Grand Canyon University

Online Student Handbook

Information for navigating
the GCU Online learning environment

March 2005

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Welcome

Welcome to Grand Canyon University Online (GCU Online). We are proud of our outstanding reputation of offering high-quality, academically rigorous programs that are facilitated by excellent instructors. The purpose of this handbook is to characterize the GCU Online student and to provide important information in support of a GCU Online student's successful achievement of academic and educational goals. Please read this handbook carefully for information that is specific to GCU Online students and to the GCU Online learning environment and refer to the GCU Catalog (http://www.gcu.edu/catalog/) for detailed information about GCU policies and procedures.

Revision History

Date	Version	Change
March 2005	1.2	• Major revision of Online Student Handbook to support Online students with respect to Online navigation and policies and procedures specific to GCU Online.
January 2005	1.1	• Added Quick Start Resource Center information. • Updated BB information for new software version and login changes. • Clarified no-show policy and added administrative drop information • Clarified participation parameters.
November 2004	1.1	• Typo corrections.
October 2004	1.0	• Updated technical support contact information. • Clarified participation and attendance policies. • Added no-show policy. • Added Revision History table.
July 2004	1.0	• Origination of Online Student Handbook.

The GCU Online Student

GCU Online advocates the ideology that a student is responsible for one's own success, and the University strives to provide the knowledge, direction, and tools in support of a student's ability to succeed academically and professionally. An important component of personal and professional achievement begins with taking an active role in the learning process. The role of a GCU Online student is to reach for intellectual challenges, work to the best of one's ability, and to remain true to one's values and ethics.

Student Performance Standards

There are several performance standards common among all courses in the GCU Online learning environment. In addition to assessments of comprehension, students are evaluated on participation and other criteria, including but not limited to the following.

The GCU Online student will:
1. Read all announcements posted in the Announcements section of the Blackboard classroom to stay abreast of information pertaining to course content, changes in assignments or due dates, and other information or directives necessary for successful completion of the course.
2. Complete and submit assignments as directed by the due dates defined by the instructor.
3. Communicate with the instructor via the Blackboard classroom or email for clarification about assignments, course content, resources, grades, or other issues pertaining to the course or the Blackboard learning environment.
4. Be *active* and *visible* in the Blackboard classroom by participating and contributing in a meaningful and substantive way to the class discussions, communicating openly and appropriately with fellow students and the instructor, and contributing to the Collaborative Learning Community by delivering on commitments to members.
5. Adhere to the GCU *Student Responsibility Guidelines* and the *Code of Conduct* housed in the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu/catalog/).

Writing Effectiveness

Individuals are judged with respect to cognitive ability and comprehension by the way they communicate. The advantage to the written word is that one can take the time to express an idea in the right way, but the consequence of writing without critical review is that the message looses meaning or has an unintended offensive tone or connotation. The written word is permanent and, therefore, unforgiving, so it is important to write concisely, deliberately, and employ critical thinking and evaluation of your written work such that your ideas are expressed clearly, professionally, and with the intended tone and quality.

In the Online learning environment, a student's attention to detail, mastery of effective language use, and ability to synthesize information is evaluated by the way he/she writes. GCU Online requires students to use the American Psychological Association (APA) format in all formally written assignments. The purpose of applying a regimented format is to develop an understanding of the importance of presentation and consistency in written work. In Blackboard classroom discussions, students may write less formally and write with a more conversational structure. However, whether the writing is conversational or formal, GCU Online students are expected to write with grammatical correctness, organization, thoughtfulness, and appropriate tone, and proofread messages and documents for typographical and spelling errors.

