COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

DISTANCE EDUCATION

SUCCESS GUIDE
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INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to give students who are new to an online learning environment a brief introduction to issues and skills involved in becoming successful as an online learner.

Online learning may be referred to by several different titles, including:
- Distance education
- Distributed education
- Online education
- Online learning
- E-learning
- Web-based education

However you or your professors choose to refer to it, this environment offers unique challenges and unique opportunities. As you read through this document, begin to anticipate how these issues may impact you and how you learn. These ideas are not “magic bullets” that can transform you into a model student overnight. Rather, they help to point out common situations faced by online learners. Some may help you formulate your own strategies and practices. Others may not be relevant to your situation. Some will introduce you to the unique environment of online learning through Columbia Southern University. Our hope is that this guide will make you more aware of the experience you are about to have, and provide some guidance on how you can best adjust to it.
**ONLINE LEARNING OVERVIEW**

**IMPORTANT POINTS ABOUT ONLINE LEARNING**

- Online learning requires you to be familiar with at least the internet and email and many classes require that you have some form of word processing software. Always check your class requirements in the course syllabus if you have any questions.
- Online classes are not the “easy” alternative. For many students, they are more difficult than standard classes because of the electronic interface.
- You will need to ‘attend’ by checking in to your course regularly.
- Your first point of contact if you have a question or concern should be your professor.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE STUDENT**

A successful online student is one who is:

- Mature
- Independent / Self-motivated
- Disciplined / Organized
- Self-directed / Focused
- Able to prioritize responsibilities and able to work and study independently
- Dependable / Responsible
- Assertive – if you don’t know something, ask!
- Respectful of other students and the professor
- Able to think critically and solve problems
- Timely in keeping up with course work
- Dedicated / Committed / Goal Oriented

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES IN ONLINE LEARNING**

- **Be accountable:** The further you progress in higher and continuing education, the more responsibility you will need to take for your own learning. You will begin to define and prioritize what you need to know, how you will learn it, and how you will assess your progress. Outside direction and measures of your learning will continue to be a part of your education, but these will serve more to guide and direct you in your exploration of knowledge.

- **Understand expectations:** In order to meet and exceed course requirements and professor expectations, you will need a clear understanding of exactly what those requirements and expectations are. The course syllabus acts as a contract between you as the learner and the professor. It outlines what will be taught, what you will need to do to show your understanding of the content, and how you will be assessed. Read through the syllabus early and carefully. Do
your best to develop a sense of the “big picture” of the course - what will be due, and when. Then concentrate on the individual pieces, such as assignments and assessments.

- **Proactively Seek Clarification:** If something about the course or the material is not clear, don’t wait for your professor to make it clear. Especially in an online environment, professors have fewer cues to alert them to your confusion. They cannot see your puzzled expression or hear you ask, “What?” When you are unclear about an aspect of the course, ask your professor. Use very specific questions, seeking exactly what something means, what you will be expected to produce, etc. If a professor does not hear from students, she or he may well conclude that students are grasping the material and do not need further assistance. If something is unclear to you, it may very well be unclear to the rest of the students in the class. Your questions may help others in the learning process as well. *So ask, early and as often as necessary.*

- **Set Goals:** Goals keep you on target. If you don’t set goals for learning, then you may not know if you’ve achieved something worthwhile. Make sure you have personal goals in mind, both longer-term goals for your program of study and desired degrees or skills, as well as short-term goals for individual courses and assignments. If you have these goals in mind, you’ll have a much clearer picture of what you need to do to meet these goals, and thus have deeper motivation to improve your work.

- **Develop Self-Discipline:** This may seem fairly obvious, but without self-discipline, you cannot be a successful online learner. In residential classes, you have a professor and peers with whom you interact on a regular basis. You also typically meet at a certain time and place each week. This interaction and schedule help to keep you on task in your coursework. In an online learning environment, especially if you do not meet at specific times, it is much easier to put off assignments, discussion, and responsibilities. In this context, self-discipline means motivating yourself to pay regular and consistent attention to the work that needs to be done, and doing it without delay or procrastination. Even more than in a residential course, falling behind in an online class can jeopardize your likelihood of completing the course and earning the credit.

