

Spring 2021



# Recommendations for Students in Virtual Learning Environments

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# Introduction

This document contains a set of recommendations and guidelines designed to help you contribute to your classroom community, to treat your classmates and instructors with respect, and to support your success in virtual learning environments. It is important to remember that the CSU Standards for Student Conduct and our Campus Community Values apply to virtual learning environments, just as they apply to our in-person classes. Students who do not adhere to the CSU Standards for Student Conduct will be referred to the Dean of Students Office.

## **Campus Community Values**

The University is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy living and learning environment for students, faculty, and staff. We encourage each member of the campus community to choose behaviors that further this goal. When students are good citizens and engage in responsible behaviors, they contribute positively to university life.



alt="The word community"

# General Recommendations

**Remember that we are all CSUSM Cougars** Virtual learning environments may leave you feeling less connected to your peers and instructors. This feeling of disconnection can make it easy to forget that, together, we are all members of the same CSUSM community, even when we aren't interacting face to face. In all virtual learning activities in which you interact with peers and instructors, try to enact CSUSM's principles of Civility – care, respect, and empathy. Doing so helps to establish an inclusive learning environment for all.

**Focus on meeting course learning objectives**, Specifically during synchronous classes, concentrating solely on course activities, and avoiding multitasking; consider turning off notifications on your devices to avoid distractions.

**Identify yourself by name** In other virtual spaces (such as social networks) where you interact with others; you may have the opportunity to be anonymous or create a unique profile. You should identify yourself by name in virtual learning environments when engaging in course activities, whether during discussion forums or when sharing documents unless otherwise advised by your instructor. If, for privacy reasons, you prefer not to identify yourself by your full name, a first name and last initial may be appropriate (if it does not create confusion), or you might consider contacting your instructor to establish an alternative practice.

**Review the Course Syllabus** You are responsible for reviewing and knowing the policies for your specific courses. Ensure you understand the attendance and participation requirements/expectations provided by your instructors and ask for clarity as needed.

# Privacy Considerations

Be mindful of privacy and personal information. Be sensitive to the information you share within virtual learning environments.

Consider whether it is appropriate to reveal private information about yourself or others. We recommend avoiding personal information, such as phone numbers or addresses, in discussion forums or online chats. Remember that others might (properly or improperly) capture and share your words and behaviors beyond the context of your virtual learning environment.

Mute your microphone. Always mute your microphone when you are not speaking during a live class session. This not only limits background noise and ensures that the audio will be clear for all participants; muting your microphone also protects your privacy. Consider the possibility that someone with whom you share your surroundings may enter the space where you are engaging in a live class session—their words/noises will be heard by the entire class unless your microphone is muted.

Note that Zoom is not an anonymous platform, so if you're using Zoom for live class sessions, your IP address and CSUSM credentials may be logged. In all, be sure to consider how interactions within virtual learning environments may impact your digital footprint for years to come.



alt="computer keyboard and a key with the word privacy"

# Communicating Effectively in Virtual Learning Environments

**Consider the feelings and experiences of others** before asserting an idea or argument. Just like the in-person classroom environment, a virtual environment should be a place where we have the opportunity to engage with perspectives other than our own, to agree and disagree toward the goals of co-constructing new knowledge. It is important to show compassion for others and consider their feelings and circumstances when communicating with classmates during this difficult time. Know that the COVID-19 situation has had very different impacts on students, their families, and their communities. Extend empathy to all members of the CSUSM community.

**Be mindful of the impact** your words may have on others. When communicating in any virtual learning environment, it is important to remember that we may have good intentions, but our words may have a harmful impact. Be clear in your communications and avoid using language that may be interpreted differently than you intend. Try to adhere to the same rules you would follow in face-to-face communications. If the instructor or another student gives you feedback that you have negatively affected them, try to learn about their perspectives before responding.

**Use humor, playfulness, or sarcasm with caution** We often rely on non-verbal cues such as facial expressions to communicate humor or sarcasm. Still, non-verbal cues are not present in all virtual learning environments, and even in live sessions, those cues may not be clearly interpreted. Be aware that what may seem like humor, playfulness, or sarcasm to you may unintentionally offend or hurt your classmates.

# Communicating Effectively in Virtual Learning Environments

**Be understanding and cooperative** during online discussions. Keep in mind that you and your peers enrolled in the course to learn, which means that anyone can make a simple mistake in research, knowledge, or communication. When engaging in dialogue, try not to make it personal: focus your response on an idea or concept, not the person who presented it. When adverse communications or conflicts arise, try to understand the other person's point of view.

