Student Guide for Online Education

This booklet is designed to assist the MSUM student in online courses.
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Introduction to Online Education

Minnesota State University Moorhead is committed to excellence in education and that commitment is extended to our online courses and programs. Many of MSUM’s campus courses are now available online, providing you, the student, with the flexibility to learn from our dedicated instructors in the convenience of your own home.

What is Online Education?

Online Education is where the instructor and student are separated by distance, but brought together by technology in a formal learning process.

MSUM offers several online programs (http://www.mnstate.edu/online.aspx). A complete listing of all MSUM courses is available online (https://webproc.mnscu.edu/registration/search/basic.html?campusid=072).

Be sure to click on the ‘Expand/Collapse for Advanced Search’ and from the Delivery Method section select ‘Online (web only)’ so that you are only searching through the classes that are offered strictly online.

Qualities of Online Learners

Are you ready to be an online learner? Two important questions that you need to ask yourself include:

1. Are you self-motivated?
2. Do you have technology skills and availability?

Take the following survey to see if you are ready for online learning. This is a tool to help you make an informed decision regarding your learning comfort zone.

This is not to be seen as any type of evaluation of your possible success/failure in any online program, but rather your readiness for online learning.

Self-Assessment: Am I Ready for Online Learning?

Computer Access and Equipment

1. Do you have access to a computer at home?
2. Do you have access to the Internet at home?

Computer Skills

1. Do you know how to send and receive email attachments?
2. Have you used the Internet for communication and electronic discussions (chat rooms, discussion boards, etc.)?
3. Can you follow written directions that describe how to use a particular piece of software or technology?
4. Can you download and install plug-ins and updates for your browser, or would you be able to follow written directions to accomplish this?

Time Commitments

1. Can you schedule several hours per week for the online learning activities and homework that will be required? (As an example: A three-credit course may require at least 6 – 9 hours per week. Note that these hours can often be anytime during the day or night.)
Learning Style/Attitudes
1. Are you a self-motivated person?
2. Can you read and understand material independently?
3. Do you avoid procrastinating when it comes to homework and deadlines?
4. Can you communicate effectively through writing?
5. Do you enjoy reflecting and sharing experiences as part of the learning process?
6. Do you think that high quality learning can take place without regular face-to-face interaction with the teacher and the rest of the class?
7. Do you think taking a class online will be just as challenging as taking the class in a traditional setting?
8. Do you prefer written feedback on projects and assignments?

If you answered ‘yes’ to a majority of the questions, online learning may be the right option for you.

Frequently Asked Questions about Online Learning

FAQ-1
Do I need to come to MSUM Campus?

Some courses are taught in a hybrid setting - meaning that some courses are part online and part face-to-face. Other courses are completely online. The online course catalog will tell you if the course is hybrid or completely online.

Library Services for Distance Learning are also available off campus; as long as you have Internet access and a StarID, you will have access to the Library’s online database.

FAQ-2
Can I just take a course, or do I have to be accepted as an MSUM student?

You need to be registered as a student at MSUM to take courses; whether online, hybrid, or in class. To enroll in entirely online courses, you must fill out an online application (https://webproc.mnscu.edu/admissions/welcome.do?campusId=072).

FAQ-3
Do I need to be available and on the computer every day during the course?

You will get the most from participating with your instructor and other students in the course if you are regularly participating in the course’s discussion board and other assigned activities. However, one advantage to being an online learner is that there is often no set schedule for your participation, so you have the opportunity to participate when your schedule allows, as long as you meet the deadlines set by your instructor.

You can expect to spend at least as much time on an online course as you would if you took the class in a traditional classroom setting on campus. There is often a significant amount of reading and writing, and you may need to log in to your course and check the News announcements and discussion forums several times a week, if not daily.

As a rule, you should anticipate two to three hours of work each week for every credit hour the course is worth. For example, for a three-credit course you should expect to spend at least six to nine hours working on that...
course every week. If you are taking more than one course, then you should expect to spend that amount of time on each course each week.

