Creating and Implementing an Online Course Etiquette Appreciative Agreement: Recommendations and Insights for Updating Course Material and Social Expectations to Aid in the Transition to Online Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

A tech report created by the Texas A&M University Engineering Education Faculty and Friends

Tracy Hammond[123], Robert Lightfoot[12], Samantha Ray[23], Shawna Thomas[12]

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[1] Engineering Education Faculty, Texas A&M University
[2] Department of Computer Science & Engineering, Texas A&M University
[3] Sketch Recognition Lab, Texas A&M University

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Abstract

With the threat of COVID-19 risking the health and safety of the 19.9 million students and 1.5 million faculty studying and working at colleges and universities across the U.S., these institutions have had little choice but to replace traditional, in-person classes with online, virtual alternatives. This unprecedented rapid adjustment has come with many unexpected difficulties as neither faculty nor students were prepared to teach or learn virtually, respectively. Beyond the obvious challenges of converting course material and accessing resources, an invisible difficulty lies in the lack of social expectations for this unfamiliar environment. A majority of the students and faculty do not know how to properly interact in an online setting. The home environment creates a completely different set of norms and expectations, many of which can be distracting and deleterious to the classroom environment. Thus, there is a critical need to provide students (and faculty) with a set of expectations to help set the tone of the virtual classroom. In the absence of such knowledge, the virtual classroom will be at a disadvantage for providing an effective learning environment, disenfranchising, and causing irreparable damage to the education of millions of students across the nation. As such, this document provides a recommended etiquette template for faculty to use in their classroom. This document has been implemented, tested, and improved across several courses at Texas A&M University. We are sharing this etiquette template so that other faculty at TAMU and other universities can use it to test the tone in their virtual classroom.

Introduction

Faculty and students have established social norms in a traditional (e.g., face-to-face) environment. These include expectations on participation and engagement as well as appropriate dress, behavior, and technology usage during a class session. Often many of these expectations are implicit and do not require conversation or instruction, although some (like technology usage) may be explicitly addressed at the beginning of a course. The global COVID-19 pandemic has thrust faculty and students into online learning environments where these social norms are no longer sufficient. According to a recent survey of 826 higher education faculty and administrators from 641 United States institutions, 56% of faculty used teaching methods completely new to them during the transition to online instruction (Ralph, 2020). Faculty and students must engage in a conversation about etiquette expectations in this new setting, but many do not have past experience to draw from.

What are Appreciative Agreements

In every learning environment, both faculty and students have expectations about how instruction takes place and how participants interact with each other. These expectations may be only implicit, but they are always present. An appreciative agreement is an *explicit* set of expectations that are *collaboratively created* by all participants and often *given in terms of what is wanted* instead of what is not wanted (Cockell & McArthur-Blair, 2012). By their nature, they create trust among the participants and encourage a culture of positive, constructive feedback (Robaina, 2020).

Appreciative agreements are explicit. By being explicit, all participants are better equipped to have aligned sets of expectations. It removes ambiguity from how interactions should take place in the learning environment. By clearly outlining how both faculty and students navigate their learning community, all

participants experience less frustration and anxiety about interactions.   Explicit appreciative agreements foster a safe learning environment and reduce future conflict.

Appreciative agreements are collaborative. It is imperative that all participants have a voice in how their learning community functions. By working together to identify course etiquette guidelines, all participants have buy-in and are motivated to follow the agreement set by the group. This also helps establish dialog as an essential part of the learning environment.

Appreciative agreements are positively focused. They proactively establish and maintain classroom norms as opposed to a negative and reactionary approach. Instead of describing undesirable behaviors and what not to do, they focus on what behaviors promote learning, community, and success. When developing guidelines, participants typically gravitate toward eliminating negative behaviors instead of encouraging positive behaviors. Thus, elements of an appreciative agreement often need to be rephrased or reframed to identify and emphasize the positive.

Recommendations for Introducing the Course Etiquette Appreciative Agreement

Whether you use this exact list for setting the rules of virtual etiquette in the classroom, or if you create your own, introducing an Etiquette Appreciative Agreement (EAA) to your online course will prove significantly impactful. Here we offer and describe several general recommendations for introducing an EAA.

