

## **Online Learning**

Online learning, sometimes also called e-learning or distance learning, provides students with the opportunity to take the same classes offered on campus but in a different format. Most colleges offer at least some courses via distance learning and many offer full degrees or certificates using one or more distance learning formats. Students who are unable to commit to a specific classroom schedule because of work, travel, or other extenuating circumstances may find distance learning convenient for them. Distance learning courses have textbooks, assignments, exams, interaction with faculty and/or other students. Some colleges may require that students to go to campus to take exams in the campus testing center. Depending on each college and its distance learning guidelines, some courses also use real-time two-way audio and application sharing software.

Online learning courses commonly used by colleges may include one or more of the following formats:

- **Online courses** use the Internet and a learning management system to deliver course materials and to facilitate student-student, instructor-student, and student-content interaction. These courses give you the flexibility work online any time and any place. Communication with the instructor and classmates is usually electronic via email or online discussion forums. To participate in online classes, you should have a good understanding of computer hardware and software applications and the Internet.
- **Hybrid courses** combine the learning formats of in-class instruction and convenient, online computer-based learning, resulting in a reduction of the amount of time spent on campus. Students registered in hybrid courses may be required to attend some scheduled on campus meetings.
- **Interactive video courses** use real-time television and video technology to simultaneously connect students in classrooms at numerous remote sites with an instructor. The instructor may be in front of you or may be piped in to your location. These classes are comparable to the standard college on campus class and attendance is required.
- **Telecourses** may be offered at some colleges in addition to the formats mentioned above. These courses may involve watching specific televised programs at specific times during a term, and come with written or online study guides, requiring written assignments which are transmitted to faculty via mail, email, or online posting. On campus testing may also be required.
- **Other formats** may include other types of media such as CD's, DVD's, or voice mail but have been replaced by online media at many colleges.

### **How is Online Learning Different from Classroom Courses On-Campus?**

Most online learning is different than an on campus course in learning format, the use of technology as a delivery tool, and in the time required to pace yourself for successful course completion. Although distance learning and on-campus courses cover the same content, the format is different. With distance learning, you see the entire course from the beginning. For most courses, within the enrollment period there are flexible due dates, and testing occurs at your convenience within certain guidelines. Some courses may also be accelerated with the instructor's permission.

Technology provides content and interaction. Most courses require the use of a computer and the Internet. Others require viewing videos or TV programs. Still others, may use voice mail. Online discussion boards or email are often the main vehicle for communicating with the instructor.

Online learning courses usually require at least as much time as you would spend taking a campus-based course. You should plan to study at least 2-3 hours a week for each credit. In other words, for each three-credit course, you would study 6-9 hours per week. When you compare this time with what you spend sitting in class and studying outside of class, it is about the same. Since distance learning courses may be offered in time frames other than a 10 week quarter term or a 12-14 week semester term, the general amount of time per week you should expect to study is based on the per credit hour as it relates to the length of the course. For example, if you enroll in an 8-week, 3-credit class, you can expect to spend 12-18 hours per week studying for this class. In general, the shorter the class length (6-, 8-, 12-, or 16-week), the more hours of study time you can expect to spend per week per credit.

### **What is My Student Role in a Online Learning Course?**

You, the student, must take an active approach to your learning. The instructor has structured the course for you and will give you feedback, but you are responsible for learning the material. Not only will you read the material and complete assignments, but you will also interpret important issues and ask questions when you need clarification. You are also responsible for keeping motivated and engaged with the course content. "You get out what you put in."

### **What is the Faculty's Role in a Online Learning Course?**

Faculty members serve as mentors, guides, or facilitators for your learning. They will encourage further thought in particular areas, start discussion topics, grade assignments, provide feedback on assignments, and answer any questions you have concerning the course content.

### **What Are the Obstacles to Online Learning?**

Many students, already committed to work, family, and other activities, think that distance learning is the answer to their lack of time. If you already have difficulty scheduling your time to get everything done that you need to do, adding distance learning, which does not require a specific time and place, can be overwhelming.

Another obstacle to success in distance learning is assuming the instructor will lead you through the course. You must take the initiative to learn the course content. Planning a specific study schedule and sticking to it is very important. Keeping track of your time on task and completing assignments within the required time frame is a major stumbling block for some distance learning students.

If you enjoy or need face-to-face contact with your instructor and other students, distance learning may not satisfy that need. There is electronic contact with faculty and other students in most courses, and some courses become an online community, but face-to-face contact is rare.

## What Do I Need to Know about Technology?

You will need to have your own computer, or access to one in the college computer center, to meet the technology requirements for your Online Courses:

- reliable access to a campus email account, which most colleges will provide for you when you register
- reliable access to the Internet (with a recent version of Netscape, Internet Explorer, or *google*)
- MS Office 2000 or later (mainly needed for word-processing in order to complete assignments)
- access to software such as Adobe Reader, RealPlayer or Windows Media Player

For your Non-Online Courses, you will need to have:

- access to a TV, DVD player, a cable channel, or access to a campus Learning Resource Center.

## What Level of Computer Skills Will I Need?

Computer Skills are critical to your success. You should know how to:

- Create a new folder.
- Save a file.
- Cut, copy and paste.
- Find a lost file on your hard drive.
- Download a file.
- Send and receive email.
- Send an attachment file in email.
- Participate in a class discussion forum.
- Use an Internet browser to search for information on the Web.
- Set bookmarks for Web pages.
- Save an image from the Web and create a new folder for it.

## Online Learning Terminology

Here are a few technical words or phrases which you may see in connection to a distance learning courses or program:

**Asynchronous communication** means the interaction among participants does not take place at the same time. Asynchronous learning is usually referred to as learning anytime, anyplace.

**Bandwidth** is the information-carrying capacity of a communication channel.

**Browser** is software that allows you to display pages from the Internet.

**Computer Conferencing** is a form of distance learning where faculty and students create and respond to questions, messages, or articles; sometimes a "threaded," or connected discussion takes place.

**Course or Learning Management Systems** are commonly known software programs that contain the features necessary for a student to take a Web-based or web-enhanced class - email, discussion areas, assignment area, assessments, chat, and external links. Most colleges offering an online

course format identify them by brand name such as "*Blackboard,*" "*Angel,*" "*Moodle,*" or "*Desire2Learn,*" to name a few. Simply stated, these systems provide a common look and feel for student and faculty interaction in the online arena.

**Dial Up** is a network connection made by placing a call to a telecommunications device that is connected to the Internet or some other service.

**Face-to-Face** is a term used to describe the traditional classroom environment.

**Home Page** means a document with an address (URL) on the internet which is maintained by a person or organization and contains pointers to other pieces of information.

**Hyper Text Markup Language** (HTML) is a type of code used to create a home page and used to access documents over the Internet.

**Listserv** is an e-mail program that allows multiple computer users to connect onto a single system, creating an on-line discussion.

**Netiquette** is the guideline used by people navigating in a virtual environment in order to follow proper protocols and have good online "manners" generally known as netiquette, or etiquette on the Net.

**ISP** is short for Internet Service Provider, which is a service needed by users who are going to access the Internet from home or work unless they are connected directly to the Internet through a local area network (LAN).

**Server** means a computer with a special service function on a network, generally receiving and connecting incoming information traffic.

**Synchronous Communication** is interaction between participants that happens at the same time.

**Virtual Classroom** is an online discussion forum where most of the conversations relating to the coursework take place (either synchronously or asynchronously).