

The advantages of taking on-line college courses

by Richard D. Webster



*There are benefits and potential drawbacks concerning taking an on-line course.
This article accentuates the positives.*

(Part II of a multi-part series) You and your roommate (let's say his name is Tony) both leave work at 6:00 pm and are both taking a class which begins tonight at 7:00 pm. Tony rushes into your apartment at 6:15, splashes some water on his face, combs his hair, grabs an apple from the fridge, gathers his books, packs his laptop and rushes out to begin his 45 minute commute to class. Although it's pouring rain outside, Tony has to stop along the way and gas up the car as this round-trip commute will consume $\frac{1}{4}$ tank of gas. Once he gets to campus, he drives around looking for a place to park, and then hikes the half-mile dodging raindrops from his parking space to his classroom.

Tony shakes off the rain, finds a seat, unpacks his books, plugs in his laptop, and prepares to listen attentively as his instructor begins the evening's lecture. Tony can't hear the lecture and becomes quickly annoyed with the 2 students sitting behind him carrying on a conversation oblivious to the instructor.

As Tony was rushing out of your apartment on his way to class, you were calling the local pizza delivery place and looking for your fuzzy pink slippers - as *your* 7:00 class is on-line. By taking this on-line class, you are saving on travel expenses, the wear and

tear on your 2003 Honda, the stress of navigating the local beltway at rush hour, and, not having to worry about the weather, how much gas is in your tank, finding a parking spot - or how you look. Your biggest concerns are paying for that pizza, finding those slippers, and making sure your computer is booted up properly.

In addition to the **convenience** and **cost-savings** factors, there are several other advantages to pursuing your education on-line.

1. **Quick Feedback:** As your instructors are available on-line, they can promptly respond to your questions, problems, and grading issues. When you submit an assignment electronically, your instructor will get back to you fairly quickly with a grade and any pertinent comments.
2. **Experiential Learning** (not to be confused with "*experimental*"): Basically, experiential means "*learning by investigating and doing*". You may not fully appreciate this while you're taking the class, but working your way through the on-line lecture notes, textbooks, assignments, and preparing for quizzes on your own provides a much higher level of learning, and ultimately a better way of retaining what you're learning versus a more teacher-centered, traditional classroom environment.
3. **Repetition:** Repetition or doing something over again, is a valuable learning tool. The more often you do something – the better you learn those inherent concepts and skills. When you submit an assignment on-line, you also get that pretty quick feedback as to any errors you might have made – as opposed to handing in a hard-copy in class and waiting one week to find out your grade and to see if there are any problems that require correcting. Whether your teacher is on-line or in the physical classroom, well, all teachers are different. They all have their various styles, demands, and expectations. Many (not all) on-line instructors will allow you to repeat or correct an assignment if you've lost some points along the way.
4. **Managing your own time and activities:** You have a total of fifteen assignments that must be completed on your own time and submitted electronically. All of those assignments will indicate a due date and time. It's up to you to complete those assignments and have them submitted by the due date and time. The beauty is you get to work on those assignments at your own pace, as your time allows, and from the comfort of your own home (or from wherever you have an internet connection). You won't be disrupted, distracted, or held back by other students' un-professional behavior in a physical classroom setting.

In Maryland, The University of Maryland University College is currently the premier location for on-line college courses – offering 130 undergraduate and graduate programs ranging from Accounting to Teacher Education. The advantages concerning taking an on-line course are varied, ranging from sheer convenience and cost savings, to a higher degree of learning.

But for now, check the Sunday paper for a “10% off coupon” from your local pizza place and find those fuzzy pink slippers – because it’s time to boot your PC and get to class!