Recommendation 1: Discuss on Day 1

It is important to discuss an EAA from the very beginning to start both the faculty and students with the same set of expectations (Eberly, 2020; Castillo, 2013; Ambrose et al., 2010; Erickson et al., 2006; Lyons, 2003). This addresses any issues before bad habits set in, which can be troublesome to handle later. Often addressing issues later can make students feel that they are being "singled-out" among their peers.

An example is the recommended use and purpose of Piazza. As a tool to ask questions and share ideas, Piazza is great. As a platform to express dissatisfaction with the class, teammates, professors, or assignments, it does more harm than good. Informing students that interviewers from companies looking to hire might have access to their comments on Piazza might produce the more desired use of this platform. If all of this is stated before anyone uses Piazza, no one is singled out.

Recommendation 2: Create an Etiquette Appreciative Agreement Collaboratively with Students

The appendix provides an example of an EAA that can apply to a variety of courses. However, because this represents an agreement between faculty and students on behavior expectations, it is best created collaboratively. This helps establish trust and gives students agency in the process (Bernstein & Flinders, 2017; Holton, 2001). The collaborative effort will better support continued compliance later in the course (Bloom et al., 2013). It has the added benefit of supporting community development in online environments where faculty need to be more intentional about fostering a learning community (Davey & Bora, 2019). Below in this section we outline some potential methods for creating an EAA collaboratively and engaging in a class-wide discussion where every student has a voice.

Recommendation 3: Be Open to Change

Recognize that an EAA may change as it is adapted to different classrooms. The students may have some excellent and valid suggestions. If you and the class agree that those are improvements, you should update the EAA appropriately. This shows the class that you are reasonable, listen to the students, and value their opinion. It also gives students greater agency in their learning environment by encouraging them to self-advocate.

Recommendation 4: Put it in Writing

Whether the EAA is made collaboratively or not, it should be put in writing and included in the course materials. This will serve as a reference and resource for both the faculty and students. Having a written document that everyone has agreed to will enable faculty to address behavioral issues more easily and with less conflict. When addressing an issue, the faculty member can point the student to the written EAA. Because the EAA becomes the mediator, it moves the dynamics away from faculty vs. student and towards behavior vs. agreement (Crosby & Brockmeier, 2016).

It is important that every participant takes responsibility for understanding and acknowledging the EAA (Chan, et al., 2014; Carpenter & Pease, 2013; Brewer, Williams, & Sher, 2007; Stephenson & Laycock, 1993). There are many ways to facilitate this, but it may be helpful to have a short auto-graded quiz after the agreement is in place where students acknowledge that they have read it and agree to it. If there are particular elements that the faculty want to emphasize, they can add questions about these in the quiz. The faculty can then reach out to students personally who do not initially complete the quiz and either remind them of the agreement's importance or engage in a conversation about any concerns the student may have.

Recommendation 5: Stick to the Etiquette Appreciative Agreement or Reevaluate it

After the initial creation process, you should stick to the EAA for the duration of the course. If you do not, it signifies that the agreement is not meaningful, which undercuts the benefits it brings. You are establishing a culture of trust and mutual respect --- adhering to the agreement upholds these values. If there is a specific reason you are not sticking to the EAA, or if there is a particular scenario it is not adequately covering, it may mean that the agreement should be updated to reflect the changing circumstances. Because this will be a change to the expectations everyone has agreed upon, it must be supported with class discussion and buy-in.

Potential Methods for Class Discussion of an Etiquette Appreciative Agreement

There are several ways to develop an EAA collaboratively depending on the type and size of course. At a minimum, the faculty can present an initial set and engage in a discussion/activity with students on what they would change, disagree with, or add. While this will help give some buy-in from the students, a more collaborative activity where students start from an empty set and create the guidelines together will support greater agency and community trust (Bernstein & Flinders, 2017; Holton, 2001). Faculty members

who have done this type of activity (either for class etiquette or team contracts) find that students tend to come up with a set very similar to the faculty's core elements on their own.

