Minnesota Virtual School for Success

Student Handbook

District #402

MNVSS School Year
2015-2016

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Mission

The mission of MNVSS is to engage, inspire, and educate the whole student for an options-rich future through a challenging, flexible, teacher-developed curriculum; with the encouragement of responsive faculty and staff; within a creative and supportive learning community.

Vision

At MNVSS all students define their unique identities and entry points into adult life; their reasons to persist and to stretch toward excellence; and their individual and collective purposes that make school, work, and life meaningful. MNVSS supports students to engage with learning not only online but everywhere adults will support their achievements.

Note to All Students

After you review this handbook, you should be able to explain to your counselor/online coordinator, parent/ guardian, and/or teacher the following:

- ☐ The MNVSS Attendance Policy and what "continuous progress" means.
- ☐ Academic honesty and how to stay within the MNVSS Academic Honesty Policy.
- ☐ The MNVSS Drop/Add Policy
- ☐ The MNVSS calendar and pace charts.
- ☐ Requirements for comprehensive (MNVSS only) students
- ☐ What you are expected to do each school day.
- ☐ Important habits to save time and effort

If you have any questions or are unsure of these seven important pieces of information, please contact your counselor or online coordinator. Don't be shy – they're here to help you prepare for school!

Welcome!

All MNVSS staff and faculty have been hard at work preparing for an exciting 2015 summer school session**.** Each of us brings different expertise and skills, but we all have this in common: We are all committed to creating a highly interactive, academically and socially rich online middle and high school experience for you.

This handbook is a quick reference to the MNVSS program. Inside you'll find important information about what you can expect from us, and what we will expect from you. The handbook also contains general instructions for locating your courses online, turning in assignments, and communicating with your teachers and online coordinator.

Please take the time to carefully read all of the information contained here. That way you will get off to a great start and have a productive and successful online learning experience!

Going to School Online

What does it mean to go to school online? Like all schools, MNVSS is made up of many parts, most of them accessible through the Internet. MNVSS students use the Internet to show up for classes, share ideas and information with teachers, read, write, draw, research, ask and answer questions, work on projects, complete quizzes and tests, take home report cards, discuss career and college options, and do many other activities that are part of the high school learning experience.

MNVSS uses Odysseyware as its portal for students to go to school online. To access Odysseyware, go to www.mnvss.org and click on the "Odysseyware" tab.
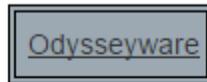
Your courses = Odysseyware. Odysseyware is the system where all of your coursework and classes are held. All of your lessons, projects, quizzes, and tests are compiled here, and this is where you will complete each one. It's also where your school community gathers and where you will have the opportunity to communicate with your teachers, and where your teachers will communicate with you. You'll use this system to "go to school" each day.

Read through the rest of this handbook to learn about the Odysseyware system you'll use and what to do once you get there. The following pages will help you to stay on track, keep yourself organized, and not get "lost in the halls."

All MNVSS students, new and returning, are expected to complete:
- MNVSS **Technology Orientation** before the start of the semester in which the student enrolls,
- and **New Student Orientation** or **Returning Student Workshop** the first two days of each semester

Students can guarantee their success as online learners by making sure they have all the software tools they need before getting busy with their academic courses.

It is possible to complete the Technology Orientation in about an hour, although some students may take longer if they need to troubleshoot technical issues.

In **Technology Orientation**, you will
- Learn about and practice using features of the Odysseyware system,
- Become familiar with other internet communication tools and software central to their success,
- And verify that they have the MNVSS required software and updates installed on their computers.

New Student Orientation and **Returning Student Workshops** are held each semester. Here, we introduce new tools, techniques, and discussions to help students stay on track as online learners.

What to do every day:
- Log in to Odysseyware.
  - Check the *Messages Tab* where you can see:
    - The Message of the Day
    - Special notifications
    - Messages from teachers
      - This is also where you have the ability to send messages, questions, or help requests to your teachers and your online coordinator.
  - Click on the *Learn Tab* to see what is scheduled to be completed next in each course.
    - "Overdue Assignments" will also appear here until they have been completed with a passing grade. Even though you have the opportunity to work at your own pace, due dates have been set in place to help keep you on track for finishing the course on time. Your grade will not be penalized for late assignments.
  - You will use the arrows on the right to navigate to your next task. Assignments and projects that are not completed right away are automatically saved in Odysseyware so that you can return at a later time to complete them. However, quizzes and tests will not be saved, and must be completed once you've selected to attempt them.
  - You can view your progress and current course grade for each course in the *Courses Tab*. If you want to check on a particular assignment, project, quiz, or test score, use the arrows to navigate through the courses.
  - To be a successful online student, we recommend you spend about 60-90 minutes in each course every school day, or at least 5 days during the week.
- Check your e-mail (either at Outlook Live [www.mnvss.org/mail], if you have chosen to sign up for an e-mail through MNVSS, or your personal e-mail.) for notifications not sent through Odysseyware.

