



Faculty Handbook

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SIGNUM UNIVERSITY

- A. Mission
- B. Core Values
- C. History
- D. Structure
- E. Degree Program
 - Master of Arts in Language and Literature
 - Credit Transfer Policy
- F. Certificate Programs
- G. Auditing Classes

SECTION 2: FACULTY BASICS

- A. Types of Faculty
 - Lecturers
 - Preceptors
 - Affiliated Faculty
 - Thesis Directors
 - Thesis Second Readers
- B. Qualifications and Hiring Policy
- C. Payment
- D. Faculty Orientation and Meetings
- E. Faculty Policy Drive
- F. Faculty Observations and Evaluations

SECTION 3: FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Basic Responsibilities
- B. Scheduling
- C. Technology

- D. Course Opening and Closing Procedures
 - Opening a Course
 - Closing a Course
- E. Syllabus Template
- F. Attendance Policy
- G. Withdrawal and Incomplete Policy
 - Withdrawals
 - Refunds
 - Incompletes
- H. Examinations
- I. Grading Scale
- J. Writing Rubrics
- K. Thesis Guidelines and Procedures
- L. Academic Honesty
- M. Academic Freedom and Intellectual Property
- N. Student Support
- O. Writer's Forge
- P. Library

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SIGNUM UNIVERSITY

A. Mission

Signum University believes that education should be accessible, dynamic, and affordable. Signum University establishes a completely digital campus that promotes a vibrant academic community for our students and faculty, provides career-growth enrichment for our staff, and pushes the frontiers of online education.

B. Core Values

Signum's mission is accomplished through the application of the University's core values.

Education is interactive and informative.

Signum University believes a strong learning community is one in which students and professors can grow together in a context of high-quality academics. The University's virtual campus is designed to make that community a reality, delivering both the relational and academic components of a true liberal arts education.

Online education is valuable.

Signum University embraces the flexibility and richness of online education. Its learning environment incorporates both traditional and state-of-the-art educational models to provide a dynamic platform that is accessible to anyone with an internet connection. The University continuously invests in this campus to develop Signum's innovative academic opportunities.

Excellent education is affordable.

Signum University offers affordable education. It believes everyone who desires to learn should afford to invest in their education. With this belief in mind, the University matches its accessible platform with attainable tuition so that more people might benefit from continued, and even lifelong, education.

Rewarding education is accomplished through teamwork.

Signum University fosters an amicable and productive relationship between faculty and staff to the enrichment of all. Its philosophy requires that faculty and staff work together with students, using a team-oriented approach focusing on individual responsibility and gifts, to create an exceptional learning experience. Signum also believes that, given this approach, staff and faculty should be rewarded in full for the work they accomplish.

Lasting education is thorough.

Signum University helps its students pursue their chosen area of study through online education. As part of this vision, the University teaches students how to interact with academics, personalize their curricula, and communicate meaningfully

with peers and colleagues, all with the goal of contributing to their fields of research now and in the future.

C. History

When he was working as a tenured literature professor, Dr. Corey Olsen decided to experiment with sharing his classroom lectures on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien through a podcast called [The Tolkien Professor](#). The podcast quickly surpassed a million downloads, and its success prompted Dr. Olsen to experiment further by bringing in listeners to discuss Tolkien's legendarium at length through a seminar-style series on *The Silmarillion*.

As *The Tolkien Professor's* audience grew, Dr. Olsen discovered more and more people who had a desire to study speculative literature: fantasy, science fiction, mythology, fairy tales, and so forth. While some colleges and universities offered electives in such subjects, no dedicated programs existed to fulfill the demand. Thus, in 2011, Dr. Olsen offered his first online, graduate-level, for-credit course on the works of J. R. R. Tolkien while continuing to engage audiences through free programs such as "Riddles in the Dark" on *The Tolkien Professor* podcast and the Mythgard Academy lecture series.

