

STUDENTS' GUIDE TO DISTANCE EDUCATION AT MCC

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ABOUT DISTANCE EDUCATION

WHAT IS AN "ONLINE CLASS"?

At Muskegon Community College, an online class is defined as "a class where there is no scheduled seat time and where both teaching and learning take place over the Internet." Although it is defined as 100% virtual, some instructors do require proctored on-campus testing.

WHAT IS A "HYBRID CLASS"?

At Muskegon Community College, a hybrid class is defined as "a class where part of the class is conducted on campus and part of the class is conducted online." In most cases, the ratio is 50/50. It is important to know if you are registering for a hybrid class format. (See the section on **How do I know if my class is Online, Hybrid, or Traditional?**)

WHAT IS BLACKBOARD?

Blackboard is Muskegon Community College's virtual learning management system. It is a website where instructors maintain online and hybrid courses. Students use Blackboard on a regular basis to access their online and hybrid courses. Many instructors of traditional (also referred to as "face-to-face") courses also utilize Blackboard for posting of syllabi, posting of grades, and for other class information. All students have Blackboard logins.

REGISTRATION AND SCHEDULING

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CLASS IS ONLINE, HYBRID, OR TRADITIONAL?

1. Access the *MCC Schedule of Courses*—either the printed schedule or online at: <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/pages/479.asp>.
 - a. If your class is an online class or hybrid class, it will be noted next to the class listing.
 - b. If you also check under the headings "ONLINE CLASSES" and/or "HYBRID CLASSES," you will see all classes in those formats listed.
 - c. Please note that instructors in many face-to-face classes use Blackboard as a supplemental tool (**this is not noted** in the MCC Schedule of Courses). OR
2. Access Web Advisor at: <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/webadvisor>; check under "Search for Sections"—you will see the "Internet" or "Hybrid" notations next to those classes.

HOW DO I REGISTER AND PAY FOR AN ONLINE CLASS? WITHDRAW?

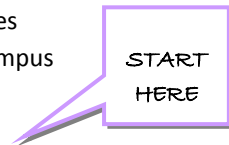
Registration and payment methods for online and hybrid classes are the same as face-to-face classes. Withdrawing from an online or hybrid class is also the same as withdrawing from a face-to-face class. Information regarding all of these processes for all classes can be found at <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/pages/476.asp>.

DO ONLINE CLASSES HAVE A DIFFERENT TUITION STRUCTURE?

- No, tuition for online classes is the same as for face-to-face classes.
- For tuition information, visit: <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/pages/1048.asp>.

ONCE I HAVE REGISTERED FOR AN ONLINE CLASS, HOW DO I BEGIN?

This is very important. All instructors teaching online classes have different start-up procedures. Some require an on-campus orientation; some require that you (students) email them, once registered; some require that you wait for their email providing you with step-by-step instructions for beginning. Information for beginning YOUR class will be found at: <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/pages/1321.asp>. Click on the link to your online class to find this information. It is normally available two weeks prior to the start date of your class.



HOW DO I PURCHASE TEXTBOOKS FOR MY ONLINE CLASS?

Textbooks can be purchased at the Muskegon Community College Bookstore or online; visit: <http://muskegoncc.bkstore.com>. Be sure to have your course name and number, section number, and instructor name accessible.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TAKING AN ONLINE CLASS

Advantages:

- They are convenient; within the due dates established for a course, you can work at your own pace and on your schedule.
- Flexibility--You can devote time to your family.
- Online classes can be fun!
- As a result of taking online courses, you acquire computer skills that can be used in a professional career and that can enhance any portfolio or resume.
- Save on fuel.

Disadvantages:

- There is No regular face-to-face interaction with the instructor.
- There is No regular face-to-face interaction with other students.
- There are No guaranteed immediate answers to questions.
- On-campus testing may be required.

MYTHS ABOUT ONLINE CLASSES



- They are easier—this is NOT TRUE. Online classes are demanding; they require that students be active learners: seek answers to questions, be proactive, and manage self-discipline.
- You spend less time—this is NOT TRUE. In many cases, you will spend more time as there is a need to assimilate more information on an individual basis. Vital to a successful online learning experience is the ability to balance responsibilities, both within and beyond your course. Knowing how to set priorities is key to getting the greatest benefit from your online educational experience. Find out before or as the course begins exactly what work is required of you, and determine if you can keep up with the work. Do not hesitate to ask for advice or help from your instructor. (See Section on **How Much Time Should I Devote to My Online Class?**)

- Due dates are anytime—this is NOT TRUE. Most online instructors have due dates! Grades are often determined by due dates, and points are reduced for late assignments. Make sure you know the due dates at the beginning of your class, and keep a calendar.
- All online classes follow the same structure and Blackboard menu—this is NOT TRUE. Every instructor has a different agenda, a different teaching style, and a different “look” to the Blackboard classroom. You will need to visit your virtual classroom often, acquire the feel of the navigation, and feel comfortable with the classroom environment.
- There is no student-to-student interaction—this may NOT BE TRUE. Many instructors provide a Discussion Board where students actively participate on a regular basis. In many classes, these student postings are graded; some are mandated without a grade; and some are voluntary for bonus points.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE STUDENT?

