MSVU Student Guidelines for Conduct in a Virtual Environment

As members of our community, students, staff, and faculty share important values. The Mount's mission, namely its commitment to the advancement of women and social justice, as well as its promotion of EDIA – equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility – within our community, including diversity of race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, ability, culture, religion, and background (e.g., professional, academic, and economic), extend from on campus to our virtual environments.

COVID-19 has resulted in much of the engagement among the Mount's community members being held virtually rather than in person in 2020 and continuing into 2021. We have all had to adjust to virtual methods of interacting with one another, recognizing that we are all struggling with our pandemic circumstances, albeit in some different ways, and that we all have varying styles of communication, which can make navigating the virtual world more complicated. In light of the move to primarily online interaction, the following guidelines have been established to facilitate positive interactions in a virtual environment during the pandemic and beyond. Faculty and staff strive for these kinds of positive interactions, and we encourage students to aim for these with us and with each other too.

The following guidelines are intended to promote collegial conduct between students and faculty, staff, and peers in a virtual environment, including online courses and email communication, though many of these guidelines are also applicable to in-person environments:

- Use people's preferred names or nicknames and pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them), and if you are comfortable, state your own as well.
- Avoid sharing personal information pertaining to others and be cautious about sharing personal information about yourself.
- To help ensure others understand your oral and written communication, make an effort to use language correctly, and try to avoid short forms, all caps (which may be perceived as yelling), and informal abbreviations (e.g., IDK = I don't know).
  - For emails, clearly identify yourself to the other person and explain the question or matter you wish to discuss.
- Tone is difficult to communicate in writing. Be careful about responding with humorous or ironic statements, as they may be misinterpreted. While common emoticons, such as a smiley face or sad face, can help convey the tone of your statement, try to avoid using ones that are open to interpretation or may cause confusion.
- We all have different styles of communicating, which can become more accentuated in the virtual environment when we are physically isolated from one another. Thus, misunderstandings, uncomfortable situations, or conflicts may potentially arise.
  - If you feel comfortable, some strategies to mitigate or resolve these problems are to assume a positive intent on behalf of the other person in a given context and to demonstrate a willingness to resolve problems by first trying to discuss the issue with the other person, whether a peer, a staff member, or faculty, before escalating matters. You can also suggest bringing a support person to this discussion.

- o If doing so does not address your concerns or you do not feel safe in this situation, speak to a peer, instructor, department chair, dean, or staff member with whom you feel comfortable.

Online Learning

While learning in an online environment, it is important that we treat each other as we would in face-to-face classes. In addition to the general guidelines listed above, the following are intended to promote collegial interactions in an online learning environment, including emails to the instructor, comments in class – by mic or chat – forum posts, and presentations:

- When communicating with your instructor, use their proper title, such as Dr. or Professor, along with their last name, unless they have invited you to use their first name instead.
- If you are having problems with some aspect of the course (e.g., format, sessions, assignments) or the instruction, first strive to contact your instructor, who is most knowledgeable about these matters, to get clarification or try to resolve the problems. You may also request that you have a support person with you if that would make you feel more comfortable during such a discussion.
  - o If after attempting to discuss the matter with the instructor and it is still not resolved to your satisfaction, you may consider contacting the relevant department chair as a next step.
- The opportunity to present and debate ideas is an important part of your MSVU education. Debates and discussions are more productive, and participants are more receptive when comments are constructive and collegial. Disagreement is an expected part of academic discussions but try to focus on the matter under examination and avoid negative comments about other people and personal critiques.
  - o If you post something inappropriate, your instructor may delete the post and/or contact you privately to discuss the matter.
- Try to show consideration of the opinions of others. Being open to new perspectives is one of the objectives of academic discussions. However, if someone says or writes something that you think is genuinely harmful or hateful, draw it to your instructor's attention.
- Be thoughtful about your comments, attempting to avoid making harmful or hurtful ones. Before you say or write something, ask yourself: "Would I say this out loud in a face-to-face class?" If not, reconsider saying or writing it in your online class.

At MSVU, student conduct, including online conduct, is covered under our Non-Academic Discipline Policy. Students and faculty can report concerns through this policy, and students may be subject to disciplinary measures for inappropriate behaviour. Please familiarize yourself with the MSVU Student Charter of Rights and Responsibilities in this policy.

Note: These guidelines were modified from Student Guidelines for Communicating in Online, Professional Contexts, Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo and Netiquette: good online behaviour at University College London.