To better accommodate the growing number of students seeking a Master of Arts in Language and Literature, Dr. Olsen created Signum University in 2012. Today, the Graduate School at Signum University continues to blaze a trail in online learning through innovative program design and digital campus technologies, with a focus on keeping costs extremely low compared to both traditional universities and other online learning programs. There are now four concentrations, certificate programs, and auditing options in addition to the M. A. degree at the heart of Signum's Graduate School. Meanwhile, [Mythgard Institute](#) remains a separate branch of the University focused on producing free, inventive educational programming for people of all ages through the ongoing *Tolkien Professor* podcast, Mythgard Academy book discussions, the Mythgard Movie Club, and forays into the virtual world of Middle-earth through *Lord of the Rings Online*.

D. Structure

President Corey Olsen and the Signum University Board stand in a supervisory position over the following divisions, each of which is headed by a Division Lead:

- Digital Campus
- The Incubator
- The Language & Literature Department
- Outreach
- Planning
- Stewardship
- Student Support

For up-to-date details about teams within divisions and about personnel, visit our [Kumu Organizational Chart](#) and our [Kumu Staff Chart](#).

At Signum University, we don't draw a divide between "Faculty" and "Staff", preferring an "Equal but different" model. "Staff" is the umbrella-term we use to refer to faculty and non-faculty alike, and employment policies apply to both. We take very seriously our commitment to providing a work environment that is positive, engaging, and equitable. Because of our unique organizational approach and our online environment, many of our policies and procedures differ drastically from those of a traditional American higher education institution. Our [Team Member Guide](#) contains information about our philosophy and culture, as well as information on policies affecting your employment, and on the standards we expect our Team of faculty and tactical staff to adhere to.

E. Degree Program

Master of Arts in Language and Literature

- Signum University's Graduate School offers a Master of Arts in Language and Literature. Faculty members play a key role in using Signum's flexible online platform to challenge students and enable them to grow throughout their academic experience in the University.

To receive an M.A. in Language and Literature, students must complete 36 credit hours as follows:

- the 3-credit Research Methods course (taken as one of the first 4 courses of the program)
- 6 credit hours of language (two courses)
- 6 credit hours of literature (two courses)
- 15 credit hours from a combination of language or literature courses

- 6 credit hours of thesis planning and writing (after completing the above requirements):
 - LITZ 6398: Thesis Planning
 - LITZ 6399: Master's Thesis

M.A. students may choose to specialize in one of four concentrations:

- Tolkien Studies
- Imaginative Literature
- Germanic Philology
- Classic Literature

For students who choose one of the four available concentrations, at least 5 courses must be taken in the chosen area.

Credit Transfer Policy

The Graduate School is happy to work with students to accept transfer credits from previous studies at a nationally or regionally accredited higher education institution, especially those that are equivalent or similar to courses within the M.A. program, pending approval from the Department Chair. However, the number of transfer credits may not exceed at any time one half of the number of credits required for the degree, and at no point may the granting of credit for experiential education amount to more than one quarter of the credits required for the degree.

F. Certificate Programs

The Graduate School offers a certificate program for students who wish to study at a graduate level but do not want to pursue a degree. Coursework and expectations remain the same for M.A. and certificate students, although certificate students commit to fewer courses that are limited to their area of concentration.

The courses and course requirements for the certificate program are similar to those taken for M.A. credit. However, for a certificate program, students will take only five credit classes (15 credit hours), do not need to take Research Methods, and will not complete a thesis.

G. Auditing Classes

Students who wish to audit classes in the Graduate School for personal interest have three options.

1. Premiere auditors may participate in live lectures during the first run of a new course; they also have access to recorded lectures, class materials, and a discussion forum.
2. Discussion auditors receive full access to current courses, including the ability to attend live discussion sessions led by a Preceptor.
3. Anytime auditors learn at their own pace with access to recorded lectures, class materials, and a discussion forum.

SECTION 2: FACULTY BASICS

A. Types of Faculty

Signum University's Graduate School uses a Lecturer/Preceptor system of instruction, as well as affiliated faculty on an occasional basis.

