



Signum University Team Member Guide

INTRODUCING SIGNUM UNIVERSITY

- A. Mission
- B. Core Values
- C. History
- D. Signum University Today

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

- A. Introduction
- B. Legal Stuff

WHAT SETS US APART

- A. Philosophy & Culture
- B. Organizational Structure
- C. Online Work Environment
- D. Internationalism
- E. Approach to Employee Performance

GETTING STARTED AS A TEAM MEMBER

- A. Team Assignments
- B. Muster
- C. Finding Your Way Around the Campus
- D. Please ask questions!
- E. Communications Systems
- F. Attendance
- G. Confidentiality

WHAT SIGNUM VALUES

- A. Respect and courtesy
- B. Trustworthiness

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

SIGNUM GLOSSARY

INTRODUCING 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 University is a values-based academic community. We believe that scrupulous adherence by our board, staff, and faculty to our core values is what makes us exceptional.

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. Signum University Today

Signum University offers a Master's degree in Language and Literature, with optional concentrations in Tolkien Studies, Imaginative Literature, Germanic Philology, and Classic Literature. Instruction and interaction is entirely online, pioneering a number of techniques to make online learning more interactive. The

model consists of lectures, which may be live or pre-recorded; online live preceptor sessions, with a low student-to-teacher ratio for interaction and discussion; and student-driven discussion boards. Most class requirements can be completed by students asynchronously, making it an ideal model for individuals with [busy schedules]. Signum also offers certificate programs and auditing options for those not seeking a Master's degree, a variety of fun programming that's free and open to the public via Mythgard Institute at Signum University, and children's programs through Signum for Kids.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

A. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to give you a crash course in who we are at Signum University, how we do things, and how you can be a part of it all. We hope you come away with a sense of what we expect from you, what you can expect from us, and where to go for further information. As an online institution, we feel it's best to make these policies available to you via the internet so that you can know for sure you're using the most recent version. There are other individuals connected with Signum University, such as volunteers, for whom the information contained in this handbook will be useful as they learn about Signum, but for whom specific employment-related passages will not apply.

B. Legal Stuff

We hope this Team Member Guide will be of help to you as you learn your way around Signum. It is intended to provide you with general information about our policies, culture, and expectations; it is not intended to be all-inclusive. All organizations are subject to change, and Signum reserves the right to change, revoke, or replace any or all of its policies and procedures at any time, with or without notice, and reserves the right to make final decisions about the interpretation and application of all policies. We will make every effort to notify you of any changes in policy, but the final responsibility for knowing and abiding by Signum University's policies, in this guide or elsewhere, rests with you. If you have questions about specific policies, speak with your Team Leader or the Employment Team.

The most common model for employment in the US is at-will employment, meaning that both the employee and the employer are free to terminate the employment relationship at any time, for any reason or no reason, and with or without notice. At Signum, we don't feel that at-will employment is normally in the best interest of either employee or employer. We value the security and continuity of a contract, when practical. A contract protects you from termination of your employment without notice or on a whim. It also provides Signum with the opportunity to

ensure continuity in operations by allowing adequate time to prepare for an employee's resignation. If you have been provided with a contract, signed by you and the University President, the terms of your employment are specified within it, including the length of the notice needed to terminate your employment on either side and the causes for which the University may terminate your employment. If you have no such contract, your employment remains at will and subject to the conditions outlined above.

The information in this handbook supersede all previous handbooks. By seeking or continuing employment with Signum, you agree to abide by all University policies, including the ones contained in this handbook.

WHAT SETS US APART

A. Philosophy & Culture

You have joined what we call the "University Team", that is to say the group of people who enable Signum to function. The University Team comprises both employees and volunteers, and includes within it Tactical Staff, Faculty and what, in other institutions, would be referred to as "Administration" or "Management". At Signum we see these as artificial divisions and ourselves as a single community.

Signum is a 100% distributed institution. We own no real-estate or physical premises and never intend to. People work in their own homes and we communicate via the internet, both with each other and with students.

We work very flexibly and non-hierarchically. People are organized into teams for organizational clarity but these are not restrictive structures. Someone can work on multiple teams according to their particular skills and interests. Moreover, the same person might be a leader on one team and an ordinary team member on another.

