



Distance learning

EXPLORE THE CATEGORIES FOR ONLINE LEARNING PROGRAMS

Types of distance learning are many and varied

Distance learning has evolved greatly since the days of correspondence learning in which the student would receive course materials, including textbooks and other course materials, through the mail. Students would then work completely at their own pace, finishing the course according to their work and life schedule. Although correspondence courses still exist, they are quickly being replaced by online courses, which offer instruction from teachers, interaction with other students, and a forum for feedback.

There are a number of advantages to the new formats of distance learning, such as making permanent professional contacts, a greater amount of teacher support and a multimedia educational experience. With the advent and improvements on computer, digital and Internet technology, the shift from the traditional classroom experience to online or distance learning only seems natural. This is especially true for programs that traditionally require large amounts of reading and written assignments, such as business administration and management, human resources management and services, finance and accounting.

There are a variety of ways to structure distance learning courses. The format depends on the purpose of the online course. Are you seeking an online degree and taking a full online course load? Or are you supplementing your on-campus curriculum with online classes? Or perhaps your school has an overload of courses and requires that you take an online course. Whatever the reason,

it is important to know which type of distance learning course you are taking so you can understand the time and travel requirements that will be expected of you.

Synchronous vs Asynchronous Distance Learning

The four types of distance learning fall under the categories of either synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous literally means "at the same time", while asynchronous means "not at the same time". Synchronous distance learning involves live communication either through sitting in a classroom, chatting online, or teleconferencing. Asynchronous distance learning usually has a set of weekly deadlines, but otherwise allows students to work at their own pace. Students have more interaction with their peers and deliver correspondence through online bulletin boards. This type of learning might get tedious for some because they are usually only receiving the information through text medium, however some asynchronous classes involve video or audio supplements.

Synchronous learning is less flexible and disrupts the student's life to a greater extent. It is, however, the most popular form of college distance learning and continuing education programs, as it facilitates a greater amount of interaction between students and professors.

Some classes that do well in a synchronous format include those degree programs that highlight com-

munication, such as general psychology, nursing, general education, and counseling psychology. Those programs that weigh more heavily on projects and assignments thrive in an asynchronous format because they provide the students with more time to focus on their work. A few degrees that work well in this format include marketing, healthcare administration, legal assistant or paralegal, educational/instructional media design and advertising.

Open Schedule Online Courses

With open schedule online courses, students are allotted the greatest amount of freedom. This is an asynchronous form of learning in which students are provided Internet-based textbooks, mailing lists, Email and bulletin boards to complete their coursework. At the beginning of classes, the student is provided a set of deadlines, but is allowed to work at their own pace as long as the work is turned in by the deadline. This type of learning is great for students who work well independently and those who do not procrastinate.

Hybrid Distance Learning

Hybrid courses combine synchronous and asynchronous learning to create a structure in which the student is required to meet at a specific

time in a classroom or Internet chat room.

However, they are allowed to complete assignments on their own time and may pass them in through an online forum. This option is sometimes offered when a university lacks adequate space to accommodate all their course loads.

Computer-Based Distance Learning

The main difference between computer based learning and hybrid learning is that students are not allowed an open schedule. They are required to meet in a specific computer lab or in a classroom at a designated time each week.

Fixed Time Online Courses

The most common type of distance learning today is fixed time courses. As the title states, these courses are strictly online, but students are required to log-in to their online learning site at a specific time. Although they are completely online, the format remains synchronous because mandatory live chats are often required.

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PARENTS CAN HANDLE BALANCE ACT

Parents in college

There's no denying that returning to school as a parent is challenging.

College parents face a variety of unique challenges. Finding a perfect balance between work, family, and school while attending to household and personal responsibilities can be stressful.

Fortunately, colleges have programs and organizations specifically designed to assist with the transition from parent

to student.

Daycare Centers

If will be attending classes on campus, many colleges, especially community and technical schools, have on-campus daycare centers. Even some large, traditional universities offer child care programs as well.

Scholarships and Financial

Aid for Parents in College

Typically, information about scholarships and financial aid for students with children can be found under headings for "non-traditional" students. The term "non-traditional" refers to students who were displaced from college or who never attended college post-high school. Be sure to search through the non-traditional sections on school and scholar-



ship websites. More often than not, you will find some sort of program tailored to parents going back to school.

For example, Raise the Nation is a national grant program that helps single mothers deal with the financial burden of going back to school. Local scholarships are also available.

Financial aid for college students with kids is also quite common. Depending on their needs, parents in college can qualify for federal Pell grants, student loans, or state/university-specific financial aid programs. The first step in the financial aid process is to fill out a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). This application will determine your qualification for federal aid, and give you a good idea of where you stand in terms of financial assistance.

Online Education for College Parents

Many parents who want to further their educations choose online programs. Online programs have a unique set of advantages that can align with the needs of busy student-parents. The obvious advantage is that online educations allow students to spend more time at home. They aren't required to com-

mute to class, which means the extra expense of childcare doesn't apply. Online programs are also more flexible; they allow students to do their coursework on their own time, and without the pressure of a deadline.

Student Organizations

One of the appeals of higher education is that it instills a sense of community within its students. Clubs, student organizations, and sororities and fraternities allow students to make connections with people who have common interests. This isn't only for traditional students however. Non-traditional students, such as students with children, also have unique opportunities within student organizations.

For example, the University of Missouri, St Louis offers sororities for student-moms. Additionally, many colleges have study groups and student-run organizations specifically for college students with kids.

As you explore your educational options, remember to take advantage of all of the opportunities designed for parents returning to college. You'll find that these programs will not only help you financially, but can make you a happier student as well.

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