Lecturers

Lecturers determine the main content of a course. They are responsible for designing and delivering the bulk of the lectures for the course; the exact number, and whether lectures are live or pre-recorded, will be determined by an individual contract. Guest Lecturers may also be employed within a course by mutual arrangement between the primary Lecturer and members of administration. Lecturers will also develop sections of the syllabus, including the lecture schedule and primary reading assignments. They are encouraged to work with the Preceptor(s) of their course as much as possible. During live lectures, our online platform allows Lecturers to ask the students questions and to respond to their questions and comments in real time. This enables students to make a tangible contribution to the classroom experience, resulting in the lively and stimulating discussions that are so essential to scholarly growth.

Preceptors

Preceptors are professors who work in a faculty team for a course; in the case of a live class, this will include a Lecturer. Preceptors are responsible for designing, assigning, and assessing student work; leading weekly discussion sessions; working

one-on-one with students as needed, especially on their seminar papers; and maintaining active faculty-student interaction. They may on occasion be invited to give lectures in the course as well.

Affiliated Faculty

Affiliated Faculty are outside experts contracted by the Graduate School to perform a specific, limited, usually one-time function. They are not considered employees of the University, but contractors; however, all Affiliated Faculty must comply with applicable laws, policies, and guidelines that govern Signum University. Tasks of affiliated may include directing or reading an M.A. thesis, giving a guest lecture, etc.

Thesis Directors

The Thesis Director mentors and guides the student's thesis research and writing. The thesis is a two-semester process. Specific duties and responsibilities are detailed in the [Thesis Guidelines](#).

Thesis Second Readers

The Second Reader performs one thorough reading of the student's thesis and provides commentary in a timely manner. Specific duties and responsibilities are detailed in the Graduate School's [Thesis Guidelines](#).

B. Qualifications and Hiring Policy

Candidates for a Preceptor position will hold at least an M.A. (Ph.D. preferred), while candidates for a Lecturer position should hold a Ph.D., equivalent professional experience, or other terminal degree; both preceptors and lecturers will have experience teaching a diverse population of students at the college level (graduate teaching preferred) and a high level of comfort and ability working with technology or a demonstrable willingness and aptitude to learn the technologies used for Signum University's digital campus (online teaching experience preferred). Passionate, knowledgeable, compassionate, visionary scholars are the ideal candidates for precepting at Signum. Additional specific qualifications will be publicized for each available position. Candidates are evaluated and interviewed by members of the Graduate School's Administration. Successful candidates are offered a contract that defines duration of employment, duties and expectations of both parties, pay and royalty arrangements, and termination conditions. Affiliated faculty are chosen by members of administration based on academic credentials, scholarly reputation, teaching experience, publication history, and so forth as relevant to the subject-matter in question.

C. Payment

For most course models, the following payment information applies. Some hybrid course models will have their own individualized payment arrangements, which will be clearly detailed in the faculty member's contract. Other payment models may be agreed upon in various circumstances according to individual contracts.

- Please [click here](#) for current payment information.

D. Faculty Orientation and Meetings

Newly-hired faculty will be required to participate in orientation. Orientation will usually include at least one live session with members of Administration, recorded materials, and faculty meeting(s). Additional professional development opportunities will occasionally be offered; both new and existing faculty are required either to attend these events live or watch the recordings later in a timely fashion. Lecturers and Preceptors for a live course are required to meet at least once per term as a team before their course begins and regularly throughout the term.

E. Faculty Policy Drive

Faculty instructions, policies, and forms are available on Signum's Faculty Policy Drive.