Signum has a very distinctive culture. We resist the corporatization of education and ban titles like manager or director. We see ourselves as a single University Team rather than the competitive factions - Faculty, Staff and Administration - which most universities are divided into. We embrace the formula, "Equivalent but Different". People serve different roles but there is no elite. We believe in transparency and have a single role grading (post evaluation) structure which encompasses everyone from the most simple data-entry post to the University President and on which each person's remuneration can be calculated according to a simple formula.

As you can see Signum is very different from the typical American higher education institution and we value that difference and our independence. We have a clear set of principles and values and those guide all that we do. We will never sacrifice that

independence in return for public funds or take money from anyone who wants to change what we are.

Signum University is being built from scratch in an entirely online environment. We share many ideals with traditional academic institutions, but unlike almost all schools and even most businesses, Signum University is a native of the digital world. For this reason, many of the approaches, procedures, and policies of Signum operations are quite different from those common in the higher education world. Signum is, as we have often joked, "Weird on Purpose." In some cases, our approach to organizing and doing things is unusual because it is tailored to life on our digital campus. In other cases, we have deliberately broken away from accepted, traditional models and procedures because we consider them inefficient, divisive, or even unjust. Building a university from the ground up is a huge job, but it has also provided a remarkable opportunity to rethink academic and administrative systems that have continued unexamined at traditional institutions for decades or even centuries. Here at Signum, we are not afraid to do things differently!

B. Organizational Structure

Although Signum eschews hierarchy, we recognize the need for structure, accountability, and leadership. Structure and leadership allow us to make the best and most efficient use of our resources, enabling us to achieve our core value of affordability. Accountability gives the oversight we need to ensure we achieve our core values of education that is informative, thorough, and valuable, and ensures we all live up to our values and objectives. Structure, accountability, and leadership all promote our core value of teamwork, as members are able to envision themselves working towards a shared goal. Faculty and tactical staff collaborate as employees, and may work side by side with volunteers. All of these individuals are considered Team Members. Due to our unique approach to structure, the traditional hierarchical organization chart is inadequate to depict the interconnectedness of our members. We therefore use a different type of chart to help provide a visual representation of our team located [here](#).

Signum's structure has three basic elements: Divisions, Teams, and Projects.

A **Division** is an organizational unit consisting of multiple Teams who share a common theme or function. Divisions are defined by leadership over a broad area.

The Strategy Team, the primary leadership of Signum, is made up of the Division Leads and University President, working to coordinate the efforts of the various divisions across the institution.

The current divisions comprising Signum University are:

Stewardship - The Stewardship Division runs the business side of the institution, taking care of money matters, employment, and record-keeping.

Outreach - The Outreach Division is focused on promoting Signum to the outside world, spreading the word about who we are and reaching out to the people who may become our future students and supporters.

Digital Campus - Provides the IT infrastructure and the technical expertise which supports online classes, library, videos and podcasts.

Language & Literature Department - Houses the University's Faculty and is responsible for all academic matters including preparation of courses.

Incubator - The Incubator is the division where new projects are started, under the guidance and supervision of the President.

Student Support - The Student Support Division works to ensure that our students have everything they need to succeed in our program.

Planning - The Planning Division focuses on helping form Signum's long-term goals, as well as working to ensure that we are on track in pursuing those goals.

A **Team** is a group of people under the guidance of a leader working to do something that is part of an ongoing function. Examples include Admissions, Events, and Bursary (Finance). Teams are what might be called departments or units in other organizations.

Anything that is not a Team is a **Project**. Projects may be formed for a temporary or ongoing purpose, may be a solo or group endeavor, and often work across divisional lines. Examples of Projects might include a technology upgrade or a re-certification task force. Projects sometimes eventually grow into Teams.

Board and President - The Board, as the governing body of Signum, reviews all the decisions made by Signum leadership, while the President coordinates the efforts of individual Divisions into a unified strategy.

C. Online Work Environment

Signum's work environment, like its classes, is 100% online-based. Much of the work and communication can be done on your own schedule; if you work best at midnight, go for it! You can work in your pajamas, too -- online work means no dress code (better change out of the pajamas before video calls, though). We use a variety of conferencing and communications software to keep from losing the personal feel.

D. Internationalism

Working with people living in another country isn't just possible at Signum -- it's expected. Because our online environment is conducive to any location and multiple time zones, it's ideal for collaboration worldwide.

E. Approach to Employee Performance

Signum University has a three-pronged approach to employee performance: the **Code of Competency**, **Code of Discipline**, and **Annual Development Interview**.

