

Characteristics of Distance Students

Age - Distance learning students are usually older comparing with typical students engaged in campus-based programs. In 2004 the amount of graduate school students was 73%, their age was under 35 years old. One can say that the age of distance learning students is getting younger.

Gender - It was researched that from 60% to 77% distance learning students used to be women. The latest research shows that 75% of distance learning students are men.

Employment Status - More than half of distance learning students have full-time jobs, their quantity is from 77% to 90%. The reason why people study at distance learning courses is a chance to achieve advance in their careers.

Marital Status – It is not exactly known about the marital status of distance learning students. It is known that they have to combine study with their work and family.

Status - 83% of distance learning students study at individual courses. 23% combine campus-based and distance learning education to have more scheduling flexibility.

Students who study effectively on distance learning programs possess the following characteristics:

Internal Locus of Control - The students of distance learning courses control more their work and productivity comparing with students engaged in campus-based programs. Their success depends on their inner control and efforts.

Self-directedness - Distance learning students have such necessary quality as self-directedness, they control their own learning and success. The instructor should give directions and recommendations to distant students, who self-direct their efforts and work to follow those directions.

Various Traits of Character - Distance learning students possess such qualities as being intelligent, emotionally stable, trusting, compulsive, passive, conforming, self-sufficient and introverted.

Learning Styles - There is no dependency between various sensory-type learning styles such as auditory, visual, or tactile and the tendency of students to study in distance learning courses. Distance learning students learn from different content types and activities. They are less dependent to others in the educational environment comparing with campus students.

Motivation – People choose distance learning programs, because they are convenient and they are not time-bound. Such people have little free time, therefore, they need to combine study with their schedules, and they find it comfortable. Besides, received instructions motivate them.

People study at distance learning courses, because they want to achieve enhancement in their careers. Therefore, their attitude to work is responsible. Distance learning students have little free time to pay attention to the details of assignments. Therefore, instructors should provide them with a clear and detailed syllabus. Instructors should understand that their students may be busy with work and family and sometimes have no time for assignments.

Common Mistakes

Navigating the distance learning world can be tricky. Online students must be ready to work independently and carefully as not all of online courses and schools are reliable. As you continue your journey through the maze of virtual learning, avoid these seven common mistakes of distance learners and save yourself some hassle:

- 1. Choosing the wrong school.** It is the most difficult task for every online student to choose the right school. “Diploma mill” schools charge unsuspecting students thousands of dollars for worthless degrees, whereas credentialed, trustworthy schools are able to give their students diplomas to be proud of. Before accepting the offer from online establishment, see its accreditation and registration data, do some kind of research to find more about the school, certificates programs that it offers.
- 2. Procrastinating.** This problem appears when students are to make their tasks at home by their own speed. Many students never finish their degree because they lack the self-discipline and motivation to sit down and get their work done on a daily basis. If you don’t know how to set yourself to work, define some concrete goals to reach during the separate parts of completing.. Many students have found it beneficial to create a deadline for receiving their degree and set smaller monthly, weekly, and daily goals that will allow them to reach that deadline.
- 3. The problem of connecting your professors and friends may appear.** One of the most rewarding experiences in education is learning through collaboration. You will learn more if you have good relations with both your colleagues and the professorate staff, but you should not rely only of them, make your own decisions and don’t be afraid to express your own opinion. Don’t let yourself miss out on the benefits of these relationships just because your classrooms are online. Connect the study board by email correspondence, phone and other suitable for you recourses.
- 4. Overpayment.** The sad truth is that school is pricy. Your education will need to spend a lot of money, so calculate if the costs for your expensed will be justified. You don’t want to find yourself making a \$30,000 teacher’s salary while paying back a \$100,000 student loan. (Too bad, but it is not an excretion). However, an MBA from a reputable school may be worth a significant student loan in the long run. No matter what you choose, take loans only if you are sure you take them for things worth the expenses and make an effort to keep some money for a rainy day. Books and supplies can often be found at significantly lower prices (or even for free) if you know where to look and most computer and software companies offer huge discounts for currently enrolled students.
- 5. Scaring potential employers.** The number of people who discover the strong points of online education is growing gradually. However, be aware that it is not completely accepted by all people. There is a number of employers who will be suspicious when you show them an online degree. A lot of people are still ignorant of the advances online education has made in recent years and fail to recognize the difference between legitimate degrees and “diploma mill” certificates. Though it is quite normal practice, avoid mentioning that your degree is an online one; some people consider it to be not very eligible. It may not make a difference, but it may end up saving you a lot of hassle.
- 6. Not getting credit where credit is due.** Beginning to learn online you will already use some knowledge of your predecessors. If you have credit from previous schools, make sure to have transcripts sent to your online university and have the counselors check for course equivalency. You may claim to transfer

