

# Professor Dawn McBride's Discussion Forum Expectations, Confidentiality, and Grading Criteria <sup>1</sup>

*The following information has been taken directly taken from an earlier version that was written by McBride and Sheppard (2010)<sup>2</sup>. Where needed, I have personalized the information to make it specific to my courses<sup>3</sup>.*

## DISCUSSION FORUMS

Discussion forums are like a classroom. There are students and an instructor. Students actively process the course material in an interactive manner, and the instructor supplements and facilitates the discussion. Sometimes discussion forums (DFs) in the MC program will be live using web conferencing, but more often than not, they will be in the form of asynchronous communication, where you can post your comments about course material 24 hours a day.

## TYPE OF POSTS

**WHAT ARE SOCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DFs?** To build and enhance a community feeling during an online course, there are a number of social and administrative DFs. These forums are open 7 days a week, 24 hours a day for the duration of the course, and you can participate as little or as much as you like in these forums. Social and administrative DFs are typically optional and are never graded for quality or quantity. In my courses, I will have the following forums open:

- *Course announcements*
- *Q & A about assignments*
- *Who am I? (or Introductions)*
- *Coffee room or water cooler corner*
- *Q & A about the Summer Institute and/or Seminar (if relevant)*

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<sup>1</sup> **To cite information from this document, please use the following citation:** McBride, D. (2017). *Professor Dawn McBride's discussion forum expectations, confidentiality, & grading criteria handout*. Retrieved from University of Lethbridge course name [insert] website [insert]. Or, if preferred use: Retrieved from the University of Lethbridge Moodle course website.

<sup>2</sup> McBride, D., & Sheppard, B. (2010) *Discussion forum expectations and grading criteria in the U of L Master of Counselling program*. Retrieved from University of Lethbridge. The original document (May 2009; 2010) was created by the above parties including contributions by Lynn Davis (former U of L MC faculty).

<sup>3</sup> As of May 1, 2017, I updated this document as there is no longer standardization in the U of L M.C. program around DF post and performance expectations. Academic freedom allows instructors to set their own expectations. I have chosen to adhere to the standards we used between 2009-2016, albeit with some minor modifications.

**WHAT ARE ACADEMIC (WEEKLY LESSON) DFs?** These forums address the course content in a specific and focused manner. *The remaining sections in this handout mainly refer to the Academic DFs.*

**WHAT TYPES OF ACADEMIC POSTS ARE THERE IN PROFESSOR MCBRIDE'S COURSES?** There are four main types of academic posts.

**Core Post:** I will post a variety of questions you need to answer in the DF. When you answer an instructor's question, this type of post is called your "**core**" post.

**Reply Post:** When you make a post to a fellow student's post or to an instructor's post (other than answering the instructor's posted required DF question) this type of post is called "**reply**" post. Reply posts often expand upon an idea and/or enhance a student's core post. Reply posts are very important as these types of posts generate and maintain discussion.

**Information-Sharing Post:** When you want to share a resource (e.g., book, website, article, or personal development experience), this is labelled an "**information-sharing**" post.

**Cheerleading Post:** To build community and to reinforce post participation by your colleagues, it is beneficial to post encouraging comments. These types of posts are called "**cheerleading**" posts. For example, you might write the following cheerleading post in reaction to someone disclosing a personal experience, "*wow... thank for you sharing about x. It really helped me to shift perspectives on that issue*".

**TIP:** It is strongly recommended, based on experience and feedback from past students, that students who are taking two courses devote at least 3-5 hours per day for the first two weeks of their courses (14 days) to get organized and on top of the workload.



**Why?** Well, first-year, online graduate students generally need extra time, per day, to learn how to read volumes of required reading efficiently and stay focused on their studies, despite many job and family distractions; to master online technologies; to organize their study material; to develop and stick to a firm study schedule; and so on. **Graduate studies require daily study** 😊. Second-year online students are often into the groove so they may not need as much time as first-year students to tackle online work. 😊

# DEADLINES

## (IN ALL OF PROFESSOR MCBRIDE'S COURSES)

**WHAT IS PROFESSOR MCBRIDE'S ONLINE WEEK?** Unless notified, Professor McBride's online courses start on Wednesday (6:00am) and end on Saturday (10:00pm). All times are always Calgary time.

**WHEN DO CORE POSTS HAVE TO BE MADE IN PROFESSOR MCBRIDE'S COURSES?** You are welcome to make your core post anytime up to Friday at 11:59pm (Calgary Time).

**WHEN DO THE REPLY POSTS NEED TO BE MADE?** These posts are welcome anytime, starting on Day 1 of the course up to the last posting day/time. It is okay to make posts Saturday night; there is no penalty for Saturday evening posts.

