



Online Instruction Handbook
for the
Undergraduate College Programs

2026

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Introduction

The Saint Mary's University of Minnesota Online Instruction Handbook is designed as a resource for faculty teaching courses using distance education technologies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota (SMUMN). At its core, Lasallian education emphasizes a student-centered approach to education marked by an inclusive community that ensures no student is left out as they are provided a quality education that prepares them for ethical lives of service and leadership. These [Core Principles](#) of the Lasallian educator should also guide how we teach students in online environments. We build community and show students our care for them through the hospitality of our class structures and the ways that we invite them into the life of education and research.

Distance Education Definition (HLC definition based on federal definition)

Education that uses one or more of the technologies below to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor or instructors and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor or instructors, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies that may be used to offer distance education include:

1. The internet;
2. One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communications devices;
3. Audio conference; or
4. Other media used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in items 1–3 above.

For purposes of this definition, an instructor is an individual responsible for delivering course content and who meets the qualifications for instruction established by HLC.

Regular and Substantive Interaction Definition (HLC definition, based on federal definition)

Institutions are expected to ensure regular and substantive interaction between students and instructors in their distance education and competency-based education offerings. An institution ensures regular interaction between a student and an instructor or instructors by, prior to the student's completion of a course or competency:

1. Providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course or competency; and
2. Monitoring the student's academic engagement and success and ensuring that an instructor is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive

interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

Substantive interaction is engaging students in teaching, learning and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and also includes at least two of the following:

1. Providing direct instruction;
2. Assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
3. Providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course or competency;
4. Facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course or competency; or
5. Other instructional activities approved by HLC or the program's accrediting agency.

Related Definitions (HLC)

distance education course (new definition as of July 1, 2026)

A course in which instruction and interaction take place exclusively as described in the definition of distance education, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.

distance education program

A certificate or degree program in which 50% or more of the courses may be taken as distance education courses.

Saint Mary's Definitions of Its Delivery Modalities

In-Person: 100% of the instruction takes place when the instructor and students are physically present in the same location, such as a classroom. Both the instructor and students meet on a regular, scheduled basis, allowing for direct, in-person interaction.

Online: 100% of the instruction and interaction is delivered using distance education technologies. Most often, all instruction and interaction within an online program is asynchronous, depending on the program's design, but may include required synchronous meetings.

Hybrid: Instruction and interaction is delivered using a combination of distance education technologies and in-person classroom meetings, when the instructor and students are in the same location. This modality is sometimes referred to internally at Saint Mary's as "blended".

Saint Mary's Office Hours Requirement for Asynchronous Courses

Instructors teaching asynchronous online courses must have a minimum of one hour of online office hours scheduled weekly. Online office hours represent scheduled times when an instructor is online via video technology (Zoom, Google Meet) to answer student questions related to the course. The days and times of weekly online office hours must be listed in the syllabus and Canvas so that students are aware of the schedule at the start of the course.

Instructors teaching online courses with a combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions are also highly encouraged to schedule online office hours and be online for that hour each week.

Expectations for New-to-Online Teaching Faculty

- New-to-online teaching faculty must meet with their department chair to review teaching expectations and course specifics. Faculty are encouraged to review Canvas functions and features by viewing the [Canvas Essentials webinar](#). Faculty are asked to set up a Qualtrics account ([directions](#)) for course evaluation

Course Preparation Expectations

- Submit your syllabus, using the most current [syllabus template](#), to your department chair within the first two weeks of the semester.
- Provide current contact information and scheduled office hours on your syllabus
- Reference the [Course Readiness Checklist](#).
- Post your course syllabus in Canvas course site.
- Make the course available to students by publishing (including hyperlink) before the first day of the semester.

