

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK WHEN CHOOSING AN ONLINE PROGRAM



Are you considering enrolling in an online college program?

We want to help you prepare so that the program you choose meets your needs. The questions below are designed to help YOU do your OWN research, narrow down the choices, and find the right program for you.

What Do You Expect of the Program?

When it comes to selecting an online program, you should focus on your needs as a student. The best program will be the one that fits your requirements, academically, professionally, personally, and financially.

Program Expectations of Me

- How long typically does it take to get a degree/certificate?
- Does the program require me to go to the campus or other location for instruction, labs, internships, or other practical experiences?

Your Expectations of the Program

- How long has the institution offered the program online?
- What competencies and/or knowledge, skills, and abilities will I gain?
- Will the program acknowledge or credit me for prior knowledge, skills, military experience, or credentials I have in this field? What is the process for gaining that acknowledgement?
- If it is an out-of-state institution, does it have the proper approvals to serve students in my state?
- Who is the typical online student at this institution and does that sound like me? How flexible are the instructors with adult or non-traditional (such as adult, working full-time, or active-duty military) students?
- Does the program address your time constraints?

Many institutions are in **their third decade** of offering online programs. It's no longer about how or where you learn, it's about the type of learning that is right for YOU.

What Learning Experiences Are Used in the Program?

There are many misconceptions about what it is like to learn in an online class. These questions will help you uncover the variations in approaches instructors might take.



The Overall Learning Experience

- Will I learn on my own? Will I need to teach myself?
- How will learning take place? Will I be reading information, watching recordings of lectures, or participating in videos/simulations made especially for distance students?

The Typical Course Experience

- How many students are in the typical online class?
- Do the classes meet synchronously (faculty and students meet at the same time) or asynchronously (students do not have to meet at the same time)?
- Are courses primarily text-based or do they include multi-media?
- Do courses use innovative modes of instruction, such as virtual reality, game-based instruction, or project-based learning?
- How often will I interact with faculty? ...with other students?
- How are tests/other assessments handled? Am I required to go to a specific testing location or to use special testing software? And is there an addition fee or cost for this?
- How is the course content accessible to those with disabilities?

Instructor Experiences and Credentials

- Have instructors been trained in online teaching? What experiences and/or credentials do the instructors have? Do they know how to use the course technologies?
- Do my instructors have prior teaching experience at the college or university?

Student Support Services

For a fully engaged student experience, you will need support outside the classroom (such as tutoring, library materials, or textbooks). Learn what services your online institution offers to the distance student and that the services are available at a time and place that works for you.

Orientation

- Is there an online student orientation on how to succeed in distance learning?
- Is there training on how to use the technologies that will be employed in my courses?

Student Support

- What student support services are available at a distance, such as registration, financial aid help, bookstore, library, tutoring, and advising? Do I have to go to campus for these services?
- If I am enrolling in a certificate or degree program, how will I access academic advising to make sure I stay on track to meet my goals?
- If I am sight-impaired, hearing-impaired, or have other accessibility needs, what services are available to assist me?
- Are there support services for active-duty military, their families, and veterans?
- Can I participate in student clubs and activities?

Money Matters

As you know, your education is an investment and you need to understand all the costs associated with your education. Whether face-to-face or online, there are often fees and other items you may need to acquire (such as a computer), in addition to tuition.

- How much will I spend in tuition?
- How much will I spend in fees? Are there special fees I must pay as an online student?
- Am I required to pay fees for services I won't access as an online student, such as the campus gym or parking?
- Are there any special fees or costs, such as for proctoring, software, hardware, video cameras, or travel to campus or a specific location?
- How much will I spend on my course materials, such as books or online resources?
- Are "open" or low-cost textbook options available?
- What financial aid options are available?

Technology

To be successful in your courses, you will need certain technologies, such as a computer and a reliable internet connection. If you can't make that purchase now, make sure you can study, access classes, and complete assignments at a public library or other public access location. Make sure their operating times are convenient for you.

- What are the specifications for the computer and software required for me to participate in my course?
- What level of internet access will I need?
- Does the institution have discount programs for purchasing computer hardware and/or software for online students?
- Can I participate on my mobile devices?
- Is technical support available 24/7 or, at least, the hours that I might need it?

When Researching Online Programs...

Websites and publications that recommend online colleges or universities provide lots of information, but might not meet YOUR individual needs.

Rankings typically examine the entire institution and not individual programs. Even a top-notch institution may be weak in the program you are considering. Also, the ranking criteria they use may be of little importance to YOU.

Television and web ads often lead to what are known as **lead generation sites**. You can tell if you are on one if it asks for your name and contact information before giving you any useful information. Their main interest is to get your phone and e-mail address so that they can sell you on the programs that paid to be on the site. YOUR needs are secondary.



Outcomes

Students attend college to pursue degrees for many reasons. To be sure that you realize your personal goals upon obtaining your degree, you are encouraged to explore how the schools you may be considering will help you reach your desired outcomes.

Career Placement and Development

- Are career services available to online students to seek and be placed in jobs after graduation? What percent of students are placed in jobs?
- Does the career services office assist entry level as well as experienced students?
- Once I graduate, will I still be able to utilize the services of the career services office?
- Are all career services offered virtually or are some face-to-face?
- Does the program or school have an alumni network of potential employers? Is it active?
- Am I qualified to sit for a professional licensure exam in my field?

Closing Thoughts

Taking classes online is an excellent way to complete coursework and work toward a degree or certification. We hope these questions help you consider your needs as a student in an online world. Best wishes as you begin your educational journey!



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