

ONLINE COLLEGES and E-LEARNING EXCELLENCE

A student's guide to online education, from getting started to graduation.
Learn keys to success and important how-tos from today's leading distance learning experts.





INTRODUCTION:

WHY THIS GUIDE IS IMPORTANT

Today's students can take a class from practically anywhere in the world. Laptops, tablets, and smart phones make it possible to conduct research, communicate, and engage with a community of learners simply by logging on. According to the 2012 "Survey of Online Learning", more than 6.7 million students take at least one online course. Everyone from single moms and deployed service members to high schoolers and disabled students are flocking to the virtual classroom.

Yet many aspects of online education remain misunderstood. While e-Learning eliminates the time and place requirements inherent in classroom learning, it shouldn't be viewed as a one-size-fits-all solution. What's best for a dad who works full-time may not be the right approach for a high school student looking to earn college credit.

We interviewed experts in online learning at top universities, as well as at organizations dedicated to the advancement of online learning and to the promotion best practices. This guidebook is the result and it will help you:

- Better understand the concept of e-learning, including keys to success, critical mistakes to avoid, important concepts, and how-tos.
- Understand how e-learning can be individualized, including options for students with disabilities, working adults, and K-12 students.
- Debunk many of the myths and misconceptions about online learning.



To further help and inform distance learners, we've included an extensive list of additional resources at the end of this guide. Use these sources to find detailed information best tailored to your individual needs as you explore whether online learning is right for you. Online education may not be one-size-fits-all, but starting out with the right information can make it much easier to go from day one to degree.

ONLINE LEARNING FACTS

- More than 6.7 million students take at least one online course.
- Thirty-two percent of higher education students take at least one course online.
- Seventy-seven percent of academic leaders rate the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face learning.
- Business degrees are the most popular, followed by social sciences and health professions
- Eighty percent of students live within 100 miles of the institution they choose, and most live within a 50-mile radius.
- 65% of online students take courses through non-profit institutions

Sources:

The 2012 "Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States" study by The Babson Survey Research Group and the College Board; and The "Online College Students 2012: Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences" report from The Learning House, Inc. and Aslanian Market Research.

EXPERT SOURCES AND PARTNERS

Many thanks to the following institutions and organizations, which shared their knowledge and experience for this guidebook:

CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE



CUNY School of
Professional Studies



LSU | Online



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN • CHICAGO • SPRINGFIELD



THE UNIVERSITY
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TYPES OF ONLINE LEARNING

At its most basic, online education is a mode of delivering instruction to students who are not physically present in a traditional classroom setting, using technology such as the internet. If your vision of online learning, however, has you sitting in front of a computer reading static content, think again. Online learning today can be interactive and dynamic and employs tools that bring content to life. Whether you take just one class or enroll in a degree-granting program, your online learning experience should rival that of any traditional classroom. Not all classrooms are created alike, however, and so not all online learning is the same. It's important to understand the different types of online learning when evaluating whether it's an option you should consider.

Online Learning Providers

You may have heard the term "MOOC" being used. MOOC is short for "Massive online open course." MOOCs are online courses open to anyone with web access. You don't need to apply to take a MOOC, you just sign up. MOOCs are typically structured as online video lectures and generally offered by large universities, even very prestigious ones like Harvard and MIT. The idea is to make knowledge accessible to anyone. People who are interested in learning more in-depth about a topic without needing to earn credit for the class are good MOOC candidates. Because MOOCs are open to anyone, classes often have large enrollments, so think of MOOCs as giant lecture halls where there is scant opportunity for one-on-one interaction.

Many colleges and professional organizations offer individual courses and entire certificate programs online. Like MOOCs, students don't need to apply to these, but unlike MOOCs, there is generally a cost involved. Courses may or may not lead to some sort of credential, and are largely designed to broaden a person's knowledge of a specific topic.



