Expectations of Online Students

What does it mean to be a student in an online course?

In many ways, taking an online course is like taking a course on campus. Both feature individual assignments and cooperative group projects, and both require you to take exams to show you are learning the course material. The instructor directs students through the activities, posting announcements, delivering lecture materials, responding to questions, and grading assignments and exams.

The great benefit of being in an online course is that you can have direct, one-to-one communication with your instructor and fellow students at any time, rather than only during class or office hours.

Class Participation

- You will be expected to do the same amount of homework you might do in an on-campus class.

- You will be asked to spend more time generating and participating in discussions with the instructor and the other students. These discussions, in which you will respond to other students' comments, play a central role in the learning experience.

- If you are assigned to participate in team projects, your team members will rely on you to participate and contribute to the projects.

- You must be responsible for keeping up with the workload so that you can be an active participant in online discussions.

Unlike the situation in most on-campus courses, where you can show up for class, listen to lectures, and perhaps not play an active role in the discussion, the assignments in online courses require your participation. If you do not keep up with reading and other homework, you will not be able to contribute meaningful, timely comments to the online discussions. Avoid this predicament by setting aside specific times each week for engaging in course participation activities, and stick to them. Otherwise, you may find you quickly fall behind in reading messages to which you need to respond.

How often will I have to be online?

A good rule of thumb is to log on at least once a day to check announcements and review online materials. How long you need to be online depends on the activities for that session.

Look at the calendar to see when certain assignments are due and when projects begin and end. Different courses may offer very explicit schedules that tell you when you need to be online for different assignments. For example, you may have a class discussion for which you will need to submit an initial comment on a Monday and then respond to another student's comment on Tuesday. Requirements of
this kind will be spelled out in the respective assignment or discussion.

Flexibility is built into online courses. You can log on when it is convenient for you, but there are some things to consider:

- Although online courses are asynchronous (students are not online at the same time), there are deadlines.
- You are responsible for getting assigned reading materials.
- You will need to add to discussions and reply to other students’ comments.
- You will need to hand in individual assignments on time.

Your presence in the course will be apparent only if you add to discussions and do the online assignments. Also, as stated earlier, it is crucial that you keep up to date by reading all lecture materials and posted comments before participating in the online discussions.