your transcripts from your previous school. (Just make sure you do a good job of stating your case). You may be allowed to receive credit for life experience, based on different data and a number of reviews. Check with your school's counselors to see how you can get credit for what you already know.

7. Remaining ignorant of online resources. Online students have a lot of educational material to deal with, just consider the sources of getting this material. Be aware of general resources such as virtual dictionaries, research help, and online books, as well as resources that relate to your specialized subject matter. If you find a couple of site to pump the necessary information from, you will not need to spend money on lots of educational paper literature.

Effective Distance Education Strategies

Pay attention to seven strategies required for effective Distance Learning.

Distance learning is special, you do not see or meet the teacher and do not have classmates, but nevertheless you can study successfully when you plan your work in advance. Pay attention to the following seven strategies required for effective distance learning.

1. Determine purposes.

- You should have such objective: "I will succeed in this course."
- Before starting a new course, you should look through the materials and divide the lessons/assignments into parts that can be easily managed. Sometimes, it is difficult to go through the whole lesson, so plan for how much material you can go through, then return to it until you have finished the work.

2. Determine a constant study/learning schedule.

- Have a calendar or journal where you will write your study goals and mark important dates. Do not forget to look at it daily to remind you what and when you are to do.
- Determine when you study the most effectively. When you have a possibility to stay alone, none should interrupt you and you can completely devote yourself to study.
- Have frequent breaks, during which you can walk around, stretch, drink or eat something.
- It is recommended to have a special study place, where all the supplies such as computer, paper, pens, calculator, etc is available.
- Have your own speed of learning. Do not hurry, it is more important for you to obtain required knowledge than to receive a certificate.

3. Let people know about your distance course!

- Inform people about your distance course. They can help you or at least do not interrupt you.
- Ask a friend to help you.
- Ask a friend to correct your work before you send it to your instructor.

4. Join a study group!

- Join a club, it can be a local investing club.
- If you want to master a foreign language such as Spanish or Japanese, ask the owners of a local restaurant if they can get acquainted you with anyone who wants to do language exchange with you.
- Have consultations with specialists in spheres you are learning. If you study a course about health or medicine, ask a nurse or pharmacist for a consultation, at least once a month.
- Look in the Internet bulletin boards or chat rooms that are linked with the course you are studying.

5. Determine your learning style and apply it!

- Search for real-world situations and examples of the things you're learning about. If the area of your study is civil engineering, search the information related with bridges.
- It is more interesting to be engaged in the area you are studying than to read about a topic.
- Use the received knowledge in practice. The received knowledge of accounting can be used in practice while balancing your checkbook.

6. Celebrate successes in your study!

- Celebrate successes in your study and frequently reward yourself. You have deserved it! Be proud of your achievements!

7. Ask Questions.

- If you have some difficulties, don't be afraid to ask.

Such basic strategies will help you to master effectively a distant course. Learnt material should be memorized. For this purpose, you are to repeat the necessary learning material several times during some days and frequently apply this material. Besides, you will better remember the material that appeals to you.

Effective Distant Learning

Pay attention to the following tips and strategies that can provide effective distant learning.

1) Ask former students of the course about its drawbacks and benefits.

Ask former students of the course what was easy to learn and what caused difficulties. Let them tell you their point of view concerning the course's drawbacks "if only I had known that . . ."