***"Online learning needs to be more than
information presented online.
Learning is the goal."***

JAYSON BOYERS

Vice President, Continuing Professional Studies

CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE

Earning an actual degree online is also possible in today's educational landscape, be it an associate, bachelor's, master's, or even doctoral degree. Just like classroom-based degree programs, online degree programs require participants to apply and qualify for admission. Online degrees are available from schools that offer all of their content online, as well as from traditional "brick and mortar" colleges and universities, where online students earn the exact same diploma as those attending classes on campus.



Online Education Delivery Models

Many people think online learning is synonymous with self-paced learning - that you learn at your own rate and convenience. While this is sometimes the case, the reality is that schools employ a variety of approaches to online learning. Some courses require real-time interaction, some don't, and others might be a mix. Like traditional classroom courses, online classes can have start and stop dates, or they can be open-ended, offering tremendous flexibility. It's important to understand these models so you can identify which might work best for you.

Synchronous online classes require students and instructors to be online at the same time. Instead of having to be in a classroom, say at 7 p.m. on Tuesdays, everyone logs in to a computer at that time. Synchronous courses are structured the most like classroom learning. They are also the least flexible in terms of scheduling. In contrast, **asynchronous online classes** can be accessed at any time. In asynchronous classes, professors prepare course materials, lectures, assignments, and tests and require students to complete sections and assignments at their convenience within a certain timeframe, usually one week. Some programs offer a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

“Someone enrolled in a MOOC will have a very different experience compared to that of someone enrolled in a structured online class designed to be applied toward a degree.”

CLAIRE PETTNER

Director of Recruitment and Retention
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINEPLUS

Online programs can also be offered entirely online or employ a **hybrid** or **blended learning** approach, where portions of the class are conducted online and portions are conducted in person. This approach lends itself well to courses that require some sort of hands-on or practical learning. The percentage of time spent online versus in-person will vary depending on the subject matter. The online portion of hybrid programs can be delivered in a synchronous, asynchronous, or mixed format.

How to Choose

The online learning format you choose should be directly related to your educational goals and the type of learning experience you desire.

Some questions to ask yourself:

- Do you want to learn more about a topic without needing to receive credit for the class?
- Do you want to obtain credit for the coursework?
- Is your goal to pursue a degree?
- Do you want to study completely online, or do you want opportunities to meet the professors and students in person?
- Are you looking for a cohort model, where students begin and go through the program as a group?
- Do you want small class sizes, larger lecture formats, or a combination of both?
- Can you take tests online or will you need to travel to a proctored location?





BENEFITS OF ONLINE LEARNING

Studies have repeatedly shown that online learning is equal to or better than the classroom learning experience. According to 2012's "Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States", a survey conducted by Babson Research Group and the College Board, 77 percent of academic leaders rate the learning outcomes in online education as the same as or superior to those in face-to-face learning. The U.S. Department of Education's 2010 study titled "Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning" also concludes that on average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction.

Flexibility

By its nature, online learning is more flexible than classroom-based learning, although the degree of flexibility will vary depending on the delivery format. A synchronous program may not require you to commute to campus, but it does mean you'll need to be at your computer at predetermined times, while an asynchronous program lets you log on at your convenience. Adult students, particularly working professionals or people with children, gravitate toward asynchronous learning models, because they generally provide 24/7 access to coursework and materials. This enables them to fit learning into their schedules without having to take time off from work or parenting responsibilities.

More Connection

It may seem counterintuitive, but students can experience higher levels of engagement with professors and peers online than in a traditional classroom. If you have questions, professors are readily available via email. This is of particular value to students who may not be as comfortable raising their hands and asking questions in a classroom setting. Bulletin boards, chat rooms, and mailing lists in online courses make it easy to connect with and get to know fellow students, and even form study groups. Because online classes typically attract students from a wide range of backgrounds and locations, the ability to connect and obtain different perspectives adds value to the learning experience.

"In many cases, online courses offer more interaction with faculty members and with fellow students. Quality online classes encourage engagement and interaction. Students value that everyone is heard, not just the one or two in the front row."

RAYMOND SCHROEDER

Associate Vice Chancellor of Online Learning
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SPRINGFIELD





Experience Using Technology

While online students should already have some basic understanding of computers, the experience of taking a class through the Internet can enhance their ability to communicate using the latest technology. Employers also value the type of teamwork that online learning fosters, as students often use electronic communication to complete projects. These projects are very similar to real-life instances where employees in companies with multiple locations have to work together electronically to solve problems.