- **Become an “Active Learner”:** In a traditional classroom, you may have sat through lectures or presentations, taken some notes and waited to understand what the professor thinks about the subject. This passive reception of information does not work well in an online environment. To be successful in this environment, actively seek ways you can best understand the course material. Read, listen to, and watch the course materials more than once. Take notes as you do so. Interact with your professor and classmates. Become involved in discussing and defining course topics. By creating your own definitions and models to represent the topic, or working with others to create shared definitions and models, you take ownership in the final product which can help you in understanding and internalizing the subject. Do not simply accept and memorize. Question everything; particularly if it doesn’t make sense or seem to fit with what you already know. Critically evaluate the information you receive. Everyone stands to benefit from your active learning, including the professor and your peers as well as you.

- **Practice good communication:** Don’t use text-ese in email communication, web postings and class materials. Remember that facial expressions and body language may be hard to communicate in a virtual world, and your recipient may not understand the tone in which the conversation was intended.
✓ Prepare your technology ‘back up plan’: Know how to contact your teacher in an emergency, and have a plan in place in case your computer crashes. Saving an extra copy of your assignments and assessments to an external hard drive or USB stick is one strategy you can use to help alleviate potential disaster.

✓ Ask for What You Need: Additional services, like academic support services or technological assistance, may be available to you as an online learner. If you think of a service that would be helpful to you as a student, and CSU does not offer that service, ask whether that service can be created or if special assistance can be provided. If your professor cannot provide this service or assistance directly, ask him/her to recommend another contact or resource.

SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

TIME

No matter how convenient or flexible online education may be billed, taking a course online takes time. You might save commuting time in an online course, but you might also spend more time dealing with technology concerns. Whether the time you spend on course-related work is more or less than you might spend in a traditional, classroom-based course, it is still time you need to reserve and manage carefully. When evaluating your online course options, consider how much time you have to dedicate to coursework every week during the term, and investigate or estimate the time commitment the course will require from you.

MANAGING TIME

Online learners often benefit from carefully structuring what time they have available. Identify what time of day or night you do your best work, and when you are able to access the Internet and your course materials. Set aside a certain time each day to work on your course, and stick to this schedule. Studying is a little bit like walking the dog – it needs to be done regularly and frequently to be effective. Just as you wouldn’t ask your dog to wait for his walk until the weekend, neither should you put off studying till that ‘perfect time’.

Be aware at the start of the course whether you are required to participate in activities at any specific times, and plan for these well ahead of time. Bear in mind also that you could enroll in an online course based anywhere in the world, which can mean that course-related activities are scheduled in a time zone other than yours.

BALANCING RESPONSIBILITIES AND SETTING PRIORITIES

Vital to a successful online learning experience is the ability to balance your responsibilities, both within and beyond your course. Knowing how to set priorities is key to getting the greatest benefit from your online education experience. Find out before or as the course begins exactly what work is required of you, and do your best to plan ahead. Inevitably you will have more tasks to accomplish than you have time in which to complete them. At times like these, do your best to determine which course activities are most vital, and concentrate on those. Do not hesitate to ask for advice or help from your professor.
MANAGING STRESS

Just because a course is delivered in an online format does not necessarily increase or reduce the stress you may experience taking it. Consider your own sources of education-related stress when choosing to take courses online. If you feel high stress from giving in-class presentations, then an online course would probably save you from that kind of stress. On the other hand, if using computers and related technology makes you experience excessive stress, you might reconsider taking a course online, since most online courses rely exclusively on computer technology.

Strategies for managing course-related stress include:
- Know your deadlines. These include course deadlines as well as important events occurring elsewhere in your life while you are enrolled in the course.
- Plan ahead. If you know that your time will be consumed by a non-course-related activity during a particular week, do your course-related activities ahead of time.
- Ask for help resources, especially technological resources, and have them at hand when you are working on your coursework.
- Keep in touch with your instructor. If you do fall behind, let your instructor know immediately, and ask him/her for assistance in planning how you will catch up.

STUDY HABITS AND SKILLS

Know yourself and your learning style. When it comes to learning, everyone is different. Everyone has their own preferred approaches to new material and their own preferred style of learning. The same studying and learning techniques that work for your friends and peers may not be the best styles and techniques for you, and vice versa.