2) Acknowledge with the course design.

Pay attention to the course syllabus before registration. Find out if this particular study content suits you and you will be a successful self-directed learner.

3) Be realistic.

If you suffer from lack of time and cannot do the work of the course, it will lead to your disappointment and frustration. It is not necessary to maintain a class attendance schedule, but you should do regular academic work.

4) Have intermediate purposes and terms of work.

If you begin to think that you should do the whole course, you can be afraid and become frustrated. If you define time for each part of work, it will encourage you.

5) Determine your purposes in a study schedule.

Do not forget that you should study at least two hours weekly for getting every credit. Determine the periods of the day you are active and attentive and devote this time to study every week.

6) Be in a constant intellectual contact with your instructor.

Do not lose an intellectual contact with your instructor, attend or phone him or her constantly. Frequently, learners have problems with the right order of words in a question. Do not be afraid, ask your teacher for assistance.

7) Be critical and evaluate your own progress constantly.

Read constantly the course goals and standards to evaluate your progress and development.

8) Apply various study resources.

Distance learning courses have many various study resources. It is not simple watching or listening. Take notes. Think over questions that might be included in a test available in your study guide, textbook, films or audio tapes.

9) Define time restrictions for test performance.

If you are sure that you have already known the material required for a particular test, you can do a test. Don't hurry, because you will make many stupid mistakes and your testing will be ineffective.

10) Define time restrictions required for work and follow them.

Have a calendar with the quantity of weeks in the quarter and the required work that should be done weekly. Mark in the days of taking tests, submitting projects and contacting the instructor.

11) Have some study friends.

If you look for study friends for academic success, encouragement and support, ask your instructor to find other students who will be eager to work with you.

12) Discuss your progress and development.

Discuss your progress and development concerning different points in the course with your instructor. Define the points that cause difficulties or are unclear.

13) Define the things that motivate you the most.

Define the things that motivate you the most. It may be mastering a skill, a reward or praise. Do not call friend before you study, you should keep to a schedule. Imagine being in class and being scheduled to your course work.

How to Succeed

1. Set Goals.

The first goal or aim should be the successful competence of the particular course.

It is very useful advice because the good planning of some actions may be the half of the work to do. You can divide your task to some separate parts and then try to finish by these parts. That will simplify the learning of material.

2. Your Learning Must be Gradual and Steady.

- Make a study calendar in which you will be inserting the important meetings, completed and not yet started tasks. It may remind you of doing some extra job or simply be the index of your progress.
- Find for yourself the best time for your studies. It may be free time after some job or maybe when your room mate is away. Choose if these are weekends or some particular working days. You can also define special hours for that purpose.
- During your work time take some breaks which will give an opportunity to relax and gain some strength before doing the further parts of your studies.
- Try to have a concrete stable place of work or study place. It's very desirable to have the supplementary equipment and needed facilities not too far from it.
- Pace yourself. Escape self overestimation. There's a reason it takes several years to graduate from traditional university. You're in this to learn, not just to get a certificate, so make sure you're learning, not just racing through the materials.

3. Discuss It.

- Share with people what you are doing. You're more likely to stick to a course if your co-worker knows you're doing it. If you are studying high-tech or internet development, the person might just know a programmer he can hook you up with for tutoring.
- If you have already learned about people who are doing the same work, you can ask them for help if necessary.
- Also ask somebody to check and proof our work before passing it.

4. Join a Study Group.

- If you study some foreign language you can visit some language society that might give a possibility to make some exchange in the country the language of which you are learning.

- Find some tutor. He or she may help you with the practical performance of your knowledge.
- Internet is a wide source of information, so don't ignore it.

5. Define the Learning Style You Are Using and Keep to It.

- If you are interested in some technical discipline don't lose a chance to master your knowledge while dealing with technical equipment connected with your discipline.
- Try to involve yourself in the topic you are learning, in that case the material will get stuck to you better.
- Start practice straight after the theory is completed.

