the rationale for recording the class. Recordings for purposes other than instruction are not permitted.
3. **Opting out.** In the written notification, faculty should give students the ability to opt out of the recordings by turning off their cameras by muting their audio, not enabling video, and not typing into the Chat window. In these cases, students should still be considered in attendance and not penalized in any way.
4. **Who is allowed to record?** The faculty member and course staff are the only ones authorized to initiate a recording of a class. Further, faculty should make it clear to all students that they are not authorized to record a class, as per the Mercy Student Handbook.
5. **Chat.** The chat feature can be a recorded part of the class per Zoom capabilities.
6. **Personal exchanges.** The faculty member should discontinue the recording if students are interacting personally with each other or the instructor before or after class.
7. **Distribution of recordings.** Faculty may only make recordings available to students in the class, and only through a password protected link on Blackboard. Faculty must make clear that students are not permitted to share the recording with anyone outside of the class pursuant to privacy laws, including the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
8. **Deleting recordings.** Faculty should manually delete all recordings from the course site after final grades are submitted.