FAQ-4
How will I know when the course begins?

The course will start on the date indicated in eServices. Once you have registered for the course, your instructor will email a welcome letter to your MSUM email account approximately 1-2 weeks before the course begins. This welcome letter will give you detailed information about the course, such as any course date exceptions, course materials such as books, and technical requirements that will enable you to have a positive learning experience. Your instructor will usually also give you his/her email address so that you may contact them if you have any additional questions.

FAQ-5
How do I get my course books?

The welcome letter that you receive will have the information needed to order your course textbooks. You may order the textbooks from the MSUM bookstore: http://bookstore.mnstate.edu/.

FAQ-6
What do asynchronous and synchronous mean?

Most courses are asynchronous which refers to communication not occurring at the same time. Some instructors use synchronous communication tools such as WebEx to deliver real-time class sessions. Your instructor will let you know if your course is totally asynchronous or has some synchronous components.

FAQ-7
What if I cannot login to D2L Brightspace?

Contact the IT Help Desk through email at support@mnstate.edu or by phone 218-477-2603.

Requirements of Online Learners

Computing Knowledge

Online learners must able to use basic Internet functions and have a moderate amount of skill with commonly used software applications such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel, etc. In addition, you must have knowledge on how to store and upload files and how to use email. Be sure that you will have constant access to a computer and Internet source when needed for your class.

Organizing Your Time

Set aside a time that works for your schedule on a daily basis to sit down and work in the online course. 2-3 hours per week of study time for each credit is recommended. Online learners should check their course News announcements and Discussions several times a week, if not daily.

You must be able to motivate yourself independently and be able to sort out your time efficiently. Do not rely solely on your instructor to remind you of due dates and participation expectations. You must be self-disciplined.
Communication Skills

Communication with your instructor and other students is an integral part of the online learning environment. Three common ways you can expect to communicate with your instructor include email, online course discussion boards, and possibly phone or web conferencing.

Online learners need the ability to communicate effectively using the written word. In addition, online learners should be comfortable expressing themselves and reflecting on the information covered within the course platform, while being as clear and concise as possible. Because your instructor is unable to see your non-verbal body language, it is essential that if you are having difficulties with any aspect of the course that you let your instructor know immediately, falling behind in an online course results in most students being unable to catch up with the rest of the learners. You need to feel comfortable asking questions if you have them. You aren’t on your own in an online class; the instructor is still there to answer questions through email or discussion posts.

Virtual Research through MSUM’s Library Services

MSUM’s Livingston Lord Library is dedicated to providing the online learner with resources equivalent to those used by students taking face-to-face courses. To meet the needs of online learners, the Library has a full-time distance learning librarian. This librarian, Travis Dolence (dolence@mnstate.edu), is available to assist distance students via phone, email, chat, voice-over-Internet (e.g., Skype), or web conferencing software. Please see the Library’s main distance education site (http://libguides.mnstate.edu/c.php?g=183297) for assistance. Services offered by the Library include:

- **Delivery of books**
  The Library will mail books from its collection to students taking online courses.

- **Reference assistance**
  The library can provide assistance for students who need help with any aspect of research, including in-depth consultations related to large research projects.

- **Help with access to online databases**
  If you have problems accessing databases please email Travis Dolence at dolence@mnstate.edu.

Online Discussions

Responsibilities

D2L Brightspace has a discussion component in which the learner is expected to interact with the instructor and other learners in the course. Below are some guidelines to follow when using an asynchronous communication in the course platform.

Discussion Forum Ideas

If you are to develop as a thinker, you will need to develop as a writer as well. In online courses your discussion takes the form of writing being we do not meet face-to-face. To develop as a writer, you must impose upon yourself the same standards good writers impose upon themselves. The key question teachers will ask themselves as they grade your written work is “What specifically does your writing demonstrate about your ability to reason/think?”
As you discuss/write, here are some key points you should keep in mind:

- Make clear the question or issue you are discussing or you will drift. Clarify the question you are focused on and stick to that question throughout the discussion. Show how each point is relevant to that question. Are you answering the question for discussion?

