



# **Distance Learning Student Handbook**

2014

## Table of Contents

	Page
Table of Contents	2
I - Introduction	3
II – Time	3
III – Balancing Responsibilities and Setting Priorities	4
IV – Online Communication Skills	5
V – Online Community	6
VI – Library Services	7
VII – Florida Memorial University Undergraduate Catalog and Student Handbook	7
VIII – Technology Considerations	7
IX – Study Habits and Skills	9
X – Where to Get Help	10
XI – Your Next Steps	11
XII – Conclusion	12
Frequently Asked Questions	12 - 14

## **I. Introduction**

Welcome to Florida Memorial University's distance learning program. This information is intended to provide you with a brief introduction to the skills necessary for becoming a successful online learner.

You may also hear online learning referred to as:

- Distance learning
- Distributed education
- Online education
- E-learning

Whatever it is called, online learning offers unique challenges and opportunities. The ideas presented here are not going to turn you into a model online student overnight, but hopefully they will help you develop enduring strategies for success. We hope that you will explore the resources and suggestions offered here and will find your online experience rewarding.

Online courses offer the opportunity to attend classes at your own convenience any time and any place. In an online course the instructor and students are connected to each other through a computer network. Using the Internet, you can receive instruction, compose and submit assignments, ask questions of the instructor and other students, discuss issues and actively participate in the class all from your home, your office, or the nearest campus computer lab. Florida Memorial College is committed to providing quality faculty, programs and services.

## **II. Time**

No matter how convenient or flexible online education may be, taking a course online requires time. You might save commuting time in an online course, but you might also spend more time with technology concerns. Whether the time you spend on course-related work is more or less than you might experience in a traditional, classroom-based course, it is still time you need to reserve and manage carefully. When evaluating your online course options, consider how much time you have to dedicate to coursework every week during the semester, and estimate the time commitment the course will require.

### ***Managing Time***

Online learners often benefit from carefully structuring what time they have available. Identify what time of day or night you do your best work, and when you are able to access the Internet and your course materials. Set aside a certain time each day, or a few days during each week, to work on your course, and stick to this schedule. Be aware at the start of the course whether you are required to participate in activities at any specific times, and plan accordingly. If you are in a different time zone remember to plan accordingly for your course submissions.

### **III. Balancing Responsibilities and Setting Priorities**

Vital to a successful online learning experience is the ability to balance your responsibilities. Knowing how to set priorities is the key to getting the greatest benefit from your online education experience. Determine early in the semester exactly what work is required and do your best to plan ahead. Do not hesitate to ask for advice or help from your instructor.

#### **A. Managing Stress**

Strategies for managing course-related stress include:

- Know your deadlines. These include course deadlines as well as deadlines and important events occurring elsewhere in your life while you are enrolled in the course.
- Plan ahead. If you know that your time will be consumed by a non-course related activity during a particular week, do your course-related activities ahead of time.
- Know your available resources, especially technological resources, and have them at hand when you are working in your course.
- Keep in touch with your instructor. If you do fall behind, let your instructor know immediately, and ask him/her for assistance in planning how you will catch up.

#### **B. Student Accountability**

The further you progress in higher and continuing education, the more responsibility you will need to take for your own learning.

#### **C. Self-Directed Learning**

As you explore the many avenues of learning available and begin to define your individual path, you will still need to work with your instructors to make sure you are meeting the requirements of the individual courses.

#### **D. Understand Expectations**

In order to meet course requirements and instructor expectations, you will need a clear understanding of these requirements and expectations. Instructors will provide a syllabus which acts as a contract between you and the instructor. Read through the syllabus carefully and print it out.

#### **E. Seek Clarification**

If you have questions regarding content, contact the instructor immediately. In the online environment instructors have fewer cues to alert them to your confusion. They cannot see your puzzled expression or hear you ask, "What?" If something is unclear to you, it may very well be unclear to the rest of the students in the class. Your questions may help others in the learning process as well. So **ask**, early and as often as necessary.

#### **F. Become an "Active Learner"**

To be successful in this environment, actively seek ways you can best understand the course material.

