

## The Real Deal: Disputing Some Common Myths about Online Courses at UMUC

(Adapted for use in UCSP 615 with the permission of Leslie Dinauer, PhD, from *Myths about Taking Online Classes*, 2006, <http://polaris.umuc.edu/~ldinauer/MythsWeb.htm>)

When it comes to the differences between online and face-to-face (f2f) courses, new UMUC graduate students sometimes do not know what to expect. Incoming students may even mistakenly assume that online courses are easier, or take less time and effort, than f2f courses. In reality, students may find online courses challenging for a variety of reasons.

In preparation for graduate study at UMUC, students should consider the following:

- Students in online courses should be prepared to write extensively, because nearly all communication is written. Students need strong reading and writing skills in English.
- Students in online courses need to be competent in the use of computers, software, and platforms. Also, they must have Internet access and a current e-mail address.
- Since the online classroom is asynchronous and students are expected to be active participants online, students need to log in frequently to check what has transpired since their last visit and to contribute to the discussion (in lieu of classroom meetings).
- Students in online courses need disciplined work habits, effective time management skills, and the ability to work both alone and collaboratively.

Here are some insights gleaned over nearly 20 years of experience in online course delivery at UMUC:

**Myth:** Online courses are easier than face-to-face (f2f) courses.

**Fact:** At UMUC, graduate courses maintain the same academic standards, regardless of course delivery method—online, face to face (f2f), or hybrid (combination of f2f and online instruction). Course objectives, content, readings, and assignments are comparable across formats. Furthermore, all graduate students are expected to observe established UMUC academic criteria and course requirements. Lastly, online courses may be more difficult for some students, mainly because it is so easy to forget to go to class (i.e., log in to the online classroom).

**Myth:** Online courses take less time and effort than face-to-face (f2f) courses.

**Fact:** In reality, online courses require as much, and perhaps even more, diligence and participation than f2f courses. As noted above, online courses at UMUC are asynchronous and do not meet on set days or at set times. Instead of attending a single three-hour class held once a week, online students need to carve out significant blocks of time at frequent intervals throughout the week to log in and participate actively in computer-based discussions, in addition to completing readings and written assignments (class time plus homework time). Also, students need to keep in mind that responding in writing online typically takes longer and requires more effort, compared with speaking in f2f classes. To handle this workload, students must prioritize and budget their time carefully.

**Myth:** Online courses are entirely flexible. Instead of having to attend class at a set time each week, students can do their own thing, at their own pace.

**Fact:** Instead of attending on-site classes in real time, students can enjoy the convenience of 24/7 access to UMUC's online learning environment. While this does provide some flexibility, graduate courses still keep to a standard weekly schedule, as outlined in the course syllabus. Students are responsible for following the established timetable and adhering to all deadlines for submissions. This applies to required class activities such as assigned readings and participation in discussions, as well as timely completion of individual assignments, group projects, and quizzes and exams.

**Myth:** Students in online courses can get by without participating in class discussions, as long as they complete the other assignments and take the exams.

**Fact:** Student participation in online class discussions is a significant part of the graduate learning experience at UMUC. The reality is that students cannot expect to do well if they drift in occasionally and make a few gratuitous comments. Active involvement and engagement with course content materials facilitates mastery of key concepts and promotes successful learning outcomes. Moreover, discussions provide an opportunity to interact with class members from varied backgrounds and perspectives.

**Myth:** Online students who submit responses to class discussions at the start of each week do not have to visit their online classrooms again until the following week (in other words, they can take the rest of the week off from participating in class).

**Fact:** As the old adage goes, "You get out what you put in." UMUC graduate students should be in the habit of logging in to their online classrooms regularly and often—at a minimum, four to five times throughout the week—to read what has been posted since their last visit, and to contribute to discussion topics in a thoughtful, professional, and meaningful manner. Asynchronous online class discussion adds value, in that it provides students with an opportunity to revisit, reflect, and research important topics and issues, and to share logical, well-written responses, supported by factual material and data from academic and professional resources.

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