Potential ways to create an EAA collaboratively:

- Entire class discussion
  - Faculty initiates class discussion on why an EAA is important, what would happen in their absence, and what the set should contain.
  - This helps establish a sense of community but can be difficult in larger classes for every student to have a voice.
- Think-group-share (Angelo T. A, & Cross, K. P. (1993))
  - Faculty sets the stage with a brief discussion on why an EAA is needed and lets every student to reflect *individually* on what they would want in such a set for a few minutes. Then the faculty divides the class into small groups where students share and collaborate on a set of top items (keep few in number). Faculty brings the class back together where each group shares findings and closes activity with a completed guideline document to be shared with the class.
  - This scales well to different class sizes, and every student gets an opportunity to discuss with others and be heard. It can be difficult in an online environment to get students discussing in groups right away before they are comfortable. Faculty can mitigate this effect with an ice breaker type activity in the small group first. The ice breaker does not need to be related to the course (and often is more effective for getting students to participate if not).
- Individual student input
  - Faculty motivates the need for an EAA and purpose of giving every student a voice in its creation. Students then reflect *individually* on what they would want in the set of guidelines, both of the faculty member and the other students. Students submit written feedback for the faculty to use to create and adapt an agreement for the course. (An anonymous google form with targeted questions can help facilitate this.) Faculty present the final EAA to the class, highlighting where student input was used.
  - This is the least collaborative approach but does give every student an opportunity to give their feedback, especially those who may be uncomfortable sharing with others in the class. Faculty should be aware that this approach will likely have lower levels of participation as students are not required to engage.

Build a Sense of Community

The implicit sense of community in an in-person course can be lost in the transition to a virtual course (Davey & Bora, 2019; Swan & Shih, 2019; Heyman, 2010). Faculty can regain this community by encouraging students to get to know each other, being an active participant in discussion boards, adding a fun, social component to course performance, and providing venues for students to connect over common interests.

Community of scholars

As much as possible, faculty should nurture a community of scholars among the course participants. Developing a community in an online setting requires faculty to be more cognizant of the environment they are creating and more intentional with the choices they make from the beginning. The implicit

environmental expectations and boundaries set by a physical classroom are no longer present. Even the simple act of a group of people being physically present together that build community is no longer a given. Many of these etiquette guidelines are focused on reestablishing the sense of community and making expectations on presence and engagement explicit.

Encourage the students to get to know each other

Requiring an introduction from each student prior to the first day of class can reduce the anonymizing effect of virtual communication (Wang et al., 2019; Lomei, 2017; Tomei et al., 2008). The format can be a discussion board (open to all to read) or survey (with private concerns addressed). Questions can range from major and classification (for gateway courses) to a more in-depth reason for taking the class (going beyond "It is required for my major.") Asking questions like where did you grow up, go to high school, or what extracurricular activities have you/do you participate in gives insight to the diversity of your class and helps students make meaningful connections with each other. Finally, asking what would allow me to get to know you out of 100 students in this class, or what is something interesting about you gives great ways to introduce some of the class to each other. Spending the first half of the first day of class on the introduction of the instructor to the class and the class to each other sets a great tone (Eberly, 2020; Castillo, 2013; Ambrose et al., 2010; Erickson et al., 2006; Lyons, 2003).

Beyond the first day, faculty can encourage students to explore the discussion board introductions when working in teams/groups to get to know the people they are working with. The introduction should include pictures and/or videos to better personalize these interactions. Faculty can also start group work with a brief ice-breaker activity that requires students to revisit these introductions or learn something new about their classmates.

Be an active participant in discussion boards

Faculty can drive community engagement on the discussion boards through regular postings, as well as designing some assignments to require interaction on the discussion boards (Wiley, 2020; Garrison; Anderson, 2011, Heyman, 2010; Pickett & Pelz, 2003; Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Note that discussion boards are not text only, so images and videos are an effective means to 'brighten' this area. The more active the faculty member is, the more active the students will be.