- Read, listen to, and participate in the course
- Become involved in discussing and defining course topics
- Critically evaluate the information you receive

### ***G. Develop Self-Discipline***

Self-discipline may be the most important characteristic of a successful online learner. With it, you have a tool that leads you to become an efficient time manager, and without it you may encounter difficulties. Here are some tips to help:

- Know when assignments are due; **print your syllabus and course schedule/calendar**
- Set up a schedule of when you will log in to the class and stick to it
- Minimize distractions while online
- Ensure consistent access to a computer
- Have an alternative plan in case you have computer problems

## **IV. Online Communication Skills**

### ***A. Writing Clearly***

Being a productive member of an online learning community requires you to communicate clearly and concisely when you write. A few simple guidelines can help you produce clear, effective written contributions to your course. As always, review guidelines for assignments:

- Keep your sentences short
- Keep your paragraphs short
- Watch for careless errors; check your spelling and grammar
- READ your posting before you submit it
- Correct any awkward or unclear areas before you post the final version in quotation marks and identify the author, so that you do not accidentally plagiarize someone

### ***B. Discussions***

In many courses, you will be required to join in class discussions and respond to classmates' comments. These discussions may become complex, intense, and even provocative. Here are some tips to help you with discussions:

- Know what the instructor expects of your discussion responses
- Think before you write
- Reread your response prior to sending

Before you send off a hastily written, emotionally based reaction to another's contribution, develop your ideas into a less emotional and more reasonable response. Then wait a few minutes and reread what you have written before you submit your response. Learning how to turn a reaction into a response will make your course contributions more meaningful – and may earn you a higher mark for participation, if participation counts toward your grade. Pausing and rereading gives you the opportunity to review your writing for organization, clarity, and correctness.

## V. Online Community

### ***Building a “Classroom” Environment***

Online learning does not mean that you are learning alone. You will have a class consisting of instructor(s), fellow students, and perhaps others with whom you will interact. Your instructor will build a class environment through discussion questions, group projects, and other activities. You help build this classroom environment through your participation. Seeing and speaking to others is not a necessary component in getting to know someone. Through your messages and discussions, both delayed (asynchronous) and real-time (synchronous), you have the opportunity to develop personal and professional relationships. The classmates you get to know online may come from very diverse situations and can offer a wealth of knowledge and experience. Your fellow classmates and instructors provide resources, information and support. Look for areas where you may post reviews for books you have read on pertinent topics, links to online resources, and observations for specific topics. Within your ‘classroom’, you and your fellow classmates can build a collective knowledge base which may become invaluable even after your coursework is completed.

## VI. Library Services

**Distance Learning Library Services are available to Florida Memorial University students taking online classes.**

### Accessing Online Resources:

In order to use the Library’s electronic resources, students must have a valid Florida Memorial University ID Card. Students can come into the Library to have the card validated. Students unable to come into the Library can call the Circulation Desk at 305-626-3640 to validate their ID cards.

All of the Library’s electronic resources are available to our students and can be directly accessed through [www.fmuniv.edu/library](http://www.fmuniv.edu/library).

Databases: Contain electronic articles from journals, magazines and newspapers. The databases and e-journals are found on the library’s homepage under the heading “Find Articles”.

E-books: The Library has a collection of over 80,000 electronic books. The e-books can be found by title, subject, author or keyword by using the online catalog or under the “Find a Book” section on the Library’s homepage. (For full access, you may be asked to provide your name and password (which will be the 14-digit code found on your ID card).

### Research Guides

Research guides have been designed specifically by the librarians at Florida Memorial University to assist you with researching various subjects. Aviation, Biology and Communications are just some of the subjects listed. APA, Chicago and MLA Style Guides

are also featured. This information can be found under the heading “Research Help” on the Library’s homepage.

### NoodleTools

If you need help compiling a bibliography or “Works Cited” page, the NoodleTools database can help you with that. NoodleTools, which can be found under the “Research Help” section of the Library’s homepage, will format your sources for you in APA, MLA and Chicago styles. To begin using it, just sign in and create a username and password.

### Interlibrary Loan / Document Delivery:

If there are journal articles or other documents that you need but are unable to access, we will try to provide those articles to you, free-of-charge, via email or fax.

### Research Service

Librarians at the Reference Desk are available to assist you with your research needs through chat, email, telephone or fax during library hours. You may contact the reference desk at 305-626-3647 or by fax at 305-626-3625.

### Ask-a-Librarian

Reference services via live chat are also available through the “Ask-a-Librarian” service (found on the “Research Help” section of the Library’s homepage) where Librarians throughout the State of Florida will answer your research questions. The Ask-a-Librarian hours of operation are: 10 am to Midnight – Sunday through Thursday and 10 am to 5 pm – Friday and Saturday.

## **VII. Undergraduate Catalog and Student Handbook**

The complete Florida Memorial University Undergraduate Catalog and Student Handbook are available on the University’s web page at [www.fmuniv.edu](http://www.fmuniv.edu).

