



AQUINAS INSTITUTE

Distance Learning Parent Information

Understanding Distance Learning

We are all used to being in the same classroom with a teacher and learning in a face-to-face setting. This is comforting, familiar, and for most of us what we consider “normal”. The new normal, at least for now is a big change for most of us. We feel out of place and unsure of how this is all supposed to work and wonder what we should expect.

The work load may feel different but distance learning is an effective tool. It is important to understand some of the inherent differences between being in a classroom for face-to-face instruction versus the distance model that Aquinas is currently employing.

The differences between distance learning, traditional education and homeschool are also important to understand. Aquinas is not using a homeschool model. Our teachers are teaching your children. However, the level of support that parents may need to provide may be more than it would be under ordinary circumstances.

- ✿ In home school, parents are responsible for developing (or obtaining) and delivering the curriculum and the instruction. Parents are also responsible for assessing and evaluating student performance and progress.
- ✿ In distance learning and traditional education, curriculum, instruction, and instructional materials are facilitated by the school with direct and in-direct support from expert teachers and educators. In our current effort to provide distance learning, your child’s Aquinas education continues with our teachers and the Aquinas tradition of excellence at the core.
- ✿ Aquinas also continues to provide our counseling supports and functions of our counseling center to assist your child(ren) in social emotional development, provide tools for navigating some of the stress associated with change, working with students and families on the course selection process for next year, and facilitating and navigating the college process.

Important Concepts in Distance Learning

We understand that every family is having a different experience with work load and with navigating the differences between distance learning and the traditional classroom setting. Distance learning is designed to give students the necessary tools to continue an Aquinas education from remote locations when face-to-face instruction has been suspended for a period of time. The following are adapted from the *Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design* which is a collaborative research effort on best practices in distance learning:

- ✿ Remember that technology is a "bridge" between students and teachers.
- ✿ Routine, Routine, Routine is important. Students are not time-bound in a familiar way. Setting up a home schedule that works for your at-home situation is paramount. Consider following our daily school schedule if that works for your child, but make a schedule and follow the schedule every day.
- ✿ Expect that the amount of time spent “in school” each day will not be the same as that of a traditional school day. There is not passing time or scheduled lunch break. Teachers are not directly taking attendance and assignments and instructions are written and posted so class time is much more compact. The work load is also designed for students to complete outside of class with opportunity for direct support from the teacher outside of the lesson.

- ✿ Understand that the technologies employed will vary from teacher to teacher and class to class. The use of various technologies is a major difference between traditional and distance learning.
 - The use of the internet, student portal, and various web-based media platforms are supplemental to the content in a traditional classroom.
 - In a distance learning environment, the use of technology is the way that the major content is delivered. It may be through the use of virtual discussion in the web portal, the use of interactive tools like Zoom, as well as video platforms of recorded content like YouTube and 365 Steaming. Teachers may also employ some traditional formats like shared power point notes, worksheets, and data based question activities.

Students With IEPs and Learning Center Resources

Accommodations for students who have an Individual Education Plan or an Aquinas Accommodation Plan will receive services through distance learning. The Aquinas Learning Center provides necessary supports to all students who qualify.

Understanding Instruction in Distance Learning

Face-to-face instruction involves students and teachers interacting in real time. Distance Learning requires that students work through teacher prepared lessons and other teaching material at their own pace. Students ask questions on online discussion forums or through messaging features and email or “in person” during teacher office hours. Sometimes students will need to wait for a teacher or another student to respond.

Parents/guardians may find that there is sometimes a greater need to assist their child in navigating the technology or helping with understanding. All children are different and have different requirements for support in a nontraditional setting. Patience and routine are important in helping your family find the best the best way to navigate individual student needs for at home support.

This is not a slowing down of learning. This is actually an advantage of distance learning. Teachers can present complex ideas in notes and through posted content and invite students to pause content or step away and think about the information presented before moving ahead allowing students to learn at their own pace, ensuring no one is left behind.

Instructional Delivery vs. Facilitating Learning

Aquinas is a place where the teacher is the facilitator whether we are in the traditional classroom or a virtual classroom. The teacher’s role in leading and guiding discussions is key, however, they are not the only source of knowledge. This model of learning is important in developing independent thought and continued engagement with the material.

Student Performance

The ideal situation is for a student to have access to both an opportunity for distance learning and face-to-face instruction. In a full Distance model, it is important that routine exists so that students have a clear time-line for completing assignments and assessments, receiving instruction, participating in discussions with classmates and teachers, and having personal balance.

Student grading will continue to reflect performance, understanding of content, participation in discussions, attention to detail, and the ability to demonstrate what they have learned and can do.