Our goal is not to squeeze every last drop of performance out of each individual that works with us, but rather to improve performance by offering employees the opportunities, where possible, to improve their skills and progress along their career path.

All employees are expected to meet our [Code of Competency](#). We want to be able to use your knowledge and skills in the best way possible. Therefore, some shortcomings that in other organizations would be cause for discipline, are handled under the Code of Competency and are treated as opportunities for learning and improvement. We (and you) can't afford the time to use you in the wrong place or doing something you are not qualified for. So if there is something you feel you need to know in order to turn out your best work, don't hesitate to ask. And if you feel your role matches your skill set poorly, let us know.

Instead of an Annual Performance Review, Signum has a **Development Interview**.

Development Interviews are intended to make life and work at Signum better for all concerned. It gives you a chance to identify areas you would like to develop and discuss them with your supervisor, and it gives your supervisor the opportunity to encourage and challenge you to learn new things, and to grow in ways that will help your current role, as well as your career goals. We hope in this way to address areas for improvement while they are not concerns, and to keep employees from feeling as though their role has become a stagnant one.

Grounds for Discipline. It is the duty and responsibility of every Signum University employee to be aware of and abide by existing policies and work rules. All employees are also required to cooperate with disciplinary investigations and answer questions truthfully to the best of their ability. Signum University recognizes that the majority of employee transgressions are not willful or malicious but occur through factors such as ignorance and poor judgment. We therefore consider it appropriate to operate a staff disciplinary system which offers opportunity for reflection and improvement before termination is considered. However, there are offenses which represent such a major breach of trust between the employer and employee that in these situations severe penalties, including dismissal, may be immediately necessary. See our [Disciplinary Code](#) for more information.

Some actions which would potentially be grounds for discipline (these are intended as examples, and are not intended to be all-inclusive):

- Stalking, bullying, or violent communication or behavior
- Theft or fraud, whether of tangible, digital, or intellectual property
- Harassing or discriminating behavior or language
- Drug or alcohol offenses
- Refusal to cooperate with all legal policies and procedures
- Sexual Harassment

GETTING STARTED AS A TEAM MEMBER

A. Team Assignments

You will be normally be assigned to one or more Teams or Projects, based on your skills and Signum's needs, but also on your preference. If you see an area where you would like to serve and where you think your qualifications will be put to good use, let us know. Many of our Team Members begin on the Errantry Team, from which members can be deployed (like knights errant) to ride to the aid of teams or projects in need. A leader can put in a request for assistance, and the Errantry Team leader can find a person with the required skills and time to help out. Many Signum Team Members remain in Errantry alongside other assignments, a plan which we feel gives the maximum flexibility and efficiency, while allowing members to exercise a variety of talents and become familiar with multiple areas of the University. All staff within Signum are expected and actively encouraged to be flexible. Our structure and working practices are non-conventional and we need people who accept and embrace this difference. It is understood that your assigned role may change, based on changing needs of the institution. While you will normally have a designated Team Leader, roles within Signum are often undertaken collaboratively, performing functions that cross traditional Division or section-lines. It is therefore an expected part of the normal working week that staff may spend part of their time with other teams including potentially under the direction of persons other than their normal supervisor.

B. Muster

The Signum Muster is a our online staff meeting held biweekly on Thursdays at 1pm EST. It's our way of keeping everyone in the university up to date on what we are doing institution-wide and to make announcements, call to arms, accolades, even a bit of brainstorming. If you are available, you can join the Muster live with this link:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/regist...6580840196> If you are not available, that's no problem. Both audio and video recordings of previous Musters are posted online shortly afterwards.

C. Finding Your Way Around the Campus

Signum uses a variety of software and online systems, including email and other communications systems, record-keeping software, and conferencing/webinar systems. Part of your orientation will include a crash course in the ones you will need to use. Feel free to look around and familiarize yourself with anything you are given access to. Knock on doors. Poke in closets.

D. Please ask questions!

Your Team Leader can be a good resource for questions and answers. If they don't know, they may be able to direct you to someone who can. Contact the Employment Team (employment@signumu.org) for employment related questions or if you can't figure out who to ask. Signum has an online forum called the Speaker's Corner that you can sign up for. The Speaker's Corner is a place for questions, feedback, personal announcements, and water-cooler chatter. At the end of this Guide, you will find a list of relevant contact persons.

