

Disadvantages of taking on-line college courses

by Richard D. Webster



'... the biggest pitfall is not keeping up, not doing the work.'

(Part III of a multi-part series) Not everyone may be prepared for the on-line academic world. Although the advantages concerning taking an on-line course might outweigh the disadvantages, there are several noteworthy potential pitfalls, especially if you're considering taking your first on-line course.

1. **Culture shock:** We all hate change. We've become comfortable with the status-quo of going to class every Monday, Wednesday and Friday and gathering with our teachers and classmates. It's part of our established routine. With an on-line education – there are no more familiar and traditional classroom settings. It's just you working from home or from wherever you connect to the internet. There are some who can't shake the sense of not having to be in class at a certain time, and, the safety and familiarity that comes with the face to face meeting. Students are not prepared for the reality of working solo, and for the higher level of responsibility that comes with being more in charge of their own destiny.
2. **False expectations:** For whatever reason, some students seem to believe at the outset that taking an on-line class is inherently easier than attending a traditional class. Those students are in for a surprise. For the most part, one

should be prepared for a more strenuous experience in the cyber classroom as the responsibility for success becomes more *student-centered*. Students should have access to their on-line course schedule of activities at all times, and be prepared to regularly and routinely - and at least daily - check their e-mail and on-line course web site for important notices and updates.

3. **Not keeping up:** Perhaps the biggest potential pitfall is not keeping up, or not doing the work. You've got to stay motivated and keep up with your readings, on-line lecture notes, responding to the instructional objectives for quizzes and exams, and keeping up with, completing, and submitting all assignments in a timely manner. It's easy to fall behind in any of these areas when not being constantly prompted by your teacher at the face to face class meeting. The best organizational tip I can provide would be to stay on top of your class schedule, know what's going on and what's due at all times; and make sure to set aside ample time to complete your work.
4. **Technology dependence:** Did you ever relax into your favorite easy chair, grab the TV remote, turn on the TV – and then get nothing but snow and static on the screen because the cable's out? Take that feeling of frustration and multiply it 100 times when you can't connect to the internet for whatever reason (the electricity might be out, your cable modem might be out, your home network or PC could be malfunctioning, etc). We are never so dependent on computer and networking technologies as when taking an on-line course. Sooner or later, and for whatever reason, there will come a time when you need to connect, but cannot. In those instances it's important to have a Plan B or an alternate place to work (like the local library or a friend or relative's house) ready and waiting.

An on-line education may not be suitable for everyone. Being aware beforehand of the disadvantages associated with taking an on-line college course, like the culture shock, the rigors, and technology dependence, may make all the difference in deciding to participate in the cyber classroom experience.