TOUGALOO
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COLLEGE

Strategies for Maintaining a Harassment-Free Virtual Learning Environment

All Tougaloo employees remain obligated—even in a virtual learning environment—to report instances of sex-based misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator. Reports to the Title IX Coordinator should be made via email, mail, telephone, or the online reporting form. Please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Linda J. Daniels, at titleix@tougaloo.edu or by phone at 601-977-4462 or 769-257-1552 with any questions or concerns.

New Delivery, Same Responsibility
Recent events require our institution and its faculty to deliver educational content to students on virtual and online platforms for the foreseeable future. *Canvas* and *Zoom* are more valuable than ever as assets to accomplish this objective. It is imperative that all faculty remember the responsibility we have to maintain learning environments free from harassment and discrimination. Because the virtual learning environment poses a wide range of new challenges for many of our faculty and students, we have gathered information below, which we hope might be beneficial to the faculty. This document will be updated as necessary and can be located on the Title IX webpage, under "Faculty Resources."

Set Expectations
Discuss expectations for the virtual environment.
- Acknowledge the new environment and take time to update expectations for the virtual environment in relations to student participation and conduct during virtual class sessions and in-class discussions.
- Direct students to review relevant campus policies related to disorderly conduct, sex-based harassment, and technology use. Create an opportunity early on for students to ask clarifying questions about how these and other policies may apply in the virtual environment.
- Consider inviting students to take part in an exercise where they collectively set expectations for one another. Encourage students to hold one another accountable for adhering to these standards.
- Update your syllabus to reflect evolving expectations related to the virtual environment.

Encourage students to maintain a "classroom mindset."
- Encourage students to adopt a "classroom mindset" in the virtual classroom. Students know to arrive on time, dress appropriately, minimize personal distractions, avoid cross-talk, and limit private conversations with other students when in the physical classroom. Students should take the same approach to their conduct in virtual class sessions.
- The Zoom platform's *Nonverbal Feedback* feature allows students to mimic classic non-disruptive in-class behaviors like raising a hand, responding in agreement or disagreement, requesting the instructor "slow down," requesting a break, applauding, or excusing oneself to step away.

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Be transparent about platform management features.
- If you are using the *Zoom* platform with *Canvas* integration, remind your students that class sessions are recorded from start to finish to be accessed by students at a later time and date. Embarrassing or disruptive behavior exhibited during a virtual session will live on past the few moments they experience.
- Chat communications between students in the *Zoom* platform are also saved and retained. Comments made publicly within the chat function and even privately between two participants are recorded and retained, so students should exercise good judgment when using that function.

Remind students of your reporting responsibilities.
- Be sure that your students know about your reporting responsibilities under various campus policies, particularly the Tougaloo IC Policy.

In Advance of a Virtual Session
"Is it essential to the virtual class session?"
Student interaction with an instructor during any class session is critical to the learning experience. Consider what functional limitations may be placed on student participants in the virtual classroom, which might ultimately be most conducive to good order in the classroom.

Audio
In a physical classroom, distractions are limited and instructors are not forced to compete with noisy siblings, barking dogs, or errant audio from a television or radio. To combat these occurrences in the virtual classroom, consider activating the setting, *"Mute Participants Upon Entry"* in the Zoom portal. As your lesson progresses and student feedback is required, you can individually "Unmute" student participants to allow for their contribution to the subject at hand.

Video
Just as errant sounds can be distracting and disruptive to a virtual class session, the video shared by participants and hosts can prove equally distracting to the lesson objectives of the session. While the subject matter and your teaching style might require participants to view *you* during a virtual lesson, consider the probative value of having video of your student participants streaming during the session. If you prefer participants' stream video as a way of gauging student engagement in the lesson, consider using Zoom's *Nonverbal Feedback* features.