Note that the use of discussion boards may vary wildly depending on how much virtual facetime the students get each day. For instance, a three hour synchronous daily half summer class may not use a discussion board a lot since they are already getting fifteen hours of face time with the instructor each week.

Add a fun, social component to course performance

Building a leaderboard with volunteer participation where students can choose a nickname will allow students to look at how they are doing in class in relation to others. This works with classes that have lots of activities and replaces the face-to-face discussions students have at their desks, asking "How did you do on that last assignment."

On the first day of class, Bingo is a fun option to help get the students to know each other. On a pre-survey, ask students to list three things that are unique about them. Scramble them using an online Bingo card creator and make them available to students in a drive, making sure to have a way for students

to know which one they should select, such as an excel sheet with card names matched to names. Then have several 3 minute breakout rooms where students talk to each other and try to find matches on their cards. To make this most effective, select "Move all participants into breakout rooms automatically" to prevent delay and confusion as students do not always notice the "Join breakout room." Similarly, to prevent wasted time on the back end of the breakout room, select "Set breakout counter to '10' seconds." Between breakout rooms, click "recreate" to randomize each grouping.

Another worthwhile social activity to dedicate some course time to is holding discussions about current events. Giving students a safe space to discuss their thoughts and what they're currently going through with their peers has great value for both their personal development and wellbeing. During a break or transition time in the course, use 5 to 10 minute breakout rooms so that students can talk to each other privately without any instructor involvement. In case a student wants to share their thoughts with the instructor, it is useful to also create an anonymous survey for that purpose.

Creating a class twitter channel that allows students to go on a virtual scavenger hunt can engage students in a current and enjoyable format. The learning objectives for the assignment can be built into the items in the hunt. With a requirement for "unique finds" the assignment can build on the sense of the community of scholars.

Provide venues for students to connect over common interests

Community grows from interacting with one another, and not always regarding course content. Have various students briefly present on pre-approved topics of interest to provide some relief in our high stakes world of education. Consider topics such as school traditions, recent industry milestones reached, historical figures, and personal networking practices.

Organize and sponsor in-class clubs for students with common interests such as gaming, esports, reading, plant management, physical sports, cinema, maker movement, and social media. This provides a forum for students, outside of the course material, where they can interact with their classmates regarding shared interests and passions. Often students just need someone to break the ice and get them started.

Important Components of the Etiquette Appreciative Agreement

The EAA deals with several components of course etiquette expectations: how students present themselves online, how students engage with the material, and how students engage with others.

Students' Online Physical Presence (Items 1-6)

This section of items discusses how students should present themselves during the lecture. We argue that you should include the following items in your EAA:

1. Be on time, present, and visibly engaged during the entire lecture.
2. Use your real name.
3. Mute your microphone.
4. Keep your video on.
5. Wear attire appropriate for class.

6. Act as you would in person.

Social norms and expectations deter people from being unruly or disruptive in public. Rarely will a student suddenly call a family member during a face-to-face class or move about the room. Classrooms also do not often experience external disruptions from people walking in and out who are not associated with the class. In online classes though, these distracting behaviors are entirely possible and/or reasonable. In a home office, a family member can come into the room unexpectedly and require attention. When a student's desk and seat are just a screen, the student is free to move around their environment. Online learning environments do not need to be constrained to the same social boundaries of traditional classrooms, and in fact there is freedom to allow some behaviors that may promote learning. However, some mutually agreed upon boundaries are necessary to protect the learning environment.

Remind students that many things that would be inappropriate in a regular classroom are also inappropriate here. For example, if it is important for you that students not eat while in the virtual classroom with you, then you should mention that.

In a traditional class, faculty and students are expected to be on time, present, and engaged during the entire class session. Be mindful that technical issues arise, often at the most inopportune times. It is valuable to have a contingency plan in case you lose connection to the course. If possible, it helps to have a teaching assistant attend the lecture. You should establish a clear policy of what the students should do in your absence.

Students are also expected to bring the supplies and materials they need with them and to wear appropriate attire. An online class is no different, but there are additional items to address that are no longer free/a given.