To understand what style of learning best suits you, first try to understand your own strengths and weaknesses and how you approach new learning situations. Assessing your skills and preferences will help you select the type of learning strategies – and perhaps the online courses – that are most likely to keep you interested and motivated and help you reach your learning goals.

IDENTIFYING STUDY SKILLS

Having identified how you best learn, you can begin to look at specific study strategies and evaluate how well they may work for you in your online course. These techniques may address strategies for reading informational content, taking notes, memorizing information, exploring new concepts, and taking tests, to name a few.
ONLINE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

SYNCHRONOUS VS. ASYNCHRONOUS ENVIRONMENTS

Communication in online courses is of two different types: synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous communication takes place in "real-time," or at the same time. To be online at the same time as your peers and interact with them is to communicate synchronously. Chat and instant messaging are two examples of synchronous communication tools. Chat sessions and instant messaging can have a lively, immediate feel, and may feel casual or conversational in tone.

On the other hand, asynchronous communication takes place over time, not requiring group members to be online simultaneously. Email, discussion forums, and bulletin boards are examples of asynchronous communication often used in online courses. With asynchronous communication tools, you browse, read, and respond at your own pace to what others have already sent or posted.

Your online course may use one or many of these tools. If possible, practice with the tool before the assignment takes place. Ask your instructor for help if you are unsure how a tool works before you need to use it.

WRITING CLEARLY

Have you ever been in a class, group, or meeting and been tempted to ask a peer, “What is your point?” The same thing can happen in an online course when people make contributions that are long, poorly organized, or difficult to read. Becoming a productive part of an online learning community means you must already know how – or be willing to learn – to communicate clearly and concisely when you write.

Of course, basic comfort with typing is essential, but clear written communication begins before the writing takes place. Read all assignments more than once to make sure the task and assessment criteria are clear to you. If your peers have already begun a discussion assignment, “listen” to their ideas. Read their postings carefully and take notes on their ideas. If possible, pay special attention to contributions to which the professor responds positively.

When you have the necessary background for the task, you are ready to begin writing. Rather than composing a contribution directly in the course environment, however, sketch out your ideas in a word processing program or text editor beforehand. Write “out loud” – that is, type out what you’re thinking. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar at first, and develop shorthand that makes sense to you. Concentrate on expressing your thoughts. You can edit them later.

A few more simple guidelines can help you produce clear, effective written contributions to your course.

- Keep your sentences short. Watch for run-on sentences that don’t provide breaks between ideas.
- Keep your paragraphs short—no more than 4-5 sentences or lines of text.
- Use white space to make your posting more readable. For example, use two hard returns to separate paragraphs or parts of your response.
- Even if correct spelling and grammar are not required, use the spell-check and grammar features of your word processing program to help catch careless errors.
- When you think you are finished composing a response, wait a few minutes. Then read your posting out loud before you submit it. Fix any awkward or unclear spots before you post the final version.
When your writing is ready for the class to see, cut and paste it into the course environment. Ask your professor for directions if you are unsure how to do this.

As you are writing, you may find you have more questions about the ideas you are reading about and working with. Posting a question to a peer during a discussion is a wonderful way to join a discussion and ensure that your responses are as effective as possible. Likewise, you can always ask your professor for tips on how to improve your discussion contributions.

“Listening” Effectively

Listening is just as important in an online classroom as it is in a traditional classroom or face-to-face conversation, especially when your peers are presenting views and ideas that are new to you. There are several ways to listen and be considerate of other views in an online learning environment.

- Read others’ postings and ideas several times, whether or not you are asked to respond. You may want to open a word-processing program or text editor, and summarize or paraphrase what you are reading. In these notes, recast your peers’ ideas in your own words. Include key words and phrases. Be sure to enclose direct quotes in quotation marks and identify the author so that you do not accidentally plagiarize someone else’s words or ideas later in the course.

- Ask for clarification if you do not understand a peer’s contribution. If you are asking a question for clarification, make a polite statement first, such as “Thank you for your idea” or “I have never thought about this perspective before.” Show you have thought through the person’s ideas first, and work hard not to make your question sound impolite or hostile.

- If appropriate, use emoticons or shorthand to communicate humor or irony. Don’t assume that your joking or sarcastic tone will come through when your classmates read your responses.