- You should give examples and illustrations wherever clarification of your meaning is needed. When you do not give concrete examples and illustrations to make your point clear, you demonstrate that you do not know how to clarify your thought, or for some reason have chosen not to. You should make clear the logical relations between the sentences and paragraphs you write. Use transitional words and critical vocabulary.

- Analyze key concepts whenever it is needed.

- When you write sentences that can be interpreted in many different ways (and you do not make clear which meaning you intend), you demonstrate that you are thinking in a vague way. You should therefore strive to write so that you make clear precisely what you mean. Ask others to critique your work.

- Do not make sweeping generalizations or judgments about positions you have not sufficiently analyzed. If you do that, you are demonstrating ignorance and lack of perspective. Demonstrate that you have considered all reasonable ways of looking at an issue.

- Of course you should use correct spelling and grammar. Occasional misspellings or poor word usage is human. Sometimes our fingers move slower than our minds and we type in error. Be sure to review your writing.

- In a discussion, others will comment on your thoughts. Do they agree or disagree? Each participant will have introduced themselves and based on their past experience, you might want to request specific classmates to comment on their experience. This makes the discussion more helpful and interesting.

If you feel like you need more help with improving your writing skills, or need other tutoring assistance, visit Smarthinking on the Academic Support Center web site (http://www.mnstate.edu/asc/onlinetutoring.aspx).

**Study Tips**

Use these easy course organization, scheduling and study skills tips for becoming a successful online learner.

1. Get familiar with the course.

2. Read the course syllabus.

   The course syllabus contains all of the information a student needs to progress through an online course.
3. Identify the tools required to complete the course.

Make sure you have access to all of the technology requirements to take the course. You should consult your course syllabus to find out the exact technology requirements for your course. Check with your instructor if you have questions.

4. Develop a regular schedule for doing assignments.

5. Avoid distractions and interruptions during the time you have reserved for studying. Turn off your cell phone and find a place to study that is free from distractions.

6. Actively keep in contact with your instructor.

Instructors are available by phone and email. Some may even keep regular online office hours. Contact your instructor regularly, especially when you have trouble understanding course content.

7. Find study partners.

Online students sometimes feel that they are missing interaction with other students that they might find in a traditional classroom environment. Identify an individual or small group of people from within your course to study with you.

8. Prepare for assignments and tests.

Course assignments can involve the use of different mediums - print, video, audio, online text, or Internet searches. Develop a thorough set of notes and review the components from each medium before taking tests.

9. Set interim goals and deadlines.

Keep a calendar showing the number of weeks in the term and mark the assignments due and tests to take each week. Stick to the schedule and don't fall behind!

10. Evaluate your progress regularly.

Re-read the course objectives and your schedule of goals to see how you are progressing with them.

**Technology Requirements**

Taking online courses doesn’t require any special hardware or software to run the course platform. However, you will need reliable access to a broadband Internet connection.

MSUM provides an email address to all registered students.

Your computer should have a sound and video card to experience multimedia online. Speakers, a microphone headset, and a webcam are recommended. You may also need special software programs called plug-ins.
Perform a System Check to make sure your computer’s software will be compatible with the course platforms: http://www.mnstate.edu/instructional-technology/computer-check.aspx.

Software

Some courses will require that you have special software or additional components. You should consult your course syllabus to find out the exact technology requirements for your course.

At a minimum you should have access to a word processing program (such as MS Word) and your computer should be equipped with anti-virus software.

MSUM Technologies

There are many different types of technologies exercised by the instructors at MSUM. You can visit the Instructional Technology Services (ITS) site to see more information on these technologies. Once instructed on the technology the course you are enrolled in uses, you can find any tutorials or help at the ITS web page: http://www.mnstate.edu/instructional-technology/.

