SUCCESSFUL DISTANCE LEARNING

Students who are new to the distance-learning format are often concerned about adapting to unfamiliar methods of information delivery. While the courses do incorporate computer-based techniques that require some competency with information age technologies, they also require the same skills necessary for success in the traditional classroom. Therefore, successful students adapt conventional techniques for academic success to the newer methods of distance learning courses.

Get Organized

Saint Leo University courses offer information in many different ways, including readings, discussions, lectures, and the message board. You should prepare for the challenge of managing this combination of activities by organizing all of your materials and references at the beginning of the course.

- Gather all required materials— including textbooks, study guides, CDs, etc., — and assemble all print materials in one binder.
- Access the course website and bookmark it (save it as a “Favorite”) in your Internet browser for easy reference. Save e-mail addresses of your course instructor and regional facilitator in your e-mail address book.

Schedule Your Time

Courses are designed to allow busy working professionals to integrate academic pursuits into their existing professional and personal commitments. Participants complete many of the activities and assignments at their own convenience. However, the courses are not self-paced; course instructors announce deadlines for each task, and participants are expected to meet those deadlines. Therefore, you must create a study schedule that will allow you to digest the course material over time while also adhering to deadlines. Pace yourself to study only one topic or module, with its related presentations, readings, and assignments, at a time.

Communicate

Success in online learning courses depends to a large extent on regular communication with the course instructor and peers.

- Check your email and the course web site every day for updates and announcements. Ask questions promptly when you don’t understand an assignment. If you think your questions will be of general interest to your class, post them to the message board.
- Check the discussion board daily for new postings, and regularly add your own input. Try to participate in all chat sessions.
- Network with other participants outside of class to establish new professional relationships and to create study partnerships or groups.
Understand Your Learning Style

People learn differently. Some prefer to study alone, and some need interaction with others. Some people learn best by reading, while others need to hear the information presented in an oral format. Some people learn well from books, and some people like a more hands-on approach.

This course is designed to accommodate the full spectrum of different learning styles. You can more successfully facilitate your own learning by understanding how you learn best. When you become more aware of the methods that work for you, you can draw more effectively on your strengths and compensate for your weaknesses as you encounter the wide variety of different modes of instruction. For example, if your learning style is more interpersonal, you could create an informal study group with a few other classmates to help you process the information presented in a written format. If you tend to be a visual learner, you could create or ask your instructor to refer you to charts, graphs, drawings, or other visual aids to help you understand the concepts being presented.

Regardless of your own personal learning style, plan to take advantage of all learning resources offered in the course to allow yourself opportunities to process the information in a variety of ways.

Coping with the Material

Different people have different learning and study styles, and different material may require different styles of learning, but there are some general tips we can offer for coping with the large amount of material facing you.

- For each module, first review the PowerPoint slides and assignments in the course syllabus. The PowerPoint slides indicate the primary topics for the module. These are the topics you will find covered in both the readings and the presentations.
- After you have familiarized yourself with the PowerPoint slides and assignments for the module, skim the readings for the module. In doing so, see if you can find the information that will help you complete the assignment.
- Watch the lectures for the module. Again, focus on those aspects relevant to the PowerPoint slides and assignments. Note the segments of the lecture you anticipate re-watching.
- Finally, read the assigned portions of the text and study guide for understanding. Your course instructor will help you to identify the most critical content.

We have found this five-step learning model – review, skim, watch, read, and review – can be a particularly effective method of coping with large amounts of material in a distance-learning program. Along the way your professors will be giving you a great deal more advice about how to deal with the material most effectively. But most important of all, have faith.