



Houghton P.A.C.E. Online

Online courses offer P.A.C.E. students the opportunity to earn needed gap and/or minor credits and also expand educational knowledge – all while sitting at a computer.

Houghton P.A.C.E. offers online courses four times a year, starting in January, April, July, and October. Each course will consist of five modules with each module lasting two weeks. Thus each course will be ten weeks in duration.

Modular activities include assigned reading from course text(s), asynchronous dialogues, written assignments, and etc.

The purpose of asynchronous dialogue is to help you understand the relevance of concepts. You will test your understanding of every concept with your classroom peers and your professor. Simply reading course material is not sufficient. Rather, the extent to which you can discuss and apply what you have read is the level of learning our online courses seek.

Learning how to write in a thorough, yet concise manner, is a skill to gain. This means that the quality of each posted message must be excellent. Your professor will comment throughout the dialogue to help guide you and the entire class toward this desired result.

All of Houghton's online courses are developed and taught by Houghton College faculty (full-time and part-time), who are dedicated, experienced educators known for integrating their Christian faith with their outstanding scholarship, teaching and expertise. Houghton's online course content is designed and delivered to meet the same high standards as courses offered in our traditional classroom-based format.

The core of Houghton College's online courses is the creation of a dynamic learning community that is based on student engagement with each other and with a faculty member. Online discussion and collaboration occurs within Synapse, the college's course management system.

How do I know if I'll be a successful online learner?

In 2007, *Educause Quarterly* published an article entitled, "[How Students Develop Online Learning Skills.](#)" Following are seven tips successful online students identified as practice steps that led to their success. You can read the entire article by clicking the above link.

1. **Develop a time-management strategy.**

Students were asked what time-management strategies they found most helpful. One challenge facing an online student is the self-discipline required to devote adequate time to class in courses that might not have regularly scheduled times to meet synchronously online or in person. Most students found that establishing their own schedules for class time helped them ensure enough time for class participation. A key difference between in-person and online learning is the independence and ability to participate in the online class at a time convenient to the student. This also presents a potential problem, as procrastination could cause a student to fall behind in the online course. The graduates who participated in the study were asked how they avoided this problem. A few students commented that logging in to their course portal every day and checking for new postings or updates helped prevent them from falling behind. Other students commented that weekly assignments from the instructor kept them on a regular schedule in the course. Another student stated that an upfront planning process was critical to succeeding in the online course because studying was integrated with many other responsibilities.

2. Make the most of online discussions.

Student interaction mostly occurs through an online threaded discussion that allows students and instructors to interact in asynchronous time. This is a significant shift for students accustomed to in-class discussions. It may provide opportunities for richer discourse through written discussion that allows students to spend time crafting their responses. When asked how they made the most of their online interaction with other students, these students mentioned some interesting techniques. One student commented, "Interacting with the other students was the fun part of my (online) classes. As much as possible, I would post a response, question, or comment to another student's posting. This built up an online relationship." Another student suggested, "Respond to several student postings, but make sure you have something meaningful to add, don't just say 'good post.' Also, don't always interact with the same few classmates. Look for something to say with various students."

Students who incorporate a plan for regular communication with their classmates into their overall course schedule will have greater success in their online course.

3. Use it or lose it.

One challenge some students face when learning online is retention of the course content. Students surveyed agreed that finding a way to apply the concepts helped them retain the information. "I applied the 'use-or-lose' technique. As soon as I'd read or study it, I put the knowledge to work through collaboration with students or at my place of employment."

One way to apply these concepts goes back to the use of the online threaded discussion. Concepts can be interpreted and restated in each student's own words in an active dialogue with others.

Another student commented that "applying the new material to what I already knew" was a helpful way to retain the material from the online course. Several successful online students mentioned that they retained what they read by developing a way to apply those concepts to a current or past experience, for example at work. Some students explained that taking handwritten notes from text and dialogues helped them retain essential points, just as if they were in a regular face-to-face course.

4. Make questions useful to your learning.

One student commented that "asking questions is integral to learning. By asking questions, fellow students and instructors would go deeper into the subject. Going deeper made the subject matter more understandable." The online course environment typically provides communication tools (such as threaded discussions, e-mail connectivity, and live chat) that students can use to ask in-depth questions.

Students also can take the time to craft questions that may go beyond what they would ask in an in-person course, probing the subject with greater specificity.

5. Stay motivated.

Without direct physical contact and interaction with other learners or an instructor, online students can lose their interest or motivation mid-way through their course or program. The graduates who participated in this study were asked what motivation techniques they found most helpful in preventing burnout or loss of interest when studying online. As one student put it, "keeping your eye on the prize" is always helpful.

Students also mentioned they find motivation in getting a good grade and in setting personal goals. One student stated, "I always want to get an 'A' in every course I take.

Some students took advantage of opportunities to work with other online students; using the encouragement and feedback they received from that connection to stay motivated. One student explained, "I had a friend (in my online courses) that I teamed up with, and we tried hard to make sure we not only finished our assignments, but that we turned in only the highest quality work possible."

Each individual may find something different that works for him or her in staying motivated. With a greater amount of work done independently in online courses, a new online student would be well advised to consider developing personal techniques for staying engaged, specifically by creating a self-motivation plan.

6. Communicate the instruction techniques that work.

Instructors in online courses employ a variety of techniques aimed at engaging the learner. The participants in this study discussed some of the techniques that were most successful. One student commented, "I liked instructors who logged in often and asked a lot of questions. Not only did this help to increase understanding of the subject, but it gave people the opportunity for class participation." Another student added, "One teacher went farther than I would expect, but I found his technique wonderful. He posted the initial question for discussion, and then asked us individual questions based on our answers." This technique worked well with a variety of learners.

7. Make connections with fellow students.

The participants in this study had the opportunity to share successful techniques and practices that helped them in developing their online student skills through some open-ended questions. One student mentioned that making a friend (connected with online) helped. Being part of a community of learners is helpful in courses that are taught in-person, and the same holds true for online classes. One student explained that "it made a huge difference when you had good students in the class." Another student commented, "The experience was enriched greatly by the relationships and interaction with my fellow students. It amazes me how well we got to know each other even though we were often miles apart and were only virtual classmates. I learned as much from other students and their experiences as I did from the instructors. I never expected that type of rewarding learning experience in a traditional classroom."

What are Houghton's technology requirements for online courses?

Internet Connection	High speed DSL or broadband cable required.
Browser	Mozilla Firefox 3.0 or higher; IE 7.0 or higher.
Operating System	Windows XP (recommended), Windows Vista, Windows 7, Mac OS 10.4 or higher.

Version	
Desktop Processor (CPU)	Pentium 4 at 2.0 GHz or faster.
Laptop Processor (CPU)	Centrino (or Centrino Duo) 1.5 GHz or faster.
Memory (RAM)	Windows XP: 512 MB or more, Windows Vista: 1024 MB or more, Windows 7: 1024 MB or more, or Mac OS: 1024 MB or more.
Hard Disk Space	40 GB or more of free space.
CD-ROM/CDE-RW Drive:	(DVD or combo drive helpful.
Some courses may require additional software and/or hardware as it pertains to the instruction of the course. These additional requirements will be clearly spelled out in the course manual.	

What do I contact if I have any questions?

If you have any general questions about online learning, please contact Katie Buvoltz, Associate Dean of Adult and Distance Education at 716.378.3215 or katie.buvoltz@houghton.edu

If you have any technology based questions, please contact Mark Pavone, Director of Administration P.A.C.E. at 1.888.874.7223 ext. 8736 (office), 585.307.7251 (cell), or mark.pavone@houghton.edu