Now that you have had an opportunity to think a bit more about life as a graduate student at UMUC, it is important that you also have an understanding of the unique aspects of graduate student life as they relate to the virtual learning environment.

One of the major benefits of obtaining a graduate degree at UMUC is the opportunity to do so in an online learning environment. Online education has expanded dramatically over the past decade. Moreover, advances in technology have revolutionized our understanding of and approach to actively engaging the learner.

Graduate students who have come before you have made a successful transition to the online learning environment. Below, we have identified tips and strategies employed by UMUC graduate students that have helped to maximize their success.

General Tips for the Online Graduate Student

Ensure that you have reliable and readily available access to a computer and the Internet.

The requirement that you have a computer and the ability to access material online is non-negotiable. Computer deficiencies or connectivity challenges are unacceptable reasons for your not being able to engage actively in the online learning experience. Also, it is wise to maintain appropriate security for your computer system. Finally, there are support resources in place if you need help, and you should get help as soon as you notice any issues with your system. Help@UMUC can help answer your learning management system (LMS), MyUMUC, and other learning application questions. Technical support is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day, by visiting www.umuc.edu/help or calling (888) 360-8682. You can also learn about technical requirements for graduate students by visiting www.umuc.edu/techreq.

Grow your ability to be self-directed, self-disciplined, and self-determined.

The benefit of the online learning space is that it provides significant flexibility and autonomy. The challenge of this environment, however, is that you become the owner of how and when you engage your learning. Visit the virtual classroom environment early and often. Create a consistent time daily for going into the online classroom. Developing a regular routine for being engaged in the online classroom will be essential for your success.

Become a part of, and contribute to creating, an environment that encourages individuals to share and express their perspectives freely.

The online learning space should be open and engaging, where differing perspectives and viewpoints are respected.

Be able to communicate effectively through academic writing.

The online classroom environment relies heavily upon written communication to convey information. Therefore, students should possess strong reading and writing skills. Communicating in the online classroom is not the same as texting, chatting, tweeting, or other online formats in which shortened phrases and phonetic spelling are acceptable forms of writing. The virtual classroom requires writing that contains the same academic quality found in a research paper. If you routinely send text messages, tweets, or e-mails that contain a mixture of symbols, shapes, and interesting characters, seek out measures

that will dramatically enhance your ability to write academically. UMUC offers an optional three-credit writing course (COMM 600: *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*). Although this course does not count toward any individual program requirements, it is designed to reinforce and strengthen graduate-level writing skills. Finally, when participating in the online classroom, read, read, and proofread again!

Think before you write.

The online learning environment has been successful because it has also become a place where individuals feel more comfortable contributing and sharing, compared with sitting in a physical classroom. Such comfort, however, sometimes facilitates an erosion of civility, particularly during times of academic debate and disagreement. Some people have found it easy to resort to insults and attacks when using computers, even when they would never consider doing so in a face-to-face classroom. Communicate with others online as if you were sitting across from them. Respect must be the cornerstone of how you communicate in the virtual learning environment.

Create virtual strategies to organize your materials as you would "paper" files.

Embrace methods such as e-portfolios, virtual files and folders, flash drives, and other such methods to keep important information organized. Also, clearly label your information, and store files in places that are protected but easily accessible. Back up your work! Even though today's technology has made it much more difficult to lose documents, losses can still occur.

Think on a national and global clock.

Your classmates and your faculty are located around the country and the world; this is another tremendous benefit of the online learning environment. This dimension will greatly enhance and add to the richness of your graduate experience. Recall, therefore, that timeframes that are convenient for you may not be convenient for others.

***Online* and *accessible* do not always mean *instantaneous*.**

Give others (particularly faculty members) time to get back to you. Note that most of the activity in the online space occurs asynchronously; therefore, you must allow others sufficient time to read, reflect, and respond to information you have provided.

UMUC's Learning Management System

As you become more familiar with the UMUC online learning environment, you will likely identify your own tips and strategies that can foster your success. We encourage you to share what you discover with your peers, as this information may enhance the learning experience for others.

In part, your success as a graduate student at UMUC is tied to your ability to navigate the learning management system (LMS). The LEO User Guide, which you can find in the classroom horizontal navigation bar by selecting **Help >> Help Guide >> Learning Environment**, will be helpful to you as you continue to learn about the LMS. As you delve deeper into your graduate program, you may become exposed to or identify on your own other technological tools that facilitate your academic experience, particularly as it relates to your program. We encourage you to take advantage of the unique features of the graduate student experience online, and also to further your own

understanding of technology's impact nationally and globally within your professional field.