

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINE

GUIDE FOR DISTANCE STUDENTS





Draw your own map to
**Online Learning
Success**

Welcome to online learning at Montana State University!

Montana State University is known for its world-class faculty, its hands-on, active learning environment and its welcoming “Mountains & Minds” attitude.

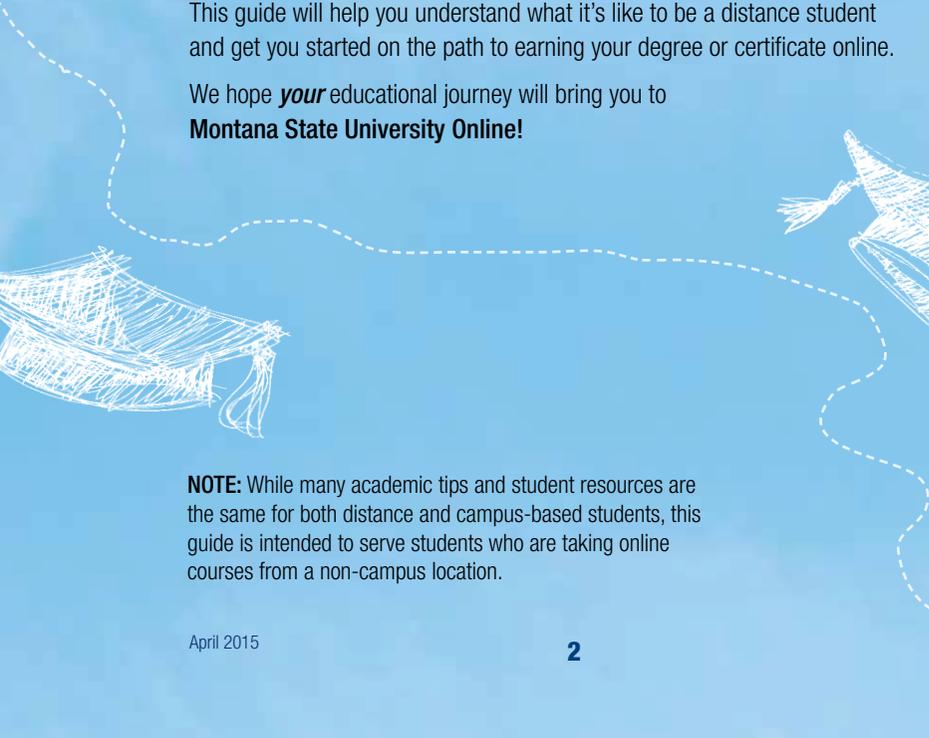
You’ll find that same quality and atmosphere in MSU’s distance programs, along with flexibility and support that allows you to succeed as an online student no matter where you are in your career path.

A pioneer in distance learning, MSU houses one of the oldest and most established networks of online graduate science courses, The National Teachers Enhancement Network (NTEN), which has been operating continuously since 1993.

Each year, MSU adds new and different online undergraduate and graduate courses, professional development opportunities, and graduate certificate and degree programs.

This guide will help you understand what it’s like to be a distance student and get you started on the path to earning your degree or certificate online.

We hope ***your*** educational journey will bring you to
Montana State University Online!



NOTE: While many academic tips and student resources are the same for both distance and campus-based students, this guide is intended to serve students who are taking online courses from a non-campus location.



Is online learning right for you?

Online learning requires different strengths than classroom learning. Some of the benefits are the ability to access your course materials at your convenience (at any time, from any place) and to have time to think and reflect before participating in class discussions. However, online learning also requires self-discipline, a comfort level with technology and the capacity to communicate through writing without ever meeting your instructor or peers face to face.

Complete this quick quiz to decide if online learning is right for you.

	YES	NO
Do you have (or can you obtain) a reliable computer and internet connection at home?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you feel that high quality learning can take place without face to face interaction?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Can you dedicate 10 or more hrs/week (day or night), to participate in the learning process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you a self-motivated and self-disciplined person?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For schoolwork and deadlines, do you manage your time and avoid procrastination?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you comfortable communicating in writing?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you enjoy reading?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are class discussions helpful to you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you value critical thinking as part of the learning process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you think sharing your work, life and educational experiences increases learning?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you comfortable with email, computers and new technologies?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does your lifestyle (family, work, community) make it hard for you to attend courses in person?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you answered mainly YESs, you are ready to become an online student!

If you answered four or more NOs, online learning may work for you, but you will have to reflect on what you need to do to become a successful online learner.

