Online Frequently Asked Questions

(Prepared by Professor Maggie Burke)

This FAQ is a list of questions that are frequently asked about online learning and the answers to those questions. This FAQ is organized into categories. You can click on a category heading to jump to that category. You can also use your browser's search feature to search for a particular word or phrase within this document. If you don't see your question here, post it to the appropriate forum in the discussion boards.

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Professor Warren's FAQs

Q: What time are we supposed to be online from when to when? Do they vary from day to day or is it a set schedule?

A: There are no specific times when you must be online. You will be able to access the course site whenever it is convenient for you. There are specific days of the week when certain activities must be completed, but you can complete them at any time before that.

This is an "asynchronous course".   **Asynchronous** activities take place outside of real time. Discussion board messages can be added at any time and read at the learners' leisure; you do not read someone else's message as it is being created, and you can take as much time as you need to respond to the post. Asynchronous activities take place whenever learners have the time to complete them. For example, viewing videos linked to the course site, reading a textbook, and writing a paper are all asynchronous activities

Q: Do we ACTUALLY use the text? Do I need to purchase it?

A: Absolutely. Each week we will discuss concepts presented in your text. In some cases I will assign a case study found only in your text, or refer you to an exhibit.

Q: Where can I find assignments and due dates?

A: Along with your syllabus that I mailed to you before classes started was a tentative schedule of course content. Our tentative schedule is also available from the Course Menu; see "Course Schedule". I provide this for those of you that may need to plan ahead.

Each week usually on Sunday evening, I will also post a prompt on the homepage of the week's upcoming activities. All Assignments are available to you from within the Unit or Chapter Module.

Class activities usually run from Monday through Sunday, accommodating those students who rely on the weekends to complete their assignments. Specific Due dates are rare. In general all weekly activities should be completed by Sunday evening.

Q: Where do I find my small group?

A: Throughout the semester, due to the nature of the topic and to familiarize students with the group function for major team projects, I have opted to use small group discussions. Your group will appear from the "My Group" on the course menu and I have provided a link within the Chapter/Unit Materials for the week. Within your group you will have access to various collaboration tools. To view those options click on the title of the topic. On the Group Homepage you will see the assignment, names of group members and access to the tools.

Q: A new text has an access code to the text website. Do I need it? Can I purchase a used text without an access code?

A: Unless specified in the syllabus, accessing the text website may not be required.

Q: Where do I find a Mobile App for Blackboard?

A: Instructions for downloading are available here:
http://www.ccri.edu/it/blackboard/mobile_learn.html

Apps for mobile devices might also be available for your specific text. However, it is not recommended that you rely on the Mobile App to complete assignments.

Technology

Q: What hardware and software do I need to take an online class?

 A: This page on CCRI's IT website tells you the minimum hardware and software requirements to use Blackboard:
http://www.ccri.edu/it/blackboard/computer_browser_plugin_requirements.html

It's possible that your professor will be using other software, such as a Pearson mylab product. If so, you will need to check the requirements for that software. Your professor will supply you with a website with those requirements.

Q: What computer skills do I need to take an online class?

 A: You should have the following skills:

- You should know how to use your own computer's operating system to install and uninstall software, to create and zip folders, and to organize your files.
- You should be able to use a browser (such as Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari, or Chrome).
- You should know how to use a text editor or word processor and email.
- If your professor requires specialized software for the class, you should learn how to use that software.

It's also important that you know where to get help should any problems arise.

Q: Is there any way to know when systems are going to go down?

A: Usually. IT maintains a system status page that will keep you informed of planned system downtime. It's here:
http://webfor.ccri.edu/systemstatus/systemstatus.cfm?StartRow=1&endrow=5

However, it's important to understand that sometimes emergencies happen that are beyond our control. It's therefore a good idea to always have a back-up plan.

Q: How do I take a quiz/exam in an online course?