Important Policies
Continuous Progress and the MNVSS Attendance Policy
At MNVSS, attendance is defined as continuous active engagement with the learning process and making continuous progress in each course in which you are enrolled. You must meet all of the following expectations in each course in order to be counted as attending school:
- Spend an average of 60-90 minutes per day of well-focused <u>time in each course</u>.

- Consistently submit assignments that show effort, are of your own creation, and earn points. (Work that is submitted but violates the MNVSS Academic Honesty Policy will not earn points and therefore will not be counted towards attendance.)
- Engage in other required learning activities that earn points (i.e., on the job training).
- Revise work as recommended or required by the teacher.
- Maintain regular and responsive communication with teachers, counselors, and your online coordinator. This includes:
  - Responding to e-mail and text messages and/or returning phone calls from MNVSS faculty and staff.
  - Updating MNVSS office staff when addresses and phone numbers change.
  - If you are under the age of 18, your parent or a guardian must send an email to your online coordinator when you are unable to login due to illness or other personal emergencies. A signed explanation from a practitioner may be required to verify the absence. If you are over 18 you must e-mail a note to your online coordinator and, if required, provide a signed explanation from a practitioner to verify the absence.
  - Comprehensive students (enrolled only at MNVSS) are also required to attend a weekly meeting with their online coordinator. The meeting time and place is determined by the online coordinator. Attending these meetings is part of our attendance procedures and required for being marked present for that school day.
- MNVSS tracks attendance through system logins, system activity, and work submission. Remember – if you submit work that clearly does not show effort, you are not counted as attending your course.
  - Note: Technical difficulties are not excusable absences. If you are having technical issues, contact your online coordinator immediately, then follow the necessary steps to troubleshoot and solve the problem. (See pg. 9)

Students who do not attend one or more courses are referred to county truancy officers.

The most successful online students are those who work in each course each day. If you know that you'll need to be offline for a day or more, send an explanation to your online coordinator and contact your teachers. If you are having trouble keeping up with your assignments in more than one course, contact your online coordinator right away.

Grading at MNVSS
All MNVSS courses are graded at the end of each semester according to the school calendar. Depending on the course, students may need one semester or an entire year to earn the required credit. The grade given at the end of the semester or school year is a final grade which is recorded on your transcript.

Academic honesty

In an online program, as in a traditional classroom, each student is responsible for doing his or her own work. It is important that you understand plagiarism and cheating well enough to avoid them, because these are actions which undermine your learning and for which you can receive failing grades in courses or in extreme cases be expelled. You can learn more about avoiding cheating and plagiarism in many of your courses, but generally speaking, the guidelines below will help you to avoid these problems.

All forms of cheating and plagiarism make a student subject to academic probation and/or to disciplinary action at MNVSS. When you applied, we required you to review the Academic Honesty Policy. The complete policy is available at this URL:

http://www.mnvss.org/images/Files/academic_honesty_policy.pdf

Cheating is any attempt to do work for others or have others do work for you. Some examples of cheating are:

- Giving your work to another to be copied.
- Receiving work from another so you can copy it.
- Writing assignments for others or having them write for you.
- Working together on assignments without notifying your teacher.
- Using an assignment you have already written for another course.
- Using online tools that aren't approved by your teacher ahead of time.

To avoid cheating, refuse to give assignments to someone else and refuse to receive work from others. Talk with your teacher ahead of time if you'd like to work on your lessons with another person, or to use an assignment you have already written for another course. There may be ways to do so that are honest and that support your growth as a student. The important thing is to negotiate all such arrangements with your teacher in advance.

Plagiarism means representing someone else's work—their writing or their ideas—as your own. Some examples of plagiarism are:

- Quoting text or other works on assignments without indicating where you got the information.
- Presenting another person's ideas as your own even if you've put the information into your own words.
- Using facts and/or statistics in your work without stating the source of the information.

To avoid plagiarism in your assignments, make sure you give proper credit for other people's words and ideas by identifying the source of any information that is not your own. If you are in doubt about

how to do this, ask your teacher. Make sure to raise this question in the first draft of anything you write.

Respectful communication is important in any online community, and is required at MNVSS. Offensive language of any kind, including profanity, racial slurs, personal insults, and indications of sexual or physical harassment or hate speech, will not be tolerated in academic work or in informal exchanges anywhere within the MNVSS environment.