E. Communications Systems

As a team working remotely from locations around the world, communication is at the heart of everything that we do, and is absolutely essential for smooth performance of University functions. Among other methods of communication, each Team Member will be given a signumu.org email, which is to be used for all Signum business. Forwarding of email from this address to a personal one is not permitted. We expect you to use your Signum email only for things that fall under the aims, goals, and principles of the University, and not against our [Acceptable Use Policy](#).

Use of Signum systems, including email, should be understood to be with no expectation of privacy. Signum University reserves the right to monitor and have access to any systems or software provided by the university, as well as any communications conducted using them.

F. Attendance

Signum does not have a conventional clock-based approach to attendance. We recognize that staff are working in their own homes, and a consequence of that will be interruptions and activities that would not normally be part of the work day.

Many tasks can be completed flexibly, and we feel that offering that flexibility is a valuable benefit to our Team Members, some of whom may not be able to commit to a more conventional schedule. A flexible workforce is also a benefit to Signum, as it

allows us to adapt quickly to meet ever-changing needs, and we feel that with the right people, a flexible work policy promotes quality instead of hindering it.

In most cases, as long as you are able to meet expectations and deadlines, you will be evaluated on output and performance rather than adherence to a strict schedule, and a time-record will not be required. However, certain positions (particularly those involved in course delivery) will require attendance on specific days and times, and should not be undertaken without a reasonable certainty of the ability to fulfill this commitment. Also, it should be understood that some tasks may require extra effort at certain times. For more detailed information about our flexible work practices please [click here](#).

G. Confidentiality

All Signum Team Members are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement which lays out your responsibilities for safeguarding information you may receive as part of your duties with Signum. We take very seriously the responsibility to protect the information we are entrusted with, and we expect you to do the same.

WHAT SIGNUM VALUES

Signum University is values- and people-oriented, not profit oriented. It is therefore very important to us that our Team Members understand our values, so that they can apply them in situations they encounter. All faculty and staff, as well as students, are expected to abide by the University's [Code of Conduct](#). University employees are expected to comply with all policies and procedures including, but not limited to, the policies contained in this Guide. In addition to our Core Values, these are some of the ideals under which Signum operates:

A. Respect and courtesy

Every person is important. Everybody's views, lifestyle, personality, and contribution to Signum is deserving of respect. We strive for courtesy in our language to our Team Members, our students, the public. We expect our Team Members to follow this example; however, we recognize that there are situations where respect for yourself may potentially result in behavior that under other circumstances appears disrespectful or discourteous.

B. Trustworthiness

We value individuals who are honest and reliable, both personally and professionally. This is of particular importance in an online environment, where some traditional means of accountability and oversight are not always as visible.

We feel, however, that whenever it is practical, individuals should be trusted to make the right decisions with a minimum of oversight.

C. Teamwork and Cooperation

We need each other to accomplish our mission. While you may be doing much of your work on your own, good cooperation with other Team Members will enable us to accomplish more and take advantage of opportunities to make both our educational and work experience better and more valuable.

D. Communication

Communication is a key part of teamwork, and is especially important for teams working at a distance from each other. Effective communication can prevent many misunderstandings before they start, and resolve many others before they grow out of hand. Effective and timely communication also increases productivity, and reduces many sources of frustration and stress.

E. People-Centered

Signum University would not exist if it were not for the people that make up our community. We believe that an institution should not attempt to exploit its faculty, staff, or students, and that the bottom line needs to be about people as well as financial stability. We do not use the term “Human Resources” when referring to our staff, as though they were resources to be arbitrarily used and abused. We believe that our Team Members will do their best work when they are happy, interested, and engaged, and we strive to maintain an environment where that is possible.

Commitment to our students is one of our primary concerns; we wish to provide the highest quality educational experience possible. To that end, all Team Members are expected to behave in a respectful, courteous and professional manner towards students and all members of the public while engaged in Signum business.

F. Taking Employee Concerns Seriously

Your Team Leader is naturally your first resource for any problems or questions you encounter, but you should feel free to bring up concerns to anyone, at any level, at any time. Your supervisor and the Employment Team should be seen as resources for you to use, not as entities to keep you in line. See our [Complaint Policy](#) for further information.

G. A Discrimination and Harassment-Free Work Environment

There are various laws governing equal opportunity and equality in employment. You can view federal and state-required postings [here](#).