Cost Savings

While the cost of completing a degree online is often the same as that of completing an on-campus degree, online learning does offer some financial benefits. Even if you're taking a hybrid program, you won't need to travel to campus on a regular basis, which saves money on gas, parking, and car wear and tear. You can prepare meals at home, saving on the cost of grabbing a bite somewhere between work and class. Childcare is typically not needed when studying online. And the ability to still work and earn an income while attending school is a huge benefit for many.

“The two main surprises that we hear from students are that the course is much more challenging than they expected, and that they receive much more attention from the instructor than they expected.”

TYLER RITTER

Associate Director of Communication and Instructional Design
**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA – CHAPEL HILL, FRIDAY
CENTER FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION**





THE ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Students taking online classes should expect to be engaged and challenged, learning content that is designed to deepen their understanding of the subject matter and that encourages them to make connections between ideas. For most classes, the goal is to move students beyond learning basic facts to understanding and applying more complex concepts. Experts agree that the biggest misconception about taking classes online is that they're easier than their classroom-based counterparts.

Don't confuse "flexible" with "easy." Online learning at reputable schools is equally or more rigorous than classroom learning. It is not a shortcut to a degree. Colleges emphasize that their online programs offer the same curriculum taught by the same professors who teach their campus-based courses. These professors expect a high level of performance from students. You also can't hide in the back row in online learning.

While students might not be attending class physically, they need to set aside enough time to be successful in their courses. Online courses can be flexible in terms of when you access the material, but they do need frequent attention. Students must have a certain degree of self-discipline and structure. Successful students schedule time to complete classwork and assignments and to participate in class discussions or team projects, ensuring they keep up with the pace of the course. Sometimes online students are surprised by the amount of time they need to spend on classes.

Students should anticipate developing close relationships with their classmates and getting to know and interact with their instructors. Sometimes students communicate with their peers and online instructors as much as, if not more than, they would in a face-to-face setting. Many mentoring relationships are established and lifelong relationships are forged through online learning.



"Some students think online courses will be easier, but they're sadly mistaken. Online students shouldn't underestimate the need for self-discipline and structure."

DAVID SCHEJBAL

Dean of Division of Continuing Education, Outreach & E-Learning
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - EXTENSION

"Establish a routine time and a quiet place to complete your online assignments. We have learners who get up early. We have learners who do their school work after their kids go to bed. The most important thing is to establish a study routine."

KAREN POLLACK

Director of Academic Affairs
PENN STATE WORLD CAMPUS



WHO IS BEST SUITED FOR ONLINE LEARNING?

Online learning is an educational delivery method, and therefore a matter of preference. Any learning experience should be enjoyable and enriching. The question to ask is not, “Can I learn online,” but “Should I learn online?” Prospective online students need to consider how they like to learn, because a thoughtful assessment of priorities, strengths, and goals will lead to the best decision.

Like classroom learners, online students need to be motivated. Beyond the desire to learn you need to be self-disciplined, have good time management skills, and be comfortable in an environment where it’s just you and your computer. You need to be proactive and access the course frequently so you stay on top of the work. You’ll also need to be at ease communicating and interacting with other people without face-to-face contact.

“Students may be surprised at the amount of time they need to spend on classes. LSU has seven-week modules with one to two classes per module, so things are compressed. People used to semesters need to adjust.”

CHARITY BRYAN

Director

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINE



The CUNY School of Professional Studies offers this online readiness quiz on its website to help prospective students figure out whether online learning is right for them.

1. I have access to a computer with a high-speed Internet connection.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
2. I am comfortable installing and troubleshooting software on my computer.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
3. I am proficient in using search engines and advanced search options.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
4. I have 9-12 hours per week to dedicate to each of my courses.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
5. I believe that online (class) discussions and interactions are as beneficial to my learning experience as in-person communication.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
6. I am able to meet deadlines and manage my time.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
7. I enjoy peer review, giving and receiving feedback from other students in my classes.
☐ Yes / ☐ No
8. I am comfortable communicating primarily via email, discussion boards, and other forms of writing.
☐ Yes / ☐ No

If you responded **yes** to these questions, online learning might be right for you.