Online learning requires commitment, self-discipline, some technical savvy, the ability to learn from lengthy reading material and the ability to engage in lively online discussions.

Distance Student Profile:

Shanna Stanley

Online bachelor's degree completion program in Liberal Studies

Shanna Stanley of Conrad, Montana, finished her Montana State University bachelor's degree online while working full time and raising her daughter. (Shanna is pictured here with her parents and daughter.)



SHANNA STANLEY of Conrad, Montana, completed her bachelor's degree online in August 2014. She is the mother of a young daughter and works full time as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

"I am a single mother and I work and wanted to go to school full time," said Stanley.

"I couldn't go to Bozeman for school, so the online program seemed to fit best for my hectic life."

"Liberal Studies, and specifically the online program, gave me the flexibility I needed to be able to finish my bachelor's degree. Not only that, the Liberal Studies program gave me a well-rounded education that focused on different cultures, different languages, politics, law, business, art, sociology, etc. All of these things contribute to me being a more educated person in real world issues. This program has given me an increased appreciation for the beauty and art of my country as well as the beauty and art of other cultures. I have also learned to view and analyze the world from a sociological

perspective, which makes life much more interesting. If you add on what I have learned about politics, law, and business, I believe I have gained a very valuable and well-rounded education from the Liberal Studies program."

"The advice I would give is to make a plan from the beginning and to stick with that plan. In a program like Liberal Studies where you are not tied down to specific classes, it is important to have an idea of what you need to accomplish from the very beginning. Specifically, start working on upper division credits right away. If you wait until the end to get all of your upper division credits, it is much harder to find classes that fit your needs."

In Summer 2014, Stanley, a straight-A student, was nominated by MSU for a non-traditional student award given by the University Professional and Continuing Education Association.

For more information on the online degree completion program, visit montana.edu/finish

What is it like to take an online class?



Online classes can be an exciting challenge for students. You and your instructor may never meet face-to-face but will communicate regularly through email, online discussions or video tools like Skype.

Plan to check your email regularly (daily, if possible). This is the primary means of communication between online instructors and distance students.

Some instructors set online office hours when they are “live” and available. Communicate

immediately with the instructor when you know you are having a problem.

You’ll spend a lot of time reading and writing, and quizzes will be given in an online format. Exams may require proctoring.

MSU online courses are self-scheduled, but not self-paced. You will be required to keep up with the class and meet deadlines.

You may take part in group assignments or discussions. Get to know other students, as they may be a useful resource for you.

Quotes from current distance students:

“Set aside the time you need for studies the same way you would for attending a class in person.”

“Each person and each class were valuable to me. The wonderful professors make this online program successful. They expect no less from their online students and I think that they give even more of themselves to the online students to ensure our success.”



Distance Student Profile:

Carla Rickert

Online master's degree
in Land Resources and
Environmental Sciences.

Carla Rickert takes part in
an annual environmental
monitoring program at
Cedar Point Environmental
Park in Florida.



CARLA RICKERT, a grandmother and biologist from South Dakota, started as an MSU Online student when she was nearly 60. Less than two years later, Rickert, who said she was the first of seven kids in her family to earn a bachelor's or a master's degree, graduated from MSU with her master's degree in Land Resources and Environmental Sciences. She made the long trip to participate in the commencement ceremony.

Like many online students who return to school after an absence, Rickert said completing her graduate degree was a personal goal, but family circumstances had previously prevented it.

"Being a member of the 'sandwich generation' (taking care of an elderly mother in Iowa, spending time with an adult daughter in Florida and expecting our first grandchild in Bozeman), I did not see how it would be possible to finish and still fulfill obligations and desired family time," she said. Rickert said she applied to the LRES online master's program the day she discovered it. "It seemed like an opportunity made especially for my crazy schedule at this time in my life."

Rickert said that at first she was very nervous about taking classes online—especially in a scientific field that she had not previously

studied. "I had an enormous learning curve for about a month," she said. "Then, after that short adjustment period, I settled in and loved the online format for the remainder of my graduate studies."

"There are many obvious positive aspects of taking online courses (besides learning so much more)," she said. "I could respond to posts at 3 am in my pajamas if that is the only time I had that day. I never had to miss class due to illness and I could take my coursework everywhere I needed to be. It is possible to form study groups and make classmate friends online."

Rickert said she also appreciated distance learning because it allowed her to meet and learn from many different people.