**CAN MY REPLY POSTS BE CLUSTERED TOGETHER?—(I.E., CAN I MAKE THEM ALL AT ONCE?)**  
**NO.** For obvious reasons, it is not permitted to make the majority of your posts within one day. At minimum, reply posts need to be generously spread out over a period of at least 48 hours/2 days. Aim to spread your posts out over the online week. See the next section on some study tips.

**WHEN DO THE INFORMATION-SHARING POSTS AND CHEERLEADING POSTS NEED TO BE MADE?** These are welcome up to the last posting day/time.

**ARE THERE ANY SKIP WEEKS IN PROFESSOR MCBRIDE'S COURSES?** For the most part, there are usually "skip/reading weeks" between some of the lesson weeks allowing more time to complete the course material.

**HOW AND WHEN ARE ONLINE POSTS EVALUATED?** Please see your course syllabus for this information.

**WHEN DO I NEED TO COMPLETE THE READINGS AND TASKS FOR EACH LESSON?** Ideally, by Tuesday before the online week begins. Typically, many students work on the lesson material Sunday evening, Monday evening, and some of Tuesday. Please see the next page for some more information on your online week.

- ❖ **BEFORE YOU START EACH LESSON,** I would advise you read through the entire lesson so you can get an idea of the readings and tasks involved for the week. Then, create a do list and study schedule to finish the tasks on time.

## YOUR ONLINE WEEK

### HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD I SPEND IN DFs?

You are strongly advised to regard participation in the discussion forums as roughly equivalent to the **minimum** three hours traditionally spent in an on-campus graduate seminar.

**These three hours do NOT INCLUDE** reading, preparing for participation in the Dfs, completing small group/pair work, and completing the lesson/course assignments.

- These “extra” tasks in addition to the minimum three DF hours you are expected to spend in the MC forums.
- Therefore, expect to spend **a minimum** of 10–15+ hours per week, per course, engaged in various weekly study activities.
- These hours are heavily dependent on how fast a reader you are, how long you have been out of the academic mindset, the number of distractions you face when studying/participating in the course, and so on. Face-booking, checking email, and watching TV are MAJOR time sponges.

### WHAT STUDY SCHEDULE DO YOU ADVISE?

For 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students: There is no ‘best’ study method to tackle graduate level course workload. A study schedule needs to factor in whether you are learner who likes to dive in deep till the task is done or if you like to pop in/out of an activity.

On the following page is a schedule I would follow if I were in your shoes as graduate student facing a great, albeit heavy, course ☺.

**TIP:** Make a schedule and stick to it as a strategy to fight against nasty procrastination and being overwhelmed.

Teach your family and friends when you need to dive deep into earning a Master’s degree. → Share your study schedule with them!

For 3<sup>rd</sup> year students: You know what works best for you ☺.

## SAMPLE STUDY PLAN FOR 1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> year graduate students

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			We are online at 6:00am	We are online 24/7	We are online 24/7	DF/Online till 10:00pm
<input type="checkbox"/> read the lesson plan <input type="checkbox"/> set a study schedule <input type="checkbox"/> do 50% of the readings & take notes <input type="checkbox"/> make flash cards (* if in ethics-exam prep) <input type="checkbox"/> lesson tasks: tackle 25%	<input type="checkbox"/> finish the readings and notes <input type="checkbox"/> make more flash cards <input type="checkbox"/> lesson tasks: finish 50% <input type="checkbox"/> adjust schedule accordingly	<input type="checkbox"/> lesson tasks: finish 75% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> work on drafting DF posts <input type="checkbox"/> review your flash cards	<input type="checkbox"/> make a core post <input type="checkbox"/> read your peer's DF posts <input type="checkbox"/> make a cheer or info post <input type="checkbox"/> complete remaining lesson tasks, if not already completed <input type="checkbox"/> draft more DF posts (early draft)	<input type="checkbox"/> make 1-2 reply posts <input type="checkbox"/> make a core post (if needed) <input type="checkbox"/> read your peer's DF posts <input type="checkbox"/> gently review flash cards	<input type="checkbox"/> deadline to post core posts (by 6pm, Calgary time) <input type="checkbox"/> read your peer's DF posts <input type="checkbox"/> make a cheer or info post <input type="checkbox"/> trade your *flash cards with a peer	<input type="checkbox"/> in morning, finish reply posts <input type="checkbox"/> review *flash cards for memory <input type="checkbox"/> if desired or needed, make 1-2 reply posts Sat late afternoon-evening <input type="checkbox"/> by 10pm: complete quantity evaluation form
<p><b>TIP:</b> It is often easier to complete the readings and lesson plan activities between Sunday and Mon. or Tues. This allows you to pop into the into the DF a few times between days btwn Wed. – Sat. thereby freeing you up to accomplish other tasks. → Find a study plan that works for you and then educate those around you when it is best not to disrupt you.</p>			<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Wed. to Fri</u> → work on course assignments <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Saturday noon onwards</u> → carve in meaningful time to be spent with loved ones, friends, and/or engaging in rejuvenating self-care activities. <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Sunday</u> → devote a good chunk of time to non-course activities. However, this schedule requires you to spend 5-6 hours accomplishing readings & several lesson tasks so Monday and Tuesday are not so busy for you.			