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Online learning may pose challenges for students who need the accountability of having to show up to class in person at a certain date and time. Younger students who could benefit from the college undergraduate experience, the “growing up” piece of college, might do better in a campus setting. Online learning works best for people who’ve already built their primary social network and have support mechanisms in place.

Many colleges offer online readiness tools to help students figure out whether this type of learning is a good option for them. It’s better to know up front if online learning isn’t right for you, instead of when you’re midway through a class you’ve already paid for.

“Successful online learners tend to be very active in the online discussion boards and engage well with their classmates and their instructors. It helps bridge the distance between someone who lives in Oregon and a classmate who lives in India.”

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY





CHOOSING AN ONLINE COLLEGE OR PROGRAM

One of the benefits of online study is that you're not restricted by geographic boundaries. This broadens your options considerably, so take the time to research institutions, programs, learning options, and teaching styles to make sure you're choosing the absolute best option to meet your educational goals. You should start with some idea of the type of online learning experience you desire. Do you want a school that offers all its classes online, or are you interested in a traditional college that also offers online degrees? What type of delivery model speaks to you: synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid? Answering these questions will help you narrow down the field.

“The best online programs make sure they offer faculty ongoing development opportunities and support.”

SUSAN KO

Faculty Development Director
CUNY SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

The next steps when choosing an online learning college or program are essentially the same ones you'd take when selecting a classroom-based program. First look for schools with a reputation for teaching in the discipline in which you're interested. Which are the schools known for business, nursing, engineering, and so forth? Second, make sure the school is accredited by one of the six regional accrediting agencies (see “Additional Resources”), and/or if it's an online-only school, by the Distance Education and Training Council.



Because being an online learner typically means a student may never come to campus and may even be in a different time zone or a distant part of the globe, online learners sometimes express feelings of disconnectedness. To help minimize these feelings, schools are using several strategies to engage students and build lasting relationships with them as future alumni. According to Duquesne University, these strategies can be put into two categories:

Enhancing the Student Experience

- “One-stop” advising and support services
- Offering events specifically for online students
- Making involvement in student organizations more “online friendly” or specific to online students
- Creating a portal where online students have a virtual campus experience and can network, engage, and form study groups with other students
- Providing “virtual” graduation ceremonies
- Disseminating “institutional mission, history, and values” through speakers and rich-media presentations

Enhancing the Academic Experience

- Enrolling cohorts so online students can easily develop a community of peers
- Providing support services similar to those on campus – online advising, tutoring, writing, and library assistance
- Designing engaging and collaborative learning activities to foster community
- Using more real-time webinar activities
- Offering faculty and peer mentoring
- Understanding “at-risk” characteristics of online students and being proactive
- More comprehensive orientations to prepare students to use the school's particular learning management system and navigate their academic program

- Does the school feel like a good fit for me?
- Will this program help me meet my career goals?
- What part(s) of the program are unique?
- What is the quality and expertise of the faculty?
- How large is the program?
- What are the expectations for students?
- What kinds of students are enrolled in the program and what can I learn from them?
- How successful are prior graduates?
- What sort of alumni network does the school offer?
- Does the school offer a good value?
- Are degrees from this institution widely accepted?
- Is the school a right fit for me?

DAVID SCHEJBAL

Once you've created your short list of schools based on the above criteria and any other factors that are important to you, it's time to focus on the online aspect of the program. Start with the basics:

- What level of instructor interaction do I want?
- How long are the courses (semester, quarter, eight weeks, etc.)?
- Are there options for self-pacing?
- Is it a cohort program?
- How many hours per week will I need to devote to each class?
- What kind of technology will I need to take this course?