Signum cooperates with these laws not only because we are required to do so, but because we believe that it is right. Furthermore, we are committed to continually seeking ways to make our workplace more equitable, and to protecting the rights and welfare of our Team Members in any way practical. In keeping with those commitments we have developed policies on [Equal Opportunity Employment](#) and [Harassment](#). Signum welcomes Team Members with disabilities, and is committed to making reasonable accommodations for the performance of their jobs in our [Individuals with Disabilities Policy](#).

H. Flexibility

Signum values its Team Members and attempts to be supportive of the challenges they face in coupling work and life. We feel that our flexible working practices are an asset for Team Members in any circumstances, but in some cases (such as military service or medical conditions) a leave of absence is required. Signum University complies with all applicable Federal and State laws governing such leave. In addition, Signum may in some circumstances provide up to 6 months of unpaid leave of absence for Team Members who follow proper notification procedures. See our [Leave of Absence Policy](#) for more information. A Team Member who leaves the University in good standing may be eligible for preferential rehire should they reapply at a future date.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Type of Enquiry	Direct to	Email
Enquiries about student transcripts	Tripp Reynolds	tripp.reynolds@gmail.com
Any student question or general enquiry about the university	Sharon Hoff	info@signumu.org
Questions about finance including reimbursement of expenses	Tina Harden	tina.harden@signumu.org
Issues about accreditation including guidance on what can be said publicly	Jenn Raimundo	jennifer.raimundo@signumu.org
Questions about the Work-Study Program or employment at Signum	Employment Team	employment@signumu.org
Requests for publicity about events or activities	Curtis Weyant	curtis.weyant@signumu.org
Technical support for Bitrix including adding new team members	Mark Lachniet	mark.lachniet@signumu.org
General technical questions	Digital Campus	digital-campus-team@signumu.org

SIGNUM GLOSSARY

Organizational:

Division - Organizational unit consisting of multiple teams who share a common theme/function.

Faculty - The academic staff of the institution. Signum University does not draw a hard line between its academic and administrative staff, a practice which might be unfamiliar to those inside universities. The two groups have differing roles, but equal standing.

Lead/Leader - We use these terms to differentiate those who would conventionally be classed as managers. Leads have responsibility over a Division, while Leaders provide leadership and coordination for a Team or Project

Professor - Used in US in recognition of professional status. This may cause confusion with those familiar with the usage in the UK, where it's a separate status, an institution's award for outstanding research.

Provost - Stewardship Division Lead. A title which may be unfamiliar to those outside universities.

Tactical Staff - The technical and administrative staff of the University. Sometimes known as “non-teaching” staff in other countries. Signum University does not draw a hard line between its academic and administrative staff, a practice which might be unfamiliar to those inside universities. The two groups have differing roles, but equal standing.

Team - These are the basic structural units of Signum. In most other institutions they would be called areas or departments based on size.

University Team - Name for the collective personnel of Signum University including Faculty, Tactical Staff and Strategy Team.

Work-Study - Special program launched by Signum to increase staff numbers using volunteers.

Courses:

Anytime Audit - Class lecture recordings, materials, and discussion boards made available on a completely asynchronous basis.

Asynchronous - Not limited to happening at the same time.

Discussion Audit - Access to all class components including live Discussion sections.

Discussion Section - The core live interaction component of Signum's graduate classes. Led by a preceptor and containing no more than twelve students.

Flex Classes - Flex courses are re-offerings of courses that ran in previous semesters. Since the lectures were recorded, students have more freedom in when exactly they will watch. Students do still attend weekly live sections with their preceptor and fellow classmates.

Lecturer - The professor responsible for developing a course and delivering weekly lectures to all students. Lectures may be delivered live, or, in the case of a flex course, are recordings from a previous offering of that class. Thus, for a flex course, the lecturer no longer needs to be actively involved. The lecturer may also occasionally be a preceptor.

Live Classes - A class where the lecture component is delivered live and students have the opportunity to ask questions and interact with the lecturer.

Preceptor - The professor responsible for interacting directly with students—leading discussions, curating assignments, grading work, and responding to student questions. Preceptors for a certain class may change from semester to semester, as availability shifts, whereas the lecturer will remain the same. The preceptor may also occasionally deliver lectures. There is usually more than one Preceptor per class, as Discussion Sections are kept to a limited size.

