



Learn How Online College Works

Description

It's no secret that Americans are paying tens of thousands of dollars every year to earn a degree in hopes of beginning their career. For some, they aim to strive even further: working toward a postgraduate degree or Doctorate.



As the touchstone for our society, and the foundation for our financial future, pursuing higher education from a quality institution is absolutely critical. Due to the inherent costs associated with college, many people, however, are unable to or disregard a college education outright.

Earning a college degree can be challenging, time consuming, and expensive. The alternative solution rests in the hands of online education. Often seen as a improvident or a scam in its infancy, online learning centers have made considerable strides for legitimacy, quality of content, and tools to provide

the best education possible.

In this guide, I'm going to weigh the differences between online and brick-and-mortar schools. We'll discuss the benefits, advantages, and concerns you should have before considering an online education so you're equipped with what you need to know.

Who is Online Education For?

If you're thinking about pursuing an online degree or taking college courses online—great! You've come to the right place. During its shaky inception in the early 1990s, online education was marketed as an avenue for education possible to those least likely to pursue it. Namely working adults who saw higher education as inconvenient.

For the most part: this is true. Perhaps the biggest advantage of an online education is the convenience and accessibility it offers over a traditional institution. I'll be deep-diving into the benefits of getting an online degree later, but the advantages are quite clear. Being able to read, research, and learn from the comfort of your home at any time makes even the busiest of bodies think twice.

As technology improved, so did education and the techniques professors employ to teach students. Applicants can take advantage of powerful learning tools, digital course books and supplements, video and audio, and the Internet to get an education online. With online degrees being regarded as credible and legitimate as a traditional slip, online college is a viable alternative to brick-and-mortar.

Put simply: online education is for anyone who finds living and learning on-campus to be inconvenient or too expensive. There are some noticeable differences between digital and traditional, but online learning often offers enough benefits to outweigh what one loses without face-to-face interaction. Online education is also for anyone who would like to attend a school or undergo a program that is inaccessible to where they are located. Lastly, an online degree offers students the chance to work, raise a family, or pursue other interests while learning.

How Does an Online Education Work?

For those who have gone to a public school all their life, transitioning to an online only format could be startling. You may be wondering exactly how digital learning works and inherent differences and obstacles students might face. I'll be going into the concerns you might have regarding an online degree later. For now, let's breakdown the online learning process from soup to nuts.

The Tools You'll Need

This may come as a shock to you, but you'll need a computer and stable Internet connection to get started with an online class. The programs your professors utilize may vary from place to place, but you'll most often be engaged through digital platforms hosted on a server run by the institution or third-party app.

This means you can be versatile in your search for a computer. A laptop or tablet is probably the optimal choice. They allow you to be agile—you can take learning on the go and tackle assignments at

the office, while running errands, or at the coffee shop. Although phones can access powerful tools such as Microsoft Office, I don't recommend them. Working and listening to lectures is best suited on a larger screen. Of course, a desktop computer is a solid choice. While immobile, desktop computers are powerful enough to handle more machine-intensive software. Depending upon what class you're taking, such as: video editing, computer programming, or engineering, you might need a desktop with the hardware to properly handle industry-standard tools.

Beyond a computer, the other things you'll need are generally much simpler to acquire. You'll need a word processor and Internet browser for the most basic of assignments. You might also have to buy or download the software required by the online class.

Back in the physical world, it can't hurt to have a reliable notebook and pencil.

Once these requirements have been met, students can start completing coursework.

Beginning a Class

Online classes may operate differently depending on several factors. Namely, what institution you have enrolled in and how the professor teaches. Generally, however, here are a few elements you can expect when logging on to your online class.

- **Course Syllabus:** This is the outline of coursework, lectures, and assignments that will be distributed throughout the semester. It's your roadmap for the class.
- **Discussion Center:** If you're taking an online class with multiple students, there may be a forum for collaboration and interaction with your fellow classmates. You can also field questions and receive help from the professor.
- **Assignment Module:** You might work on a unique software platform for completing and turning in assignments, or you might simply have to email your professor the work you've done.
- **Tests & Exams:** An online exam might only be posted and taken during a predetermined set of time.

Lectures

Just like in a regular classroom, you'll need to listen to or read lectures from your professor. Fortunately, these are often prerecorded and uploaded to your digital platform following the syllabus, or simply posted as notes or a slideshow to be read.

Depending on how your professor runs the class, you may need to be present at the time the lecture is being made or have the freedom to read or listen at your convenience. Lectures are likely to be held everyday or a few times a week.

Completing Assignments

Nobody likes homework, but tackling assignments online comes with some advantages. From your course management software, assignments will be uploaded and made available to students according to dates from the syllabus. If you're lucky, you may even be able to pull ahead and work on future assignments.

Like a standard classroom, you can expect your assignments to come with a deadline which you'll need to upload your work by in order to receive credit. Dependent on what class you're taking, you may expect long-term projects or more involved assignments that require offline work. Reading digital textbooks or articles might also be required to supplement the lecture.

Opportunity for Discussion

One of the most prominent arguments against online education is that you simply don't have the same level of access to your professor and fellow students that you do while on campus.

In a sense: this is true. Learning in a physical classroom allows for a more organic flow of discussion. The professor can field questions in real-time, and you can voice your concerns immediately. It may also be easier to collaborate with your classmates on projects and assignments, or study together for important exams.

Online colleges have made serious efforts to replicate the traditional college experience online, however. Students enrolled in an online degree will likely be required to engage in weekly discussions on course content with the professor or rest of the class.

This may mean posting to a discussion board or participating in group chats held at a specific date and time. There may be a prompt for students to respond to or students may be asked to come up with their own discussion topics. It will vary by class and the preference of the professor.

Conclusion

While still a relatively new medium (relative to universities) online learning is a viable solution to earning a degree from the convenience of your home or office. Listening to and reading lectures, doing homework, and talking with your professor doesn't sound so different than any traditional class. In reality, there isn't much mystery behind online classes at all, and you'll find a quality education from talented professors wherever you go.

Of course, there are some things an online college class can't provide that the brick-and-mortar schools can. Stick around for the companion piece to this article, where we dissect the benefits, opportunities, and concerns you might have regarding pursuing an online degree.

Category

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