The following requirements are recommended for optimal success as an online student. Please note that some courses may have more specific requirements. At the College, most instructors teaching from campus have Windows XP operating software and MS Office XP software. Most instructors require students to use MS Word. If you are using Office 2007, you may be required to use the "Save as type" drop down to save as an earlier version of MS.

WHAT ARE THE HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS FOR AN ONLINE CLASS?

Minimum Hardware Requirements:

- Pentium Computer
- at least 512 MB RAM (memory)
- at least 133 MHz processor
- Sound card
- CD ROM drive



- at least 28.8 k bps modem
- at least Windows 98 or higher

Note: Dial-up service may inhibit your ability to access some class materials—dependent upon the tools used by the instructor.

WHAT ARE THE SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS FOR AN ONLINE CLASS?

Minimum Software Requirements:

- Internet connection (ISP) and Browser (Internet Explorer 6 or above)
- Microsoft Word XP or above
- Microsoft Excel (some courses)
- Real Player*
- Adobe Acrobat Reader*
- Macromedia Flash and Shockwave*
- PowerPoint or PowerPoint viewer

*Plug Ins and Other Useful Software that may be required in certain classes

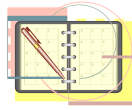
WHAT PERSONAL SKILLS SHOULD I HAVE TO BE A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE STUDENT?

You should be:

- Self-motivated
- A good reader
- Comfortable communicating in writing
- Self-disciplined
- Efficient in time management

HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD I DEVOTE TO MY ONLINE CLASS?

Time Management is a huge factor in online success:



- Block out time to do your online class.
- Establish a regular class time to keep just like attending a campus class.
- Remember, you should be reserving the time equivalent to that time you would spend in class plus the study time outside of class.
- ALWAYS, start on your work early in case of a computer problem—don't wait until the last minute.

WHAT COMPUTER SKILLS SHOULD I HAVE TO BE A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE STUDENT?*

You should be able to do all of the following:

- Send and receive email using MCC's email account
- Send attachments with an email
- View, save, and print attachments to an email
- Download files, if necessary
- Upload files, if necessary (for example, to the Digital Dropbox or Assignment window)
- Navigate the web using basic browser methods
- Post and reply to discussion threads
- Use basic word processing skills
- Save in different file formats (such as .rtf)

*It is strongly recommended that students enroll in CIS 100, Introduction to Personal Computers, before registering for an online class. This course provides students with the technical skills described above as well as Blackboard training.

In addition to Computer Skills, students are expected to apply Email Etiquette:

The majority of online students and instructors use email to communicate. Please keep these universal netiquette policies in mind:

- Follow the specific instructor's directions regarding subject lines and attachments.
- Write complete sentences when sending an email message.
- Don't use all CAPITAL LETTERS.
- Check your spelling.
- Be courteous, and never use offensive language.
- Sign your email messages.
- Be careful what you include in your messages; sometimes email can be delivered to the wrong person.
- Double check your humor and tone before hitting the "Send" button.

HOW CAN I EVALUATE MY PERSONAL AND COMPUTER SKILLS FOR QUALIFICATIONS?

- Visit <http://muskegoncc.edu/pages/635.asp> and take the self-assessment quiz.
- Visit a counselor.

FAQS



WHAT METHODS DO INSTRUCTORS USE TO PRESENT COURSE CONTENT?

Contrary to what many think, teaching online is much more than assigned reading and quizzing. Some of the tools that instructors **may** use in addition to required textbook reading include:

- PowerPoint presentations
- Audio/visual lectures
- Written (typed) lecture notes
- Diagrams and illustrations
- Web links and other Internet resources
- CD ROMs
- Assigned article reading
- Interactive assignments and quizzes
- Discussion board postings
- Synchronous chats
- Essay and Objective testing with myriad question types



HOW DO I LOG IN TO BLACKBOARD?

- The website for Blackboard is <http://mccb.muskegoncc.edu>.
- This website can also be accessed from MCC's home page: <http://muskegoncc.edu/> and clicking on the Quick Links dropdown.
- Your login is: `firstname.last name` (example: `john.smith`)
 - **This is exactly the same as your email login, web advisor login, and network login.**

WHAT IS MY BLACKBOARD PASSWORD?

- Your password is: `First initial + last initial + studentID + !` (example: `js0012121!`)
 - **This is exactly the same as your email password, web advisor password, and network password.**

WHAT IF I FORGET MY USERNAME, ID, OR PASSWORD?

- If you do not know your username or Student ID, please go to: <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/username> or call the Central Helpdesk at

1-866-718-5170. If you changed your password and do not remember or you do not know your password, please visit the password reset page for students at <http://www.muskegoncc.edu/password> or call Central Helpdesk @ 1-866-718-5170.

WHAT IF I HAVE PROBLEMS WITH MY EMAIL OR WITH BLACKBOARD—WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT?

Students have a 24/7 Central Helpdesk number to call: 1-866-718-5170.

CAN I USE BLACKBOARD WITH A MAC?