F. Faculty Observations and Evaluations

There are several purposes for regular observation and evaluation of Preceptors. First, observations and evaluations are standard procedures that are expected by academic institutions. They show our seriousness and maturity as an institution of higher learning. Second, they are a means of ensuring that we are upholding good teaching standards across the university. Third, they contribute to our mission to "make education accessible, dynamic, and affordable." Evaluations will take into account whether each faculty member is fostering a vibrant and open academic community, cultivating intellectual exchange between students and teachers, making class sessions interactive and informative, and nurturing both the relational and academic components of a true liberal arts education. Finally, they offer opportunities for faculty development, as peers can share pedagogical strategies and administrators can create trainings for continuously improving online teaching. Overall, the purpose is to build faculty community, make recommendation for way to better support [Signum's Mission Statement and Core Values](#), note areas of accomplishment, recommend the adoption of successful practices to other faculty

members, share stories of successes and challenges, and generally foster an amicable and productive relationship among members of faculty and staff.

Here are the steps that will be followed in observing and evaluating Preceptors.

1. Administration observations of faculty should take place within the first semester of hiring and biennially thereafter. Peer observations should happen once a year.
2. Observations will be done by the Department Chair, President, or another member of staff as long as that person is an active and experienced teacher. They will not be performed by Administrators without significant teaching experience. In the case that no such Administrator is available, a veteran member of the faculty will perform the observation and report it to Administration. Observers should consult with one another to compare notes about any areas of concern or worthy of specific praise and emulation.
3. At the time of scheduling the observation, Administration will ask whether the faculty member wants the observation to be done live or via recording and, if live, whether to choose the date or have the observer drop into the class unannounced and then whether the observer should participate in the class or remain silent. In the case of a recorded session, written permission from the students will be obtained.
4. The observed faculty member will express a choice ahead of time whether s/he wants to meet with the observer before the observation happens to discuss expectations and so forth.
5. During the observation, the evaluator will use the [Faculty Observation and Evaluation Form](#) to rate the instructor's proficiency in various areas. S/he should also make any notes that would be helpful or encouraging, including areas for improvement, points for praise and emulation, and activities worth sharing with all faculty for their consideration.
6. After the observation, the observer and instructor will meet online synchronously to talk about the session. As is true of the entire observation and evaluation process, the goal of this meeting is to build faculty community: to make suggestions about how better to support [Signum's Mission Statement and Core Values](#), to note areas of particular accomplishment and pass them along as recommendations to other faculty members, to share stories of successes and challenges, and generally to foster an amicable and productive relationship among members of faculty and staff. The completed evaluation form will be returned to the faculty member at this time.

7. Items of note, whether areas for improvement or for praise, should be incorporated into future faculty meetings, orientations, professional development opportunities, and other communal sessions.
8. In addition to being observed by a teacher/administrator every other year, each Preceptor should observe at least one other Preceptor once a year. These peer observers will fill out the same [Faculty Observation and Evaluation Form](#) and submit it to the Department Chair. All faculty will then gather for periodic group conversation (either synchronously or asynchronously) about the crafting of discussion sessions, professional development, and so forth.

SECTION 3: FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Basic Responsibilities

A **Lecturer's** main responsibilities for the first run of a live class include:

1. Writing the course description and Student Learning Objectives
2. Communicating with the Academic Coordinator about website content
3. Creating the reading schedule for the term
4. Customizing the course syllabus to reflect course-specific policies
5. Working with the other members of the faculty team and the department administrators to set up the Google Classroom shell.
6. Preparing and delivering 24 live, 90-minute lectures per term (or another similar schedule as determined by an individual contract)

A **Lecturer's** secondary responsibilities include:

1. Liaising with the course Preceptor(s) to plan discussion prompts, assign work, and perhaps contribute to the evaluation of assessments
2. Recording the lectures and working with the Digital Media team to ensure quality of the recordings

3. Providing feedback and clarification for students via Google Classroom, email, etc.

A **Preceptor's** key duties include:

1. Leading online discussion sessions
2. Planning these discussions to include reviews of lecture material, prompt questions based on reading, responses to student questions, and integration of material from Google Classroom
3. Grading student work in a timely manner using the University-wide grading scale and other aids such as detailed assignment sheets and perhaps a rubric; providing feedback on individual papers (and other assignments); and working with students on their revisions.
4. Responding to student, faculty, administration, and staff emails, messages on the collaboration platform, and other communications in a timely manner (48 hours is the recommended maximum turnaround time); using your Signum staff email, not a personal one or a student one. If you have more than one Signum email address, make sure to alert your students to use your staff address.
5. Adhering to the University's term schedules; holding students accountable to prescribed schedules and standards
6. Applying the Withdrawal and Incomplete policies as detailed below
7. Submitting final grades within one week of the final exam to the Registrar, Department Chair, and Student Support Director. Including narratives about failing students.
8. Grading and returning student work within a reasonable period of time, including one writing assignment graded and returned during the Withdrawal period.

