

The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary
Dean McCaw's Notes for Teaching within UDTS' Culture for Formation

Grace and peace to you in Christ who has called us. The UDTS faculty and staff are thankful to have your gifts represented in our shared mission to strengthen Christ's church to minister in God's beloved world. Whether you are teaching with us once or on an ongoing basis, in our certificate program or degree classes, we trust you will be enriched by the circle you join, and that your offerings will strengthen UDTS' service to the church. May these accent notes to our call to teach be helpful.

– Beth McCaw, Seminary Dean

- Along with exercising scholarship, we form disciple leaders in part by **pastoral and spiritual presence**. Regardless of our disciplines, our graduates speak of the ministerial care they have received from their teachers. I am thankful that we represent leaders, teachers, and preachers who are well rounded bearers of the gospel of Christ.
 - In your recorded lectures, either open or close with prayer and/or a Scripture reading.
 - Along with keen and faithful scholarship, encourage spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, and scripture reading.
 - Weave pastoral sensitivity in responses to posts and correspondence. If you run across something concerning, do not hesitate to invite a student to an individual and prayerful conversation with you, the UDTS Pastor to Students, the Director of Vocation, or the Dean.
 - Small graces of tone in electronic communication such as e-mails and posts can provide reassurance, especially in the absence of face-to-face non-verbal cues. *For a student in the midst of a personal crisis, a warm inquiry about wellness can prevent a reaction of despair to more abbreviated correspondence about academic performance.*
 - Provide guidance and boundaries as needed in interactions so that the class engages in an upbuilding but focused way. *Examples: Edit - or ask a student to edit - a harsh or prejudicial post; correct graciously but clearly when a discussion thread is moving too far outside of its intended lane.*
 - Curtail – and edit if needed - sensitive or deprecating information about others for which permission to share has not been received. Help students observe boundaries and keep confidences. *The finer details about someone's personal life offered in a polity or pastoral care illustration are not needed to make the discussion point.*
 - If a student falls behind, and you doubt that they will be able to do justice to both the course and life, invite them to conversation about extending or dropping with an advisor or the Director of Vocation or the CEP Program Director. Resist significant short-cuts that devalue the student's own education or the offerings of their classmates. An exception would be accommodations supported by the Director of Vocation/Academic and Student Affairs Committee.

- We offer virtual and hybrid education that includes an **experience of being formed and learning in community**.
 - Communicate clearly in your course site and/or welcome lecture when and how you can be reached, and then be responsive within those boundaries. Include your equivalent for office hours (*you may also include virtual “office hours” for phone calls or zoom if you like*).
 - In a semi-synchronous program students may reach out at all hours of the day or night, and on all days of the week. While we track with students throughout the week, we cannot monitor and respond immediately 24/7. Acknowledge receipt and indicate when they can expect to have a full response.
 - Track and coach students in your class toward semi-synchronous engagement so that they find one another in shared learning. A student who consistently posts at the last minute or right after a week’s topic closes does not contribute to nor benefit by discussion or exercises.
 - Be creative with exercises that support mutual engagement. Quizzes/knowledge checks are needed for some content and instructor awareness/feedback. There are other types of exercises that strengthen the class and go beyond the common discussion forum:
 - Break a topic or theme into a half dozen pieces or steps and pair up students to zoom, call, or correspond for an analysis or summary on that point.
 - Lift up expertise in the class. Invite a student with a success story to post a “bonus” video in a given week (that you vet). *Examples: A five minute interview on how a congregation began a grief support group; a two minute introduction of an exemplary liturgy for communion; description of a creative polity application from a stated clerk.*
 - Launch a group project in which each contributes a piece that you compile or edit into a resource (with any needed feedback/correction). *Examples: Each student writes a paragraph of theological reflection, and a discussion question, on an ordination vow, and the set is compiled and sent round to the class end of the week.*
 - For larger classes, break discussions into smaller groups and require responses to a minimum number of classmates. (You can set a required number of responses in “activity completion” for a forum.) *Some instructors mix up small group membership each occurrence; some keep them the same the entire term. I prefer to run small groups for 3-4 weeks and them remix to provide new perspectives and relationships; I break this up with several weeks when there is an “all class” structured exercise.*
 - We guarantee students full class content in semi-synchronous engagement (no particular hour of availability required). That being said, many appreciate and will engage in optional zoom sessions. *Several instructors offer “bonus” opportunities to have a drop-in time with the instructor weekly or monthly, or to occasionally zoom into a hybrid session with a residential section of a course.*

- Our commitments to formation in community translate into **teaching that is high contact with personalized feedback.**
 - Especially for our CEP classes (eight short weeks), it is a top priority to provide timely, weekly, specific feedback. *Examples: Wrap up feedback within 48 hours of the close of a topic and alert the class when your response is available. It may be impractical or unhelpful to join a student group discussion daily; instead provide one individual response to each student who posts, or a summary response for each small group conversation, or circulate a video or write-up of top needs and insights across the class for the week.*
 - In Moodle you are able to view “activity completion” and “logs” of student activity. Check these at least every other week to ensure that students are engaging fully, and that you have not overlooked someone dropping out. *Examples: Occasionally a student will skip lectures or reading but post discussion of the topic – catch this early to ask them to hold off on responses until they are fully informed for the discussion. Or a student might have gone silent in discussions but has been reading pdf’s and watching lectures, and needs a line of encouragement that simple posts are better than none. Be aware that once a student has missed 1/3 or more of the weeks of timely engagement, they cannot satisfy the requirement of having attended the class for successful completion and credit.*

- Enjoy discovering the **distinctive gifts of our adult learners from many walks of life** and circles of ministry.
 - Some students will have relevant expertise for the topic from other study or professional life. Watch for opportunities to invite that enrichment into class. *In Pastoral Care I have invited social workers, doctoral level clinicians, hospice chaplains, domestic violence counselors and midwives to provide extra insights.*
 - Help the class to honor the giftedness of participants beyond the class focus – no one is the star, and no one need apologize that this topic is new to them. *In a pastoral care certificate class I have facilitated discussion with four people who held doctorates in other fascinating areas, people who had ministered in complex cultural contexts foreign to me, and parents of children with diverse abilities, challenges and talents.*
 - Some of our students do, or will, minister multi-vocationally in ways different from the full-time traditional pastorate. We are preparing them to be flexible, creative, resilient and whole in a changing ministry landscape. Accounting for diverse contexts in our teaching and illustrations can help them to feel vocationally anchored rather than blindsided or ill-equipped. *Examples: We cannot assume they all have a regular full weekday to give to exegesis, a church office in which to counsel those in need, a routine of weekly worship leadership in a church building, or the partnership of a church office administrator or a musician. They may have fascinating stories about the way they share good news in their hardware store Monday-Friday, or preach and serve communion to skateboarders on Thursday evenings, or attend athletic games with the parents and students for whom they teach and pray in public school or college.*