6. Mark the Successful Fulfillment of the Study Tasks or Passing the Examinations.

- Be proud of yourself when completing the task, thank yourself and reward with something special.

7. Put Questions.

- If you don't understand something, so don't be scary or ashamed to ask a question, if you find out what is that you don't know, you will know it for sure!

The main thing during the process of studies is to memorize and not forget the material you have learned. (Not passed but learned). If you were made by someone to learn it, you will doubtfully remember it, you need to have strong desire to have this information in your head.

Myths and Experience

Myth 1 - Distance Learning Schools Aren't As Good As Traditional Schools.

Online universities can offer as good an education as any traditional school. Your task is just to select the right online educational establishment. Many quality programs allow students to interact with expert teachers and learn through multimedia software. With the help of distance learning you will be able to develop your learning skills and advance your career.

Myth 2 - Employers Won't Accept Degrees From Distance Learning Universities.

While this may be true of "diploma mills" and other fake schools, degrees from properly accredited schools are accepted by employers in the same way that traditional degrees are accepted. It is impossible to find out whether your degree was taken online or in simple auditorium.

Myth 3 - Distance Learning Credits Don't Transfer To Other Colleges.

Diplomas and credits from online schools that are accredited by the proper regional agency will be accepted by traditional institutions in the same way that diplomas and credits from "regular" colleges are accepted.

Myth 4 - Accredited Schools Always Offer A Good Education.

There are a lot of institutions that state that they are accredited; many of them are, but a great deal not. However, in order to be widely accepted, your degree needs to come from a school approved by one of the six nationally recognized regional accrediting agencies. A great deal of schools creates their own agencies in order to attract new clients. Checking with one of the big six agencies directly can help you avoid being scammed.

Myth 5 - Online Schools Are Faster And Easier Than Traditional Schools.

While some online students choose accelerated programs, others select online schools that let them do their work slowly, over a longer period of time. The status of the school doesn't mean that some institution is harder or easier. Flexibility is key in the world of distance learning and the majority of online programs tailor their curriculum to fit the needs of specific students.

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The Distance-Learning Experience

Distance-learning programs have changed beyond recognition in the last few years. Whereas once there was reliance on boxes of folders, books and other literature, there is now a focus on using the Internet.

Although some printed materials remain, the Internet has opened up a new world of interaction, which has become a key element of the online learning experience.

Use of Technology

The most important facility the Internet offers is the ability to communicate with fellow students and teachers. By using online chartrooms, a class can have a virtual tutorial, receive feedback from tutors and share ideas with other students.

Other multimedia facilities make full use of the computer as a learning tool. Animations, interactive guides and downloadable notes all bring a new dimension to learning. And this emphasis on using new technology means that the programs on offer are often fresh and up-to-date. A key factor if you are studying to refresh your knowledge while you work.

Support

Because distance-learning programs allow teachers to deal with enquiries more effectively, it's possible for them to give feedback relatively quickly. So, although you are studying alone, any support or assistance you need is only an e-mail away.

Institutions offering these courses are very careful to ensure that distance-learning students don't feel isolated. You can therefore receive a more personal service than in a traditional classroom.

Pros and Cons

Advantages

- Distance from institution doesn't matter. This benefits disabled students, or students who live in a remote location or even a different country.
- Learning is flexible. So students who have a full-time job or family commitments can study when it suits them.
- More places. There is unlimited number of places so courses are more readily available.
- Cost. Distance-learning courses tend to have cheaper tuition fees than the class-based version.
- Online community. Unlike a traditional classroom, which can be dominated by a few vocal students, all distance-learning participants are expected to contribute, fostering more of a community spirit.

Disadvantages

- Reduced interaction with class (although online study chatrooms and virtual classrooms can actually benefit those who don't feel comfortable speaking up in a real classroom).
- Reliance on technology. Most distance-learning programs have a heavy emphasis on Internet and e-mail communications. Therefore you must own a computer that meets the minimum specifications.

Flexibility

High level of flexibility may be one of the reasons why this kind of learning is so popular among students worldwide.