## **VIII. Technology Considerations**

As an online student, your computer becomes your primary interface to your course(s), instructor(s), and your fellow students. In order to effectively use this interface, it will need to meet certain minimal requirements. If your computer cannot perform the functions you need to complete a class, you will have to make the effort to upgrade your equipment. It is not required that you own computer equipment; however, it is strongly recommended that you have a computer that will be available to you on a dedicated basis that will meet your personal study habits. Additionally, have a back-up plan should your primary equipment fail or become unavailable. Many public libraries have computer, as do the computer labs and library on the campus of Florida Memorial University. **Your cell phone is not an adequate interface for performing the work for your online course(s).**

## Suggested computer system requirements:

### Macintosh

#### Windows

Windows XP or Vista Pentium class III/Celeron 1 GHz processor Minimum 512 MB RAM 20 MB free disk space Internet access at 28.8k or above Sound card or integrated audio for audio playback 32-bit video card for video playback Speakers or headset Explorer 7 or Firefox 3

Mac OSX 10.4 or higher G4, G5, or Intel processor Minimum 512 MB RAM Internet access at 28.8k or above PowerPC G3 or higher Sound card or integrated audio for audio playback 32-bit video card for video playback Speakers or headset Firefox 3

You cannot use a beta or preview version of web browser software.

- The browser's encryption or cipher strength should be 128-bit.
- Your valid, working Florida Memorial University email address is the only accepted email account. Please contact the Information Management and Technology Department at 305.623.1413 to ensure that your Florida Memorial University email account is functional. If you use a spam block/filter or have a bulk mail area in your account, make sure you allow messages from the fmuniv.edu domain into your account's Inbox.
- Word processing software to create exchange and share written assignment documents. Florida Memorial University recommends that students have access to a word processor with the capability to save files in the Microsoft Word 6.0 or RTF file format.

#### Depending on course requirements and/or your preference, you may need:

- A printer that will allow you to print out documents, such as the syllabus, course schedule, or assignments.
- Course specific software/hardware: Check with your professor to determine whether course assignments may require you to use additional software and/or hardware. **Students who do not comply with the technical requirements may encounter limitations to their participation in the Florida Memorial University distance learning course(s).**

The Florida Memorial University Blackboard platform is not an internet service provider. Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is responsible for helping you configure your computer system so you can connect to the Internet/WWW. Your ISP will assist you with problems concerning connectivity to the Internet/WWW and the Florida Memorial University web site. If you have difficulty connecting or maintaining a connection to the University web site, contact your ISP immediately to determine the source of the problem. If you are disconnected from the Internet or the SLN web site without warning, contact your ISP immediately. If you have concerns about your system, contact the Florida Memorial University HelpDesk at 305.623.1413. Please note that you may have additional software required by your instructor. That information will be in the course description and/or the course syllabus.

## **Distance Learning Privacy Statement for Online Students**

Florida Memorial University is committed to protecting your privacy. The University has established this privacy policy for students taking classes online and is providing it to you so that you can understand the manner in which Florida Memorial University collects and uses your information and the efforts we use to protect it.

The University does not collect any personally identifiable information about you unless you affirmatively choose to make such information available to us. By personal information, we mean information that can be used to identify or contact an individual. Florida Memorial University does not actively share personal information about website visitors or students. Personal information provided by visitors, such as email addresses or information submitted via online forms, is used by the University to assist individual visitors as necessary. This assistance may involve redirecting an inquiry or comment to another University individual or unit better suited to provide resolution.

You will utilize a two-tier log-in to access your online courses. This two-tiered system ensures the confidentiality of you and your coursework. Florida Memorial University also complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which prohibits the release of educational records without student permission. For more details on FERPA, currently enrolled online students should consult the Florida Memorial University Student Handbook. This information is also available through the Blackboard portal when you are given your campus account.

## **IX. Study Habits and Skills**

### ***A. Know Your Learning Style***

Not all online classes are presented in the same way. Instructors, both in a traditional classroom and online, use different techniques and methods for explaining concepts. Some may choose to present the course material in a visual format, others use a lecture format, and others enhance lecture formats with hands-on applications. Knowing your learning style can be beneficial whether you are taking a course in a classroom or online. There are many different styles of learning. Some of us are visual learners; we learn and remember by seeing things (seeing it). Some learn best by listening to a lecture (hearing it). Others are hands on learners; they need to manipulate objects to demonstrate learning (doing it).