When evaluating an online learning program, it's important to delve deeply into two key areas: student support and faculty training. Online students have unique needs and it's important to select a program or school committed to serving those needs. What resources does the school offer to help online students be successful? For example:

- Does the school offer a special orientation for online students?
- Will I have an advisor?
- Is online tutoring available?
- What kind of feedback loop exists – teacher to student? Vice versa?
- How do I get administrative questions answered?
- How do I get course-related questions answered?
- Is there 24/7 tech support available?

Many schools keep tabs on their online students and check in with them regularly to see how they're doing. They offer personal touch points starting with the application process. How responsive a school is during the application process can sometimes be an indicator of how responsive it will be once you're enrolled. What is the quality of engagement when you communicate with the admissions staff? Do they answer emails promptly? Do they understand the needs of online students?



The best schools reach out to students proactively, often during the registration process, to see how things are going. Some schools keep tabs on how often students log into a course and check in if a student hasn't been online in a while. This kind of personal touch can be important in creating a sense of community and helping students stay on track.

“Accrediting bodies are starting to require that schools offer the same services to online students as they do to those on campus.”

BETHANY BOVARD
Instructional Designer
SLOAN-C INSTITUTE

Lastly, assess how well, or even whether, the school trains its faculty to teach online. Not every professor is cut out for online teaching. He or she needs to be comfortable with technology and with engaging people socially. Looking at a school's faculty website pages might give you a sense of the resources and training related to online teaching that are available to faculty, as well as the school's expectations of faculty who teach online.



ONLINE LEARNING FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

Online learning can be a great, and in many cases, superior choice for people with disabilities. Many students with physical disabilities find it easier to go to school via computer than to navigate a campus, for example. Progressive schools that follow best practices are placing great emphasis on accessibility considerations for online learning. As a result, colleges report that the number of students with disabilities engaged in online learning is increasing dramatically.

Accommodations that allow schools to meet ADA requirements, such as captioning and speech- to-text translation for the hearing impaired, or special textbook formatting for the sight impaired, are built into most online learning delivery programs. This ensures that the online learning experience is accessible from the start. Faculty should also be trained to make documents accessible, such as creating contrast from foreground to background for students with low vision, or providing written transcripts for recorded lecture content for hearing impaired students. Some schools employ special software to make scanned documents more accessible and usable by screen readers rather than appearing as images.

“Online learning is offering disabled students an increasingly rich set of resources and tools that enable them to succeed and reach their educational goals as well.”

KAREN POLLACK

Director of Academic Affairs

PENN STATE WORLD CAMPUS

A school’s disability services office must be trained to serve online learners as well as it does on-campus students. These offices should assist students who need additional accommodations, and check in with students on a regular basis. Campus communities nationwide are continuing to assess instructional technologies, classroom design, online platforms, and instructional materials to ensure that they are accessible. Results will provide great benefits for all learners, including those with disabilities of any kind.





INTERNATIONAL ONLINE STUDY

You can access online courses and programs from anywhere in the world. Therefore, you can take a class or program offered by a European or Asian school as easily as you could take one offered by a U.S. institution. Europe, for example is on the cutting edge of online learning, and has a number of schools with robust offerings. American students may choose to study in Europe or Asia as a way to improve their language skills, work with a particular professor without having to be physically present, pay lower tuition fees, or even finish a program more quickly than in the U.S.

In practice, however, many more international students enroll in U.S. programs than the other way around. U.S. colleges account for almost 30 percent of worldwide international enrollments, followed by the U.K. with 12 percent. Colleges like the cultural and intellectual diversity that international students bring to their programs. Online international students don't have to worry about visa requirements, and although tuition can be high for U.S. programs, many international students benefit from having currencies that are stronger than the dollar; they also save money on travel and living expenses. Learning online does present some challenges for the international student who has never studied in the U.S. Our style of education can be different in general, plus there's the added layer of learning to learn online.

“Language is often the hardest piece for international students who choose online learning.”

SANDRA COSWATTE
Director
SLOAN-C INSTITUTE

Worldwide time zone differences make synchronous courses difficult for international students. If real-time communication is important to the class, it needs to be carefully scheduled so that everyone – from the student in Missouri to the one in Shanghai – can participate. In general, online schools and programs with international students must be prepared to meet the unique needs of this population.