Responding vs. Reacting

Often you will be required to join in a class discussion and respond to other postings. These discussions may become complex and intense. Before you send off a hastily written, emotionally based reaction to another’s contribution, turn to a word-processing program and develop your ideas into a less emotional and more reasonable response. Then wait a few minutes and reread what you have written before you make your posting public. Learning how to turn a reaction into a response will make your course contributions more meaningful – and likely earn you a higher mark for participation if participation counts toward your grade. Pausing and rereading also gives you the opportunity to review your writing for organization, clarity, and correctness.

Contributing to the Online Community

Online learning does not mean you are learning alone. You will belong to a class consisting of your professor, fellow students, and perhaps others with whom you will interact. Your professor will attempt to build a class environment through discussion questions, chats, group projects, and other activities.
You can help build this classroom environment through your participation. Seeing and speaking to others is not a necessary component in getting to know someone. Through your chats and messages, both real-time (synchronous) and delayed (asynchronous), you have the opportunity to develop personal and professional relationships. The classmates you get to know online may come from very diverse situations and can offer a wealth of knowledge and experience. If you are willing to share your thoughts, experiences, and knowledge with your classmates, they may also return the favor.

**Research Information**

As an online learner, you may not have immediate access to some of the resources and assistance available on a physical campus. However, there is a plethora of information and help available online and through special service arrangements. To make use of these, you will need to make yourself aware of what services are available. You will also need to pay careful attention to the validity of these services and to some legal and ethical issues concerning research and use of information found for academic purposes.

**Library Services**

An important part of every academic course involves researching the literature and finding relevant information on the subject. Campus libraries serve as the repository for information, collecting, organizing, and making this body of knowledge available to everyone involved in academic work and research.

Fortunately for online learners, most of the services provided by libraries now can be accessed online. Library catalogs, reference assistance, interlibrary loan, and even some full-text books and periodicals can be searched and accessed. CSU’s online library should be the first place you look for additional information beyond your course readings and assignments. Several of the following categories in this section may be made available through your library.

A student can navigate to the CSU Online Library in two ways:

- Login to a course in Blackboard and use the My Library button on the course menu.
- Login to the myCSU Student Portal and use the library link on the menu of options to the left of that webpage.

Research assistance is available via telephone or email during the following hours of service (CST):

- **Monday – Thursday**: 8:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- **Friday**: 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM
- **Sunday**: 3:00 PM – 11:00 PM

You can submit research requests to librarian@columbiasouthern.edu or telephone toll-free at (877) 268-8046.

In addition to research assistance, the CSU Online Library can provide helpful information on using the APA rules of style.
**Online Databases**

Databases online can provide fast and efficient ways to find information pertinent to your topics of interest. They may also provide seamless access to the full-text versions of these articles and other items (though this access may depend on where you are when you are accessing the databases). Each database has a unique interface and search mechanism, so you will often have to experiment and use available help documentation.

**Using Web Search Engines**

While library catalogs and online bibliographic databases can provide direction and access to scholarly information, the Web itself is a storehouse for billions of documents. For reasons outlined below, it’s usually best when doing academic research to first look for information in books and journals because they go through quality control measures before they are published. Yet the Web can also reveal thousands of potentially useful documents related to your research topics.

**Information Literacy and Information Efficacy**

Once you find information or research, you must also look critically at what you’ve found to assess its authenticity and truthfulness. How do you know if information you’ve found is reliable and based on sound, honest research? This may apply to books and articles found through library catalogs and online bibliographic databases, and even more so for information found on the web. The web has been described as the greatest vanity press in history, allowing almost anyone to publish almost anything. You as the reader should be looking critically at any information you find.

Here are some critical questions to ask of any information you uncover:

- Who is the author of this information?
- Does anyone else, such as a publisher or association, take responsibility for making this information available?
- Has this work been referred or reviewed by subject matter experts?
- Is other important information included with this work such as a date, author’s credentials and contact information, or citations for other works referred to in this work?
- Have any other reputable publications cited or referenced this work?

All the topics addressed in this section relate to the idea of information literacy, or the ability to locate information, evaluate that information, and use it in appropriate ways. Being an online student will likely increase your level of information literacy. Becoming aware of the concept of information literacy and its implications on learning can help you as you take courses online.