A: The orientation in this module has an introduction to taking tests (quizzes, exams) in Blackboard. To start, your professor will tell you when and how to take a test. You may use your regular browser, but you might be required to download a special browser called Respondus for taking tests. Your test might be open only for a brief window (several hours or several days), and it might be timed. There are a lot of options in Blackboard and so each test might be unique.

It's also possible that your professor will require you to come to a campus for tests. You can check the syllabus or ask the professor if this is a requirement for your course.

Q: How do I hand in assignments in an online course?

A: There are many different ways to submit assignments in an online course, so you should follow your professor's instructions. Possibilities include submitting your assignment by attaching it to an email message, attaching it using in-course messaging, or attaching it using an assignment file upload (an assignment link the professor will create in the course -- some faculty call this a dropbox). The orientation in this module has a section on attaching files that you might find helpful.

Q: How do I post to discussion boards in Bb?

A: The orientation in this module has an introduction to posting to discussion boards. To summarize briefly, you will follow your professor's instructions regarding how to prepare before posting (for example, what assignments to complete first), and you will then find the appropriate

forum. Select the forum, and either start a new thread or find the thread the professor has asked you to respond to. You should spend time composing a thoughtful, spell-checked, and grammatically correct response. You can construct your response in a word processor or text editor so that you can save a copy on your hard drive (and so it can help you with grammar and spelling). Then copy your answer and paste it into your post or response in the discussion forum.

Q: My computer crashed, and I've lost my work in Blackboard. What do I do?

A: That's not good. Ideally you had created most of your work outside of Blackboard (for example, in a word processor), and were only pasting it in. Restart your computer and browser and try again. You should contact the help desk to report the problem and for advice on recovering your lost work, and also to let your professor know there was a problem. (Hopefully you weren't submitting at the last minute!)

In the future, run the browser check at the beginning of the semester and also if there are changes to your computer. This will ensure your browser is compatible with Blackboard. Follow the advice from the browser check page to change browser settings and install plug-ins as needed. Then, do as much work as possible outside of Blackboard and paste it in.

Personal challenges

Q: I thought online classes would make it easier for me to balance school and family issues, but it's not working that way. What can I do?

A: This is a common problem that students face, especially when they're taking online classes. It seems as if an online class should be easy to fit around your other obligations, but often it's as hard or harder than an in-person class. Some students find that family members are less helpful and supportive when the class is online – they assume that the student should be able to "put it off for now," or that "it's not a real class." They may not realize what online classes are really about and how hard and how much work they often are.

 While every situation is different, an open conversation with other family members who might be able to offer support may be helpful. You might try to see if a friend, partner, or parent could take some caregiving responsibilities off of your shoulders for a few hours a week. You might even find that things work better if the other people in your life realize how important your classes are to your ability to achieve your goals: a degree, a better job, a better life.

You might also find that CCRI's counseling services can help you work through some of the problems you face or help you develop techniques to deal with them more effectively so that your school work does not suffer. They can also put you in touch with other resources in the area. Counseling services are available to all enrolled CCRI students. You can learn more by going to: https://www.ccri.edu/advising/. or by calling (401) 825-2301 (Knight), (401) 333-7160 (Flanagan), (401) 455-6063 (Liston), or 401-851-1625 (Newport).

Q: I thought online classes would make it easier for me to balance work and school issues, but it's not working that way. What can I do?

A: Balancing work and school is a common problem for students regardless of whether they take their classes in a classroom or online. It's a tough task. You need to work to pay your bills, but you need to do well in school so you can get the degree that will lead to a better job in the long run. It can be a very difficult balance to strike. Many students find that being very detailed in their weekly scheduling and following that schedule to the minute is really important to their success. Some of the tips in the organization section of the FAQ may be helpful. If you schedule study time and paper writing time just the same as you schedule work into your week, you may find that it's easier to make the most out of the time you do have. With any class, you should expect about 3 hours per week of class-time (which, in a DL class, may translate to time spent watching or reading lectures and supplemental materials, and posting to course discussion boards) and another 6-9 hours per week of time spent in other activities, like reading, studying, writing papers, doing homework or problem sets, working on projects, and the like. In a 7-day week, see if you can find a way to dedicate 1-2 hours PER DAY for your DL class.