One of the main challenges international students face in US online classes is miscommunication due to cultural differences. Because students must “talk” online, without the benefit of having non-verbal cues to help with meaning, miscommunication can often occur. It's helpful when instructors and student groups develop guidelines regarding:

- The use of greetings
- The formality or informality of posts
- Slang and idioms
- Expectations regarding response speed
- To what level personal information is disclosed

“The human touch is critical in online learning.”

JAYSON BOYERS
Vice President, Continuing Professional Studies
CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE



K-12 ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning is not just confined to the college level. Online learning in grades K-12 is becoming increasingly popular. A 2013 report by the Evergreen Education Group titled “Keeping Pace with K-12 Online and Blended Learning,” shows that U.S. students in traditional K-12 schools enrolled in almost 750,000 online courses through their state during the 2012-2013 school year. These tend to be individual classes that are generally not offered by the student’s K-12 school, such as a specific language or an AP class. Some classes are created by the states, although increasingly, states are turning to external providers for these courses.

Students who are not in traditional schools, but receive all of their education online, number 310,000, up 50 percent from 2009. The study found that at least 24 states and Washington, D.C. have blended schools (partly classroom and partly online), most of them charter schools that tend to have more flexibility in how they serve students. An increasing number of traditional public schools, however are also changing their teaching and learning models to better meet student needs and reduce costs by adding online learning.



Some states, such as Alabama, Florida, and Michigan require that high school students take at least one online course as a prerequisite to graduation. These states feel that online courses prepare students for success in the digital world. Michigan students are required to complete 20 hours of online learning, and can begin accumulating those hours in the sixth grade. Widespread adoption of such practices, however, will depend largely on student access to high-speed Internet services in rural areas.

“If you need the accountability of showing up for class, because they’re taking attendance, online is going to pose some challenges for you.”

CHARITY BRYAN

Director

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINE

Many of the same criteria that apply to college-level online learning is relevant at the online high school learning level. Students who do best are motivated, disciplined, plan ahead, and schedule study time. Learning outcomes at the high school level tend to be the same or better than classroom learning as well. For example, the AP exam pass rate for students taking an AP course at the Virtual High School, a leading provider of 9-12 online learning content, was 70 percent in 2012, compared to the national AP exam pass rate of 59 percent.



ONLINE LEARNING TECHNOLOGY

Online learning technology has made great strides in recent years. Learning management systems (LMS), the software applications schools use to administer, document, track, report and deliver online learning have significantly improved and are relatively simple for students to navigate. Examples of LMS include Blackboard, Angel, Canvas, and Sakai. Students access the LMS online through the school's website, and other than a brief orientation, an LMS usually doesn't require much training to utilize.

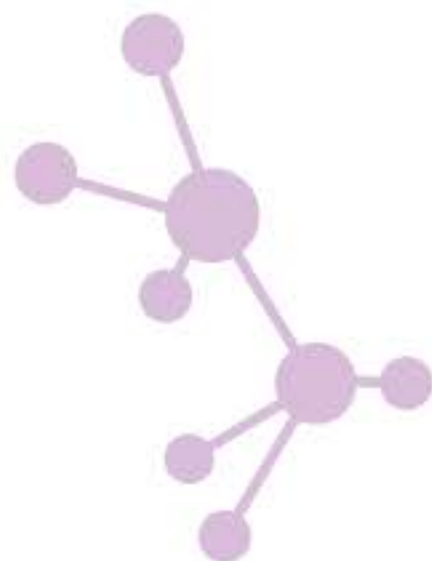
In addition to an LMS, however, online courses are using more technology than ever. Students are able to access resources through databases, applications, digital textbooks, and other technology. Depending on your comfort level and expertise, each might take some time to learn how to use.

