



## **EC Online Course Facilitation Guidelines**

**Revised April 25, 2018**

Welcome to Ecclesia College Online! This document will go over the basics for facilitating a course in EC's Canvas learning platform for online students.

If you have not done so already, please familiarize yourself with the [EC Online](#) section of the main website.

[Canvas](#) is very intuitive, so clicking around in your course(s) will show you most of what you need to know about the platform. But the [Canvas Instructor Guide](#) can take you deeper into its functions.

**Academic Policies** for students are listed in each syllabus, as well as the [EC Online Academic Policies](#) page on the website. While you should be familiar with all of the policies, the things to pay special attention to are listed below with additional comments not found in the syllabi or web pages:

- **Late Work Policy**: Weekly assignments are due by 11:59PM (Central Time) each Sunday night. Discussion Forums and automated tests/quizzes close at that time and will not reopen. Assignments which require/allow upload of a document may be submitted late (up until 11:59PM on the Wednesday following the due date) for a deduction in points of 10% per day. Student may NOT email assignments. They must all be submitted via the course platform.
- **Discussion Forum Requirements**: Students must post their weekly initial substantive post by 11:59PM (Central Time) every Tuesday. Facilitators should attempt to post first in each forum, on Monday. Each week, they must post a total of three substantive comments. Comments should be posted on three different days of the week; in addition, four additional topics on four different days should be posted in the forum.
- **Graded Assignments**: As the facilitator for the course, you must post grades for each assignment within 6 days of the due date (i.e. by the following Friday).
- **Academic Honesty and Integrity**: While we have found plagiarizing to be rare with our online students, it has happened. If you suspect a student of copying someone else's work, this free [Plagiarism Checker](#) can be of use.

Alternatively, you can copy and paste the section of the writing you think might be plagiarized in Google to see what matches might come up.

- **Incompletes:** As this policy states, extensions are rarely granted. Students must have a good reason for missing class or not turning in assignments. A “Petition for an “Incomplete Grade” must be submitted via email no later than the first day of the sixth week of the eight-week course and must contain supporting documents in the form of attachments. You might have a student contact you about receiving an extension on a class or an assignment. If you do, please refer them to the Distance Education Academic Committee. They can submit their request, along with proper documentation, to the Committee via [online@ecollege.edu](mailto:online@ecollege.edu). We will certainly seek your opinion on their request, but you can rest easily knowing the final decision is up to the Committee. We understand how much extra work extensions can add to an instructor’s workload, so we only grant extensions in cases that actually warrant them. Often, students will seek extensions because they have been irresponsible. We do not make the course facilitator responsible to do added work because a student has irresponsibly not met course requirements and expectations in the timeframe assigned.

### **Students Working Ahead in a Class**

Best practices for online education require students to go through a course together at the same weekly pace. On occasion, students will go away from home (overseas, mission trips, etc.) so that it is difficult for them to complete assignments during the week they open in Canvas (this is most common with students participating in a special EC Online Cohort).

In these cases, a student can ask for the course facilitator to send them the assignment instructions and discussion topics (quiz/exam questions excluded) via email ahead of their travel dates. Students must still submit all assignments in Canvas during the week they are due. Email submission of assignments/posts is not allowed.

If students fail to submit assignments on time in Canvas, hopefully the extra credit assignment (at the end of most courses) will help them make up for the loss in points.

As the course facilitator, please do not adjust due dates on any assignment in your class(es). Each course is copied over to new start dates, and adjustment of dates and times will discompose assignments for future classes.