**Copyright**

Copyright refers to the rights of an individual or organization that has published a piece of work and is regarded as the owner of that intellectual property. If others use that work in a way which infringes upon the rights of the owner, they may be in violation of copyright law. There are several exceptions to this law, allowing use of portions of copyrighted materials for educational purposes, for ‘fair use’, for library use, etc. For students doing academic work, referencing or quoting from existing works is usually permissible.
under fair use guidelines. However, it is your responsibility to make sure you are not violating copyright law as you make use of others’ intellectual property.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

As a student in an online course, you are subject to academic conduct and misconduct rules adopted by your institution. Rules and regulations differ by institution, as do procedures for investigating and disciplining students who commit academic misconduct.

Plagiarism is just as important a concept in an online course as it is in a traditional classroom. Ask your instructor for more resources if you need further help understanding and avoiding plagiarism.

**CSU Statement of Policy**

Ethical conduct is a foundation upon which a successful academic career at Columbia Southern University rests. The students, faculty, and staff must commit themselves to the highest standards of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Therefore, any deviation of these standards is a breach of the ethics that are the basis of Columbia Southern University’s academic programs and thus a violation of the university’s Academic Integrity policy.

A violation of the Academic Integrity policy includes, but is not limited to:
- Cheating: using unauthorized materials or receiving unauthorized assistance during an examination or in connection with any work done for academic credit.
- Plagiarism: taking the work of another and offering it as one’s own without proper acknowledgement of the true source, whether that material is paraphrased or copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form.
- Unauthorized collaboration on a project, homework, or other assignment unless otherwise allowed by course instructor.
- Sharing, selling, or buying information related to graded learning activities.
- Using professor feedback for another student as the basis for an essay response.
- Resubmitting a paper that has already been submitted for another course.
- Accessing or using unauthorized materials (electronic or print) and/or websites.
- Use of an alternate, stand-in, or proxy during an examination.

**Sanctions**

Columbia Southern University regards violations to the Academic Integrity Policy as a very serious matter. Students who are found to be in violation of the Academic Integrity Policy are subject to sanctions, which range based on incident and severity from a letter of reprimand up to and including university dismissal and degree revocation.

**Statute of Limitations**

There shall be no ‘statute of limitations’ that precludes faculty from acting on the discovery of alleged violations, either during the time in which the course in question is being offered or after the course has ended (and after the student has graduated).

**Right to Appeal**

If a student is found in violation of Academic Integrity, they are allowed due process and may, within 72 hours of official notification, contest the university’s findings. A formal, written challenge must be sent to the academic chair that presented the official notice of violation to the student. The student’s appeal will be sent to CSU’s Academic Review Committee for a final decision.
IMPORTANT CSU RESOURCES

THE COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

The CSU Website, www.columbiasouthern.edu, is the gateway to your University. In addition to CSU news items, the school history, a directory of CSU Administration and Faculty, a list of CSU Learning Partners, and features for school alumni, the website offers a student the following information:

- Descriptions of CSU’s Online Degree Programs
- An explanation of the Admissions process
- Important details about Tuition and Financing
- Facts about CSU's advantages and programs for Military Personnel
- A link to the myCSU Student Portal

MYCSU STUDENT PORTAL

Actively enrolled CSU students have exclusive access to myCSU Student Portal, a web portal that includes many tools for managing the student experience. You can access the Student Portal from the CSU home page. The available features include news and announcements, course information, your student email history, online forms, and CSU policies. You can find links there to:

- Update a student's personal information, including contact information
- Browse the University Catalog and read the course descriptions
- View the CSU Academic Calendar and Term Course Schedule
- Login to Blackboard
- Access the CSU Online Library
- Examine the CSU Grading Rubric

If you find you are not receiving regular correspondence from CSU concerning your courses, myCSU also allows students the ability to verify the email address that CSU has for you. There is a test button that will send an automated email to the account on file, thus allowing the student to check if their email account is allowing CSU emails.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Your Course Professor
When uncertain about an important concept in a textbook or how to proceed with an assignment, students sometimes overlook a very valuable resource – the course professor. Whenever you have a course-related question, your professor will be the best source of information.

You can find your professor’s contact information and biography by using the Professor link on the course menu in Blackboard.