The Collaborative Learning Community (CLC)

One of the important features of the GCU Online curriculum is the Collaborative Learning Community. The purpose of the CLC is to bring into the classroom environment the real challenges professionals face in the collaborative workforce environment. The CLC can be a vehicle for connecting people through sharing of experiences or perspectives, mentoring, or engaging collectively in the exploration of a new topic; all of which accelerates learning of tacit knowledge and the development of collaboration skills. The construct of the CLC is held together by operating norms, delegated and/or informal roles, mutual respect and trust, and a sense of purpose. Each CLC member has vested responsibility in the success of the CLC. CLC members share in the responsibility to:

- Introduce themselves,
- Clarify strengths that would benefit the outcome of a project,
- Define time commitments that can be made for the CLC,
- Use appropriate communication (netiquette),
- Foster trust by following through on commitments made to the CLC in a timely manner,
- Work towards unanimity rather than majority rules,
- Attempt to resolve CLC issues through open communication and mutual respect, and
- Provide the instructor an honest evaluation of fellow CLC members if requested.

CLC members may consider using the *CLC Group Projects Agreement* document (Appendix A).

Four to six individuals are assigned to a CLC group page in the Blackboard learning environment in which members work collaboratively and asynchronously on group projects. The instructor may monitor CLC activity but should not become engaged in CLC discussions or activities. In the event that CLC members collectively and unanimously choose to work outside of their CLC group page, minutes documenting participation and contribution must be posted

to the group page. CLC members may not mandate synchronous activity unless all CLC members unanimously agree.

An instructor may choose to reassign CLC members whose CLC size has diminished to two members due to attrition in enrollment; a functional CLC must have at least two members. It is a discouraged practice for instructors to reassign a CLC member to another group due to internal conflicts or problems. Though CLC members may move forward on a project when a fellow CLC member has not met his/her responsibilities or commitments, CLC members may not actively exclude a CLC member from contributing to or participating in a CLC project. Participation, contribution, and the quality of the final project are considered in the performance evaluation of a CLC member. Therefore, each CLC member, under expressed circumstances, may earn a score or grade that differs from those of fellow CLC members for the same project.

Online Contacts

GCU Online is committed to customer service. Students are strongly encouraged to ask questions and request clarification about any aspect of their Online experience. GCU Online has established a system of communication whereby students have one point of contact to the University for answers or resolutions.

Enrollment Counselors

New students to GCU Online or re-entry students (i.e., those students who have been out of a GCU program for more than two years) work with an Enrollment Counselor to initiate their educational experience at GCU Online. The Enrollment Counselor guides new students through the application process, the financial aid process, and works with students through their first eight-week course. Every new student is assigned an Enrollment Counselor when information about GCU Online and programs are initially requested. Enrollment Counselors serve as important points of contact for new students to GCU Online and can assist students with ordering books, accessing Online classrooms, understanding expectations in an Online course, and working through other classroom related issues or questions.

Students can identify their Enrollment Counselors by contacting the GCU Information Desk at 1-800-800-9776. Each Enrollment Counselor has a direct toll free and local (Phoenix, AZ) phone number, which is listed in the GCU faculty/staff directory on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu).

Academic Advisors

Every student who has successfully completed three course credits at GCU is assigned to an Academic Advisor. The Academic Advisor serves as a primary point of contact with the University for the student and can assist students with questions pertaining to transcripts, degree evaluations, registration, campus resources, and University policies and procedures. Students should consider the Academic Advisor as a partner for meeting educational goals and objectives, so it is important for students to build a productive relationship with

their academic advisors that is built upon regular and open communication. Likewise, Academic Advisors contact their students regularly to assure that GCU Online is meeting the needs of its students.

Students can identify their Academic Advisors by logging on to Web Advisor via the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) or by contacting the GCU Information Desk at 1-800-800-9776. Each Academic Advisor has a direct toll free and local (Phoenix, AZ) phone number, which is listed in the GCU faculty/staff directory on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu).

Finance Counselors and Advisors

Upon initial registration, new students receive an email welcoming them to GCU Online from their Enrollment Counselor in which a Finance Counselor is introduced. Both new and returning students need to establish good lines of communication with their Finance Counselors or Finance Advisors, respectively, to understand financial ramifications and obtain financial clearance to drop courses or roll enrollment over to another term. The Finance Counselors and Advisors are good resources for assistance in completing financial aid paperwork or confirm alternative methods of tuition or fee payment.