A **Preceptor's** other duties for a live course include:

1. Completing one pre-course orientation as a new hire before beginning the first term

2. Meeting as a faculty team with the Lecturer and other Preceptor(s) of the course at least once synchronously before the start of the course and asynchronously throughout the course as necessary; weekly communication (by email) is a minimum recommendation
3. Contributing to the development of the course syllabus and course schedule in consultation with the Lecturer, following the syllabus template, and submitting syllabi to the Department Chair for review within two weeks of the start of each term
4. Populating the course's Google Classroom for each section
5. Attending live lectures or watching/listening to the recordings of the lectures before discussion sessions each week
6. Composing discussion prompts, assignment prompts, exam questions, and other assessments, perhaps in consultation with the other members of the faculty team for the course
7. If desired, sending optional notes from discussion sessions to other members of the course's faculty team in order to share thoughts and ideas on discussion topics
8. Informing students about the grading scale and the University-wide Pass/Fail/Honors grading; publicizing this information on syllabi, the course classroom, and elsewhere
9. Setting and holding standards for attendance and participation
10. Introducing grading standards, assignment sheets, writing rubrics, etc. early in the course, explaining these standards to students, and using them to assess essays
11. Sending discussion questions to students in a timely fashion before discussion sessions, as soon as possible after the first weekly lecture; two days is the recommended minimum
12. Providing written assignment sheets with clear instructions and guidelines for all assignments well before assignment deadlines
13. Giving live updates (in the course classroom and by email) whenever course materials change (such as syllabus, schedule, readings, writing assignments, etc.)
14. Holding "office hours" by appointment to allow further opportunities for students to ask questions, clarify ideas, and present paper topics; these can be by phone, video conference, or any other convenient method
15. Maintaining grading standards across multiple sections (if offered)

16. Sending out a mid-course email with encouragement to continue in the class on an individual basis or otherwise providing sufficient reinforcement for students to continue in the course
17. Sending individualized, personalized emails to each student periodically as needed
18. If desired, offering optional review sessions to students as relevant
19. Handling any course-specific or content-related questions from students, in consultation with the Department Chair as necessary to clarify policies and procedures. Non-class-specific questions from students should be directed to the Student Support Team.
20. Referring students to the Student Support team for academic advising, Library/Information guidance, IT support, personal help or advice, and emergency assistance. In the event that a student needs help with more fundamental writing skills not directly related to the course content, recommending that the student make an appointment with a writing tutor at the [Writer's Forge](#).
21. Making students aware of conference, journals, and other presentation and publication opportunities in their field; encouraging students to submit work to these venues.
22. Attending Musters (all-University meetings) or watching/listening to the recordings afterwards.
23. Checking email, Bitrix, and Google Classroom regularly and responding to all communications in a timely manner, with a recommended maximum of a 48-hour turn-around time.

N. B. Flex courses will require the Preceptor(s) to take on most of the Lecturer's course-setup duties.

B. Scheduling

The Graduate School offers a rotation of courses such that most of the courses in all concentrations will be offered at least once every three years. As far as possible, there will be at least one course in each concentration at any time. Some will be live and others pre-recorded ("flex"). The course schedule is set in advance, but of necessity may change due to personnel availability, etc.

C. Technology

Technology is one of Signum University's primary tools, but it never becomes an end in itself. Instead, the Signum team uses technology to connect people with people, present quality classes and materials, and make learning accessible to as many students as possible.

