Online Classroom Structure and Communication

TROY online uses Blackboard as the main delivery channel for online courses. You will be assigned a username and password to access your online courses through blackboard. It is very important to take the time to learn about the TROY online classroom setting and how to communicate in an online environment. This document will shed the light on the standard TROY online course menu and communication.

You should take the time to familiarize yourself with your online courses before the start of each term. TROY online courses are available as early as a week before the start of the term and as late as the Friday before the start of the term.

Communicating within an online course is of great significance. In fact, communication is the key to succeeding not only in an online course, but in life. Most communication in online courses is done via text, as opposed to a face-to-face course which relies heavily on talking.

The following topics will be discussed:
- TROY online Course Menu
- What does each content area include?
- Email
- Additional instructional tools

TROY online Course Menu

Standard TROY online Course Menu layout

- Online courses are set up differently depending on the instructor.
- There are standard course menu buttons in every online course.
- Course buttons may be named differently, so check with your instructor if you are not sure about the purpose of a course menu area.
- Instructors have the discretion to rename/add new buttons in the course menu.
What does each content area include?

- **Start Here**
  - This where you will find the Site Map
  - Any information your instructor deems important to know before the start of the course will be listed here including Student Expectations, Student Contract, Prerequisites, etc...
  - Start navigating the course by accessing the Start Here button first.

- **Announcements**
  - Announcements are the first thing you will see when you enter your course.
  - Read the announcements every time you log in.
  - Important information regarding changes will be listed here (e.g. course schedule changes, due dates, reminders, etc.)
  - Troy University may also post announcements related to its online programs.

- **Syllabus**
  - The syllabus serves as the course contract as it outlines everything you need to know about the course (e.g. instructor’s information, required textbook, student expectation, prerequisites, course requirements, method of instruction and evaluation, course schedule, etc.)
  - Print a copy of the syllabus and keep it handy.

- **Instructor Contact**
  - This button houses important information about your instructor’s education as well as contact information such as email address, phone numbers, and virtual office hours.

- **Assignments**
  - Required assignments will be listed here.
  - The Assignment Feature may be used to submit assignments in Blackboard. More information on how to use this function is listed in the Student Resources Area.
  - Some instructors use this area for course quizzes and exams as well eliminating the Exams/Quizzes button.

- **Course Documents**
  - This is a very important area of the course menu as it may house the PowerPoint presentations, chapter documents, audio lectures, and any other related items your instructor might require for the course.
  - This area can be listed under different names at the instructor’s discretion.

- **Discussion Board**
  Classroom discussions are slightly different in an online environment, as opposed to those in a face-to-face class. Since most of the communication is written, it will require that you read more than you would in a traditional course. Interactive discussion brings forth sharing of students’ prior knowledge and experience. The discussion board is a big part of the learning process in TROY online courses.
  - Most classroom discussions will take place via the Discussion Board.
o Visit the Discussion Board daily to avoid getting behind.
  o You will be required to answer questions and respond to some of your classmates in most courses.
  o Some forums may be graded.
  o Be sure to read the requirements for posting/responding to forums.
  o It is a good idea to read the first message of each discussion post.
  o The discussion board contains an “Ask the Instructor,” “Student Lounge” and additional content forums that the instructor creates.
    ♦ Post general questions about the course content that other students may need to know about in the “Ask the Instructor” forum.
    ♦ Never post a personal question. In that case, you would need to either email or call the instructor.
    ♦ Use the “Student Lounge” forum to communicate with classmates about non-course related content.
    ♦ For technical questions, visit the Tech/Proctor Info button (located in your course) or Blackboard Support.

  o Classroom introductions are usually a part of every course and located with the discussion board. It is important that you present a good introduction, since it is the first impression your instructor and fellow classmates will have of you.
    ♦ Your initial introduction should be brief, but full of substance.
    ♦ Don’t say anything in your introduction that you wouldn’t want to share with the world.
    ♦ Respond to fellow classmates with whom you may have something in common.
    ♦ Post meaningful comments. Do not simply reply to everyone with the same comment.
    ♦ Remember to respond to the instructor, as well.

  *Sample items to include in your introduction:*
    ➢ Name, Occupation, and State of Residence
    ➢ Your Major
    ➢ Reason for taking this specific course and what you expect to learn
    ➢ Your academic and professional goals
    ➢ Information about your family, hobbies, etc. (only if you are comfortable)

  • Exams/Quizzes
    o This is where you will find your required exams and quizzes for the course.
    o Students usually have access to tests and quizzes for one week.
    o Most quizzes are objective assessments (M/C, T/F, etc.) that are automatically graded.
    o Some courses require proctored tests—taking test in presence of another person.
    o Some of your exams might require lockdown browser.
    o Instructors may use the Assignment button for exams and quizzes instead.

  • External Links
    o Instructors use this area to list important links that are relevant to the course and its content.
    o The TROY library link is listed here.

  • Tech/Proctor Info
Items to help learn more about proctoring requirements as well as the technology used in online courses.
- Contains Proctor Info (not required in all courses), Student Training/Technical Support (how-to guides and videos) and Handbooks folders

- **Course Tools**
  - Contain links to My Grades, Wimba features, Smarthinking, etc.

**Email**

Once you enroll with TROY, you will be assigned a unique email address. This should be used to communicate with your instructor and TROY staff. Email is frequently used in online courses. Below, you will find some key points to remember when communicating with instructors and classmates via email.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Classmates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructors should respond within 48 hours.</td>
<td>Be appropriate and professional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be professional and use the instructor’s</td>
<td>Be aware that email message can be modified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriate title.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always proofread your message.</td>
<td>DO NOT e-mail anything private because it could be forwarded to someone else.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Include your course name and section and a</td>
<td>DO NOT forget to empty your mailbox trash.</td>
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<tr>
<td>subject for your email.</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the body of your message, be detailed but</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>concise about your question or issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DO NOT</strong> include personal details that are</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>irrelevant to your issue or question.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact Dr. Barbara Echord at <a href="mailto:bechord@troy.edu">bechord@troy.edu</a> or 334-808-6199 if your instructor does not respond to your e-mails or calls for an extended period of time or if they seem to have disappeared from the course.</td>
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**Additional instructional tools** *(not required in all courses)*

- **Blogs, Wikis and Journals**
  - Used to write about assigned content and to comment on classmates’ work
  - Collaboration activities used between instructors, students and classmates

- **Groups**
  - Group projects are sometimes used in courses.
  - Some students find working in groups difficult while some students enjoy it.