Where to Begin with an Online Course?
Navigating the Course Site, Setting up Notifications, and Connecting

If this is your first time taking an online course, it can seem daunting.

The first step is to explore the site. In most courses you will find four items: Home, Announcements, Modules, and Grades. Become familiar with how often your professor will update these areas.

At the beginning of the course, go into the settings of the online learning platform you are using and enable your notifications for assignments, announcements, and discussion forum activities. It is easy to fall behind in or forget about an online course when you aren't getting regular notifications. In most learning management software programs, you can receive notifications on your email and phone.

The learning management system, or LMS, is the platform that hosts a college's course websites**. Elmhurst uses Blackboard.** Although the course sites may have previously served as support to your in-person class meetings, they are now your first and most important resource. Blackboard will now be where learning and interaction take place, in addition to their existing role as a source of assignment information, announcements, syllabus details, and other updates. Your professors will use these sites to communicate specifics about how their courses will be conducted while online learning is required.

Online Courses Have Different Ways of Operating (Synchronous vs. Asynchronous)

Think about your coursework this semester: How your classes operate, both in person and on the LMS sites, can vary widely depending on the subject matter, the learning goals, and the professor's style and choices. Online learning, or "e-learning," is likewise variable, for all the same reasons. Specifically, online courses have two types of elements.

- **Synchronous course elements** are tasks that require students and professor to interact in real time. Examples include a webcast that a professor schedules for a certain time for all to view live, a chat feature that students are asked to use during a particular time period, and quizzes or exams that students take online at a fixed date and time.
- **Asynchronous course elements** are tasks that students can complete at any time they choose, so long as they are submitted by the date indicated by the professor. Examples include an assignment due on Sundays at 11:59 PM, a quiz that can be submitted at any time until the end of the month, and assigned readings for a given week of class.

Your courses may be primarily synchronous, mostly asynchronous, or a combination. How do you find out? The course website, again, is your best friend! It is crucial for you to pay close attention to information on each course's LMS site and access it regularly to keep updated on announcements and changes.

Technical Information

In general, computers that are four years old or less will be sufficient for an online course. Additionally, it is recommended that you have broadband (Cable, FIOS, DSL, etc.) internet speeds to access your course since many online courses contain video and multimedia content that might not play well through a dial-up modem. In reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak and resulting school closures, some companies such as Spectrum and Comcast are offering free service for students.

You should also update to the newest version of whatever browser you are using as well as the most up-to-date Flash plug-in. Most course work well on the following browsers:

- Chrome 75 or higher
- Firefox 68 or higher
- Safari 12 or higher

Be sure to check your browser version often as they are frequently updated and the above information may be out of date.

Adapted from Rutgers University (https://rlc.rutgers.edu/remote_instruction)