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I. Introduction

Welcome to Monroe Community College's online learning program. This information is intended to provide you with a brief introduction to the skills necessary for becoming a successful online learner.

You may also hear online learning referred to as:

- Distance education
- Distributed education
- Online education
- E-learning

Whatever it is called, online learning offers unique challenges and unique opportunities. The ideas presented here are not going to turn you into a model online student overnight, but hopefully they will help you develop enduring strategies for success. We hope that you will explore the resources and suggestions offered here and will find your online experience rewarding.

To determine if online learning is for you; take the online readiness checklist questionnaire at:

<http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/distlearn/minicrs/OnlineForm.htm>

Please note that Monroe Community College collaborates with the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) to provide students with comprehensive support services. This document includes a wealth of helpful resources from MCC and SLN.

The MCC Distance Learning webpage is the perfect starting point for students new to online learning and those who might want a refresher course or are looking for answers to specific questions.

Each semester, MCC offers over 100 courses through the SUNY Learning Network (SLN). Online courses offer the opportunity to attend classes at your own convenience any time and any place. In an online course the instructor and students are connected to each other through a computer network. Using the Internet, you can receive instruction, compose and submit assignments, ask questions of the instructor and other students, discuss issues and actively participate in the class all from your home, your office, or the nearest campus computer lab. MCC is a national leader in online education and is committed to providing quality faculty, programs and services. The MCC Online Learning website at: <http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/distlearn> is the first step to your future success in online learning.

II. Time

No matter how convenient or flexible online education may be, taking a course online requires time. You might save commuting time in an online course, but you might also spend more time with technology concerns. Whether the time you spend on course-related work is more or less than you might experience 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 semester, and estimate the time commitment the course will require.

A. 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, or a few days during each week, to work on your course, and stick to this schedule. Be aware at the start of the course whether you are required to participate in activities at any specific times, and plan accordingly. If you are in a different time zone remember to plan accordingly for your course submissions.

III. Balancing Responsibilities and Setting Priorities

Vital to a successful online learning experience is the ability to balance your responsibilities. Knowing how to set priorities is the key to getting the greatest benefit from your online education experience. Determine early in the semester exactly what work is required and do your best to plan ahead. Do not hesitate to ask for advice or help from your instructor.

A. Managing Stress

Strategies for managing course-related stress include:

- Know your deadlines. These include course deadlines as well as deadlines and 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.
- Know your available resources, especially technological resources, and have them at hand when you are working in your course.
- 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.

B. Student Accountability

The further you progress in higher and continuing education, the more responsibility you will need to take for your own learning.

C. Self-Directed Learning

As you explore the many avenues of learning available and begin to define your individual path, you will still need to work with your instructors to make sure you are meeting the requirements of the individual courses.

D. Understand Expectations

In order to meet course requirements and instructor expectations, you will need a clear understanding of these requirements and expectations. Instructors will provide a syllabus which acts as a contract between you and the instructor. Read through the syllabus carefully and print it out.

E. Seek Clarification

If you have questions regarding content, contact the instructor immediately. In the online environment instructors have fewer cues to alert them to your confusion. They cannot see your puzzled expression or hear you ask, "What?" 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.

F. Become an "Active Learner"

To be successful in this environment, actively seek ways you can best understand the course material.

- Read, listen to, and participate in the course
- Become involved in discussing and defining course topics
- Critically evaluate the information you receive

G. Develop Self-Discipline

Self-Discipline may be the most important characteristic of a successful online learner. With it, you have a tool that leads you to become an efficient time manager, and without it you may encounter difficulties. Here are some tips to help:

- Know when assignments are due; print your syllabus and course schedule/calendar
- Set up a schedule of when you will log in to the class and stick to it
- Minimize distractions while online
- Ensure consistent access to a computer
- Have an alternative plan in case you have computer problems

IV. Online Communication Skills

A. Writing Clearly

Being a productive member of an online learning community requires you to communicate clearly and concisely when you write.

A few simple guidelines can help you produce clear, effective written contributions to your course. As always, review guidelines for assignments:

- Keep your sentences short
- Keep your paragraphs short
- Watch for careless errors; check your spelling and grammar
- READ your posting before you submit it
- Correct any awkward or unclear areas before you post the final version in quotation marks and identify the author, so that you do not accidentally plagiarize someone

B. Discussions

In many courses, you will be required to join in class discussions and respond to classmates' comments. These discussions may become complex, intense, and even provocative. Here are some tips to help you with discussions:

- Know what the instructor expects of your discussion responses
- Think before you write
- Reread your response prior to sending

Before you send off a hastily written, emotionally based reaction to another's contribution, develop your ideas into a less emotional and more reasonable response. Then wait a few minutes and reread what you have written before you submit your response. Learning how to turn a reaction into a response will make your course contributions more meaningful – and may earn you a higher mark for participation, if participation counts toward your grade. Pausing and rereading gives you the opportunity to review your writing for organization, clarity, and correctness.