Students can identify their Finance Counselors or Advisors by contacting the GCU Information Desk at 1-800-800-9776. Each Finance Counselor or Advisor has a direct toll free and local (Phoenix, AZ) phone number, which is listed in the GCU faculty/staff directory on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu).

The GCU Online Learning Modality

Student participation is an important component of GCU Online learning modality. Participation challenges a student to express ideas learned in the classroom from a personal or professional perspective and provides opportunity for others to learn from those experiences and perspectives. The Online learning environment is designed to promote intellectual discussion, professional communication, and critical thinking that supports learning for all participants in a GCU Online course.

The Online Course Format

The GCU Online course is eight weeks in length and is partitioned into eight learning units or modules. All course documents and links to electronic resources are housed within the Blackboard classroom.

- Syllabus – a document of the course description, a list of required reading materials, topics and objectives, assignments and point values, the course grading scale, and other course or program specific information.
- Module – a document of the week's topics and objectives, reading and deliverable assignments, and a list of discussion questions from which the instructor may select for the week's discussions.
- Lecture – a document, written by professionals with expertise in the field of study, that provides a professional perspective of the week's topics and current application.

The documents for a given GCU Online course are standardized such that students can expect consistent information and classroom management, regardless of program, course, or course section.

The BlackboardTM Platform

GCU Online employs the Blackboard platform version 6.2 for Online course delivery. Every GCU Online classroom has a consistent standardized format. The following categories refer to the Blackboard navigation buttons located on the left margin of the computer screen.

- **Announcements** – This area appears as you sign on to your course. It is important to read all announcements for important information from the instructor or from GCU Online. Please note the tabs at the top of the Announcements screen. You may *View All* announcements or you can view announcements by *View Today*, *View Last 7 Days*, or *View Last 30 Days*.
- **Syllabus** – This area houses the course syllabus. Click on the link to open the syllabus document or right click on the link to save the document to your hard drive or print the document in its entirety.
- **Staff Information** – This area lists tech support information and is the place at which your instructor posts contact information.
- **Module Overviews** – This area houses the weekly modules for the course. Click on the link to the respective week's module to open the

module or right click on the link to save or print the document in its entirety.

- **Lectures** – This area houses the weekly lectures for the course. Click on the link to the respective week's lecture to open it or right click on the link to save or print the lecture in its entirety.
- **Discussion Board** – This area serves as the primary classroom for the course. The Discussion Board is partitioned into forums or areas in which weekly discussions take place. The instructor will post selected discussion questions as individual threads in a given week's forum to which each student is expected to respond and advance substantive contributions to a growing discussion. To respond to a discussion question or reply to a message posted in the discussion board, click on the subject line of the thread to which you wish to respond to open the message, click the REPLY button to open a comment window, compose your message, then click the SUBMIT button. Your response will post hierarchically under the appropriate message. Note that by clicking on the name of the sender of a message, your message will be sent as an email to the sender rather than posted as a message to the discussion board. Note that the Cyber Café is a special forum in which you may post your personal introduction and participate in non-course or content related discussions.
- **Groups** – This area houses the CLC group pages. Each group page operates as a separate classroom with a discussion board in which members of a CLC may work on collaborative projects.
- **Resources** – This area houses links to the GCU Catalog, the GCU Student Handbook, the CLC Project Agreement, and other electronic materials.
- **Communication** – The Messages link contained in this area redirects you to the internal messaging system (email) within Blackboard. This system is the means by which you communicate privately with your instructor and other students in the class. When you select New Message, the message block appears in the email format. Messages sent from your Blackboard message system to your instructor or classmates go to that person's Blackboard Messages inbox. The message never leaves the Blackboard environment. Because there is no flag to alert you to a new message, it is important that you check your Messages inbox regularly for communications and weekly feedback.
- **Tools** – This area contains a range of links to other areas of the Blackboard classroom such as the Digital Drop Box, your online grades, calendar, etc.