- Identification: Just as a student wouldn't introduce themselves under a fake (or inappropriate) name in a physical classroom, they should use their real name in the online version.
- Microphones: Students in physical classrooms typically do not interrupt the class whenever they want, play music for all to hear, or talk with others not associated with the class, they should also not do so online. This often means keeping everyone's microphone muted except the current speaker. This preserves everyone's ability to have a voice and reduces background noise from the many participants.
- Video feeds: Participant videos are significant in developing and maintaining a sense of community. We all need constant reminders that we are not learning (and teaching) alone. However, it may not be practical for all participants to keep their video on during the entire session if the class size is large or bandwidth is small. It is not all or nothing, there are several options for allowing some video feeds to promote community within the technology limits:
  - When splitting students into small groups for activities and discussions, encourage all participants to have their video feed on.
  - Rotate which students have their video feeds on between different class sessions. This helps all students get to know at least the names and faces of their learning community.

Both instructors and students benefit from having a sense of who is in a class. In a traditional classroom setting, the instructor and the students will learn to recognize the faces of the other people in the room even if they don't learn all or any of their names. In an online setting, to have a similar presence and involvement in the classroom environment requires using the virtual equivalent of being in the same room: video conferencing. An added benefit to this alternative is that people can have their names next to their faces, helping people learn who others are. When people don't use their actual names or choose to keep their video off, they miss out on the opportunity for others to meet and recognize them.

Students' Communication During the Class

7. Use the chat board to post questions to the class.

8. Use the "Raise Hand" emoji (or others) to ask a question.

9. Once you finish an activity or quiz, please select the check mark labeled "yes."

10. Keep your course-wide comments to the tools used in class.

11. Take advantage of course resources to ask questions.

12. Stick to class content.

13. Recognize that current events can significantly impact learning.

Faculty and students should set guidelines for how to engage in class discussions, ask and answer questions, and get students the help they need. While online learning environments have a greater number of ways faculty and students can communicate, they also lose visual cues that face-to-face environments rely on (e.g., students raising hands to ask/answer questions, signals that an activity is completed, body language indicating how students are tracking with the material). Online learning environments need to restore lines of communication for these types of cues.

Because many options are available for communication, it is important to define the mechanism for in-class communication. This helps both faculty and students know where to look for interactions so no one is isolated or feels left behind. Limiting the available methods helps reduce anxiety for both faculty and students as they monitor multiple types of input in an online class session.

Students implicitly understand expectations of communication content in face-to-face classes. The classroom itself serves as a reminder to students that their communication should focus on class material and be given only at appropriate times. This disappears when classes move online as many students "attend" class in informal settings (e.g., bedrooms, living rooms, public spaces, and outdoors) that do not have these implied norms of behavior. Faculty need to reestablish expectations of how students communicate during class to help remove distractions in the learning environment.

Current events can significantly impact student learning. Provide a safe space either inside or outside of class to allow students to discuss the impact. There are various ways to handle this. Data has shown that students don't want you to ignore or euphemistically describe current events. It is important that this does not derail the class content, but ignoring them is also a big mistake. Some instructors may want to dedicate 5 minutes a day or a week to discuss current events. Faculty should set ground rules and remind everyone how the discussion will proceed before beginning. Recognize that emotions can run high when discussing sensitive topics. Faculty should be self-aware of their own emotions, exhibit self-management when navigating strong emotions, and cultivate social awareness by nurturing a reflective classroom community. (DUCTE, 2020; Vakil, Ayers 2019; Landreman, 2013; Pace, 2003).

Students' Private Interaction with Instructor

14. Let me know if you need special accommodations.

15. If something is not working for you in the classroom, either because of content or your other classmates, tell the instructor, so that you can figure out a solution.

In traditional face-to-face learning environments, students often communicate small, private concerns before and after class, such as accommodations they need or problems they are having with the learning environment. The perceived barrier to this type of communication is higher in online learning environments where faculty and students do not have before and after class mingling time. Online learning environments can also leave students feeling isolated, and faculty do not have the same luxury of "reading the room" as they do in traditional face-to-face environments.