Q: I have things going on in my life that have nothing to do with school, but they're making it so I just can't deal with it all. What can I do?

A: Life happens. It doesn't care whether you're in school or not, whether a major deadline for a class project is tomorrow, whether you were just required to work overtime. People often have all kinds of painful challenges and woes, some of them sudden. Yet your school expectations continue.

The Counseling and Advising center at CCRI may be a good place to seek support or help finding resources to help you with the problems that interfere with your school success. They can also put you in touch with other resources in the area. Counseling services are available to all enrolled CCRI students. You can learn more by going to: https://www.ccri.edu/advising/ or by calling (401) 825-2301 (Knight), (401) 333-7160 (Flanagan), (401) 455-6063 (Liston), or 401-851-1625 (Newport).

Organization, planning, and time management

Q: Without a professor reminding me of due dates and other details every class, I'm starting to forget deadlines and fall behind What do I do?

A: A calendar that sends you text or email reminders might be helpful. Go through each syllabus for each class and enter your deadlines into the calendar, and set the calendar to send you whatever kind of reminder will work well for you. You might break your projects down into smaller pieces and put reminders in for those as well. .

Q: I'm getting behind in my class(es), and I'm afraid I won't catch up. Help me!

A: What can you give up? (Social media, video games, going out on the weekend?) You might have to give something up in the short term to meet your goal of completing your classes this semester. Remind yourself of why you're doing this and how your courses contribute to your long-term goals, and then pick something that you can give up for the semester to give yourself extra time

Q: There are so many things due, so many different rules and deadlines – I can't keep them all straight. What can I do?

A: It will help you to have a system for keeping track of rules and deadlines.

For rules, find a way to keep track of the rules for each class, and to check over those rules before you submit an assignment or take action in class, to make sure that you're on track. For example, you could print the rules for each class and keep them together in a folder next to your computer. When you are getting ready to submit work, review the rules and check them against your work. Be sure to give yourself time before the assignment is due to make revisions in case you've forgotten a rule. If you're still having trouble in a particular class, you might contact your professor and ask for advice.

For deadlines, a calendar that sends you text or email reminders might be helpful. Go through each syllabus for each class and enter your deadlines into the calendar, and set the calendar to send you whatever kind of reminder will work well for you. You might break your projects down into smaller pieces and put reminders in for those as well

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Communication

Q: How do I communicate effectively online?

A: 1. Research before you react.

    2. Follow 'the five c's' and be: complete, concise, clear, considerate, and correct.

    3. Proofread before sending or posting.

    4. Find a tone for your writing that lets you sound like yourself.

CCRI Services

Q: I have a disability (physical, emotional, and/or learning). Are accommodations available for DL classes?

A: Yes. You will need to request accommodations, just as you do for an on-campus course. Visit the Disability Services for Students website (http://www.ccri.edu/dss/) for more information.

Q: I'm having a problem with Blackboard. Who can I call?

A: You should make a note of the system and browser that you're using. If you made any changes prior to the problem, it will be helpful to note them (for example, a browser or system

upgrade or new hardware). Then contact the IT service desk (http://www.ccri.edu/it/helpdesk/). You can also try asking a question in the Technology Forum, here in OnGOALS.

Q: My email / myCCRI account isn't working correctly. Who can I call?

A: Contact the IT service desk (http://www.ccri.edu/it/helpdesk/).

Q: I need tutoring. Who do I call?

A: All of CCRI's on-campus services are available to online students as well (you will probably need to come to a campus to access these services). Take a look at the websites for the Student Sucess Center (http://www.ccri.edu/success/), and the Writing Center (http://www.ccri.edu/writingcenter/).

Q: I need technology help. Who do I call?

A: Contact the IT service desk (http://www.ccri.edu/it/helpdesk/). You can also try asking a question in the Technology Forum, here in OnGOALS.