It gives students control over their own study schedule, enabling them to fit their study around whatever else is happening in their lives. Pace and time limits is up to the students. Students with work and family commitments find this freedom particularly attractive. Distance learning is also a great option of choice for young people.

It is no longer necessary to settle for one of the courses offered by your local educational institution. You can choose any university worldwide and any qualification you want. This aspect of distance learning appeals to students who cannot, or do not want to leave their home town but wish to take advantage of what the world has to offer. A big advantage of distance learning is that there are no limits in places, as it is in the universities. Most recently, developments in distance learning have been driven by investment in educational technology.

The Way Forward

Universities, especially in Europe and North America, have been producing study materials specifically suited to online learning which means that students off campus are benefiting as much as students on campus.

Indeed, many university courses no longer require their on-campus students to attend lectures and seminars. Instead, they can access materials on the internet.

So we can see the differences between 2 methods of study very clearly. As more people gain access to personal computers, distance learning is forecast to become the way forward.

Reputable Distance Learning School

Living in culture that wants results faster, easier and more conveniently, the world of education is no different, where many courses ranging from Bachelors to PhD degrees are being offered online.

Earning a college degree requires time, effort and money and to cut corners, you might be tempted to get your degree through a mail-order or online program you see being advertised at the back of some tabloid.

Online education undoubtedly is a workable option for those seeking an alternative to brick-and-mortar classes but you must do your due assiduousness and make sure that the distance learning school you are considering is accredited.

Accreditation guarantees that the online institution is provides quality education you could learn in the third grade.

As well as governmental agencies in the United States, accreditation involves non-governmental entities.

Accrediting organizations are private educational associations of regional or national scope that develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether those criteria are met.

Institutions and programs that request an agency's evaluation and subsequently meet that agency's criteria are then accredited by that agency.

Without such an approval what you will get after graduation is really a worthless piece of bond paper, not a bona fide degree.

Here are some pointers how you can tell the unscrupulous online colleges from the good ones:

1) **Be cautious of life experience courses.** Some warning sign of a bad school is if it claims to offer an accredited life experience degree without any classes or examinations. These possibly will be a BA or an MBA. Don't be tricked. There's no an accredited degree that is based purely on life experience.

2) **Check the accreditation agencies** that they mention as many are usually non-existent and so getting their certificates are a waste of time and money. If these are certified by the following agencies then they are not solely a diploma factory.

a) DETC: Distance Education and Training Council

b) MSA: Middle States Association

c) NCASC: North Central Association of Schools and Colleges

d) NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges

e) NWCCU: Northwest Commission on College and Universities

f) SACS: Southwest Association of Colleges and Schools

g) WASC: Western Association of Schools and Colleges

How do you check their accreditation? For the first ask the school.

Reputable online schools will have no problems at all telling you if they are accredited. Furthermore, they will tell you in what State they are accredited and which educational governing bodies have accredited them. To be sure, you can check with the institution itself that accredited them.

However, some schools can seek their very best to give the appearance of being accredited. They can reach this by using such words as "authorized", "legitimate" or "pursuing accreditation." Don't be taken in by this. Evaluate an online school by their association; not by their buildings, address or the persuasive advertisements they placed in the tabloids.

3) Another central thing to look out for is the **online school's operating license**. Every higher learning institution must have a charter for operations in a particular state. Otherwise, then they are operating illegally and most likely a fly-by-night. You have to turn clear of them also.

4) **Applying for Federal Student Aid (FSA) Tuition Assistance can also help to validate an institution's credentials.** For a student to receive financial assistance to pay for his education, the school must petition the federal government and demonstrate its accreditation status in the first place. In a case the school isn't up to par, it won't qualify. As a result, if the government won't pay for you to go there, chances are there is a lack of accreditation.

The main thing is that you are going to have to spend time, energy and money getting your degree. To make sure that you do not waste either of those things, check out the school first. By doing this, it will ensure that your school of choice is accredited before you enroll will save you a ton of heartache later.

Source: <http://www.mydistancelearningweb.com/tips/>