**Formulate written communications carefully** When appropriate, take time to prepare the information contained in your online communications: thoughtfully consider all points to reduce confusion, research your facts, and provide citations for information from outside sources integrated within your communications. Effective communication promotes a robust academic environment and adds credibility to the course experience.

**Be clear and concise in your writing** Clear and effective writing translates to clear and effective communication. Do your best to adhere to discipline-specific expectations for written communication, including rhetorically appropriate expression and stylistic formatting.

**Re-read communications before sending them** You may be accustomed to informal writing on some online platforms. Still, for your virtual courses, you should respond in written format in much the same way you would for an in-person class, which likely includes taking on a more formal/professional tone to establish ethos and effectively reach your audience. Keep communications respectful and succinct, and avoid emotional and/or "all capital letter" statements, which may be construed as yelling.

# Communicating Effectively in Virtual Learning Environments

**Use an appropriate background** If you decide to share your video during a live class session, consider what is visible in the video and make sure that you are not inadvertently sharing a background that you do not want to share with your instructor and classmates. If your instructor requires you to use video, but you do not want to reveal your surroundings, consider adding a virtual background if your technological device has the capability to do so. Students can access CSUSM virtual backgrounds **here**. If you are particularly concerned about using video because of your circumstances or the space you have available to you, please contact your instructor.

**Use an appropriate display name** The screen name you display during a live class session should be the name you would use in an in-person class.

**Use the chat feature appropriately** Depending on what platform your instructor uses to lead a live class session; you may have access to a chat feature. Your instructor may provide guidelines for using this feature during the class session, in which case you should only use the chat in the ways that your instructor has outlined. In general, be aware that any chat in which you engage may be a public record archived and may be downloaded by the instructor for review (even in the case of the chat being sent privately).

*Any words, actions, or text sent or communicated within an online classroom setting is subject to campus policy, including the CSU Standards for Student Conduct. Your time in college is when you will be exposed to different ideas, people, theories, backgrounds, and values. We expect students to exercise their right to **Free Speech** without personally attacking anyone and, of course – staying respectful of every individual that makes up our community.*

# Communicating Your Needs

## **Communicate with Your Instructor**

If any difficulties arise for you personally and/or with other students during a live class session, report your difficulties to the instructor. You can do this by using the private chat function to directly contact the instructor in real-time or follow up with an email to the instructor after the class session.

Your instructors will do their best to address communication difficulties when they arise. If an instructor is unaware of a dynamic or difficult situation in a virtual learning environment, consider sharing issues directly with them.

## **Connect with Cougar Care Network (CCN)**

CCN provides information, connection to resources, advocacy, and support for students dealing with personal, academic, financial, or other challenges that may affect their academic success and/or collegiate experience.

Students can self refer by contacting Cougar Care Network at (760) 750-7627 or via [ccn@csusm.edu](mailto:ccn@csusm.edu). Students can also visit the [Dean of Students Office Virtual Front Desk](#) in Microsoft Teams for support during business hours.

## **Support with Technology**

Students can receive support with anything related to technology by contacting IITS. Visit the [IITS For You](#) website for more information.

## **Spring 2021 Student Resources & Updates**

Visit the [CSUSM as One](#) website for the most up to date campus communications, resources, and support.

# Resources

The resources included on this page have been referenced throughout the Student Virtual Expectations document. Others have also been added for reference. Feel free to bookmark these links for future reference.

[Academic Honesty Policy](#)

[Acceptable Use of Technology Policy](#)

[Civility Campaign](#)

[CSU Standards for Student Conduct](#)

[Cougar Care Network](#)

[CSUSM as One](#)

[Disability Support Services](#)

[Free Speech at CSUSM](#)

[Instructional and Information Technology Services](#)

[Mindful CSUSM](#)

[Success Tips and Avoiding Cheating](#)

[Preventing Cyberbullying](#)

[Using Microsoft Teams](#)

[Using Zoom](#)

[You@CSUSM](#) (on-demand holistic wellness support resources)

CSUSM Dean of Students Office

[www.csusm.edu/dos/](http://www.csusm.edu/dos/)

760-750-4935 - [dos@csusm.edu](mailto:dos@csusm.edu)

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