## **PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY... FOR ALL OF US <sup>4</sup>**

This section refers to professional conduct expected in Professor Dawn McBride's courses, specifically referring to privacy and confidentiality as well as the sharing of personal information in the discussion forums and seminars. By virtue of your participation in McBride's courses and the University of Lethbridge code of conduct, **it is assumed you will adhere to the following standards outlined in this section.**

### **WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CONFIDENTIALITY AND THE SHARING OF PERSONAL INFORMATION IN PROFESSOR MCBRIDE'S COURSES?**

Overall, whatever you choose to share about yourself with others is entirely up to you and is completely at your discretion. However, I need to highlight some important expectations and information that may affect your decision about how much to share:

- (a) If you have doubts about sharing specific aspects of your personal experiences, it is best that you wait until a time when you are more comfortable doing so.
- (b) To share personal experiences of others (e.g., family members, friends) you **MUST** obtain their permission to do so even if you do not reveal the person's identity. Unless you have the person's specific permission, please do not mention identifying information about the person's story (e.g., no names, no agency) and keep the disclosure broad rather than specific.
- (c) The personal information that your classmates, Professor McBride, and guests share with you should not be discussed with anyone outside the course.
- (d) You will **never** have the right to share *personal* information about your classmates and course instructors obtained during the course unless they have given you permission to do so.

***Professor McBride's Golden Rule: If you have any doubts about whether it is acceptable to share a specific piece of someone else's personal information, please don't! WAIT!***

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- (e) If you are triggered by a comment/action made during the course and seek support from your social support system and/or a professional (e.g., your personal therapist) please safeguard everyone's privacy. In other words, you are expected not to disclose the name, age, gender, personal/professional background, or context (e.g., do not identify the course) of the individual you are discussing with the professional.
- (f) If you have indicated in writing (e.g., email) to Professor McBride that you are withdrawing from her course, your access to the online course will be removed as soon as possible (i.e., within the day). To withdraw formally from the course requires you to contact MC program staff so you can complete the required paperwork.
- (g) Additional expectations of students in Professor McBride's courses regarding privacy and **student professional conduct** are outlined in the *U of L Faculty of Education Standards of Professional Conduct* statement (section 6a of the university calendar). Please review this section before your course starts.
- (h) Access to online course material, including discussion forums, generally ends within a month of the course finishing. The university IT service reserves the right to store Moodle course material for unspecified amount of time.

**WHAT ARE THE EXCEPTIONS TO PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:** Professor McBride may need to consult with university faculty/staff and/or access relevant professionals if she becomes aware of matters relating to, but not limited to the following circumstances: (i) an identifiable person is in need of protective services, (ii) if a specific person's life is in danger (e.g., through the threat or intention of suicide or by the actions of others), and/or, (iii) issues of student professional conduct. Professor McBride will do her best to safeguard your privacy as much as possible in the event she needs to access help based the above and information obtained. Furthermore, to support U of L students in their studies, Professor McBride and relevant faculty/staff may need to discuss student performance, which will be done in confidence.

**WARNING:** While everyone is expected to take all possible precautions to safeguard the information that is exchanged in this course and with Professor McBride, whether in discussion forums, web/video conferencing, E-mail, and so on, **it is impossible to guarantee your privacy.**

If you are aware of any situations where individuals are not honouring the expectation of confidentiality outlined in this document, you are STRONGLY encouraged to intervene by discussing the matter with that individual. If you are not comfortable doing so, or if a resolution is not forthcoming, please contact Professor McBride as soon as possible.