It is important that faculty are proactive in soliciting input from students about their concerns with the learning environment. Faculty should also periodically check-in with students about how things are going as new issues may come up after the course starts. Placing these expectations in the EAA lowers the barrier to communication and will help remind students to speak up if something is not working for them.

Students' Engagement with Material

16. Keep up with the material.
17. Be engaged with the course content.
18. If you have confusion, get help before you fall behind.

The transition to online learning has required adjustments to or loss of known effective pedagogical practices. Many students interact with the material differently, preferring to have course materials available asynchronously. However, this can lead to a disconnect with the material that hurts student retention and understanding. Active learning is among the most effective learning practices (Brame, 2020; Jensen et al., 2015; Freeman et al., 2014; Ruiz-Primo et al., 2011; Ambrose et al., 2010; Prince, 2004; Springer, Stanne, Donovan, 1999; Hake, 1998; Bonwell, Eison, 1991; Chickering, Gamson, 1987), but the onus of maintaining that practice falls entirely on the student in an asynchronous course. Instructors need to stress to the students the importance of keeping up with the material so that they stay engaged and not fall behind. To that end, instructors also need to encourage students to reach out to them for help and clarification as soon as the students need it. Depending on the course organization, this can be achieved using regular office hours, online discussion boards, or email correspondence. The important aspect is having an accessible channel of communication.

Virtual classrooms have some unique engagement opportunities unavailable to traditional classrooms. In a physical space, students and instructors need to clear out of the room to make it to their next class or meeting and to make the room available to the next class. But in the virtual classroom students generally have more freedom to linger during after-class questions to see what the other students are asking. This practice can be quite beneficial, giving students further insight into the course content.

Respect of Others

19. Pay attention to tone and word choice.
20. Be respectful of others and behave professionally.

21. Be sensitive to persons with disabilities, and be considerate of varying access needs.

22. Remember your email etiquette.

23. Review what you write before you post.

Electronic communication has its own set of rules and expectations just like in-person communication (Madison College, 2020). Without the verbal aspect of tone, miscommunication due to ambiguity is more likely to occur. To help make sure that people are correctly understood, clear and concise communication is key. Whenever possible, messages should be kept to the point for the benefit of all involved. To that end, make sure to reread what you write before you share it to make sure you wrote what you intended: typos are easy to do and sometimes better ways to phrase messages reveal themselves after you put the first version down in writing.

Expectations for politeness and professionalism are no different than those in a physical classroom setting. While learning and teaching from a home environment makes it easier to relax into casual behavior, it is important to remember to behave appropriately. Simple rules of thumb such as "If you wouldn't announce it to the class in person, you shouldn't share it with the class in a virtual meeting" can help you maintain this practice. As a parallel point, it is important to assume the best of people: instead of assuming mal intent, believe that everyone is doing the best they can with the resources they have. People cannot control if their internet goes out or if someone requires their attention. People can accidentally talk over someone else in a meeting without meaning to interrupt.

There are simple guidelines to follow to make sure that your course content is accessible to students with disabilities. Many virtual meeting softwares offer automatic captioning. Electronic documents have methods to synchronize with screen readers. Everyone has a responsibility to make sure that materials they share with the class are accessible to the entire class.

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Acknowledgements

About the Authors

[Tracy Hammond](), PhD, Director of the Sketch Recognition Lab and Professor in the Department of Computer Science & Engineering, is passionate about the university. Hammond is the chair of the Engineering Education Executive Committee, and member of the Center for Population and Aging, the Center for Remote Health Technologies & Systems, and the Institute for Data Science. Hammond is a PI for over 10 million in funded research, from NSF, DARPA, Google, Microsoft, et al. Hammond holds a PhD in Computer Science and FTO (Finance Technology Option) from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and four degrees from Columbia University: an M.S in Anthropology, an M.S. in Computer Science, a B.A. in Mathematics, and a B.S. in Applied Mathematics. Hammond mentored 17 UG theses (and many more non-thesis UG through 351 undergraduate research semesters taught), 29 MS theses, and 9 PhD dissertations. Hammond is the 2020 recipient of the TEES Faculty Fellows Award and the 2011-2012 recipient of the Charles H. Barclay, Jr. '45 Faculty Fellow Award. Hammond has been featured on the Discovery Channel and other news sources. Hammond is dedicated to diversity and equity, reflected in her publications, research, teaching, service, and mentoring. More at http://srl.tamu.edu.