These are some sites that offer free questionnaires to determine your individual learning style:

[www.ldpride.net](http://www.ldpride.net)

[www.howtolearn.com](http://www.howtolearn.com)

[www.metamath.com/multiple/multiple\\_choice\\_questions.html](http://www.metamath.com/multiple/multiple_choice_questions.html)

[www.longleaf.net/learningstyle.html](http://www.longleaf.net/learningstyle.html)

<http://literacyworks.org/mi/assessment/findyourstrengths.html>

There are many different theories and styles of learning, that have been categorized into three general styles - The Visual Learner (the seer), The Tactile Learner (the doer), and The Aural Learner (the hearer).

## ***B. Three Types of Learning***

### **a. The Visual Learner (the "Seer")**

If you have identified that you are a visual learner, meaning that you learn best by "seeing" the course information presented in various ways, here are strategies to consider:

- Course information will usually be presented in a text format, so you will see and read the course information on the computer and textbook. Read the text, examine diagrams or pictures, and then relate what you see to what you read
- Textbook materials enhance written lectures by providing diagrams, maps, illustrations, etc.
- Research other Internet sites which could provide additional information about the topic
- Read the course description from the Florida Memorial University course catalog or Florida Memorial University website prior to taking the course
- Contact the instructor for further information

### **b. The Tactile Learner (the "Doer")**

If you process information using a tactile, hands-on approach here are some suggestions that may help in your online course:

- Engage in discussions with other students in your online class
- Identify online courses that have a lab or other experiential component
- Find others who are taking the course and form study groups
- Contact the instructor for information prior to taking the course

### **c. The Aural Learner (the "Hearer")**

If you learn best by listening to lectures and discussing in class, then online courses may present a challenge for you. You may need to adapt your learning style to the visual text-based format used in most online courses. Knowing what the course involves ahead of time, before the class begins, might be your best avenue for determining if taking an online class is for you. Here are some strategies that may help:

- Read the course description from the Florida Memorial University Course Catalog or the Florida Memorial University website
- Contact the instructor for information about teaching style and course content
- Talk with other students who have taken online courses, particularly the one you are interested in taking
- Identify courses that have a video component. Check out the website for further information.

## **X. Where to Get Help**

### **A. Florida Memorial University HelpDesk - Contact Information**

The Florida Memorial University HelpDesk is your primary resource for technical support. You can contact the HelpDesk via: Phone: 305.623.1413 or via email: [helpdesk@fmuniv.edu](mailto:helpdesk@fmuniv.edu).

If you do not find an answer within [Frequently Asked Questions](#) and need to contact the HelpDesk, please have the following information available.

To unlock or reset your password, send an email to the [helpdesk@fmuniv.edu](mailto:helpdesk@fmuniv.edu)

Please include:

- 1) Your name
- 2) Your username
- 3) Your student ID #
- 4) Your date of birth

For inquiries related to a course, include the course name, the course ID (e.g. FMU101) and the professor's name.

### **B. Florida Memorial University Homepage**

At the bottom of the page on the left side you will find links to the following:

- » [Campus Directory](#)
- » [Discounts](#)
- » [Bookstore](#)
- » [Blackboard](#)
- » [Self Service](#)
- » [Faculty/Staff E-mail](#)
- » [Student E-mail](#)
- » [Financial Aid](#)
- » [Emergency Resource Center](#)

### **C. Florida Memorial Student Services**

The Office of Academic Affairs is responsible for overseeing the following policies and procedures:

- Academic Honesty**
- Academic Standards**
- Dean's List**
- President's List**
- Graduation Certification**
- Student Attendance Policy**

The Office of Student Affairs is responsible for overseeing the following policies and procedures:

- Student Conduct Regulations**
- Student Grievance Procedure**
- Sexual Harassment Policy**

## **XI. Your Next Steps**

- 1. Register with Florida Memorial University for your online course.***
- 2. Purchase any text books and other required material***
- 3. Access your online orientation course at least 1 week before the start of the semester.***
- 4. Attend and participate in your course on a regular basis (starting with the first day of the semester)***
- 5. Refer to the Florida Memorial Distance Learning information in Blackboard for answers to your ongoing questions.***

## **XII. Conclusion**

This document will help you get started as an online learner. Don't hesitate to ask when you have a question. Your first resource should be the instructor or department providing your course. If you still have questions or issues, feel free to call or email the helpdesk, or send an email to the Distance Learning Unit ([collette.hines@fmuniv.edu](mailto:collette.hines@fmuniv.edu))

## **Enjoy your online learning experience!**

### **Frequently Asked Questions about our Distance Learning Program**

#### **What is Distance Learning? Can anyone take these classes?**

Distance Learning courses are designed for students who desire flexibility and convenience in their studies. Our courses are fully accredited and are considered equivalent to on-campus courses. Anyone who is eligible to take regular courses on campus may enroll in Distance Learning courses. Consult the Florida Memorial University Schedule of Classes for registration information.