Accessing Your GCU Online Courses

One of the greatest conveniences of the Blackboard platform is that one can access the Blackboard learning environment from any computer that is connected to the internet. One can connect to Blackboard through its URL http://bb.gcu.edu or via the GCU website at http://www.gcu.edu. Click on

to access the *Quick Start Resource Center*. Select Blackboard™ Online Classroom. For Username, enter your first initial and last name (no spaces) and the last six digits of your social security number. Once logged into Blackboard, click on your course, located on the right side of the computer screen. Blackboard is also accessible via the GCU Canyon Cruiser on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) under the Web Services menu.

Technology Requirements

Users of the Blackboard platform for purposes of participating in GCU Online courses and other Online activities must have the following minimum technology competencies and equipment requirements.

Hardware (minimum requirements)
PC
- Pentium 500 MHz processor
- 64 megabytes of ram memory (128 recommended)
- 20 megabytes of free disc space
- 56K modem

Plug-ins for Browser
- Real Player or Quicktime
- Most recent/highest version of Acrobat Reader
- Sound card and speakers

Software (minimum requirements)
PC
- Windows 98 (Windows 2000 or Windows XP recommended)
- Microsoft Office Suite 97 to include Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook (MS Office Suite 2003 or higher recommended)
- Internet Explorer 6.0
- Current Anti-virus software updated monthly

Textbooks and Course Materials

Students are responsible for acquiring the textbooks and other required course materials for their courses. Though you may purchase textbooks from any bookstore, GCU Online students are strongly encouraged to order textbooks from the GCU Bookstore (www.bkstr.com; Follet Bookstores) to ensure that you are purchasing the correct books and editions for the courses in which you are enrolled. All textbook questions or issues pertaining to textbook ordering and shipping should be directed to the GCU Bookstore.

e-Library Services

Research is fundamentally important for the progression of knowledge in a professional field, and GCU Online expects students to develop research skills that include extracting information from primary, peer-reviewed journals, incorporating the information into class assignments, and correctly citing external resources in the text of their work using APA formatting. Online students have full access to the GCU Online library, the e-Library, via the GCU website (www.gcu.edu). Therein, students can access databases and search for relevant and current information. Complete instructions for accessing and navigating the e-Library are housed in the Resources section of every Blackboard classroom and in the GCU Online *Quick Start Resource Center*.

GCU Online Academic Policies & Procedures

A complete version of the GCU academic policies and procedures are housed in the GCU Catalog on the University website (http://www.gcu.edu) under the Academics menu. The following information serves as a guide for Online students on GCU policies and procedures that pertain to the Online learning environment. In all cases, the information in the GCU Catalog takes precedence over information in this handbook.

Online Academic Calendar

There is an important distinction between the GCU Online and on-ground academic calendars. Students enrolled in a GCU Online program must adhere to the GCU Online academic calendar. The Online academic calendar is housed in the GCU Catalog and on the University website (http://www.gcu.edu) in Academic Records under the Academics menu. For questions or clarification about the academic calendar, contact the Office of the Registrar.

Online Participation

In the Online learning environment, class attendance is evidenced by one's active participation in the learning process. Participation may encompass the expectations that students post well developed responses to weekly discussion questions, contribute actively and substantively to class discussions, submit quality assignments on time and to the correct place in the Blackboard classroom, and become engaged in CLC projects or activities. Students need to pay particular attention to the syllabus and understand the instructor's expectations to earn full participation credit, as lack of participation according to these expectations will result in a lower grade. Participation is *not* measured by the number of times a student posts to the Blackboard classroom discussion or by the number of days each week a student logs into the Blackboard classroom; rather, participation is measured by how well a student meets the expectations of the course requirements by demonstrating comprehension of the course topics. Students who do not post to the Blackboard classroom during the first week of class will be administratively withdrawn from class. Students who register late for an Online class may not expect to make up missed assignments or earn participation credit. In the event of prolonged internet disconnection to the Online classroom, students must communicate with their instructors to establish any accommodation, which is at the sole discretion of the instructor. This policy is in the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu).

