Tuesday’s Tidbits

Tips to Help You Be Successful in Your Online Classes

Online courses can be very rewarding, as long as you approach them with the right frame of mind. Adam Bulizak, Hondros College of Nursing’s Dean of Academic Affairs, has some tips to help students be successful in online classes.

According to Mr. Bulizak, taking an online course requires a high level of engagement and commitment. With the convenience of the online atmosphere comes the temptation to get a little lazy; it’s easy to drift away from online coursework when there are so many fun sites just a click away. Without regular in-class meetings to keep you on track, some students find it difficult to keep up the self-motivation required to really succeed in an online environment. Furthermore, online courses can be scary, and even frustrating, especially for people who aren’t used to the technology.

Mr. Bulizak says that just remembering these few simple tips can help make an online class manageable, effective, and maybe even enjoyable.

1. Become Familiar with the Online Learning Environment. While learning online can be frustrating at times, becoming familiar with the online learning environment alleviates most of those headaches.

There are several pieces of software that you absolutely must become familiar with during your time at Hondros College of Nursing (HCN): your HCN student email, Sakai (the online learning platform and your “classroom” for your online courses), CAMS (our online student management portal), and Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. In addition to these, some online courses deliver content through McGraw-Hill Connect and some instructors do tutoring in an Adobe Connect “classroom.” These are the tools necessary to survive your online classes.

According to Mr. Bulizak, you should explore these platforms and tools. Check your email every day. Browse every section of your online courses to see assignments, course documents, forum discussions, and quizzes. Learn how to navigate the Sakai learning environment. Open the course materials and look through them. Read the tutorials for accessing and using McGraw-Hill Connect as well as the other resources posted in your online course room.

If problems and frustration arise, make sure to notify your instructor and the technical support team, who will work to fix the issue as soon as possible. Additionally, remember to save your work frequently, because sometimes programs crash, and you don’t want to lose a document you’ve been writing all night. Finally, make backups! A computer crash isn’t an acceptable excuse for missing work; you need to make sure that your files are safe and secure, and the best way to do this is to save them both on your computer and on another drive, as well.

Learning the skills to operate common software like Microsoft Word and PowerPoint will certainly benefit you now and beyond your time at HCN. Being comfortable with technology can help you immensely with your personal, academic, and career-related pursuits.

2. Do the Work. When you’re taking an on-ground class, you have a course schedule with deadlines for assignments, and you need to work hard to stay on top of that schedule. The same is true for an online class, but in an online class, you don’t have an instructor standing in front of you to remind you to complete your assignments. Because of this, taking an online course requires a good amount of self-motivation to stay on top of your coursework.

Students in online courses have a great advantage over students in traditional courses, however:
scheduling flexibility. You can complete the course material at your own convenience (as long as you keep meeting deadlines, of course!), without having to worry about preparing for in-class meetings.

The best method for a successful online learning experience is to harness that scheduling flexibility and set aside specific, convenient times to work on course materials – maybe an hour or two every night. Write down your schedule on a calendar to keep yourself on track. Make sure to allot enough time to look at course materials, read the textbook, and complete all of the assignments on schedule (and even ahead of deadlines, so that you can ask questions and get some feedback in advance). Try to find times throughout the week when you can enjoy some quiet and comfort to complete your schoolwork.

3. Communicate. When you take a course online and you want to ask your instructor a question, you will likely email that question to your instructor or post it in the online classroom. Just as you shouldn’t be intimidated to raise your hand and ask a question in class or visit your instructor’s office hours, you also shouldn’t be intimidated to message your instructor.

Asking questions not only helps you learn about what you need to accomplish in the class, or better understand the subject matter – it also helps the instructor understand how to make the course more clear, and more successful, for everyone. This leads to a better educational experience for you, your peers, and future students. Just remember to treat your instructors with politeness and respect; read your emails over before sending them to make sure that they actually say what you mean, without any unintentional anger or condescension.

Talk to the other students in the course, as well. For our PN and ADN students, there’s a good chance that you’re also taking in-person courses with the students in your online class. Sharing information, ideas and questions with your fellow students will help you to make sense of the material. For the same reason, take advantage of online discussion forum assignments, and offer your fellow students detailed and thoughtful posts and responses.

But the most important reason for communication in your online course is that it helps you to feel connected and engaged with the course and the material. Reaching out to your instructor and classmates helps them feel that engagement as well. And if you’re engaged, it makes doing all of the work and using all of the technology feel much more accessible and normal. It makes the instructor feel like a person, and not a grading robot. Sharing in an engaged relationship helps to achieve a real and effective learning experience for everyone involved.