The primary purpose of the MNVSS environment, including the Odysseyware system, is educational. Your access to the system may be discontinued if you use it for non-educational purposes. You can view the MNVSS Acceptable Policy for more information.

When in doubt, ask!

Drop/Add Policy

A student has two instructional weeks from the beginning of the semester within which to officially withdraw from a course. If you stop participating in a course without withdrawing, you are in danger of failing. Your grade for that course will be included on your transcript and will be used to calculate your grade point average.

You need to contact your online coordinator to officially withdraw from a course. Please give your online coordinator a call to discuss the costs and benefits of dropping. If you decide to drop, you must notify your online coordinator in writing.

 If you would like to enroll in an additional course, please contact your online coordinator.

MNVSS Calendar and Pace Charts

At MNVSS, each semester course contains two nine-week quarters. Students working at a standard pace complete 8 weeks' worth of learning activities in each quarter, plus some projects or final assessments. Your course assignments are available continuously, meaning you will be able to continue on the next assignment, project, quiz, or test once you successfully complete the one before it. To be successful you have to stay on top of your coursework. We recommend that you look ahead in your courses each week to see how many assignments, projects, or quizzes you need to complete before testing. This will help you to pace yourself accordingly throughout the semester. You may need to make some changes in your schedule in order to continue making continuous progress. Talk to your online coordinator for additional scheduling help.

If you enroll in a new course mid-semester, you may be given the opportunity to complete the entire semester course at an accelerated pace.

It's important that you work on course activities regularly, and that you keep a good pace. Online learning is not the same as independent study. Teachers are expected to grade work within 24 hours, once it's been submitted; however, they are not required. The MNVSS school year calendar is visible in Odysseyware, where you can find Holidays and "Breaks". This is the calendar your teachers will be following, so you should keep this in mind when you choose to work on non-school days.

Some assignments require teacher feedback and revision, so it's best to work on each MNVSS course each day. This way, your teacher will have adequate time to respond and you, in turn, will have adequate time to accept the feedback and make any required revisions.

Course and Graduation Requirements

MNVSS requires 24 credits for graduation, in the same subject areas required by the State of Minnesota. MNVSS diploma students planning to apply to a four-year college will need to plan carefully to complete a somewhat more rigorous program (with the same number of credits but fewer electives).

Most courses at MNVSS are worth 0.25 credits per quarter. Remember, you can access your course schedule and the credits you're earning by logging in to JMC. Changes to the course schedule should be made prior to the start of the semester and no later than the Drop/Add date. To request changes to your schedule, please contact your school counselor.

Important Parts of Your Courses and School

Think of MNVSS as a school building. Like a bricks-and-mortar school, MNVSS has many levels and many corners. We describe here a few of the most important places and ways that you will communicate with teachers and your online coordinator – in Odysseyware, by phone, and by e-mail.

Course Announcements

Course announcements are posted in the *Messages Tab* of Odysseware. Be sure to keep an eye on them for important updates and class notices.

Phone

At least once each month, your online coordinator will contact you by telephone to talk about assignments and questions you might have, and to review your progress in the course. These conversations are meant to be supportive, to help you to connect with your teachers, and to give everyone a little break from all the writing involved in online learning.

Email

MNVSS teachers and staff use Outlook live for our e-mail system. All MNVSS students have the opportunity to sign up for an Outlook live e-mail address, or to continue using their personal e-mail addresses. Most of the communication between you and your teachers will take place in the

Messages Tab in Odysseyware. It is very important that you check this tab daily for special notifications, as well as messages from your teachers. Your online coordinator will use your personal or MNVSS e-mail address weekly in order to send reports and to communicate with you regularly, so it is necessary to have a working e-mail address that you check daily.

Your MNVSS email account is a web-based, hosted service provided by Microsoft Live@edu. MNVSS email uses the same login page as MSN, Hotmail, Messenger, Xbox LIVE, and Live. Your Outlook Live ID will have "@mnvss.org" at the end of your username. Example: the username "mnvss12flastame" would have the Outlook Live ID mnvss12flastname@mnvss.org. If you have a personal account with any of those services, you will need to sign out of that account to be able to sign in to your MNVSS email account. To help you determine which email account you are signed into, your MNVSS email inbox and account screens will have our school logo displayed at the top.

Special Education Services

Just like a bricks-and-mortar school, MNVSS offers special education services to qualifying students. We have our own Special Education teacher and paraprofessionals on staff who provide students and families with the same services as any other school via teleconference, Skype, phone, etc. depending on the needs and travel abilities of each student and family. Please contact your online coordinator for more information regarding services and/or required documentation.