### **Discussion Posting/Interaction**

The Discussion Forum Requirements in the syllabi clearly define what is expected of each student for this assessment. Course Instructors/Facilitators will need to use this exercise for most of the interaction they have with online students. (Grading feedback is also an important form of interaction.) As indicated above, please post a substantive response to the initial topic on Monday. Begin additional comments and topics on Tuesday or Wednesday. Note the following participation expectations for online facilitators:

- **Initial Post:** Post your own substantive response to the initial topic on Monday. (Review the example on the next page.) Use the initial post to explain the topic in more detail, explain how the topic relates to the weekly lesson, suggest methods for addressing the topic, and to remind students of discussion requirements and due dates.
- **Additional Topics:** Each weekday, post a new topic by clicking on “Reply” at the top of the discussion page. Label the new question clearly such as Topic 2. Post additional topics throughout the week, starting with “Topic 2” on Tuesday, “Topic 3” on Wednesday, “Topic 4” on Thursday, and “Topic 5” on Friday. If you plan to work on Saturday, feel free to post Topic 5 on that day (and skip the posting of a new topic on the week day of your choice).
- **Substantive Responses:** Post one substantive response to the initial topic on Monday and continue to interact with students throughout the week. A minimum of five substantive comments are required with posts on three days of the week in addition to the four new topics in each discussion activity.
- Sometimes students will stray off topic, and you will need to redirect the discussion and provide focus for the conversation. You will also find that students will benefit from your perspective and from your experience and expertise in the area of discussion.
- To summarize:
- Post a substantive comment on Monday to the initial topic.
- Post a total of four additional topics in the forum, day-by-day, on four days and by Saturday.
- Encourage questions from students and address topics raised by them as necessary.

### **Substantive Responses: Suggestions**

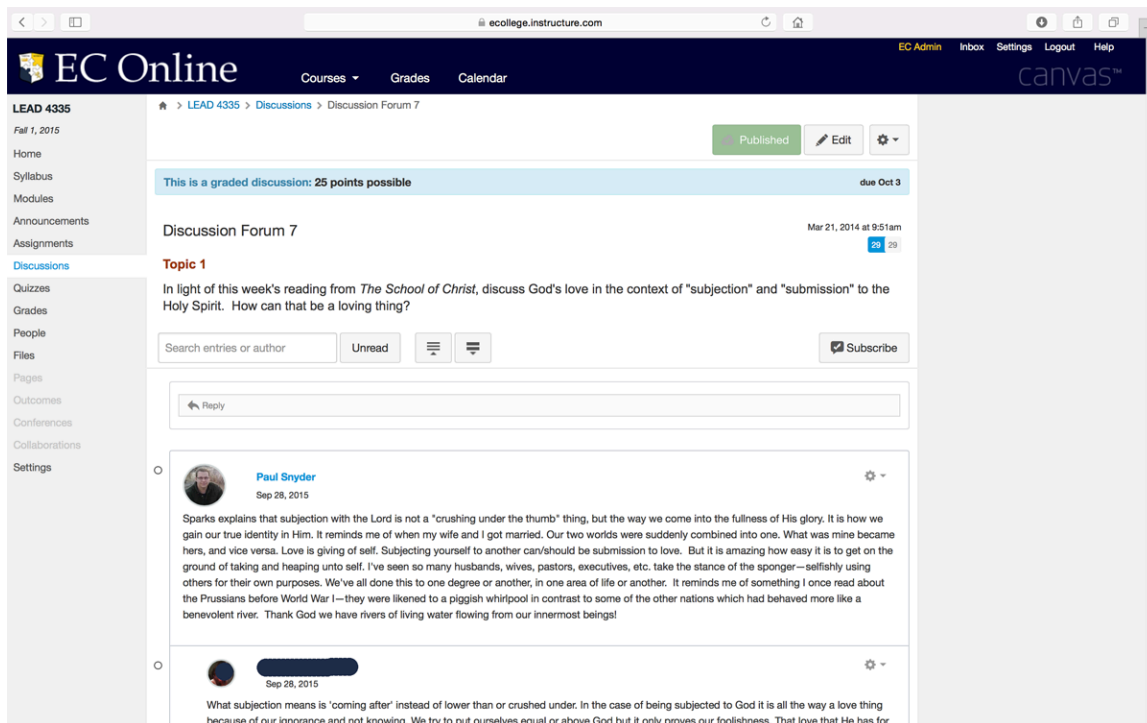
Consider the following methods for creating substantive facilitator responses to students’ posts:

- A) Create a clear connection to a statement (or statements) within the student post.
- B) Extend the meaning of the initial post by offering related information from assigned reading.

