

VDS Syllabi Requirements

In order to help us meet SACS and ATS requirements, syllabi should include the following elements, which focus on what the course intends to accomplish, what the student will be able to do as a result of taking the course, how student learning will be assessed, and what expectations the university has in terms of student academic behavior. These elements, of course, only form part of what appears on a syllabus.

1. **Purposes of the course** -- Why the course exists, what it intends to accomplish, what it will not do, how it fits into the larger purposes of the relevant degree programs (see example below)
2. **Outcomes of the course and the way these outcomes will be assessed** (see example below)
3. **Correlation of outcomes of the course to degree learning goals, *including concentration learning goals as relevant*** (see example below)
4. **Grading policy for the course** -- List of requirements, accompanied by valuations (percentages, points) for each; some indication of what constitutes “successful” work; as relevant, clear indication of varied requirements for undergraduate, master, and doctoral students.

All courses taken by ThM students must have requirements exceeding the MDiv level (e.g. additional readings, assignments, and/or length of assignments). Syllabi may specify those additional expectations (increased word count on written assignments, e.g.) **or** may state that ThM students are to meet with the instructor to work that out individually.

5. **Statement of the honor code** -- suggested language: “The Vanderbilt Honor Code applies to all work in this course. For information about the Honor System, please see <https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-sub/wp-content/uploads/sites/278/2023/02/19191957/VDS-honor-constitution.pdf>.
6. You should also provide any additional details about permissible and impermissible behaviors for your particular course, e.g. rough drafts must include proper citations, students are encouraged to discuss the answers to exam questions with other students, TAs, and faculty.
7. **Mandatory Reporter statement** – suggested language: All faculty, staff and teaching assistants must report allegations of sexual misconduct and intimate partner violence to the Title IX Office at: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/title-ix/contact.php>. Confidential support is available through Project Safe. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/projectsafe>.
8. **Disability Accommodation statement** – suggested language: “All accommodations for students with documented physical or learning disabilities must be arranged by the student through Student Access Services at 615-322-4705.”
9. **On-Line Learning** – Include in your syllabus the required statement regarding netiquette (see below)

Example of

1. Purposes of the Course & 2. Outcomes and Assessment:

“This class begins with analysis of some contexts in which moral reasoning happens today – analysis that itself begins the work of moral reasoning. The class then introduces a series of concepts that have played significant roles in and beyond Western Christian traditions, inviting students into critical conversation around those concepts. The class concludes by opening into opportunities to deepen and revise understandings of these terms in the process of using them to think through questions around two pressing topics: sex and the environment.

The class aims to give students an opportunity to become more adept in the work of moral reasoning. It invites students to take up perspectives both within and outside of Western Christian traditions. In particular, the class is designed to cultivate these qualities:

- A reflexive sensibility that enables students to understand their commitments more clearly, locate their commitments in social and historical contexts with more precision, and revise their commitments in conversation with others who have different commitments (assignments a, b, and d are tailored especially to this goal)
Degree Learning Goals: MDIV 1, 2, 3, 6; MTS 1, 2, 3, 4; ThM 1, 2
- Knowledge of a historically rooted vocabulary for moral reasoning (the mid-term and final are tailored especially to this goal)
Degree Learning Goals: MDIV 1, 3; MTS 1, 3; ThM 1; REJ Concentration Goal 1
- The ability to use and refine this vocabulary in reasoning about complex situations (assignment c is especially tailored to this goal);
Degree Learning Goals: MDIV 1, 3, 4, 5, 6; MTS 1, 3, 4, 5; ThM 1, 2; REJ Concentration Goal 2, 3
- A sense of the limits of ethics as a discourse (the mid-term and final are especially tailored to this goal)”
Degree Learning Goals: MDIV 1, 3, 6; MTS 1, 3, 4, 5; ThM 1

FOR YOUR REFERENCE

MDiv Degree Learning Goals

Students are expected to demonstrate:

1. the ability to think critically, constructively, and intersectionally about the relationship between social context, history, and the Christian faith.
2. attentiveness to and insights about their personal and spiritual formation and sense of vocation.
3. critical, constructive, and interdisciplinary competence in the academic study of religion, as represented in the M. Div. curriculum.
4. competence in the ministerial arts appropriate to their vocational goals.
5. competence in putting theory and practice in conversation with each other.
6. the ability to connect these competencies to pressing contemporary concerns, especially those articulated in the School’s Commitments.

MTS Degree Learning Goals

Students are expected to demonstrate:

1. the ability to think critically, constructively, and intersectionally about the relationship between social context, history, and religion.
2. thoughtful articulation of the connection between their course of study, their individual formation, and their vocational goals.
3. critical and constructive competence in the academic study of religion, as represented in the MTS curriculum.
4. the ability to connect these competencies to pressing contemporary concerns, especially those articulated in the School's Commitments.
5. in the MTS Concentration Plan of Study, competency in
 - a. putting theory and practice in conversation with each another and
 - b. in thinking across disciplines, as represented in the MTS curriculum.