Premier Audit - Access (excluding Discussion Section access) to a class in its first run.

Synchronous - Happening at the same time; something people are required to be present for at a specific time.

Thesis Director - An individual who works one-on-one with a student during the preparation of their Master's Thesis.

Thesis Second Reader - An individual who does a one-time reading and critique of a student's Thesis.

Signum Likes Fancy Names:

Eglerio - A term of praise (literally "praise!" or "glorify" in Sindarin), used in the Musters to draw attention to and celebrate anyone whose efforts are particularly noteworthy.

Errantry - A team of Signum staff available for rotating or short-term duties who, like knights errant, can ride to the assistance of other teams needing help with special projects or heavy workloads.

Faculty Chat - Available through Signum Symposia, these informal discussions build on the for-credit courses that our faculty teach and provide additional introductions and analysis to content in related areas of study.

Heralding - The process of collecting and disseminating information to all Team Members about what the various Divisions of the University are up to. A way of maintaining connectedness even at a distance.

Muster - Term for Signum's biweekly online staff meeting. It's a way to help keep us all on the same page as far as what's going on at Signum and what our short- and long-term goals are. All previous Musters can be found [here](#).

Mythgard Academy - A weekly live discussion hosted by Signum President Corey Olsen. Mythgard Academy supporters choose books to read and discuss in detail over several months.

Mythgard Institute - The branch of Signum University that offers free content such as discussion courses on books and movies, and guest lectures by prominent sci-fi and fantasy scholars. The Institute also organizes multiple yearly events in different locations to bring the community together in the real world.

Mythmoot - Our annual multi-day conference which brings Mythgard and Signum community members from around the world into one place for paper presentations, VIP keynote speakers, trivia contests, and of course the yearly Masquerade. Mythmoot seeks to blend the best of academic conferences and fan conventions in one glorious event. (Moot = a meeting or gathering. Also seen in names of regional conferences such as Midmoot, Texmoot, etc).

Signum Symposia - Conversations with students, faculty, and special guests on topics of general interest.

Thesis Theater - Available through Signum Symposia, a forum in which students nearing the end of their graduate course of study can present their thesis to the Signum community in an informal setting.

Writers' Forge - Signum's writing center, offering fee-based tutoring sessions for students and anyone else wishing to sharpen their writing skills.

Technobabble:

Bitrix - An online task management and coworker interaction software. Used for communication and coordination.

Discussion forum - An online “space” facilitating discussion in a chat format.

Google Classroom - A feature of Google services that connects instructors and students and provides a “home” for course materials and schedules.

GoToWebinar - Online platform for hosting and recording live discussions. GoToWebinar enables participants to register ahead of time, then log into a virtual classroom on the agreed date. The instructor broadcasts through a video feed, and students can ask questions and interact with the teacher in real time. Also abbreviated GTW or GToW or some variation.

LMS - Learning Management System

LOTRO - The Lord of the Rings Online: a massive multiplayer online role-playing game based on Tolkien’s Middle-earth world in the Third Age. LOTRO has been called by some the best media adaptation of Tolkien’s work to date. Within LOTRO, players can complete quests, explore the world, and even attend Exploring Lord of the Rings lectures by The Tolkien Professor!

Sycamore - Online database/recordkeeping platform.

Webinar - Web+seminar = a live, online meeting in which attendees can watch a video feed from the presenter, submit typed questions, and even at times offer comments themselves using computer microphones. It’s a digital classroom!

Academic or literary terms you may meet if you work with course delivery:

Close Reading - The process (or results) of careful, considered attention to a text, in which the reader employs his or her ability to notice details, think creatively, and analyze aptly. Most schools of literary theory employ close reading as a part of their process to derive meaning (or lack thereof) from a text.

Commentary - A compilation of comments on a single work, usually focused on the explication of meaning (adapted from the Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Age).

CritFic - A type of straw man argument in which someone analyzes or criticizes adaptations based on what one assumes the adapter intends to do, rather than on what can actually be known from evidence.

Critical Edition - A copy of a text that has been determined to be the closest possible to the original work, presented along with critical apparatus (basically

commentary and evidence for why that's so). The object or goal of textual criticism is to produce such editions.