When you email your professor, please remember to include the following:

- Be sure to identify yourself by name and student number.
- Give the name and complete course code for your course.
• Specify the unit, and when applicable, the assessment question that is prompting your message.
• All facts pertaining to the issue so that the purpose of the correspondence is clear.

Success Center
The specialists in the Success Center are available for any questions that may arise. If you need assistance navigating the course, submitting your course assignments, or just need to be pointed in the right direction, they are happy to help. They can also direct you to resources available at CSU, including tutoring support and academic assistance. You may contact the Success Center between the hours of 8am - 5pm CST, Monday - Thursday, and 8am - 3pm CST, Friday by phone at 1-800-977-8449 ext. 6538, or by email at teamsucceed@columbiasouthern.edu.

Writing Center
Do you need someone to review your first essay response or paper, or do you have questions about APA? The CSU Writing Center provides effective academic writing support via email or appointments by telephone. Writing tutors can provide feedback at any stage of the writing process. You can submit a draft to an online tutor any time, any day, and from anywhere by submitting the Writing Center Request Form in the myCSU Student Portal. Tutors will provide feedback within 2 business days.

Math Center
If you have math anxiety or think you can’t do math, log on to our Math Center where tutors are eager to assist you. The CSU Math Center provides effective mathematical support via email or appointments by telephone. You can submit a question or a problem to an online tutor any time, any day, and from anywhere by submitting the Math Center Request Form in the myCSU Student Portal. Tutors will provide feedback within 2 business days.

Academic Advisor
Academic Advisors representing each college are available to assist students throughout their degree programs. Each student will receive a personalized Application Evaluation Report listing transfer of credit and courses remaining in the declared degree program. In addition, Academic Advisors will work with you to prepare a personalized Degree Action Plan (DAP) to assist you with course selections for each enrollment. The purpose of the DAP is to be certain that students have the opportunity to select needed courses in the proper sequence to best promote student success.

We encourage students to contact their Academic Advisor at any time to discuss program requirements. A complete listing, along with the contact information of each of our Academic Advisors, may be viewed at http://www.columbiasouthern.edu/degree/advisors/.

CSU Departments
Student Services Department
The Student Services Department is committed to providing outstanding service to every one of our valued students. A Student Services Representative will be assigned as your personal contact to CSU, and will be available to assist with any questions or issues that may arise as you work towards earning your degree, such as facilitating your enrollment in your next course, verifying that your textbook has
shipped, arranging for a course extension, providing a grade report, determining if an assignment has been successfully submitted for grading, or sending a final exam to your approved proctor.

You should have received the name and contact information of your Assigned Student Services Representative after you first enrolled at CSU. If you call or email and your representative is not available at that time, another member of the Student Services department will be glad to help you.

You may also contact the first available Student Services representative by telephoning 877-323-4471 or by emailing students@columbiasouthern.edu

The CSU Bookstore
The Bookstore is responsible for shipping textbooks to CSU students around the world. Textbooks are provided at no cost through the Columbia Southern University Book Grant. Books may be new or used.

For complete CSU textbook policies, please see the Institutional Policies section of the myCSU portal.

Questions and concerns about your textbooks can be emailed to bookstore@columbiasouthern.edu. You may also telephone (877) 323-4474 to talk with a bookstore representative.

In addition, the Bookstore also offers CSU merchandise for sale.

CSU Registrar
The Office of the Registrar is responsible for academic advising, evaluation of transfer credit, and administrative support to the Registrar. Administrative duties include issuing official CSU transcripts, diplomas, Application Evaluation Reports and Degree Action Plans (DAP). In addition, the office receives and processes incoming official transcripts, petitions to graduate, graduation registrations, changes of programs, returning student applications, course transfer requests, enrollment verification requests, consent to release student information requests, and more. If you have questions concerning any of these processes, you may contact our Registrar’s Office by email at registrar@columbiasouthern.edu or by phone at 800-977-8449 ext. 6526.