Signum University currently uses three primary technology tools: GoToWebinar, Google Classroom, and Bitrix.

GoToWebinar is the virtual classroom. Faculty members use it to present lectures, lead discussions, and interact with students in class and through office hours.

Google Classroom plays host to the Graduate School's course pages, forums, and library. Faculty members use this system to present course materials, email students, participate in forum discussions, collect assignments, and enter grades.

Bitrix is Signum's collaboration platform for faculty and staff communication. Faculty members use Bitrix to communicate with other Signum team members through chats, calls, and messages; collaborate in course work groups; access important information about Signum's organization; and generally keep abreast of Signum news.

For more information about how to use these tools, see the [faculty orientation video](#) about technology or contact Digital Campus.

D. Course Opening and Closing Procedures

Opening a Course

At the beginning of a course, preceptors provide the following information to the Academic Coordinator for registration opening:

- Requests/ideas for course artwork

- Confirmation of official course title
- Short (1-2 paragraph) course description
- Confirmation of course format (number & length of lectures and preceptor sessions)
- Schedule of weekly availability
- Basic weekly outline of lecture topics
- List of required texts

For the start of the semester, preceptors perform these tasks:

- Create/update full course syllabus
- Populate course shell on Google classroom

During Registration Process, preceptors:

- Work with the Course Opening Team to confirm preceptor sections
- Respond to registration and scheduling anomalies as they occur.

Closing a Course

Submission of final grades is the responsibility of course Preceptors. Final grades must be submitted to the Department Chair and the Registrar no later than one week after last class session (whether it is a lecture, Preceptor session, or final exam). Preceptors are also requested to submit a descriptive narrative along with any failing grades.

For each course, the Planning Division creates an end-of-course survey for all enrolled students. Before sending out surveys, the Planning Division Lead will invite course professors to add a limited number of professor-specific questions. Surveys will open in the course classroom in week 10 and remain open until two weeks after the end of the course. After survey responses are gathered and analyzed by Planning, faculty members will have access to survey data relevant to their roles in the course.

E. Syllabus Template

Faculty members will construct their syllabi based on the required [syllabus template](#). They must be careful to note which portions to modify and which portions contain University-wide or Graduate School policies that must remain intact.

F. Attendance Policy

Students taking a Literature class for credit in the Graduate School must meet the following attendance requirements:

1. Students must make at least two active log-ins on Google Classroom each week.
 - a. An active log-in is defined as one in which the student presents a substantial discussion board post or a substantial response to another post, turns in an assignment, or takes an exam.
 - b. A substantial post or response may be defined by quality, content, and/or number of words according to the instructor's specifications.

2. Students must attend all lectures either by synchronous participation at scheduled times or by watching or listening to archived lectures. Signum University values and practices both synchronous and asynchronous learning environments by creating learning communities and encouraging personal connections through digital media. Our goal is that faculty create an atmosphere and framework for successful active learning. As such, lectures and preceptor sessions are supplemented by Google Classroom and Google Groups Discussion board which include class materials, supplementary resources, and online discussions. Faculty should look for a pattern of engagement by students in various aspects of the class experience. Instructors may require specific Google Classroom engagement in the syllabus.

3. Students must attend weekly discussion sessions with no more than two (2) absences per term. Any additional, unavoidable absences must be discussed with the Preceptor ahead of time, at which point the Preceptor may, at his or her discretion, accept the submission of work. Students who miss three (3)

or more discussion sessions will be academically withdrawn from the course unless other arrangements have been made.

4. Participation on the course classroom and in discussion sessions must give evidence of the student having watched or listened to the lectures and read the assigned texts critically and thoroughly.