#### **How do these courses work? How will I interact with my instructor?**

Students in online courses communicate with their instructor and classmates electronically via the course management system. The instructor posts such things as lectures, assignments, announcements, and other information to the site. The class may respond with questions, comments, etc. Our instructors use the Blackboard course management system.

#### **Will I be required to attend class meetings on campus?**

No. Our online courses are delivered completely online. If you are within driving distance of the Florida Memorial University campus, you are always welcome to stop by

to access on campus student services. Instructors teaching entirely online will provide you with a syllabus online. The syllabus will include the course requirements and information about any on-campus sessions you will be expected to attend.

### **How are examinations administered?**

Again, this is determined by the course instructor. Your instructor will provide you with details.

### **What software and hardware do I need?**

You must have at a minimum:

- Regular access to the internet
- A computer – either a PC with Windows and a Pentium processor or a Macintosh with at least System 9.0
- A recent version of a web browser such as Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, or Microsoft Explorer
- An Internet Service Provider
- A Florida Memorial University email address
- Current word processing software as required by the instructor. Some courses may have additional requirements. Your instructor will give you more information. For details on technology requirements, review that section in the on-line FAQs, found at <http://www.fmuniv.edu/academics/overview/online-learning-faqs/>.

### **I don't have a computer at home. Can I still take an online course?**

Yes, as long as you're sure you'll have regular access to a computer that's connected to the Internet. Some of our students use computers they have at work. There are also computer labs on campus with Internet access.

### **What kind of computer skills should I have?**

In order to succeed in this type of course, you must be computer literate and have experience in computer communication. That is, you should have good word processing skills, and be familiar with sending and receiving email. You should also feel comfortable navigating the World Wide Web. It is very important that you have these skills before enrolling in an online course, because it will take some time for you to become accustomed to the way an online course works. Before you know it, you will need to concentrate on the course material, and you won't have much time to deal with technical matters

### **I think I have the technical skills I need, but I've never taken a course like this. How do I know if this is right for me?**

In order to succeed in a Distance Learning course, you must be self-motivated and be able to work well independently with minimum supervision. You do not meet regularly with your instructor in the classroom, so you must be able to manage your time effectively and stay on track with your coursework. It's also important that you have strong reading and writing skills. Distance Learning (on-line) courses are every bit as

challenging as on-campus courses. In fact, some research studies reveal that some students find Distance Learning courses *more* difficult.

**Will I have to be online at a particular time?**

Some instructors require students to be online at a particular time to take quizzes or exams, or to participate in chat sessions. You may contact your instructor for details.

**What do I do if I need help?**

It's very important that you get in touch with your instructor as soon as possible if you're having trouble. You may contact them by phone or by email. Our full-time instructors hold weekly office hours, so you can visit them in person, if you wish. A Faculty Directory is available at our office and on our website. If you find you need help with the course material.

**What do I do if I can't access my course online?**

If for some reason you cannot access your course, email or call your instructor or the Florida Memorial University Instructional Technology HelpDesk ([helpdesk@fmuniv.edu](mailto:helpdesk@fmuniv.edu)).

**Will I have to buy books for the course?**

Your instructor will give you information about the text materials you'll need for your course. They will be available through the Florida Memorial University Bookstore when required.

**Do Distance Education courses transfer to other schools?**

We advise you to check with a counselor at the school you plan to transfer to so you are sure the course will be accepted. (By the way, your transcript will not specify that the course you took was delivered in a Distance Learning format.)

**What if I find I can't continue in my course? Can I withdraw from it?**

Yes, but in order to receive a "W" (Withdrawal), you must apply before the deadline. Consult the current Florida Memorial Schedule of Classes. Please note that dropping a course is your responsibility. Your instructor is not responsible for dropping you from your course!

**I have more questions! Who can I talk to?**

Contact the Distance Learning Unit at: 305.626.3798. We're here to help you! Or check out our FAQs at <http://www.fmuniv.edu/academics/overview/online-learning-faqs/>.