## GRADING ISSUES



Counselling is the art and science of conversation so, not surprisingly, the discussion forums are the heart of the M.C. program. As a result, McBride and Sheppard (2010) devoted a great deal of thought and energy into developing an appropriate rubric that reflects our values and beliefs about counsellor development.<sup>5</sup>

**TIP:** POST THIS SHEET NEAR YOUR COMPUTER FOR EASY ACCESS TO SELF-EVALUATE YOUR POSTS BEFORE YOU 'HIT' SEND.

**Unless noted otherwise, the following are the expectations when making posts in Professor McBride's courses:**

Evaluation Component	Grading Criteria
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Extent &amp; Quantity of Participation</b></p> <p>To score full marks, <u>the following criteria need to be met.</u></p>	<p><b><u>Part A: Frequency &amp; Types of Posts</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. All 'core posts' are due by Friday 11:55pm (Calgary Time).</li> <li>B. <u>At minimum</u>, two 'reply posts' are due over a period of 72 hours (Wednesday to DF last day) for each discussion forum question.</li> <li>C. It is not allowed to cluster all of the required posts within 24 hours.</li> <li>D. At least one post per forum question integrates a reading from the current study plan for the week.</li> <li>E. At least one post per forum question integrates a relevant reading from any valid source.</li> <li>F. Two cheerleading and/or information-sharing posts per week per forum are required.</li> <li>G. Core and reply posts are to generate meaningful replies (core and reply posts).</li> <li>H. Last post to be counted for marks must be made by the last day at the time specified when the week closes (e.g., 10pm)</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Part B: Format of Posts</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Posts are limited to a maximum of 200 words. Please do not use Part I post, Part II post, and Part III post as a way to bypass</li> </ul>

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<p>Extent &amp; Quantity of Participation, CONTINUED</p>	<p>having to write in a succinct manner ☺. Word count does not include in-cite references or references cited at the end of the post.</p> <p>J. Each post must have a new/expanded subject line so it clear to the reader what the post is referencing/addressing.</p> <p>K. Unless notified, strict APA editing standards apply (e.g., grammar/spelling error free, bias free writing).</p> <p>L. Please <u>use first person in your posts</u>.</p> <p><b><u>Part C: References</u></b></p> <p>M. Any and all references cited within text (i.e., within the post) need to be cited in APA format.</p> <p>N. Only full references are required in posts when the reading is NOT part of the course material.</p> <p>O. Full references, in APA format, are placed at the end of the post when the reference is new-not part of the course material.</p> <p>P. Full references placed at the end of the post do not count in the total word count of a post.</p> <p>Q. It is not required to use a personal communication reference style when referencing a post a peer made in the same forum. Rather, just cite the peer's name. E.g., "I align with John when he said ____"</p> <p>R. Optional: Keep all references hyperlinked/active for ease of access for your peers. In papers, remove all active links.</p> <p><b><u>Part D: Professional Conduct</u></b></p> <p>S. All posts are respectful (see Principle I, CPA code of ethics) and professional (see Principle 1-IV, CPA code of ethics) →basically, adhere to the U of L statement on student code of conduct.</p> <p>❖ This expectation around professional conduct also applies to all class and seminar discussions.</p>
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Evaluation Component	Grading Criteria
<p><b>Quality of Comments</b></p> <p><b>NOTES:</b></p> <p>1. With a greater number of posts you increase your ability to address each of the criteria items for 'quality'.</p> <p>2. Unless noted otherwise, scores are awarded for a pattern of responses; individual responses are not graded.</p>	<p><b>Part A: Affective Domain</b></p> <p>A. Identify and explore values (e.g., personal and professional values)</p> <p>B. Respond empathically and sensitively to other perspectives and viewpoints (e.g., ranges from collegial relations to societal issues)</p> <p>C. Be open to personal growth by demonstrating self-awareness that displays accountability to the personal growth change process and/or a positive shift in a value or personal perspective</p> <p>D. State and describe personal position, reasons and beliefs as they relate to the core material in the lesson <u>and</u> to the profession itself</p> <p><b>Part B: Cognitive Domain</b></p> <p>E. Ensure core constructs from the lesson and readings are accurately identified and/or described</p> <p>F. Actively and appropriately integrate relevant readings to demonstrate accurate comprehension of the materials</p> <p>G. Apply core lesson material to a variety of perspectives (e.g., stakeholder groups, historical and future perspectives, theoretical perspectives)</p> <p><b>And <u>two</u> of the three cognitive domains:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demonstrate synthesis of the material by illustrating and/or applying the material to an example (e.g., case study, personal experiences, media reports)</li> <li>● Critically analyze core lesson material by comparing, contrasting, evaluating, differentiating, and/or debating</li> <li>● Integrate material from previous lessons and CAAP courses to identify patterns, generalize information, relate knowledge to several areas, and/or to draw conclusions</li> </ul>

**NOTE: When you are asked to create a question for part of a lesson or discussion task**, the quality of your work shall be assessed, unless notified otherwise, by how well your question(s) promoted discussion, such as (i) avoiding the use of closed or narrow questions, (ii) allowing for multiple perspectives /answers (there is no one/correct answer) and, (iii) allowing your peers to meet the above affective and/or cognitive domain criteria.