

**United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities**  
**Online Academic Success Strategies**  
Fall 2025

Online courses are more convenient than campus-based classroom courses, but they require at least as much time and effort to complete activities and assignments as campus-based classroom courses. They also require a greater degree of self-motivation than attending classes in person. Your responses to the questions in this document will help you in your success as an online student at United.

### **Motivation**

The idea of online learning is exciting, but the novelty will wear off sooner or later and you will need to rely on your motivation and self-discipline to successfully complete your online courses. Build your motivation to overcome mental obstacles to your study practice. Regularly reminding yourself of your personal reasons for taking this course or pursuing this degree can be a strong incentive to stay focused on your studies.

- *What is one primary personal reason that you are pursuing a degree or taking courses at United?*

Your connection to the seminary community also plays a large part in your motivation. Since you won't be coming on campus regularly, you will need to be more proactive in participating in the community. Reach out to classmates to form study or social groups that meet regularly on Zoom or another videoconferencing tool. Attend Chapel regularly. Consider joining one or more of United's Community of Communities that meet regularly to talk with other seminarians who share your faith or identity. Read the *Monday Morning* newsletter each week to identify upcoming events and groups that you can participate in. Consider coming to campus for Spring Symposium Week or to join a class or just to hang out with classmates and faculty.

- *What is one way you will proactively connect with your classmates in the first weeks of class?*
- *What is one event or group promoted in Monday Morning that you can participate in over the coming couple of weeks?*

### **Technology**

Learn how to use Gmail, Canvas and Zoom effectively. Take time to read the basics tutorials and practice them on your own. If you experience difficulties with Canvas, Zoom, or your Google account, reach out to technology support staff for help.

- *What day and time will you set aside in the coming week to read and practice the [Canvas Basic Training](#)?*

Learn how to use your word processing software to compose and format papers to your professors' specifications. All papers submitted to United courses must meet the style standards detailed in the Ninth Edition of Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, which is based on Chicago style.

Microsoft Word and Apple Pages are popular word processors that you may already have on your computer. Google Docs is available with your United Google account. Most professors require submissions in Word format, so if you're using another word processing program, learn how to export a copy of your document as a Word document.

- *What word processing software will you use to complete written course papers?*
- *If you are unsure whether you can compose and format a paper according to Turabian style using your software, what will be your first step in learning how to do it?*
- *If you do not use Microsoft Word and are unsure how to export your document to Word format, what will be your first step in learning how to do it?*

## **Course Expectations**

Stay informed about the expectations of each course. Carefully read the entire course syllabus by the start of the term. Ask your professor if you are unclear about any of the course expectations. Check your United email regularly. Read all communications from your professor including emails and Canvas announcements. These communications often include important details on completing assignments, reminders of upcoming due dates, and any changes to the syllabus.

- *If you have not already read the syllabus, what day and time will you set aside in the coming week to do so?*
- *What will be your weekly schedule for checking your United email?*

Engage with the Canvas course multiple times at regular intervals during the week to ensure that you are aware of any changes, as well as to stay in the loop on the conversations going on among your classmates and professor.

- *What will be your weekly schedule for checking your Canvas courses?*

## **Study Habits**

Study habits, like any good habit, take time to build. Establish a study routine and stick with it.

## *Study Environment*

Identify a quiet, convenient, comfortable space with good lighting that you can dedicate to your learning—your private piece of campus. Use this space only for study as much as possible so that you are cued that when you are there, it is study time. You may want to consider your own dedicated study space outside the home like at a quiet coffee shop, or at a public or college library.

Put away your phone and turn off notifications on your computer. You may want to dedicate a computer solely to study and remove all distracting applications and games from it. You can install applications that help you stay on task like a focus timer or website blocker.

- *Where will be your dedicated study space? What changes do you need to make to it to better promote productive study time?*
- *What steps will you need to take to ensure that technology does not interfere with your focus during your study time?*

### **Study Schedule**

Avoid procrastinating, waiting until near the due date expecting to complete readings and assignments in one large time block. Instead, build a schedule for completing readings, weekly assignments, and long-term major assignments in smaller chunks over time.

Develop a consistent weekly study schedule and stick to it. Figure out when are your best times during the day each day of the week that you're available and have the mental energy to read and write. Let family members or roommates know the times you need to study without distraction so they won't disturb you.

- *What days and times each week are you regularly available to study?*
- *What are the best times of day for you to study mentally and physically?*
- *With whom will you need to make arrangements to support you in undisturbed study time?*

Block out your study times on a calendar. For a 3-credit master's course, schedule roughly 11 hours per week for reading, watching lectures and videos, participating in discussions, and completing written work. For a 4-credit DMin course, schedule 15 hours per week to complete coursework.

- *Where will you write down your weekly study schedule? An existing personal calendar?*
- *What day and time in the coming week will you block out weekly study days and times for the term on your calendar?*

### **Goal Setting and Support**

Identify specific goals for the term. Develop a concrete plan for meeting those goals, then assign specific blocks of study time to complete specific steps in that plan. Commit to the plan.

Do not deviate from the plan unless absolutely necessary. Don't beat yourself up if you falter, just recommit. Solicit accountability support from others. Form or join a study group to encourage regular study.

- *What specific goals do you have for this term? What is your plan for meeting those goals? What steps will you complete in that plan this week? What step will you complete during your next study session?*
- *What steps will you take this week to develop accountability support for completing your academic plan this term?*

## **Support Resources**

Take advantage of the availability of United's faculty and staff on Zoom to support you in your academic journey. Schedule time to meet with your faculty advisor each term. Schedule a meeting with each of your professors at least once early in the term as well as when needed. Remember that the Director of Student Services is also available to meet with you when needed. If your writing skills can use improvement, be proactive in getting writing help. Take advantage of United's student writing tutors. Also remember that United's by-appointment chaplains are available to provide spiritual care in the context of seminary study and ministry preparation as well as vocational direction.

- *Who is your faculty advisor? Have you already met with them this term or scheduled a meeting with them on their online appointment calendar?*
- *Do you need to contact the Director of Student Services or student writing tutor for help? How will you obtain their contact information?*
- *How will you schedule an appointment with a by-appointment chaplain when you need spiritual care support or vocational guidance?*

The New Student Orientation Course in Canvas covers all of the essential information you need during your first term at United. All students are expected to complete the course by the start of the new term.

United's Student Handbook and Academic Catalog are also invaluable resources for navigating your seminary journey that are not covered in the orientation course. You are strongly encouraged to read the portions of each document that pertain to you, as well as refer to them first if you have a question about your academic program or seminary policies and procedures.

- *Have you completed the new student orientation course? If not, what day and time in the coming week will you block out to do so?*
- *If you have not done so already, what day and time will you block out in the coming week to read the Student Handbook and Academic Catalog?*