The bottom line is that online educators are aware of the fact that taking online courses can sometimes be difficult, and they require some students to move outside of their comfort zones. However, honestly following these tips will aid your online learning experience, hopefully transforming the daunting effort of learning in a new way into a rewarding new experience with lasting benefits.

**Additional Important Information**

Two additional topics which are critical to your online class success are online student expectations and discussion forums. Make sure you understand the information below as it’s absolutely critical to your success.

**Online Student Expectations**

As an online student at Hondros College of Nursing, you are expected to engage in your online course; act respectfully, ethically, and responsibly; and meet technical requirements and demonstrate basic computer skills. You should:

**Engage in Your Online Course** - You are expected to be active and present in your online course. This consists of

- Reading, watching, or listening to all course materials and resources during or before the week they are assigned
- Completing all assignments on time, according to the instructions, and to the best of your ability
- Checking the course classroom and your email every day
- Reading all messages, posts, and emails from your instructor
- Engaging with your fellow students in discussion forums

Your engagement will be reflected in your grade and your attendance record. Attendance in an online course is defined as “participating” by completing a minimum of one academically related activity within a Monday-to-Sunday calendar week. Examples of academically related activity include the following:

1. Submitting an assignment
2. Participating in a threaded discussion
3. Completing a quiz/exam
Act Respectfully, Ethically, and Responsibly - You are expected to act respectfully, ethically, and responsibly. This consists of:

- Following Netiquette guidelines: demonstrate respect, consider your tone, avoid privacy concerns, and re-read your writing before sending or posting.
- Acting in an academically honest way according to the policies in the Student Catalog, including the Student Code of Conduct and the Academic Misconduct policy.
  * Note that the consequences of plagiarism and cheating range from a zero on the assignment to dismissal from the program.
  * All written assignments must follow the 6th edition of APA Style. All work from outside sources must be cited and referenced appropriately.
- Taking independent initiative to complete your work on time and to the best of your ability, to contact your instructor if you need assistance, and to schedule your time appropriately to meet the expectations of the course and program.

Meet Technical Requirements and Demonstrate Basic Computer Skills
You are expected to have the proper technology to complete your online course, and to demonstrate basic computer competency. This consists of:

- Meeting the technical requirements for enrollment in Hondros College of Nursing, according to the Student Catalog.
- Being able to use basic software, including, but not limited to, Microsoft Office (including Word, PowerPoint, and Excel), Adobe Reader, and a web browser.

Discussion Forums
Discussion in asynchronous discussion forums, in which you write a response that is responded to by another class participant, is a vital learning activity that enhances writing, critical thinking, and scholarly development. The successful student engages faculty and other students in substantive, meaningful conversations, reflecting on others’ perspectives while articulating his or her own views. More importantly, students demonstrate the ability to critically and reflectively consider new information, facts, and perspectives in the enhancement of their own knowledge and development. The discussion forum activity has two components: the learner's original response to the discussion question/prompt, and the learner's ongoing participation and contribution to the discussion.

Substantive participation in discussion posts includes full participation in the discussion and is a key component of the learning experience. It enriches group interaction and enhances the learning environment.

To be considered substantive, a discussion post (including initial posts or reply posts) should include appropriate foundation knowledge, be factual, contain supporting examples, and enhance the ongoing dialogue. However, rather than just reporting what someone else has stated, the learner should demonstrate application and/or reflection of knowledge such that the learner enhances the meaning of the material. Additionally, posts should contain examples and citations when appropriate. Citations and references must adhere to APA Style.

Contributing reply posts to the discussion should promote an exciting, vibrant, shared learning community that accomplishes the following:

- Expands on a classmate’s comments in a value-adding, topic-related way that indicates critical thinking.
- Promotes a collaborative, supportive community.
- Advances the dialogue through follow-up questions.

“One-liners,” off-topic posts, vague statements, unsupported opinions, and inadequate explanations or posts do not meet the substantive participation requirements listed above. However, respectful disagreement, with support for your perspective, is encouraged.

Participation in the class discussion provides the learner an opportunity to develop and grow as a student. Please take advantage of this unique learning experience.

To have successful online learning experiences, you need to get comfortable with the technology you’ll be using, do the work that is assigned, communicate with instructors and other classmates, know what is required of you, participate in discussion forums, and make the commitment to succeed. If you need help with using Sakai for your online courses, please see the resources in the Start Here! section of your course for further information. Additionally, contact your instructor and technical support should you run into issues with your online learning experience. If you need on-ground assistance, your Academic Support Advisor may be able to provide some assistance.

NOTE: The information found in this issue was written by Adam Bulizak, Dean of Academic Affairs.