- C) Discuss a personal experience to extend the student's point.
- D) Reference information from a secondary source to support and extend the student's point.
- E) Pose a question to students about the immediate topic or a related topic.

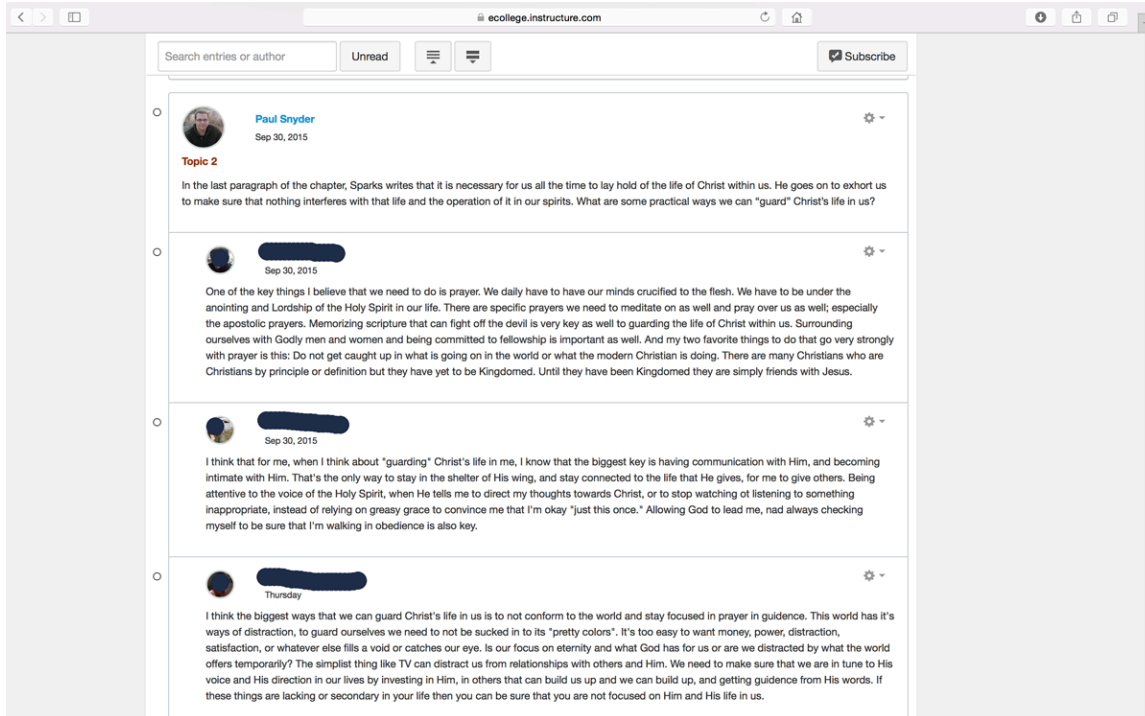
In general, note the student's point, relate it to new information, and extend it with related questions and observations. End the post with a question or ideas that will prompt continued responses from students.

The images below from the *Mentoring Foundations* course show an example of how instructor posts (both response-wise and topic-wise) should look throughout the week in a normal discussion.



The image above shows the Instructor's response at the beginning of the week to the initial topic in Canvas.

The image below shows "Topic 2" posted on Wednesday (following the Tuesday initial post due date) in the thread by the Instructor.



## Instructor Responsiveness

As an EC Online Course Facilitator, it will be very important to respond to student emails in a timely manner. Our institutional policy requires staff and faculty to respond to emails, texts and phone calls within 24 hours (Monday – Friday). Obviously, it is ideal to respond much sooner than that.

