Are You Ready for an Online Class?

So, you’re considering taking an online class? Well, this is a good time to give some thought the major differences between learning online and learning in a traditional, face-to-face classroom. Is online learning a good match for you? You will find that for some students, online classes are more difficult and for others they are easier depending on your learning style, computer skills, internet access, personality, motivation, and other commitments.

Not every student can effectively take advantage of the freedom and responsibility associated with learning within an online environment. Many students find learning easier in a classroom environment with face-to-face encouragement, immediate instructional feedback and personal interactions. Yet for many, learning online fits well and provides a valuable alternative. Compared to a standard classroom situation in which everyone is in the same room, at the same time, doing the same work, the online classroom has less face-to-face contact, less immediate access to your instructor and interaction with your fellow students usually occurs through electronic (asynchronous, not “real time”) communication instead of face-to-face conversation. In contrast to on-ground classrooms, many online students are surprised to find that they get to know their fellow students better in an online class due to the increased level of student-to-student discussion.

To achieve success in an online class, you must be significantly more self-motivated, assertive, and skilled in your ability learn independently. To a large extent, you must be able to generate your own enthusiasm and excitement about learning the material, especially when people around you (at home or elsewhere) are all doing something else. This is not to discourage you from enrolling in an online course, but only to raise your awareness of the potential personal challenges which may be associated with successful online learning.

Identify Your Learning Preference

How do you learn best? Each of us has an individual learning preference (or a mix of preferences) that indicates how we prefer to take in information. Those who learn through listening are Aural learners, those who learn through pictures or diagrams are Visual learners, those who learn through doing are Kinesthetic learners, those who learn through reading and writing are Read/Write learners. In most online classes (this varies depending on your instructor), there is little to no audio which means a student with an aural learning preference is more likely to feel challenged. Students with a read/write learning preference generally feel more comfortable learning in an online environment due the amount of information that is presented and submitted in written form. Get to understand how you prefer to learn and this will help you become a more successful student (in all types of learning scenarios!). To take an online quiz to identify your learning style, go to: http://www.vark-learn.com!
Independence and Freedom Bring New Learning Challenges

Online classes offer you an alternative method for completing your educational requirements while maintaining a busy work schedule and meeting your other obligations. However, the freedom from having to be in a specific place at specific times requires that you be more disciplined and more accurate budgeting your time. It will take time for you to read and fully understand the information provided, write out questions for your instructor, and complete other online tasks. If your learning style is predominately aural (learn through listening), you may find the online class particularly challenging, but not impossible. Also recognize that you must be more "proactive" in seeking out positive interactions with your fellow students and with your instructor if you want to become involved in "class."

More Tips for Succeeding in an Online Class

1. **Have Reliable Internet Access** -- Would you enroll in a face-to-face class without a way to get to campus? Hopefully, not. You need to think about your internet connection as your transportation to class. When your connection doesn’t work, you are unable to come to class and you will not learn. You are encouraged to have regular access to an internet connection and identify a back-up plan. Talk to people you know to identify an alternative connection to use if yours fails. And research the availability of the campus computer labs for your learning needs, as well.

2. **Read Carefully** – Classes held on campus rely very heavily on instructor verbal directions and presentations. For some classes, students can get by with just skimming over reading assignments. In an online class, reading every word of online directions and assignments is essential.

3. **Get Organized!** -- Successful online students stress the importance of buying a calendar to record all major due dates and class schedule information. If you are enrolled in more than one online class, consider using a different color for each class. One online student suggests, “making appointments with yourself” to ensure you dedicate time in your schedule to complete course assignments.

4. **Polish Your Computer Skills** – For online courses, computer and internet skills are obviously a requirement. Online instructors will assume that students are computer literate, which generally means that the student is expected to be acquainted with various standard software packages and their operation, load new programs if necessary and handle any hardware needs as they arise. DO NOT expect the instructor to extend due dates because of problems you are having with your computer.

5. **Participate** – Because of the reduced amount of verbal interactions between
students and the instructor found in traditional on-campus courses, online “discussion” is often accomplished through discussion boards, email, and/or chat rooms. Students should be comfortable communicating online and should be aware of accepted standards in “netiquette”. In fact, there is a direct correlation between a student’s success in an online course and that student’s participation. DO NOT underestimate the importance of contributing to online discussions. For more info about Netiquette, go to: http://www.albion.com/Netiquette/corerules.html

6. **Log-In Regularly:** Successful online students recommend logging in several times a week to check for instructor announcements and stay connected to/participate in discussion board conversations.

7. **DO NOT Procrastinate!** When you are relying heavily on technology, expect failures and connection challenges. Waiting until the last minute increases these risks and puts your grades in jeopardy. Additionally, you will never fully understand how long an assignment or project will take until you do it. Waiting until the last day/hour/minute is poor planning and reduces your chances at learning successfully and performing well on assessments.

**So, Are You Ready?**

For more information about online classes, go to: http://www.scc.losrios.edu/online/

**Good luck to you!**