Note: *Substantive* participation enhances the learning process for all students in the Online learning environment. Substantive participation includes, but is not limited to, comments that add depth or insight to content, comments that add relevant personal experiences to affirm key concepts, and/or comments that propose an alternative perspective of the issue, such that the discussion progresses in a meaningful way. Substantive participation *does not* include

posting generic comments such as "I agree" or "tell me more" or any similar message that does not demonstrate a thoughtful response to the topic.

Academic Dishonesty

GCU students are expected to possess a high standard of conduct and personal integrity that mirror the foundational values of this institution. Academic dishonesty in the form of cheating, plagiarism, or any fraudulent behavior is strictly forbidden and will not be tolerated. Acts of academic dishonesty are reported to the University and offenders may be subject to both in-class and University level penalties. Refer to the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University policy on *Academic Dishonesty*.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty that requires explicit clarification. Plagiarism is defined as intentionally or unintentionally representing the language or ideas of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to the following:

- Incorporating into papers or assignments someone else's work or original ideas without proper acknowledgment.
- Verbatim use of published materials without quotation marks or proper acknowledgment.
- Paraphrasing or summarizing another person's work without proper acknowledgment.
- Copying another person's work.
- Using electronically stored or transmitted work without proper acknowledgment.
- Submitting works stored or transmitted electronically as one's own.

Students are strongly encouraged to review APA formatting rules and standards for correctly citing resources.

Grades & Grading

All GCU Online courses use a 100 point grading scale. Extra credit or deviations from this point-based grading scale are not permitted in GCU Online courses. The point equivalent for each grade level for GCU Online courses is as follows:

Letter Grade	Point Scale
A	95-100
A-	92-94
B+	90-91
B	87-89
B-	84-86
C+	80-83
C	76-79
D	72-75

F	<72

In Graduate courses (500 - 600 level), a student must earn at least a grade of C or repeat the course to improve the final grade in order to continue in the graduate program. Refer to the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University policy on *Grade Point Average* and *Academic Probation.*

Incomplete Grades (I)

Students are expected to complete all course assignments, exercises, and activities within the timeframe of the course. Incompletes are not intended for students who fall behind in their work during the course. Students must formally request an incomplete grade for a course and only under extreme circumstances that prevent the student from completing the course by the end date. The instructor and the student must complete and agree to specific terms in a *Request for an Incomplete* form that is filed with the University. Failure to meet the terms of the agreement will result in the grade of I to automatically change to a grade of F. Should some personal crisis occur during the course term, a student is encouraged to discuss accommodation options with the instructor or, if necessary, other options with his/her enrollment counselor or academic advisor. Refer to the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University policy on *Incomplete Grades.*

Withdrawal from Class (W)

A student must officially withdraw (drop) from a course by the drop date posted in the Online Academic Calendar in order to receive a grade of W. Failure to submit a *Complete Withdrawal* form to the Office of the Registrar may result in a grade of F. Students are encouraged to discuss their options regarding withdrawing from classes or withdrawing from the University with their enrollment counselors or their academic advisors. Refer to the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University policy on *Withdrawal from Class*, *Withdrawal from the University*, or *Administrative Withdrawal.*

Withdrawal due to Military Deployment

In support of those students who are in any branch of the U.S. military service, a student who is deployed for active duty for the purpose of war while enrolled in Online courses may withdrawal from each class without financial penalty and retake those courses at his/her next opportunity. A grade of W will appear on the student's transcript for each class. If deployment occurs during the last week of an Online class, the instructor will calculate the student's final grade *pro rata* and submit that grade at the end of the course. Refer to the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University policy on *Military Deployment* and *Leave of Absence from the University.*

Withdrawal due to Professional Travel

GCU Online serves working students and professionals who may be required to travel as part of their jobs. Students who must travel while enrolled in class have the responsibility to continue participating in class and submit assignments. Students who choose to withdrawal due to travel, including those in the military who must travel for reasons other than deployment for purposes of war, must do so by the deadline posted in the Online academic calendar. Online students are strongly encouraged to plan travel carefully and communicate openly with their instructors prior to traveling to arrange accommodations to submit assignments early.