One of the main reasons for our excellent growth rate and national ranking is student satisfaction. Responding quickly and politely to students creates a positive and professional culture, which they tell their friends about. Word of mouth marketing is our best form of advertisement, but it can also become the worst if good communication standards are not upheld.

## Course Information Pages

From the homepage of the course in Canvas, you'll need to click on the "Course Information Pages" link and personalize the "Course Introduction" page to match you and your course. You will also need to do this under the "Welcome" link in the "Online Classroom" for "Week One." If you are substituting for another instructor, please do not personalize anything in the course. Just let the students know who you are and what you'll be doing in the first discussion.

## Weekly Announcements

Canvas has the ability to reset all assignments and announcements for each new start date. This is a timesaving feature, because it means that instructors can set up announcements once at the beginning of a new course and not have to touch them again until major changes are made to the course. All announcements are set to display automatically each week at the proper date and time. This feature is called “Delayed Posting” in Canvas, and we require all instructors to utilize it.

Included in your weekly announcements should be a “Welcome to Week X” post, as well as a “Summary of Week X” post. These posts should be tailored to weekly assignments/material, but should remain as generic as possible regarding dates and times. Remember, this announcement will be automatically reposted by Canvas to many students across many offering periods. It should lend itself to that. Please do not post additional announcements in the course that are not meant for future students and offering periods. A good example of what to post is the “Welcome to Week 2” announcement below for the *Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* course by Peter Green.

Hello Class,

Welcome to Week 2: Ecumenism in World Christianity. Ecumenism refers to the desire for unity among Christians, particularly manifested in institutions and joint activities. Ecumenism has been associated with liberal forms of Christianity (especially, for instance, the World Council of Churches). However, that is changing, and the growth of the church globally is encouraging a broader range of Christians to consider ecumenism. In this week we will be looking at how ecumenism is affected by and plays itself out in global Christianity. You should engage with the material critically but charitably.

Peter

The “Summary of Week X” announcement should also be specific as to what was covered, but generic as to dates, times, etc. Below you can see another example from *Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

Class,

This week we considered ecumenism, particularly as it relates to global Christianity. Ecumenism, or Christian unity, is an important topic. Certainly, God desires for us to be united and for that unity to be visible to the world (John 17). However, there are real problems with attempts at unity too. With whom should we seek unity? Does unity compromise the purity of our doctrine? Is unity if it only comes as “lowest common denominator” Christianity really helpful or healthy? These difficulties do not negate the need for unity, but they do require that we think hard about ecumenism

and how to do it properly. Consider thinking about how you, in your own life and ministry, and manifest the unity that Jesus prayed we would have. All weekly assignments are due before midnight (Central Time) each Sunday evening. Please let me know if you have questions about them.

Peter

Importantly, the final announcement in the course (“Summary of Week 8”) should have a link included to the [Online Course Evaluation Form](#). (It is also a good idea to post this in the final discussion of the class.) You can insert the link in the final announcement with the following statements:

Final grades will be posted by next Friday. Please don't hesitate to email me if you have any questions or feedback about the course. Also, please take a few minutes to fill out this anonymous [Online Course Evaluation Form](#).

### **Final Grades**

Please submit final grades for the course via the [EC Online Grade Submission Form](#). Final grades must be submitted by the Friday following the end date of the course.

### **Organizational Chart**

The EC Distance Education Division is a major branch of Ecclesia College. Beneath the President’s office are two main branches: Traditional Campus and Distance Education. Paul Snyder is the Director of Distance Education, which includes EC Online and off-campus teaching sites. Dr. Larry McCullough is the Academic Dean for the Distance Ed Division. Dallas Freeman is the Distance Ed Student Services Supervisor. If you have any questions please direct them to Paul Snyder ([paul@ecollege.edu](mailto:paul@ecollege.edu)) and he will direct them to the right people if needed, or answer them personally if he can. Thank you!