ONLINE LEARNING PROTOCOLS (NETIQUETTE) FOR STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

INTRODUCTION

The disruption of teaching and learning caused by the closure of educational institutions due to the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that students from across the world, including South Africa, had to learn online. We have all been introduced to new ways of teaching and learning and with these new ways come challenges and lessons to be learnt.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide students at the University of Johannesburg with a standard guide and practices (netiquette) to be followed when attending online classes. Netiquette is an abbreviation of the word 'internet etiquette' and it is a term used for general rules or manners that govern online behaviour. It is likely that online learning will continue beyond the COVID-19-

induced restrictions and that this will become part of our daily teaching and learning practices. We hope that by following basic online learning tips (netiquette), you will become more engaged with and productive in your classes. Please note the following:

- You should attend orientation sessions with the Center for Academic Technologies (CAT) to familiarise yourselves with netiquette requirements.
- As an adult learner you need to take responsibility for your own learning and to attend all online lectures.
- If you have any barriers/ limitations e.g., load shedding/device data constraint, you need to contact your lecturer to make an alternate arrangement or access the recording at a more convenient time.

The table below outlines several online guidelines to govern your behaviour when attending online classes and engaging in various social media platforms.

Table 1: Basic guidelines for online netiquette

• You must be appropriately dressed while attending online lessons. Learning from the comfort of our own homes can make us feel like dressing in comfortable home clothes, but it is important that we look as presentable and professional as we would on campus
• Turn off notifications from your computer and mobile phone to avoid disruptions during online lessons
• It is advisable to join the online lessons early. Set up your equipment and ensure that your camera and microphone are in good working condition
• It is important that you are aware of your surroundings before joining an online class. Please ensure that your background is presentable and well-organised. If possible, set up or enable a neutral background for your online camera/ screen.
• Indicate to your family members that you are attending an online lesson/ class by putting a clear note where they can see it. If for some reason your environment does not make provision for any quiet space, please mute yourself unless you must speak. You are encouraged to follow clear instructions outlined by the lecturer regarding the use of camera and audio.
• Do not try to multitask during online lessons, for example, avoid eating, wrestling with papers, changing clothes etc.

- Do not use another device or engage with someone or something else in your surroundings. Focus on the lecturer conducting the online lesson.

- Remain seated and attentive throughout the meeting. If your camera is on, it is important to give eye contact to the screen to show your lecturer that you are attending, except when taking notes. It is important to respect to the learning environment that you are engaged in during the lesson just as you would during contact/ face-to-face lessons.

- Be patient with and respect your fellow students. Avoid speaking right away and interrupting others while speaking. Follow the 'rules' outlined by the lecturer regarding the use of the chat function or putting up your hand to be able to speak.

- You are encouraged to ask questions during online classes as the lecturers are there to support and help you. It makes it easier on everyone when questions are asked during online lessons. It is however important to note that whether questions are allowed throughout the lesson or afterwards would be at the discretion of the lecturer.

- Keep up with your assignments and online assessments. One of the challenges posed by online learning is that it increases the level of responsibility for students. It is tempting to postpone assignments and neglect due dates. Please avoid this as it may get out of hand!

- Do not abuse or overuse the chat platform. Many online classes come with chat platforms to help students communicate with each other and ask questions related to what they are learning. You are encouraged to only post content-related remarks or questions in the chat and not personal comments.

- Be careful when you use humor or sarcasm. It is not always easy to pick up tone in an email or chat, and your message might be taken literally or unpleasantly.

- Think before you type anything. Remember that correspondence with lecturers is not the same as chatting with your friends. Also, anything you share in an online classroom becomes part of a permanent digital record. Therefore, please refrain from:
    o defaming or threatening anyone online.
    o making statements that are bigoted, hateful, or racist.
    o discussing or planning illegal activities online.
    o infringing or taking other people's intellectual property.
    o using capital letters as it gives the impression of shouting - rather underline words or put *asterisks* around the word.
    o 'attacking' (*flame*) anyone online, no matter how strongly you feel about an issue. Rather rethink your response.

- o viewing material or images that are vulgar, use obscene language or are pornographic by nature; or
  - o advertising or promoting anything of a commercial nature.
- Apologise to your lecturer and fellow students if you happen to break any these etiquette guidelines — whether it is not being on time, loud background noise, dominating the discussion, or not being prepared. Come right out and apologise immediately.