[Robert Lightfoot](), Lecturer, Computer Science & Engineering. Member of the Engineering Education Faculty. He received his Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from Texas A&M and Masters of Science in Software Engineering at SMU. He has 28 years of industry experience in most aspects of software development and product lifecycle. Robert Lightfoot is a PhD student at Texas A&M University in Interdisciplinary Engineering. His research focuses on engineering education.

[Samantha Ray](), PhD Candidate, Computer Science & Engineering. Samantha Ray is a PhD student at Texas A&M University in the Sketch Recognition Lab under Director Tracy Hammond. She received her Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering from Texas A&M in 2018. Her research focuses on intelligent interfaces for messy human data; her interests include human activity recognition, handwriting recognition, and second language acquisition.

[Shawna Thomas](), PhD, Instructional Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science & Engineering and member of the Engineering Education Faculty. Her research is in randomized motion planning algorithms and their application to non-traditional domains. She received her PhD in 2010 from Texas A&M University.

Appendix: Suggested Online Course Etiquette Appreciative Agreement

1. *Be on time, present, and visibly engaged during the entire lecture.*

   We will have pop up questions and quizzes from time to time, as well as frequent breakout rooms. Your absence will make the experience worse for you and everyone else. I am committed to being present, and you should be too. If I am experiencing technical difficulties, the TA will conduct the class until they are resolved.

2. *Use your real name.*

   Make sure your Zoom name is set to be your real name. Your participation grade will be based on this. Additionally, if the instructor/TA/graders don't recognize your name, then you may be booted out.

3. *Mute your microphone.*

   Please keep your microphone muted if you are not in a breakout room or actively speaking to the class. There are lots of outdoor sounds that multiply with many students. Please make the listening experience better for everyone by muting your microphone when you are not using it.

4. *Keep your video on.*

   By seeing your video, it helps to see if you are engaged and allows me to adapt the material appropriately. An enormous amount of feedback comes from your faces. I am showing my face, please show me yours. If this expectation causes a problem for a student, e.g., lack of webcam or bandwidth issues, an exception will be made. We expect students to remember and follow the Aggie Honor Code when requesting an exception.

5. *Wear attire appropriate for class.*

   Your video should be on. Make sure what we see is appropriate. I am not saying you should be wearing a suit, but you definitely should be wearing a shirt. Wear what you would wear in person.

6. *Act as you would in person.*

   If there is something you wouldn't do in person, please don't do it during the online lecture. Use your best judgement.

7. *Use the chat board to post questions to the class.*

   The TAs and graders will be monitoring the chat board to help bring up questions when appropriate. Note that while I am lecturing, I may not see the chat board questions, but I have tasked the TA and graders to make sure your question is not ignored.

8. *Use the "Raise Hand" emoji (or others) to ask a question.*

   The TA and graders will monitor for raised hands to make sure no one gets ignored. To find the hand emoji, click on "Participants" at the bottom. A screen will pop up on the right, where you will see several options: "Raise Hand," "yes," "no," "go slower," "go faster," and under "more" the options are "dislike," "like," "clap," "need a break," and "away." It may be appropriate to use any of them throughout the semester.

9. *Once you finish an activity or quiz, please select the check mark labeled "yes."*

   This option can be found by clicking the "Participants" button at the bottom. It will allow us to gauge the general amount of time it takes the class to complete a quiz. If you need help use the chat screen, "help" (if in a breakout room), or another emoji.