V. Online Community

A. Building a “Classroom” Environment

Online learning does not mean that you are learning alone. You will have a class consisting of instructor(s), fellow students, and perhaps others with whom you will interact. Your instructor will build a class environment through discussion questions, group projects, and other activities. You 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 messages and discussions, both delayed (asynchronous) and real-time (synchronous), 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.

Your fellow classmates and instructors provide resources, information and support. Look for areas where you may post reviews for books you have read on pertinent topics, links to online resources, and observations for specific topics. Within your 'classroom', you and your fellow classmates can build a collective knowledge base which may become invaluable even after your coursework is completed.

VI. Library Services

On campus libraries and library services are available to all registered MCC students at:

<http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/library/lvg.htm>

Distance Learning Library Services are available to off campus MCC Students who:

- Are currently enrolled in a MCC SUNY Learning Network (SLN) fully online course, and **are not** taking any on campus courses at either the Brighton or Damon City Campus, or any on campus hybrid or web enhanced classes.
- Are registered with MCC Libraries, upon completion of the [Distance Learner Library Registration Form](#), once per academic semester.

To learn more about MCC's Distance Learning Library Services & Resources go to: <http://libguides.monroecc.edu/distancelearning>

VII. MCC Catalog and Student Handbook

The complete MCC College Catalog and Student Handbook can be downloaded in full from the web as a PDF File at:

<http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/mcchome/catalogtoc.htm>.

VIII. Technology Considerations

As an online student, your computer becomes your primary interface to your course(s), instructor(s), and your fellow students. In order to effectively use this interface, it will need to meet certain minimal requirements. If your computer cannot perform the functions you need to complete a class, you will have to make the effort to upgrade your equipment. It is not required that you own computer equipment; however, it is strongly recommended that you have a computer that will be available to you on a dedicated basis that will meet your personal study habits. Additionally, have a back up plan should your primary equipment fail or become unavailable. Many public libraries have computers as do the Electronic Learning Centers (ELC) on the MCC Campuses.

The SUNY Learning Network (SLN) is not an internet service provider. Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is responsible for helping you configure your computer system so you can connect to the Internet/WWW. Your ISP will assist you with problems concerning connectivity to the Internet/WWW and the SLN web site. If you have difficulty connecting or maintaining a connection to the SLN web site, contact your ISP immediately to determine the source of the problem. If you are disconnected from the Internet or the SLN web site without warning, contact your ISP immediately.

Depending on course requirements and/or your preference, you may need:

- A printer that will allow you to print out documents, such as the syllabus, course schedule, or assignments.
- Course specific software/hardware: Check with your professor or campus to determine whether course assignments may require you to use additional software and hardware. (i.e., MS Word, Office2010, scanner for graphic arts course, spreadsheet software for a business course, MyMathlab).

Browser Compatibility:

- You cannot use a beta or preview version of web browser software.
- The web browser must allow session cookies from the suny.edu domain.
- The browser's encryption or cipher strength should be 128-bit.
- Valid, working email address that accepts mail from the SUNY Learning Network. If you use a spam block/filter or have a bulk mail area in your account, make sure you allow messages from the suny.edu domain and itec.suny.edu domain into your account's Inbox.
- Word processing software to create exchange and share written assignment documents. The SUNY Learning Network recommends that students have access to a word processor with the capability to save files in the Microsoft Word 6.0 or RTF file format.

SUNY Learning Network (SLN) maintains this site with up-to-date information for you on Course Browser compatibility. [SLN Online Course Browser Compatibility](http://wiki.sln.suny.edu/x/KYIF)
<http://wiki.sln.suny.edu/x/KYIF>

The SLN website has links with information on how to test your computer systems. If you have concerns about your system, contact the SLN HelpDesk. Please note that you may have additional software required by your instructor. That information will be in the course description and/or the course syllabus.

IX. Study Habits and Skills

A. Know Your Learning Style

Not all online classes are presented in the same way. Instructors, both in a traditional classroom and online, use different techniques and methods for explaining concepts. Some may choose to present the course material in a visual format, others use a lecture format, and others enhance lecture formats with hands-on applications. Knowing your learning style can be beneficial whether you are taking a course in a classroom or online.

There are many different styles of learning. Some of us are visual learners; we learn and remember by seeing things (seeing it). Some learn best by listening to a lecture (hearing it). Others are hands on learners; they need to manipulate objects to demonstrate learning (doing it). Take the assessment below to learn more about your own learning style.

Important - Remember that no test or assessment knows you better than you know yourself.

Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire

<http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>

This is an online questionnaire. Your results are graphically presented with a short written explanation. You then have the opportunity to read additional information by clicking on the Learning Style Descriptions.