If you have a MAC computer with OS 10, according to Blackboard, you should be OK if the version is either MAC OS 10.4 or 10.5. Safari 2 Or 3 is compatible with Blackboard. You will also need Microsoft Word XP or above and PowerPoint or PowerPoint Viewer. Some courses may require plug ins like Real player, Adobe Acrobat and Macromedia Flash or Shockwave.

WHEN CAN I LOG INTO MY BLACKBOARD CLASSROOM?

Normally, students are added to the Blackboard class rosters right away and can log on to Blackboard. However, you may not see your class listed right away. See the next FAQ.

WHY IS MY CLASS NOT LISTED ON BLACKBOARD WHEN I HAVE REGISTERED AND PAID FOR THE CLASS?

Often instructors do not make their Blackboard classes available to students until the start date of class. You can check Web Advisor to make sure you are registered, or contact your instructor by email.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY TEST/QUIZ FREEZES WHILE IN BLACKBOARD?

Only your instructor can make the call on this. Contact him/her via email or phone. Do not call the HelpDesk or MCC's Information Technology Department.

CAN I USE THE COMPUTERS AT MUSKEGON COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO DO HOMEWORK?

Yes, you can complete your coursework on campus if you prefer. MCC's Library Labs are equipped with the necessary hardware and software for all classes.

WHAT IS THE MCCVLC?

Our course offerings are expanded by MCC's participation in the Michigan Community College Virtual Learning Collaborative (MCCVLC). If there is a class you need and MCC does not offer it online or it is full, check out the other offerings from Michigan community colleges by visiting <http://vcampus.mccvlc.org> -- click on the "course" link followed by the "catalog (schedule)" link.

Twenty-eight participating Michigan Community Colleges have agreed to offer many of their online classes through MCCVLC. This combined offering is growing each term and is substantial enough currently to stand alongside any member school's catalog. Here's the deal: If you are currently enrolled here, MCC is your "home college." Home Colleges agree to automatically transfer your credits earned at other "provider colleges" to your home school. (For testing, you may be required to come to school, but it's done at the home college in a proctored environment.) Remember, if you are a student here and wish to take an MCC online course, register for it in the normal manner, not through the MCCVLC ... it is less expensive!

WHAT OTHER STUDENTS SAY ABOUT TAKING ONLINE CLASSES—THEIR ADVICE

- Visit Blackboard daily—look at announcements to see if the instructor has posted something for you to read.
- Stay on top of the homework.
- Don't just read/watch the lectures, read the sections in the book too.
- Don't wait until the last minute to do homework—computer glitches happen!
- Check your MCC email daily.
- Stay in touch with your instructor—they can't read your mind!

WHAT ONLINE INSTRUCTORS SAY ABOUT TAKING ONLINE CLASSES—THEIR ADVICE

- **Have Integrity**—respect the Honor Code. Often an uncomfortable subject but a necessary one--don't attempt cheating. Believe it or not, it is easier to detect and investigate cheating with an online class.

Because instructors do not physically see students on a regular basis, they are more inclined to check for and investigate suspicious activities on a regular basis.

- **Check your EMAIL DAILY:** <http://muskegoncc.edu/pages/886.asp> -- this is how your instructor and the College communicate with you.
- **Check your Blackboard Course** for Announcements DAILY.
- **Have a BACKUP PLAN**—most instructors have due dates for assignments and quizzes. If you have a computer problem, it is your responsibility to have a back-up plan.
- **Don't be a dropout statistic**--work on solving any start-up problems with email, Bb logins, course due dates, and computer requirement questions immediately. Those students who don't get a head start on the course and fall behind at the beginning are the ones who lose out and often drop the course.
- **Attend class**--although virtual, class attendance is important; and your presence in the form of visiting and participating is expected. Instructors are able to "see" when and how often you are visiting your classroom.
- **Know yourself and your learning style**—think about how you approach new learning situations. Evaluating your own skills and preferences will help you select the type of learning that best fits your learning goals.
- **Pay attention to file formats**—when turning in work, make sure you know what file formats are acceptable; your instructor provides you with this information.
- **Do not procrastinate**—you may have questions for your instructor—waiting until the last minute to ask for help doesn't work.

SUMMARY OF TERMS USED IN ONLINE TEACHING/LEARNING

<i>Face-to-face</i>	Traditional classes held on campus
<i>Digital Dropbox</i>	A tool in Blackboard where students may be required to turn in assignments
<i>Upload</i>	Save to a remote location, such as the Digital Dropbox
<i>Download</i>	Save to a local computer, such as your desktop or your thumb drive
<i>Synchronous</i>	Communicating in “real time” or at the same time—to be online and chatting with your peers or instructors at the same time
<i>Asynchronous</i>	Communicating at different times—you do not need to be online at the same time as your peers or instructors—you browse, read, and respond at your own pace
<i>Plug ins</i>	Plug-ins help your browser perform specific functions like viewing special graphic formats or playing multimedia files. Plug ins are slightly different from extensions, which modify or add to existing functionality. Common plug-ins include: Adobe Flash, Adobe Reader, Real Player, Shockwave. They are free and easy to download.