Office of Financial Aid
The Office of Financial Aid (OFA) was established in March of 2008 to help students proceed through the financial aid process, as well as many other functions directly related to the Title IV program. The OFA can assist students with any of the following:

- Answer questions students may have about federal student aid in general
- Help you get started with the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)
- Assist you through the financial aid process
- Process In-School Deferment Request (if you have federal student loans from another school repayment can be postponed)
- Check the status of a refund due to a credit on your student account from federal student aid being applied

OFA staff members will be glad to assist you and may be contacted by email at financialaid@columbiasouthern.edu or by phone at (800)977-8449 ext. 6530.
Frequently Asked Questions... and Their Answers

Don’t be embarrassed if you are enrolled in an online course for the first time and are unclear about what to expect in this new form of class. Your professor is your best source of information and will make him or herself easily available through email, phone, and voicemail. To help you get started, however, here are some frequently asked questions about online courses at CSU... and their answers. Please keep in mind that these are general questions and you should always check with your instructor for specifics.

Q: Where do I find my online class? How do I log on?
A: To find your online class, open your internet browser on your computer. Go to http://online.columbiasouthern.edu. This will take you to the login page. In the User ID box, enter your CSU student ID number. In the password box, enter your CSU password. Click “Login”. This will take you to your personal Blackboard entry page, showing you a list of your online classes. Click on the appropriate class link to enter that class.

Q: Do I have to log on to class at a particular time?
A: Usually not. If enrolled in a term course, you will have deadlines for posting your assignments, assessments, and discussion boards, but when you complete that work (5:00am, 11:30pm, or any other time) is up to you. You would be well-advised to set up a daily schedule to avoid being overburdened at the end of the week. If you have a problem, contact your professor or use the discussion board to try to get help from other students in the class. You won’t like the feeling of leaving work until the last minute and then running into trouble!

Q: Where do we meet for class?
A: For fully online classes, you won’t really “meet” in a physical face to face sense. Instead, the class will interact regularly through the internet and will communicate using web-based discussion boards and email. Your professor will make course materials and assignments available through the Blackboard learning management system.

Q: Is taking a class online easier than taking a “regular” class?
A: No. The course content of an online course is usually identical to that of an on-site class on the same topic. Some people think the workload is even more demanding than a regular face-to-face class because one must be a self directed learner and stay motivated to keep on top of the work. The most successful online students tend to share the following characteristics. They: are self-motivated and are self-starters; have good organization and time-management skills; are somewhat familiar with computers and the internet and; are resourceful and actively seek answers and solutions to questions and problems.

Q: Do I have to own a computer to enroll in an online course?
A: Strictly speaking, no. But you must have easy access to a computer with reliable internet access throughout duration of the course. Some students complete online classes from work (having arranged this beforehand with their employer, of course), public libraries, or friend’s houses.

Q: What internet skills would be helpful in an online course?
A: The most successful students tend to have the following internet skills: familiarity with their web browser and an email program, know how to make and organize bookmarks in their browser software, some familiarity with web-based interactions – email, discussion boards, etc, some familiarity with word processing, and experience in successful internet searches using a variety of search engines.

Q: What do online professors expect from students?
A: Once again, there typically is little difference between learning online and learning in a regular ‘classroom’ setting. Professors can expect that everyone will participate in the class with courtesy and consideration for each other and for the professor. Emails and discussion board postings should be
appropriate, on the topic at hand, and reflect a professional demeanor. Inappropriate behavior includes, but is not limited to, the following: disruption, plagiarism, and dishonesty. It is a violation of CSU policy to plagiarize or recycle work. Do not: Take others’ thoughts or words without appropriate acknowledgement, submit work that has been written or revised in part or in whole by another person, or submit work that you have submitted for another class. Successful online students report that their learning experience is enhanced when they are engaged with other students, as well as the professor, keek up with their assignments and reading, and visit the course frequently.

Q: How do I calculate my grade point average (GPA)?
A: CSU calculates your Grade Point Average (GPA) using a 4 point system: An A = 4 points per course; B = 3 points per course; C = 2 points per course; D = 1 point per course; F = 0 points per course.

The following illustration provides an example of the GPA calculation for a student who has taken 5 courses at CSU.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sem. Hrs</th>
<th>Grade Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLS 1000</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>(4) x 3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EH 1010</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(3) x 3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA 1100</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>(2) x 3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS 1010</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(3) x 3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBA 2010</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>(4) x 3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GPA: 3.2 (48 grade points divided by 15 credit hours)
REFERENCES