B. Three Types of Learning

a. The Visual Learner (the "Seer")

If you have identified that you are a visual learner, meaning that you learn best by "seeing" the course information presented in various ways, here are strategies to consider:

- Course information will usually be presented in a text format, so you will see and read the course information on the computer and textbook. Read the text, examine diagrams or pictures, and then relate what you see to what you read
- Textbook materials enhance written lectures by providing diagrams, maps, illustrations, etc.

- Research other Internet sites which could provide additional information about the topic
- Read the course description from the MCC course catalog or MCC website prior to taking the course
- Contact the instructor for further information

b. The Tactile Learner (the "Doer")

If you process information using a tactile, hands-on approach here are some suggestions that may help in your online course:

- Engage in discussions with other students in your online class
- Identify online courses that have a lab or other experiential component
- Find others who are taking the course and form study groups
- Contact the instructor for information prior to taking the course

c. The Aural Learner (the "Hearer")

If you learn best by listening to lectures and discussing in class, then online courses may present a challenge for you. You may need to adapt your learning style to the visual text-based format used in most online courses. Knowing what the course involves ahead of time, before the class begins, might be your best avenue for determining if taking an online class is for you. Here are some strategies that may help:

- Read the course description from the MCC Course Catalog or the MCC website
- Contact the instructor for information about teaching style and course content
- Talk with other students who have taken online courses, particularly the one you are interested in taking
- Identify courses that have a video component. Check out the website for further information.

X. Where to Get Help

A. SUNY Learning Network HelpDesk - Contact Information

The SLN HelpDesk is your primary resource for technical support.

You can contact the SLN HelpDesk via:

Phone: **1.800.875.6269** (800# is toll free within USA; direct # is 1.518.443.5617).

Web Form: To submit a ticket or request assistance via the web form use the link:

<http://service.sunyconnect.suny.edu/footprints/proj16.html>

On the screen click the "new request" icon at the top of the screen. After clicking submit request, please enter your valid email address and hit Go to login.

SLN staff respond to the web form as soon as possible and will reply to you by email. If you use a spam blocker or have a bulk mail (or junk mail) area in your email account, you must check settings or allow messages from the SUNY.EDU domain and itec.suny.edu domain into your account's Inbox. Otherwise, you may not receive their reply to your inquiry.

If you do not find an answer within Frequently Asked Questions and need to contact the SLN HelpDesk, please have the following information available. If using the web form, provide the appropriate information request:

- 1) Your name and name of your college
- 2) Your course # and section #
- 3) Name of your Internet Service Provider
- 4) Name and version number of your web browser software
- 5) Computer's operating system
- 6) Word processing software if problem is related to assignment submission.
- 7) Explanation of the technical problem you are experiencing and the SLN web site location that you are using.
- 8) For inquiries related to a course, include the course title and code, the name of the SUNY College offering the course, and the professor's name. If you do not have this information, go to the Course List/Start Dates within the 'Prospective Students' section of the SLN web site.

B. MCC Learning & Resource Centers

From fitness to physics, MCC provides learning and resource centers where students with diverse interests and needs can receive assistance from faculty tutors, video instruction or computer software. Several of our learning centers provide access to the World Wide Web, Interactive Vax Logins and the library on-line catalog. For more information go to:

<http://www.monroecc.edu/etsdbs/staffdir.nsf/CollegeDir-Learn?OpenView?a-zindex>

C. MCC Student Homepage

- Check your email
- Examine your academic record
- Read the latest MCC news
- Search Library Resources
- Explore the Job Connection
- Visit without having to find a spot to park

<http://www.monroecc.edu/webdbs/studtrib.nsf/StudentWeb?OpenView>

D. MCC Student Services

The Office for Student Services is responsible for overseeing the following policies and procedures:

Academic Honesty
Academic Standards
Deans List
Graduation Certification
Student Attendance Policy
Student Conduct Regulations
Student Grievance Procedure
Sexual Harassment Policy

<http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/stuserv/>

XI. Your Next Steps

- 1. Register with Monroe Community College for your SLN online course.**
- 2. Purchase text books and other required material**
- 3. Access your course online during preview week (1 week before the start of the semester)**
- 4. Attend and participate in your course on a regular basis (starting with the first day of the semester)**
- 5. Refer to the MCC Distance Learning Web Pages for answers to your ongoing questions.**

<http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/distlearn/students.htm>

XII. Conclusion

This document will help you get started as an online learner. Don't hesitate to ask when you have a question. Your first resource should be the instructor or department providing your course. For further help you may also consult the resources mentioned in section X – "Where to Get Help." Good luck!

Enjoy your online learning experience!

Developed by:

Susan Forsyth, Associate Professor, Health Professions
Anne Hughes, Career Counselor/Associate Professor
Martha Kendall, Training/Instructional Development Specialist
Peggy VanKirk, Coordinator, Office of Online Learning

Some content provided by:
Indiana University
Information Technology Services
Paul Alford, IT Training & Education