

Professional Behavior and Netiquette

All those engaged in teaching and learning in the Phillips Theological Seminary community deserve respect as they participate in critical theological reflection and ecumenical conversation on the range of issues enlivening contemporary discernment and debate within the church and the broader society. Among the critical dynamics of respect and open space is learning to keep confidences, which is hopefully understood as a primary ministerial skill. All the expectations and practices under which the seminary currently operates in its teaching/learning functions apply to both on campus and online courses.

Participants in the online discussions do not have available the same visual and auditory clues as those in traditional classrooms for interpreting the tone and substance of contributed comments. It is, therefore, especially important that the following guidelines concerning appropriate 'netiquette' – i.e. etiquette for written communication shared via the internet – should be consistently observed. Although individual professors may have unique standards or procedures regarding class etiquette that are specific to their course design and learning goals, members of the seminary community should attend to the following general institutional standards:

1. In online discussion, statements of disagreement and alternate understandings are welcomed, and even encouraged among participants. Yet disparaging personal ad hominem attacks cannot be permitted, even if purported to be intended light-heartedly. Overt references or those by innuendo that violate the seminary's anti-discrimination policy will not be tolerated.
2. Rude, offensive, or abusive comments are entirely inappropriate. "Flaming" (typing words in capitals) or an excessive use of exclamation marks must always be avoided because they are widely understood to signal expressions of anger, hostility, or disrespect.
3. Attempts to use humor, and especially sarcasm, to advance one's position in online discussions are most generally confusing and ineffectual. In addition, the seeming innocence of jokes can be lost in transmission.
4. Participants should be attentive to maintaining a professional style of communication. Posted contributions on discussion boards should be free of misspelled words and other distracting technical errors. As with written papers, it is essential to properly cite sources.
5. There are different modes of communication for online classes, e.g. discussion boards and chat rooms—formal and informal—where the standards may be nuanced accordingly to fit the class situation. However, when communicating online, participants should carefully review what they have written before they actually send or post it, making certain that chosen modes of expression convey what they want to say and how they want to say it.
6. Finally, members of the seminary community are to avoid forwarding any type of junk mail (e.g. advertisements, solicitations, or sexually explicit materials) to others. Moreover, they should not violate the privacy of others by divulging email address and comments outside of the class without express permission.