Technology

By now, it's probably clear to you that coming to school at MNVSS requires you to get online and to log on to Odysseyware every day. The basic instructions you need to do so are contained in this Student Handbook and in the individualized log in information you receive. Technology glitches are bound to occur, but you cannot afford to allow them to interfere with learning for long. Technology problems are not generally accepted as excuses for turning in late or incomplete work, so have a backup plan! Remember: We're here for you. Call your counselor and teachers immediately if you can't login. Here are some general guidelines for troubleshooting and solving technical issues:

- If you have trouble connecting to the Internet, first contact your local internet service provider for help.
- If your computer fails:
  - Be sure that you know where you can go to login until you can get your own computer fixed. Often a public library will allow you to work for 2 hours at a time. If you are going to be offline for a while, contact your counselor. MNVSS has a limited supply of loaner computers that may be available to use for a month or two.
  - Frequently make backup copies of your essays and other major assignments you complete, so that you can replace them if they are accidentally deleted and so you can work on them using another computer if necessary.

- Most importantly, let your teachers know that you are having problems. They may be able to suggest ways for you to keep up with the coursework. If something is not working in one of your courses, please begin by contacting your teacher. It may be as simple as a link that's not working, and your teacher will thank you for pointing it out. Your online coordinator is also available to help with these issues, and may be contacted at any time.

- If you run into a technical problem that your teacher and/or online coordinator can't solve or if you know that some required software on your computer is not working, please email your online coordinator so they can contact the necessary support service (web site: http://www.mnvss.org/techsupport)
    - You can check the Knowledge Base and FAQs to see if your problem has already been described,
    - Or you can log in to the website with your MNVSS username and password and submit a Tech Support ticket. Please be sure to give as many details as possible. Explain what you did and what happened. If you can, attach a screen shot of any error message you may have gotten. This way, Tech Support can help you more quickly.

Above all, be sure to stay in close contact with your teachers and let MNVSS staff know right away if you are having difficulty with following any technical processes—in online learning, a little clarification from your teacher can help a lot. Tell us what you need. Don't let things slide. Ask for help before you fall behind in one or more courses.

You can contact a teacher by sending a message in Odysseyware, by phone, and by e-mail. If you ask, your teacher can make an appointment to call you or to meet you in Skype or at their schools during their office hours.

Computer & Internet Access

All students must have access to a computer and high-speed Internet access. Specifications for your system can be found here. If your computer needs repairs, contact your online coordinator and teachers immediately so that they will know that your access has become limited. NOTE: technical difficulties are not an excusable absence and you are responsible for continuing to make progress in your courses while your computer is being repaired. Options may include using your public library's computer or to contact your online coordinator to see if there is a loaner computer available. A limited number of loaner computers are available from MNVSS if your computer repairs will take longer than a few days.

The MNVSS Student Needs Fund may also provide a semester of Internet access, depending if funds are available. For details, contact your counselor.

Parents play an important role

The same flexibility of online learning that makes it so attractive to some students makes it easier for others to procrastinate. Students who login irregularly or infrequently will not learn or progress in this environment. A parent or other significant person in your life can help you to stay motivated by taking an active interest in your education. Depending on your age, we will ask for your signature as well as your parent's signature on the Application Confirmation and Learning Support Agreement before you enroll.

If you are under 18, your parents or guardians will be able to monitor your progress in each of your courses within Odysseyware. A parent/guardian cannot log in to your courses but he or she can see a record of your attendance, participation, and grades—and your teachers will be e-mailing your parents regularly to talk about your progress as well. If you are over 18, or if you turn 18 during the academic year, we will assume that MNVSS has permission to contact your parent and give them access unless you state otherwise on the enrollment application form. If you are over 18 and receiving special education services, we will need written permission from you to provide your parent/guardian with access to your school records—and we encourage you to give it.

Updates to This Handbook

Your attention to the information in this handbook will make your time at MNVSS most successful. We recommend that you print out of the copy of the handbook to keep as a handy reference. However, from time to time we will make corrections or updates. When these are made, you will receive an email notification to check the Handbooks section of the MNVSS web site (policies) to learn when handbook updates have been posted.

For comprehensive (MNVSS-only) students, changes to this handbook and any policies will also be reviewed in your Advisory meeting.

Minnesota Virtual School for Success
District #2902

Student Handbook

Student:

I have received and read the student handbook and the policies have been explained to me.

_____   _____
Student Signature   Date

Parent/Guardian:

I have received and read the student handbook and understand the policies therein.

_____   _____
Parent/Guardian Signature   Date

PLEASE RETURN THIS PAGE TO MNVSS!