Course Platform Used at MSUM

A course platform is where you will login to your course to view announcements, course readings, instructions, and directions from your instructor. Some instructors may choose to use a course platform hosted by a textbook publisher, but the main education platform at MSUM is called D2L Brightspace.

D2L Brightspace

Instructors using D2L Brightspace can include online quizzes, tests, discussions, and more. Courses that are not completely or partially online may choose to use D2L Brightspace to display grades or post content (such as PowerPoints presented in class). Be sure to note whether or not your instructor is using D2L Brightspace as these tools are both helpful and, at times, necessary. For more information and help documents, visit ITS’s D2L support web page: http://www.mnstate.edu/instructional-technology/desire2learn/.

Login to D2L Brightspace

1. Login at https://mnstate.ims.mnscu.edu/

2. Your StarID and password are the same login you use as your email and eServices.

Internet Etiquette (Netiquette)

Netiquette refers to the basic rules of courtesy that apply to all who use the Internet. The most important netiquette pointers are:

- Remember the persons on the other side, whether it be the recipient of your email, is human. Treat them with the same respect you would like to receive and help keep the information community a friendly place to visit.

- Remember that your work reflects on you as a person. Never assume privacy or anonymity. Once you send an email message or post to a discussion or news group, you lose control of what happens to your message. The recipients may share or forward information you expected to be confidential with anyone they choose. In addition, messages may be backed up on the senders and/or receivers server.
• Be understanding of others. Remember, electronic communication provides only a screen of words... no body language or expression. If there is a misunderstanding, feel free to accept the blame for failure to clearly state or understand the intended message. If you must correct an error received online, be gentle.

• Email messages should be polite and as short as possible while still getting your point across. Subject lines should be descriptive to help the recipient prioritize their mail. If you send attachments, be sure the recipient has a large enough mail quota and the appropriate mail reader to receive them.

Copyright

Copyright law, which allows the creator of an original work to benefit from it, applies to the Internet as well as printed publications. When you find information on the Internet, you must cite it in the same way you would any other publication.

Students with Disabilities

Minnesota State University Moorhead is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

• If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g. mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory or physical) please contact the DRC at (218) 477-4318 (V) or (800)627.3529 (MRS/TTY) to schedule an appointment for an intake.

• Additional information is available on the DRC website: http://www.mnstate.edu/disability/

• If you are registered with the DRC and have a current Accommodation Letter, please schedule an appointment to visit with me, during my office hours, to discuss implementation of your accommodations.

Academic Honesty

The University expects all students to represent themselves in an honest fashion. In academic work, students are expected to present original ideas and give credit for the ideas of others. The value of a college degree depends on the integrity of the work completed by the student.

When an instructor has convincing evidence of cheating or plagiarism, a failing grade may be assigned for the course in which the student cheated. Instructors also may choose to report the offense, the evidence, and their action to the Dean of their college or the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs. If the instructor (or any other person) feels the seriousness of the offense warrants additional action, the incident may be reported to the Director of Student Conduct and Resolution. The Director of Student Conduct and Resolution will follow procedures set out in the Student Conduct Code. After the review of the case and a fair, unbiased hearing, the Director of Student Conduct and Resolution may take disciplinary action if the student is found responsible (see Student Conduct Code for details).
A student who has a course grade reduced by an instructor because of cheating or plagiarism, and who disputes the instructor’s finding, may appeal the grade, but only by using the Grade Appeal Policy, which states that the student must prove the grade was arbitrary, prejudicial, or in error.

For more information on Student Policies, please refer to MSUM’s Student Handbook: http://www.mnstate.edu/student-handbook/.

**Important Contacts**

**IT Help Desk**

For technology help call 218-477-2603, email support@mnstate.edu or visit the Help Desk web page: http://www.mnstate.edu/helpdesk/

**eServices**

MSUM’s Online Registration Services: http://www.mnstate.edu/eservices/

**Academic Resources**

MSUM’s online listing of Academic Resources available to all MSUM students: http://www.mnstate.edu/academics/academicresources.aspx