It's important to understand the technology requirements for any program you're considering. You're obviously going to need a computer, but the type and capability needed may vary from program to program. You will also need reliable, and preferably fast, internet access and an email account. Most schools post their technology requirements online. If you can't find them, ask questions, such as:

- What type of computer will I need?
- What operating system is required?
- Will I need to purchase specific software?
- Do I need a certain amount of available storage space on my hard drive?
- Is a DVD or CD drive required?
- Does the course accommodate mobile access?
- Will teleconferencing be required?
- Do I need a webcam?
- Do I need a sound card?
- Do I need a headset?

“Institutions are trying to keep the lowest common denominator in mind when employing technology; they’re trying to keep the technology accessible.”

SANDRA COSWATTE
Director
SLOAN-C INSTITUTE



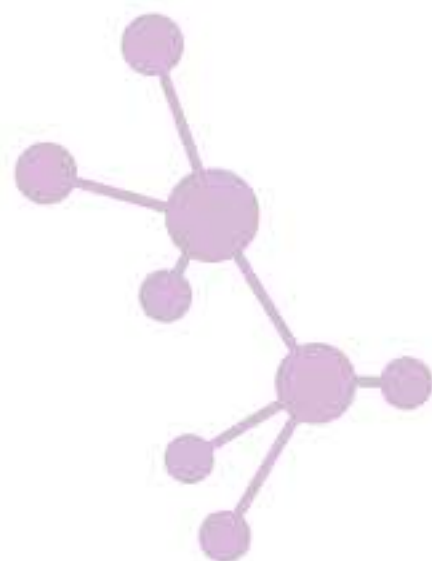


Because of its use of technology, online learning can present certain challenges that wouldn't be at issue in classroom-based learning. Many of these center around privacy and security. Most learning management systems are secure and require students to log in to access class information and student data. Nevertheless, students should also be mindful when sharing information online and cognizant about privacy concerns. For example, if a student shares a story about working with her boss as an example during a discussion on management styles, the information should stay within the realm of the class. Students should follow the school's guidelines for appropriate online conduct, practice good netiquette, and work to create a safe environment of shared respect.

“A key aspect of online learning is the support structure. The Learning Management Systems should allow peer interaction and professor interaction, and students need to be able to get feedback and connect with someone when they're in trouble.”

JAYSON BOYERS

Vice President, Continuing Professional Studies
CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE





TIPS FOR ONLINE LEARNING SUCCESS

Regardless of the type of online program you select, experts offer the following universal tips to ensure online learning success:

- Consider starting with just one online course to become familiar with the format
- Participate in any online course orientation that's offered
- Take it seriously
- If your program requires a long-term obligation, make sure you can commit
- Have a realistic understand of the hours the course requires
- Develop a plan for how you'll fit the hours the course requires into your life
- Schedule time to study
- Keep up with the work
- Work ahead whenever possible
- Be extremely organized
- Keep a calendar and know when assignments are due and tests are scheduled
- Review and understand the syllabus and all the course requirements
- Use the course syllabus to help you plan
- Create a quiet, dedicated space to study with no distractions
- Take breaks when studying
- Log onto the course site daily to check what's new
- Participate in the online discussions
- Be thoughtful when posting to discussion forums or sending emails
- Find a study partner or create an online study group
- Initiate and continue contact with the instructor
- Ask for help if you're having a problem with the work or the technology
- Advocate for yourself to make sure all your needs are met
- There will be glitches with the technology, so avoid doing anything at the last minute
- Back up your data regularly
- Be willing to share life and work experiences as part of the learning process
- Surround yourself with the tools and materials that will support your learning style
- Build a personal support team composed of family, friends, and colleagues

“Students should take their own learning styles into account to be sure they are providing themselves with the right tools, materials and study space to be successful in the time they set aside for class.”

CLAIRE PETTNER

Director of Recruitment and Retention
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINEPLUS





FINANCIAL AID FOR ONLINE LEARNING

Federal financial aid is available for students enrolled in more than 2,500 accredited online colleges and degree programs. Students who meet need requirements, as well as the following criteria are eligible. The student must be:

- A high school graduate or GED-certified
- Applying to or enrolled in a degree or certificate program
- Applying to or enrolled in an accredited institution
- A U.S. citizen or eligible non-citizen
- Registered for a social security number
- Registered with the Selective Service, if a male from 18 to 25
- Maintain satisfactory academic progress once enrolled in school

Eligible students will need to complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and submit it to the office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) at the Department of Education. The FAFSA collects information about student and family finances, which the FSA uses to determine your eligibility for any of nine federal financial aid programs, such as grants, work-study, and federal student loans, as well as more than 600 state aid programs.