Grade Disputes & Grade Changes

Students should confirm the accuracy of the calculation of their final grades immediately upon receipt. A student's final grade may not be adjusted after five weeks of the last day of the class. A grade change form must be submitted by the instructor within the allotted time in order for a final grade to be changed on a student's academic record. In the event of a grade dispute, a student must attempt to resolve any discrepancies with the instructor before filing an *Academic Grievance* (see the GCU Catalog on the University website at www.gcu.edu). Grade disputes will only be reviewed by the University if the grievance is filed within five weeks of the last day of the course and if the student has demonstrated an attempt in good faith to resolve the issue with the instructor. The following are the only acceptable reasons for a grade dispute:
- The student's grade is incorrect due to a miscalculation.
- The student's grade is incorrect due to an assignment that was not graded by the instructor but was submitted on time and to the correct location according to the instructors directions, as provided in the classroom. Assignments posted after the last day of class will not be accepted under any circumstances.
- The student's grade was adversely and directly affected because of blatant violation of university policies by the instructor AND the instructor did not make accommodations to rectify those violations.

Note that only final grades may be disputed through the Academic Grievance Process and reasons, such as an instructor was too hard or unfair, are not justifiable reasons for grieving a final grade. Refer to the GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University policy on *Grade Disputes* and *Grade Changes.*

Academic Grievance Process

In the event of an irreconcilable disagreement a student may file an Academic Grievance with the University. Such disagreements may involve, but are not limited to, final grades, charges of academic dishonesty or inappropriate conduct in class, discrimination, or harassment. To file an academic grievance, the grieving party must complete an *Academic Grievance* form with all supporting documentation to the Online Director of the appropriate college and be able to demonstrate that he/she attempted in good faith to resolve the issue. The Online Director will research the issue and respond in writing to the grieving party a

decision on the matter. Refer to GCU Catalog on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for the University *Academic Grievance Process*.

Disabilities Accommodation Process

The Student Disabilities Services at GCU recognizes the needs of students with special challenges. Online students with disabilities have the responsibility and are encouraged to request accommodation prior to the start date of each Online class by completing an Accommodation Request form and submitting it and appropriate documentation from a medical provider or testing service to onlinedisabilitiesoffice@gcu.edu with subject line of the email is the student's name (last, first). If the request for accommodation is granted, the instructor of the course will receive a confidential communication identifying the accommodations to made for the student for the course. Students may not request directly special accommodations from the instructor. Refer to the GCU Catalog and the Office of Student Life/Student Disability Services on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) for more information on *Disability Accommodations*.

Resources

GCU Online offers many resources to assist students in all aspects of their educational experience. It is one goal of GCU Online to build an educational environment in which students can find answers to their questions quickly, feel confident in the information provided, and have access to learning tools that will promote independent learning. The following are important resources and/or learning tools available to all GCU Online students.

Grand Canyon University Website
www.gcu.edu

Canyon Cruiser
From the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) select Canyon Cruiser under the Web Services menu; GCU email account and GCU announcements and University information.

Web Advisor
From the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) select Web Advisor under the Web Services menu; grades and grade information, class schedule, transcript information.
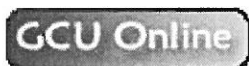
GCU Online This icon links to the GCU Online *Quick Start Resource Center* and is housed on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) and is an important link to many resources for GCU Online students.

Quick Start Resource Center
Located on the GCU website (www.gcu.edu, GCU Online icon). The *Quick Start Resource Center* houses tutorials on Blackboard and other academically relevant concepts (e.g., plagiarism, APA), access to an Online classroom in Blackboard, and contact and account set up information.

GCU Online Technical Support
All access and technical questions pertaining to Blackboard: 1-877-GCU-ThhP (1-877-428-8447) or online ticket submission at http://help.gcu.edu.

e-Library
From the GCU website (www.gcu.edu) select Library under the Academics menu.