ThM Degree Learning Goals

[N.B. Only 1 and 2 are relevant to syllabi]

Students are expected to:

1. Achieve advanced competency and deepened knowledge in an area of theological specialization by demonstrating advanced knowledge of the field, addressing its historical and contemporary, local and global contexts, and integrating VDS's Commitments into that understanding.
2. Evidence the capacity to undertake critical inquiries, engage in constructive actions, and hold effective conversations in the student's future ministerial and/or academic endeavors.
3. Produce a substantive research project, the ThM thesis, that effectively defines its question, deploys an appropriate methodology, analyzes the data/material critically and carefully, and provides a constructive argument appropriate to the theological area.

POLICY STATEMENTS

Vanderbilt Divinity School Recording Policy (for in-person teaching)

While it cannot replace actual participation in class discussion, access to a recording of a synchronous class session may help a student who has to miss class. Professors may, at their discretion and with the permission of the students in the class that day, choose to record synchronous class sessions for this reason. A student who misses a class may then request that the instructor make the recording available to them via Brightspace. Attendance policies laid out in the syllabus will still apply. If a student will be absent for an extended period due to illness, they should contact Student Access Services, which can arrange for a notetaker if appropriate.

To preserve intellectual property rights and students' privacy under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), students are not allowed to share those recordings or to make their own recordings. Violations will be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for review and possible referral to the Honor Council. Students must ensure that any downloaded recordings are deleted from their devices and/or cloud storage before the end of the semester.

Netiquette for On-line Discussion Boards

(Adapted from the University of Wisconsin Online Colleges website.)

A key distinguishing feature of online engagement is that communication occurs primarily via the written word. Because of this, the body language, voice tone, and instantaneous listener feedback of the traditional classroom are all absent. Therefore, when posting in an online discussion, keep in mind the following points:

Tone Down Your Language: Given the absence of face-to-face clues, written text can easily be misinterpreted. Avoid the use of strong or offensive language and the excessive use of exclamation points. If you feel particularly strongly about a point, it may be best to write it first as a draft and then to review it, before posting it, in order to remove any strong language.

Respect: A Web-based classroom is still a classroom, and comments that would be inappropriate in a regular classroom are also inappropriate here as well. Treat your instructor and your fellow students with respect.

Keep A Straight Face: In general, use humor sparingly (and only when very obvious—perhaps with an emoticon) and avoid sarcasm altogether. These frequently depend either on facial or tone of voice cues absent in text communication or on familiarity with the reader.

Be Forgiving: If someone states something that you find offensive, mention this directly to the instructor via your Vanderbilt email account. Remember that what you find offensive may quite possibly have been unintended and can best be cleared up by the instructor.

Commit to the Community: As a member the of Vanderbilt Divinity School learning community, you are obliged to work out things with your peers and professors. Members of a civil

community do not share private information on social media. If you encounter a problem that cannot be worked out among participants including faculty, you should take up your issue with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

The Recorder Is On: Think carefully about the content of your message before contributing it. Once sent to the group, there is no taking it back. Check both your content and your grammar and spelling before you hit submit.

Read First, Write Later: Don't add your comments to a discussion before reading the comments of other students unless the assignment specifically asks you to. Doing so is tantamount to ignoring your fellow students and is rude. Comments related to the content of previous messages should be posted under them to keep related topics organized, and you should specify the person and the particular point you are following up on.

Stick to The Point: Don't waste others' time by going off on irrelevant tangents, writing personal messages, or simply making statements of liking or agreeing with what has been said. If you wish to discuss a subject other than the one in the particular thread to which you are responding, start a new discussion post altogether.

Netspeak: Although electronic communication is still young, many conventions have already been established. DO NOT TYPE IN ALL CAPS. This is regarded as shouting and is out of place in a classroom. Acronyms and emoticons (arrangements of symbols to express emotions) are popular, but excessive use of them can make your message difficult to read.

FOR ON-LINE COURSES

Netiquette for the Synchronous Virtual Classroom

The virtual classroom allows for real-time interaction, but it is not the same as in-person classes. Navigating it well requires thought and care.

Be Present: Show up on time, dressed comfortably for appearing in public.

Be Patient: With yourself, with glitchy technology, with your peers and your instructor.

Respect: Treat your instructor and your fellow students with respect. Pay attention, listen closely, speak thoughtfully, clearly. Leave time and space for others to engage, too. A virtual classroom is still a classroom, and comments that would be inappropriate in a regular classroom are also inappropriate in a virtual setting.

The Recorder Is On (in some cases, literally!): Remember that you are visible to everyone all the time. Even side chats between you and another student will be visible to your professor.

While it cannot replace actual participation in class discussion, access to a recording of a synchronous class session may help a student who has to miss class. Unless it conflicts with course pedagogy, the instructor will record all synchronous class sessions. A student who

misses a class may then request that the instructor make the recording available to them via Brightspace. Attendance policies laid out in the syllabus will still apply.

To preserve intellectual property rights and students' privacy under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), students are not allowed to share those recordings or to make their own recordings. Violations will be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for review and possible referral to the Honor Council. Students must ensure that any downloaded recordings are deleted from their devices and/or cloud storage before the end of the semester.

Occasionally, a student may need to opt out of being recorded. the student will need to seek the instructor's permission and to determine an alternative way to participate. The student will be responsible for turning off their video and/or audio feeds to prevent being recorded.

Commit to the Community: As a member the of Vanderbilt Divinity School learning community, you are obliged to work out things with your peers and professors. Members of a civil community do not share private information on social media. If you encounter a problem that cannot be worked out among participants including faculty, you should take up your issue with the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.