Most schools also offer merit or other types of scholarships and grants to students, often independent of need. It's a good idea to check in with the school's financial aid office to learn what funding options are available. Companies, nonprofit organizations, clubs, and religious entities offer more than \$7.4 billion in college scholarships each year. Students pursuing online degrees, not just those attending classroom-based programs, qualify for most of these scholarships.

“Stay connected to your chosen institution throughout your time as a student, and then as an alum after graduation.”

CLAIRE PETTNER

Director of Recruitment and Retention
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINEPLUS

If you are employed, check to see whether your company offers a tuition reimbursement program and whether you qualify to participate. And don't forget to see if you qualify for education tax credits, such as the American Opportunity Credit and the Lifetime Learning Credit.





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



GENERAL:

- eLearn Magazine
- Online Education Trends
- Online Learning Update
- Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States
- Online College Students 2012: Comprehensive Data on Demands and Preferences
- Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning
- National Repository of Online Courses
- How Online Learning Works - Penn State
- How Does Online Learning Work? - Colorado State University
- Online Learning Overview - CUNY School of Professional Studies
- Successful Online Learner Characteristics - Duquesne University

ACCREDITING AGENCIES:

- Distance Education and Training Council
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges - Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
- North Central Association of Schools and Colleges
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools - Commission on Colleges
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges - Senior College and University Commission

FINANCIAL AID:

- Federal Student Financial Aid
- USA.gov - Financing Your Education
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid Form
- Scholarships.com
- American Opportunity Tax Credit
- Lifetime Learning Tax Credit

MOOCS:

- Coursera
- edX.org
- MOOCList.com
- Open Culture

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

- Attention Deficit Disorder Association
- Learning Disabilities Association of America

INTERNATIONAL:

- Asian Association of Open Universities
- European Association for Distance Learning
- European Distance and E-Learning Network
- International Council for Open and Distance Education

K-12:

- Center for Online Learning and Students with Disabilities
- The Virtual High School
- Keeping Pace with K-12 Online and Blended Learning - 2013 Report



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accreditation agency - An independent entity that review and evaluates institutions of higher education to ensure they meet certain standards of quality.

Asynchronous learning - An online learning mode of delivery that allows students to access classes at any time. Prepare course materials, lectures, assignments, and tests and require students to complete sections at their convenience within a certain timeframe, usually one week.

Blended learning – An online learning mode of delivery where portions of the class are conducted online and portions are conducted in person. Also known as hybrid learning.

Cohort - A group of students who begin a program at the same time, go through it as a group and graduate together.

College accreditation - A process during which independent agencies evaluate a school's ability to provide a quality education, and if the school is successful, culminates in what is agreed to be a higher education stamp of approval.

Delivery model – The way in which an online learning program or class is structured. Delivery models include synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, and hybrid programs.

Distance learning - A mode of delivering instruction to students who are not physically present in a traditional classroom setting. Distance learning began with correspondence courses and now encompasses other delivery modes, such as online learning.

FAFSA (*Free Application for Federal Student Aid*) -

A free form that's submitted to office of Federal Student Aid at the Department of Education. It collects information about student and family finances, which the FSA uses to determine a student's eligibility for financial aid.

Hybrid program An online learning mode of delivery where portions of the class are conducted online and portions are conducted in person. Also known as blended learning.

Learning management systems (LMS) - The software applications schools use to administer, document, track, report and deliver online learning

MOOC (*Massive online open course*) - An online course, usually offered by large universities for free, that is open to anyone with web access.

Online learning - A mode of delivering instruction to students who are not physically present in a traditional classroom setting, using electronic media and technology such as the Internet.

Synchronous learning - An online learning mode of delivery that requires students and instructors to be online simultaneously at predetermined times.