"It was amazing to meet so many new friends/classmates from all across the USA and one was even living in Japan," she said. "The vast array of diverse experiences from across the country enhanced our learning experiences in many ways, such as being able to experience ecosystems and environmental issues where students lived vs. learning solely about Montana."

Rickert is planning to continue her education and earn her PhD.

How much will it cost?

Tuition, fees and costs



Costs depend on whether you are an undergraduate or graduate, whether you are a Montana resident or out of state resident, and how many credits you take. See catalog.montana.edu/expenses/ for the latest tuition and fees information.

Some of the fees you may encounter as an online student include

- Application fee
- Transfer student fee (one-time fee charged to new Transfer students)
- ID card fee (this can be waived if you are a distance student)
- Registration fee (one-time, non-refundable per semester fee)
- Program fee
- Textbooks and materials
- Distance learning fee and other applicable fees

Student Health Insurance is automatically charged to students who register for 6 or more credits in a given semester. Rates depend on your age. However, the Student Health Insurance can be waived if you are covered by another insurance plan.

For more info see montana.edu/health/insurance.php

Financial aid

Many students will use some form of financial aid to pay for their college education. This includes scholarships, grants, loans and other types of tuition waivers.

The best information on how to apply for and use financial aid to pay for your education can be found through the MSU Office of Financial Aid's website: montana.edu/wwwfa or by calling **(406) 994-2845**.

To be eligible for financial aid, students:

- Must be a US citizen or eligible non-citizen
- Must have a high school diploma or recognized equivalency
- Must be enrolled in an eligible degree or certificate program
- Must be enrolled at least half time (6 semester credits)
- Must be in good standing with any previous federal aid programs
- Must maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress

NOTE: Requirements will vary with private loans and non-federal sources of aid.

Tuition payment plan

The tuition payment plan is an installment loan available for qualified applicants.

Contact MSU Student Accounts for more information:

studentaccounts@montana.edu

(406) 994-1991

montana.edu/ubs/studentaccounts/defpay.html

Applying for admission

GETTING STARTED:



The application process differs depending on:

- whether you are an undergraduate or graduate student, and,
- whether you are returning to MSU or are a new student.

Undergraduate students

Undergraduates who are *new* to MSU (transferring from somewhere else) go through the MSU Office of Admissions.

You can apply online at msuadmissions.org/transfer

Undergraduates who are *returning* to MSU fill out an “Intent to Register” form. You can access this form online from the Registrar’s office or by logging into the **My Info** system and going to the “**Student Services**” tab. When you fill out this form, you will need to list any schools you have attended since leaving MSU and have your official transcripts sent to the Registrar’s office.

montana.edu/registrar

Continuing undergraduate MSU students who are entering a new online program fill out a “Change of Curriculum” card available from the Registrar’s office.

montana.edu/registrar

Graduate students

All graduate students use the online Graduate School application system.

montana.edu/gradschool/admissions/apply.html

You will be asked to upload materials and provide the name and email of your recommenders.

International students

International students contact the Office of International Programs for more information on how to apply.

international@montana.edu

(406) 994-4031

montana.edu/international/

TIPS FOR Online Student Success



Getting started in an online program can seem daunting at first. Here are some tips for getting the most out of your online program:

Work environment



Set up a quiet place in your home where you can study undisturbed. Your computer, room lighting, broadband connection, even your chair—all are key to creating an environment optimized for studying and learning.

Time and scheduling



Be aware that the flexibility of the online environment can be challenging for students who are prone to procrastination. Don't be fooled by its flexibility! Courses are not self-paced. You will be required to keep up with the class and meet deadlines. Be aware of your dates and deadlines when you start the class; most classes have weekly assignments and discussions.



Find a time management system that works for you. Choose a calendar or time management system that is reliable and easy to update. Make a note of all due dates and set reminders.



Print syllabi and course calendars and keep them in a highly visible place so you can refer to them often.



Set aside time each day to devote to your online class the same way you would for attending a class in person. Make sure you set aside sufficient time each day to study. Think of it as an appointment you can't miss!

The online learning environment



Log into your online courses as often as you can—at least five times a week—and every day if you can. You don't want to miss out on important updates or discussions that happen in your classes.



Check your email often (daily, if possible) and make sure MSU has your correct, preferred email address.



Be clear in your communications. Whether it is an email or discussion posting, remember that in online courses, the non-verbal cues that are so important in face-to-face communication are nonexistent. Consider composing emails, discussion posts or responses in a word processing document (e.g., Microsoft Word) first, then copying and pasting into the email

or course discussion area. This can give you time to think about what you want to say and how best to say it, and allows you to check for grammar and spelling errors.