About online courses

Q: Who can take DL classes?

A: Anyone can take an online course. Just as with on-campus courses, there might be prerequisites for individual courses.

Q: Are these real classes? Do the credits count the same as with "normal" classes?

A: Online courses are real college courses. You will be engaged in a rigorous, academic experience, and you will learn the same content as the equivalent on-campus course. Our online courses are taught by CCRI faculty who are experienced and specially trained in online teaching. There is no difference between an online and on-campus course on your transcript.

Q: What can I expect when I sign up for an online class? Do we ever meet in person?

A: The Learn How it Works page on the Distance Learning website gives a general overview of the online experience. (http://www.ccri.edu/distance/howitworks.html) All online courses are different. There are two basic types: fully online and hybrid. A hybrid course will require you to come to campus throughout the semester, but probably not more than once a week. An online course might require up to three meetings on campus and on-campus testing, or you may never come to campus. Your professor will contact you before the semester begins with details, and you can write to a professor prior to registering for a course to find out how the course you're interested in works.

Q: Don't all online courses use Blackboard? My class is using a different site.

A: Most courses use Blackboard, but some faculty prefer to use a different learning management system (also called a course management system). Your faculty member might use MyCourses, located in MyCCRI, or he or she might use a publisher's learning management system. Your faculty member will provide links and registration information for the website that he or she is using.

Q: Online classes have to be easier than in-person classes, right?

A: All courses are different, and just as with on-campus courses, the difficulty of an online course will vary with the professor, subject matter, and your own background and abilities.

There are some challenges to taking courses online that you might not face on campus. You will need to keep yourself motivated and organized, and you will need to recognize when you need help, and seek it out.

An online course, because it does not meet on-campus, will include work that makes up for the missed lectures and in-class discussions. You can therefore expect an online course to take as much time as its on-campus equivalent. (That is a minimum of two hours of homework for every contact hour, plus contact hours, per week. That means a minimum of nine hours of work for a three-credit course per week.) But you won't have to commute to campus!

Q: How am I supposed to contact my professor?

A: Your professor will provide contact information for you -- either on the syllabus, in email messages, in the course site, or in all of these places. You can also look up your professor using one of the directories available on the CCRI website. (http://www.ccri.edu/directories.html)

Generally in online courses, you will communicate with your professor through email or in-course messaging. You can always call your professor at his or her office, and you can get help from your professor during his or her scheduled office hours.

Q: How do I interact with my professor if I never see him/her?

A: Interaction with your professor will be built into the course through some or all of the following:

- Email or in-course messaging
- Discussion boards or other communication tools (such as blogs or journals)
- Assignment submission and feedback
- Quizzes and tests and feedback

You can always email your professor or call at his or her office, and you can visit your professor's scheduled office hours.

Q: How do I interact with other students?

A: Interaction with other students will be built into your course through some or all of the following:

- Email or in-course messaging
- Discussion boards or other communication tools (such as blogs or journals)
- Group projects

It's possible that there will be no formal interaction with other students built into your course.

Q: Do I have to be online at a certain time in order to participate?

A: This will depend on the course, but generally synchronous communication (communication that occurs at the same time) is not required in online courses at CCRI.

Your assignments will have deadlines, and it's recommended that you log into your course a minimum of three times per week. You should also check your CCRI email a minimum of once per day.

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- You should know how to use your own computer's operating system to install and uninstall software, to create and zip folders, and to organize your files.
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- You should know how to use a text editor or word processor and email.
- If your professor requires specialized software for the class, you should learn how to use that software.

It's also important that you know where to get help, should any problems arise.

 Q: Where can I buy my book?

A: You can purchase your textbooks at any of the CCRI bookstores. (https://www.ccri.edu/bookstore/) You can also use the CCRI bookstore website to purchase your text online. This page contains instructions for online purchases from the CCRI bookstore: https://www.ccri.edu/bookstore/ordering.html