Chat Function
The "Chat" function in Zoom can be a valuable feature for discourse during a lesson. It can also be a source of distraction to you as an instructor and to participants if messages unrelated to the lesson are posted in that space. The Private Chat function presents similar issues as it may be a distraction for student participants who might use the private chat function to communicate discreetly with one another.

If you enable the "Chat" function with a virtual classroom setting, set expectations with your students accordingly. If you desire, you may disable this function in advance of a Zoom session by accessing Settings via the Zoom profile. You can disable the "Chat" function completely or simply disable the "Private Chat" function.

Screen Sharing
Screen sharing is a critical feature for instructors who rely on presentations and other media for instruction. Recent incidents of "Zoom bombing" have placed those who use Zoom regularly on high alert about the potential for participants to "hijack" a virtual classroom by sharing the contents of their screen (usually with derogatory or offensive imagery or language). If your course does not require student participants to personally present content from their screens, consider disabling this feature altogether for student participants through your Zoom portal Settings. Under the Screen sharing section, you can restrict screen-sharing privileges to "Host Only." If you anticipate your students might need to share their screens at some point in the course for a presentation, you can provide a particular student access to screen sharing privileges during a virtual class session by elevating them to a "Co-host." Under Settings, you will notice that your settings select "Host Only" for the prompt "Who can start sharing when someone else is sharing?"

During a Virtual Session
"In The Moment" Responses to Offensive Conduct
Believe it or not, some of the very same classroom management strategies you've employed in the physical classroom are just as effective in the Zoom virtual classroom. Establishing clear and reasonable expectations for student engagement in the virtual setting is a critical first step, but sometimes student behavior might warrant an in-the-moment response from an instructor to mitigate against disruptive or offensive impact. Here are some recommendations for instructor action:

- **Address the behavior, do not ignore it**
  It would be improper for an instructor to allow a student in the physical classroom setting to direct offensive and harassing language at others during a course discussion or assignment without addressing it. Similarly, standards for respectful and civil discourse amongst students should be enforced by instructors. Whether during a Zoom meeting or in a discussion board post, instructors have a responsibility to address disruptive, offensive, and/or harassing content.

- **Take appropriate immediate action**
  Depending on the nature of the disruptive or offensive behavior, there might be a variety of in-the-moment actions an instructor might consider employing:
    - provide a general word of caution and reminder about class expectations;
    - provide a courteous warning to the offending student(s);
    - disable the student's video or audio;
    - place the student "on hold";
    - "remove" the student from the virtual classroom.

    See Managing participants in a meeting from Zoom Support.

After the Virtual Session Ends

- **Report the offending conduct**
  If the offending conduct involves offensive or discriminatory behaviors that are sex-based or gender-based, instructors should report the incident via email, mail,

telephone, or the online reporting form. Please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Dr. Linda J. Daniels, at titleix@tougaloo.edu or by phone at 601-977-4462 or 769-257-1552 Provide specific details about the offending conduct, the persons involved, and any persons affected. Information about the course is also critical (course title and course number), as well as confirmation that the virtual session was recorded.

Offensive and harassing behaviors that are *not* sexual in nature but may otherwise violate the Student Code of Conduct as laid out in the Tougaloo College Student Handbook, should be immediately reported to the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success.

Disruptive and other unprofessional conduct which do not rise to the level of policy violations might very well be addressed with support from a department chair, program director, or academic dean.

- **Review the session recording**
  If your virtual class sessions are automatically recorded in Zoom for subsequent upload in Canvas or Moodle, it may be necessary to confirm whether the offending conduct was captured in the recording. If so, get assistance from IT in editing the offending content out of the version of the recording which will be uploaded to the Canvas Media Library for student access. *Do not copy or otherwise repost the recording with the offending conduct.*

- **Follow up with students affected by the conduct**
  Check-in with those students you perceive might have been particularly affected by the offending conduct. Where appropriate, make referrals to relevant campus resources. It might also be a good idea to take time at the start of the next virtual class session to revisit expectations for student behavior and engagement within the course.