Course Facilitation Expectations

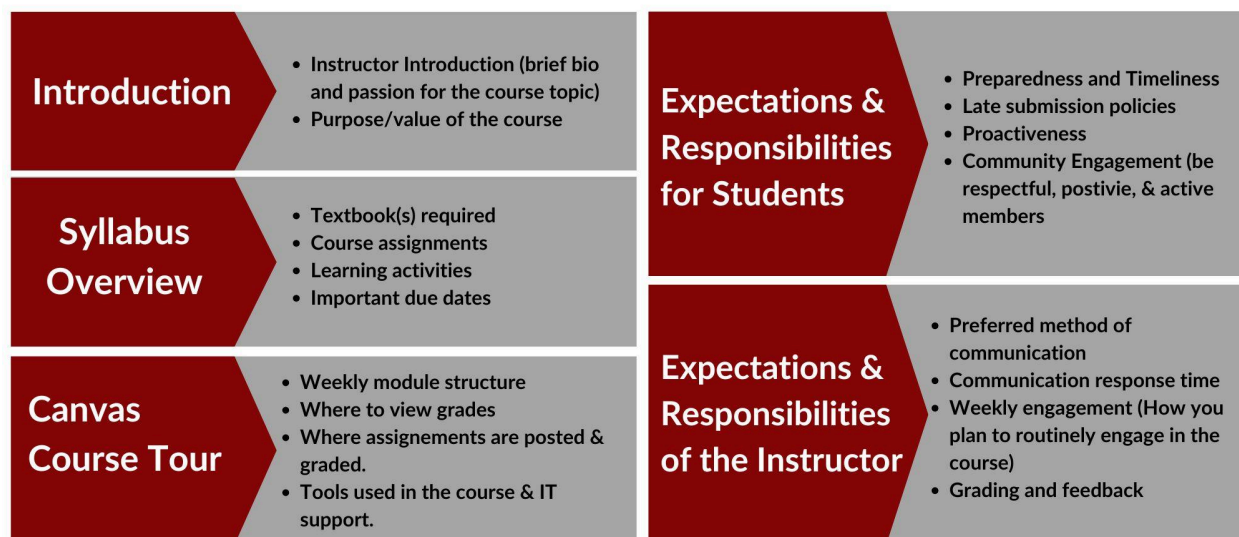
- Follow the course start and end dates established by the registrar.
- Monitor student attendance throughout the course. Attendance can be determined by participation in an academic activity including:
 - Participating in an online discussion
 - Attending a synchronous virtual class meeting
 - Submitting/completing an online activity or assignment
 - Engaging in an exam/quiz, interactive tutorial, or computer-assisted instruction
 - Initiating contact with a faculty member with questions regarding the academic subject studied in the course
 - Hold one hour synchronous office hour weekly.
- Maximize student retention by closely monitoring activity and reaching out to students who show a lack of interaction.

- If a student has not been participating, submit an Early Alert notice via The Nest's Retention Page. See your department chair for more information.
- Inform students in advance of grading timelines for all assignments.
- At the beginning of the course, provide a *course overview* to orient students to the course design and expectations via a recorded video or synchronous session.
- Foster a sense of *instructor presence* through weekly communication and interaction:
- Post a welcome message by the first day of the semester.
 - Communicate with the class at least once a week via announcements in Canvas.
 - Consider scheduling virtual office hours
 - Respond to student inquiries within 24 hours.
 - Notify your department chair and students in advance if you will be momentarily absent.
 - Provide timely, personalized, meaningful feedback on student work using clear and concise language.
- Offer feedback on formative weekly learning activities (e.g. online discussions or application activities) within 3 to 5 days.
- Post final course grades online and within The Nest grade submission system according to the Registrar's semester final grade due date.
- Remind students to complete the online course evaluation during the evaluation period for the semester.

Step-by-Step Guidelines for Facilitating Effective Online Learning

First-Day Tasks

1. **Send a Welcome Announcement**
Introduce yourself and provide a warm welcome to students. Here is [how to post an announcement](#).
2. **Share a Course Overview**
Provide students with a clear course overview. This can be written or recorded and delivered synchronously or asynchronously. Below are elements to include:



Weekly Instructor Engagement

- 1. Create a Consistent Pattern of Engagement (see Example)**
 - Routinely monitor and prompt student participation.
 - Respond to group activities such as discussions.
 - Respond to individual activities such as exercises and application tasks.
- 2. Hold Synchronous Office Hour Weekly**
Offer one hour of synchronous office hour engagement per week. Recommend a consistent day and time for office hour each week.
- 3. Provide Regular Feedback**
Post meaningful and substantive feedback and points earned in a prompt manner.
- 4. Weekly Wrap-Ups**
Summarize the week's activities, highlight key takeaways, and set the stage for the upcoming week.
- 5. Track What Works**
Keep notes on effective practices and areas for improvement to refine your course for future terms.

End of Course Closing and Reflection

- 1. Send a Closing Email**
A thoughtful closing message that brings meaningful closure to the class. It can:
 - Summarize central ideas and review content.
 - Celebrate the students' accomplishments.
 - Motivate students to continue learning and applying the course concepts.
- 2. Reflect on Your Course**
Consider these key questions:
 - What worked well?

- What can be improved in terms of content, materials, and Canvas functions?

Resources

AI Commons

- [AI Commons Website](#)

CELT Resources and Support

- [Saint Mary's Canvas Support Resources](#) (*opens in Canvas*)
- [Course Readiness Checklist](#)
- [CELT Recorded Trainings](#)
- [Regular and Substantive Interaction](#)

Canvas

- [Canvas Essentials Training Video](#)
 - [How to modify a page in Canvas](#)
 - [How to create an announcement](#)
 - [How to create an assignment in Canvas](#)
 - [Uploading a document \(syllabus or any others\) using the rich-text toolbar](#)
 - [Using SpeedGrader to score an assignment and give feedback](#)
 - [Using SpeedGrader to annotate a submitted assignment](#)

Panopto and Zoom

- [A video walkthrough of Zoom and Panopto from SMU Helpdesk](#)
- [Step-by-step instructions on using Zoom integration with Panopto](#)

Library Resources and Support

- [Library website](#)

Writing Center Resources and Support

- [Writing Centers website](#)