Critical Theory/Literary Theory - Various schools of thought attempting to answer the question "What is literature, and how do we evaluate it?" Different critical theories emphasize different aspects of a text in their search for meaning. Notable critical theories include Structuralism, New Criticism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Feminist Criticism, Marxist Criticism, and Postcolonialism. Signum is notable for its emphasis on scholars using critical theory from the Corey Olsen School of Close Reading.

Eucatastrophe - A word coined by Tolkien meaning the 'good catastrophe' or 'sudden turn' in a course of events; that moment when all seems truly lost, but then hope and joy are renewed when the tide unexpectedly turns. Eucatastrophe is closely linked with Tolkien's Christian faith, though the experience is not limited to specifically Christian stories.

Gloss - An explanation or translation of a difficult word or phrase, usually added to a text by a later copyist or editor; an extra-textual annotation, anywhere from a single symbol or an ample note to a compilation of comments on a single work (adapted from the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms and the Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages).

The Inklings - The informal circle of friends that met in Oxford in the 1930s and 40s. The defining characteristics of Inklings members were a propensity to write, and Christianity. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were the most famous of its members, but the group also included many others, including Charles Williams, Owen Barfield, Warren Lewis, Hugo Dyson, Nevill Coghill, and Christopher Tolkien.

Joining the scholarly conversation - Providing a survey of previous academic publications on the subject, then contributing an original perspective, new information, or a contrasting argument.

Marginalia - Any writing or other marks made in the margins of a text. These could include notations from the author—especially in the case of a manuscript. Marginalia can also be things written by others at a later date, which might be more often encountered in a used bookstore.

Middle English - Developed from Old English, and was also influenced by the introduction of Norman French to England in 1066. The Middle English period lasted from about 1100 to 1500. Middle English lost the grammatical gender and inflected nouns/adjectives of Old English, which makes it much more recognizable as a form of English by modern speakers, although still difficult to read without glosses.

MLA - The Modern Language Association. More often in our circles, MLA refers to the writing and citation style guide put forth by the Association in their MLA handbook (8th Edition is the latest). Papers at Signum are written in MLA format.

Old English/Anglo-Saxon - The earliest form of the English language, spoken in England before 1100 CE. Its Germanic roots were brought to England by the tribes of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who migrated there in the 5th and 6th centuries. It was also influenced by Nordic raiders and settlers who entered the British Isles throughout the early Medieval period. Old English had many linguistic features largely lost in Modern English, such as grammatical gender and case-inflected nouns, adjectives, and pronouns.

Philology - The study of language by way of historical sources. Philologists are particularly concerned with oral and written historic texts. The word has become more specific over time; Philology often referred, in older usage, to a more general study in comparative and historical linguistics, though historical texts were still an important element in the discipline.

Peer review - The process in which academic work submitted for publication is vetted by other members of the field. Peer review provides accountability and often results in modifications before a work is published.

Recovery, Escape, Consolation - Tolkien's name for the three effects of fantasy on readers or hearers of fairy-stories. Firstly, fairy-stories help humans *recover* a clear view, seeing reality in a fresh way. Fantasy can restore our sense of wonder in the primary world around us. Second, they offer a measure of escape—not the flight of the deserter, as Tolkien is quick to clarify, but rather the escape of the prisoner from bondage. To Tolkien, escape is a way of equipping us to better deal with reality, even in times of pain, hunger, injustice, poverty, and death, by helping us realize that good still exists, and to work towards making reality closer to goodness. Finally, and closely tied in with escape, fairy-stories offer us *consolation* in their happy endings, their 'eucatastrophe' (see below). They bring joy beyond hope.

Retcon - Retroactive Continuity: Reframing past events to serve a current plot need. (from TV tropes).

Sehnsucht - Longing, yearning, wistful longing, yearning sadness, literary yearning; according to C. S. Lewis: joy, romanticism, a desire that is itself more satisfactory than any possible satisfaction, a signpost to Heaven. *Sehnsucht* is also the name of an academic journal of C.S. Lewis studies.

The "So What Question" - The thesis, point, or conclusion of a line of literary argumentation or reasoning, in which the writer connects the argumentation to larger issues, showing how this argument enlightens a reading of the text(s) in question, why it matters, and what it contributes to scholarship. (adapted from Verlyn Flieger).

Subcreation - Tolkien's word for what an author does when he builds a fictional world using words. Tolkien believed the creative impulse was placed in humans by God, the original Creator. To Tolkien, "We make still by the law in which we're made" ("Mythopoeia" st. 5).