5. Faculty Members may reserve the right to modify these guidelines to suit the needs of their courses.

Students taking a Language class for credit must meet the following attendance requirements:

1. Students must make at least one active log-in on Google Classroom each week.
 - a. An active log-in is defined as one in which the student presents a substantial discussion board post or a substantial response to another post, turns in an assignment, or takes an exam.
 - b. A substantial post or response may be defined by quality, content, and/or number of words according to the instructor's specifications

2. Students must attend all lectures either by synchronous participation at scheduled times or by watching or listening to archived lectures

3. Students must attend weekly discussion sessions with no more than two (2) absences per term.

4. Students are expected to check the course page and their Signum email in the day before each Preceptor session, allowing ample time to incorporate any changes or corrections to upcoming assignments, to the schedule, or to the syllabus.

G. Withdrawal and Incomplete Policy

Withdrawals

A student may choose to withdraw from the course or switch to auditing status according to the following schedule; however, certain financial and academic consequences will apply as outlined below.

For-credit students who drop the course during the first 3 weeks of a 12-week class will receive no grade for the course on their transcripts. If the withdrawal occurs in week 3–9 and the student is in good academic standing in the course at that time, a grade of W will be recorded. If the student is not in good academic standing at that time (as determined by the Preceptor), a grade of F will be recorded. After week 9, an automatic F will be recorded (except in unusual circumstances and with the special permission of the Preceptor, and the Department Chair).

After week 9 of the course, a student may not withdraw or change registration status without written permission of the Preceptor and the Department Chair. Students are not required to submit any documentation in order to obtain a voluntary withdrawal until after week 9; documentation may be required for a withdrawal after week 9 of the course and will only be granted in extreme circumstances.

Refunds

- In the first 3 weeks of the semester, students may withdraw or change registration status for a complete refund or tuition adjustment.
- In weeks 4 through 6, students will receive a half refund/tuition adjustment.
- After week 6, no refund or tuition adjustment will be offered.
- After week 9, a student may not withdraw or change registration status without written permission of the Preceptor, Lecturer, and either the Department Chair. Documentation may be required for a withdrawal after week 9 of the course and will only be granted in extreme circumstances.

Incompletes

An Incomplete grade is not automatically granted to students seeking to extend deadlines for course assignments. It is only to be granted in the case of extraordinary extenuating circumstances. Students may apply for an Incomplete grade if they 1) desire to complete the course for credit but 2) are unable to finish the work in the final weeks due to extreme circumstances and 3) have been able to complete the course's attendance and participation requirements. If they have been unable to keep up with attendance and participation requirements, they should withdraw rather than seeking an Incomplete.

To apply for an Incomplete grade, the student must submit a written request to the Preceptor for the enrolled course. Approval is granted at the discretion of the Preceptor, who will consult with the Department Chair. If the Incomplete is approved, the Preceptor will be responsible for setting all requirements for the student, submitting the Incomplete grade to the Registrar, and communicating the situation with Student Support. The Incomplete must be submitted within 14 days of the final exam (along with all final grades for the course). After approval, the student will have until 4 weeks into the following term to submit all remaining coursework to the Preceptor in order to receive credit for the course.

H. Examinations

Exams vary according to instructor and class. Some instructors give periodic exams throughout the course. Others require a midterm and a final, while still others give only a final. Instructors may choose whether finals are cumulative or not. Exams may be written or oral. Written exams may be one large essay, several small essays, or a mixture of essay and objective questions. Oral exams may be pre-prepared and/or question-and-answer sessions with members of the faculty team. Instructors must also give at least one oral assignment or exam during the term.

I. Grading Scale

Final course grades are given in terms of honors, passing, or failing:

A	90%–100%	Honors (exceeds expectations)
B–C	70%–89%	Pass (meets expectations)

D-F 0%–69% **Fail** (does not meet expectations)

Students may receive letter or percentage grades on individual assignments, at the Preceptor's discretion, but final course grades will be H/P/F.

I. Writing Rubrics

The use of rubrics for grading writing assignments is recommended but not required. Sample rubrics, which you can adapt freely, are available in the Signum Staff and Faculty Policy Drive.

K. Thesis Guidelines and Procedures

[Guidelines for the thesis](#) process can be found in the Departmental Drive. Any questions about the thesis process should be directed to the Thesis Coordinator.