10. *Keep your course-wide comments to the tools used in class.*

    There are many different ways to do the things we teach in class. Our goal is to teach the content in a way that is most accessible and useful for the students in the course. We are always trying to improve the class, so we appreciate you emailing us with suggestions and comments about other tools. However, please don't use the public chat function to encourage everyone in the class to use different tools. This distracts the students and also encourages them to use a tool that we are not currently set up to support.

11. *Take advantage of course resources to ask questions.*

    Ask questions after class, during office hours, or over email if you have any confusions about the class. Tell us what works and what doesn't work. We are here to help you learn.

12. *Stick to class content.*

    There are lots of interesting things that we can talk about in class. It may be tempting to jump forward and ask about different concepts, however we have a limited amount of time during the class to teach the concepts for the class, and teaching an impromptu lecture on a different topic will take time away from the course material and also may not be satisfying since the instructor has not prepared to discuss that topic. Please keep the topics to class content and current events, and during appropriate times.

13. *Recognize that current events can significantly impact learning.*

    We are all affected by what is happening in the world around us. Often, we are impacted in different ways by the same event. Recognize this and exercise understanding to everyone in the course. We will periodically provide opportunities to discuss issues as a class that follow a set of agreed upon ground rules.

14. *Let me know if you need special accommodations.*

    If you have an accommodations letter from Disability Services, please contact me so we can make sure the course organization works for you. I won't realize that something is wrong if you don't tell me.

15. *If something is not working for you in the classroom, either because of content or your other classmates, tell the instructor, so that you can figure out a solution.*

    Speak up as soon as you find something not working for you so we can work together on a solution. I won't know that there is a problem if you don't tell me.

16. *Keep up with the material.*

    Even though we are online, this course still requires you to keep up with the material. Don't procrastinate and assume you can catch up later.

17. *Be engaged with the course content.*

    This is a learning community. Everyone must be engaged to have an overall good experience. Your experience with the course is dependent on the effort you put into it.

18. *If you have confusion, get help before you fall behind.*

    It is okay to be confused, but it is not okay to stay confused. Reach out for help so we can get you back on track with the course material.

19. *Pay attention to tone and word choice.*

    Humor is often heavily reliant on timing and nuances such as facial expressions. This makes things like sarcasm and jokes harder to communicate online. To make sure people understand what you want to communicate, stick to concise language and consider your tone and word choice.

20. *Be respectful of others and behave professionally.*

    Remember that people of all sorts of backgrounds are in the class with you. The class environment needs to be safe and effective for everyone, so it's important to be courteous to the thoughts and feelings of those around you. You are all in this class to learn: avoid sharing content that is not related to the course material, especially if it contains suggestive or politically sensitive content. If you have a problem with another student's behavior, tell the instructor.

21. *Be sensitive to persons with disabilities, and be considerate of varying access needs.*

    When posting formal class materials to share with the class, please: 1) Turn on closed caption (text at the bottom) for videos. 2) Use appropriate text types in documents to enable quick text-to-speech perusal. 3) Provide alternative text for all images. 4) When adding links, show the descriptive text instead of the active link, then put the inactive link in parentheses afterward since text readers allow users to skip through to links and list what links are available. Usually the actual

URL is quite unintelligible. For example [Document Design | Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](http://universaldesign.ie/Products-Services/Customer-Communications-Toolkit-for-the-Public-Service-A-Universal-Design-Approach/Written-Communication/Document-Design/) and [Best Practices in Accessible Online Design – Simple Book Production](https://pressbooks.ulib.csuohio.edu/accessibility/)

22. *Remember your email etiquette.*

When sending emails, use clear subject lines so that the recipient prioritizes your email appropriately. Similarly, make sure the content of your email is clear, e.g., make calls to actions easy to recognize as such. Remember that emails are private communication and that emails are copyrighted to the original author. Don't forward emails without permission.

23. *Review what you write before you post.*

Communicating in writing online has similar expectations to communicating verbally in person, and online you have the opportunity to review and edit before you post. Make sure to review what you write for spelling and grammar mistakes before you post. Similarly, make sure what you write communicates what you mean effectively: using all-caps or excessive punctuation does not help get your message across.