L. Academic Honesty

In accordance with educational, legal, and moral standards throughout the academic community, Signum University expects and requires that all work submitted by students will be the product of their own personal effort. This means that students will never engage in plagiarism, cheating, collusion, or other forms of dishonest academic practice. Instead, students will produce their own assignments using correct, thorough citation in an accepted style. They will indicate and integrate quotes into their work properly and include full bibliographic information.

Students will not deliberately attempt to gain advantage by presenting someone else's work as if it were their own or duplicating another person's work without acknowledgment of the original source. They will behave with integrity and be diligent students, avoiding those poor habits that could result in unintentional breaches of academic trust. They will maintain open communication with their faculty members in order to receive guidance on any matters relating to the use of source material.

The consequences of any form of cheating or plagiarism are severe because the offense is serious. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Department Chair and a record will be maintained. Depending upon the severity of the incident and the nature of the assignment, the consequences may include a warning and a chance to resubmit the assignment, a reduced assignment grade, failure of the assignment, failure of the course, probation, suspension, or expulsion from the institution.

M. Academic Freedom and Intellectual Property

According to the 1940 *Statement on Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure*, universities are founded for the common good, which “depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.” Signum University is dedicated to promoting such a search and to upholding the academic freedom of its faculty and students.

Therefore, faculty members are entitled to full academic freedom in keeping with Signum’s [Code of Conduct](#) with regard to research and publication as well as to discussion of their subject in the classroom.

Further, Signum University, while retaining rights to recorded lectures, strictly respects the intellectual property of its faculty and students. Specific details about usage, royalties, etc. will be detailed in an individual contract.

N. Student Support

Signum University has a Student Support Division available to assist enrolled students as they pursue educational growth within the institution. The Division is available to answer basic questions, offer preliminary academic advice, organize degree plans, guide students to resources, provide academic support, serve as a liaison between student and staff, handle complaints, and offer emergency assistance. The Student Support Team can be contacted via info@signumuniversity.org.

O. Writer's Forge

Signum University offers a writing tutorial program to help individuals who want to improve their academic writing skills. This program is open to all members of the Signum community, including current M.A. or certificate students, auditors, and participants in any public programs like Signum Symposia or the Mythgard Academy. In all courses, Preceptors are available to provide feedback on individual papers (and other assignments) and work with students on their revisions. However, in the event that a student needs help with more fundamental writing skills not directly related to the course content, the Preceptor for the class may recommend that the student make an appointment with a tutor.

Assistance offered through the writing tutorial program includes (but is not necessarily limited to):

1. Strengthening sentence structure, stylistics, and standard writing conventions
2. Clarifying logic and argumentation
3. Addressing pervasive, recurrent issues with syntax, diction, organization, specificity, and quote integration
4. Reviewing sources and citations in academic writing

Signum's Student Support Division will work with interested writers to set up a one-on-one video chat and to share their work with their tutor through Google Docs. Both writer and tutor will thus be able to see the document and read it over together as they talk through the writing process, and the writer will be able to mark it up, ask questions, and make suggested revisions alongside the tutor. The fee for Signum's writing tutorial program is \$25 per half hour. Students may make an appointment with a tutor at the [Writer's Forge](#).

P. Library

Signum University offers its faculty and students a convenient online library that features a subscription to the Project Muse Humanities Collection as well as a set of useful research guides and the Signum Digital Collection.

The Project Muse Humanities Collection contains over two hundred high quality, peer reviewed journals to support research in the humanities. Journal highlights include *Tolkien Studies*, *Chaucer Review*, *Arthuriana*, and *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Project Muse is accessible through Google classroom for faculty and students with an active LMS login.

Signum University's library also provides a set of research guides to direct faculty and students to trustworthy online sources on topics such as Tolkien and the Inklings, history and literature, and language and philology. These research guides are accessible to faculty, students, and the general public.

Finally, the library provides the Signum Digital Collection, which features the student thesis archive and Mythmoot proceedings.