 Consider that once you post something in an online class, you may not be able to remove it. Think carefully about what you want to say in your post before you submit it.

 Ask questions if you are not sure about something. Use the interactive tools available to you (such as the Discussion Board, Pages and Email) to ask your instructors and fellow classmates questions. Keep in mind that what you ask on a Discussion Board can be seen by others in your class, so if you need to ask a question in private, use email.

 Keep in mind “Netiquette.” Netiquette is pretty much as it sounds: social guidelines and rules that dictate interaction in online environments. For example, TYPING IN ALL CAPS IS CONSIDERED SHOUTING.

It’s pretty basic: Don’t say things that you wouldn’t normally say to someone in a face-to-face environment. It can be easy to say anything in an environment that feels anonymous, but keep in mind that you are interacting with real people in your online courses. Be careful with sarcasm and humor; it often doesn’t translate in an online environment. Remember, too, that even though you are not in a classroom, you are still expected to abide by the MSU Student Conduct Code (see p. 13).

 Keep your class syllabus and read it! The class syllabus is the road map that typically lists all course readings, assignments and deadlines. You can refer to it throughout the course to make sure you are on track.

 Online learning can sometimes feel isolating. Be involved and interactive. Taking part in class discussions and communicating with your instructors and your advisor can help you feel more connected.

Technology

 Technology can sometimes fail us. Connectivity fails. Computers crash. Have a backup plan and keep copies of your work on a cloud or backup device. MSU’s Help Desk phone number is **(406) 994-1777**.

Advising

 Find out who your advisor is. Make an appointment and establish a positive relationship. Prepare for your advising appointment by having your transcripts close by and researching the classes offered as part of your program.

Personal life

 Minimize social distractions. Consider turning off your phone and logging off social networks during study time.

 Turn to classmates, a friend or your family for support. If you’re stuck on an assignment or facing writer’s block on a research paper, email or use tools in the online Learning Management System software (D2L) to reach out to a fellow classmate. Talk to your family before you start your degree about the importance of pursuing your degree and how they can support you.

 Reward yourself and have fun! Just the fact that you are taking online classes is a tremendous accomplishment. Reward yourself along the way.

Student Services



Services available to all MSU students

MYINFO - MSU's secure student information portal, allows access to personal information such as transcripts, class schedules, grades, financial aid packages, and pay stubs. You may access My Info from anywhere and at any time, even if you are no longer a student at MSU.

montana.edu/myinfo/

DESIRE2LEARN (aka D2L) - MSU online classes are delivered using this Online Learning Management System (many campus-based courses use D2L, as well). A brief, self-paced course introduces you to D2L and its tools. For help, contact the D2L support team.

ecat@montana.edu

(406) 994-3255 (994-D2LL)

ecat.montana.edu

DEGREEWORKS - DegreeWorks provides an accessible, convenient, and organized way for students to know where they are academically and how they can plan the rest of their college careers. DegreeWorks is an excellent tool for distance students to monitor academic progress anytime, anyplace. However, note that DegreeWorks is not a substitute for consultation with an academic advisor, and students still need to discuss their program of study with their academic advisor.

montana.edu/degreeworks

ACADEMIC ADVISING - Academic advising is provided to students who are admitted to a degree program. Go to DegreeWorks to find your advisor.

montana.edu/degreeworks

MSU WRITING CENTER - The MSU Writing Center offers online tutoring on a limited basis for distance students. Online tutoring sessions

involve document sharing, chat and phone, as needed. To make an appointment, visit montana.edu/writingcenter and click *Make an Appointment*.

MSU LIBRARY - Subject librarian research consultations, chat/phone/email research help, research database, tech help and interlibrary loan are some of the resources available to distance students.

(406) 994-3139

lib.montana.edu

OFFICE OF THE DEAN OF STUDENTS -

The Office of the Dean of Students advocates for students, works with individual students and student groups, and collaborates with other campus offices to ensure students are successful at MSU.

deanofstudents@montana.edu

(406) 994-2826

montana.edu/deanofstudents/

Allen Yarnell Center for Student Success

OFFICE OF STUDENT SUCCESS - The Return-to-Learn Program helps returning MSU students understand the reenrollment process and overcome any hurdles to completing a degree. Success advisors and learning strategists will meet with online students in person or over the phone to create an academic success plan and discuss time management, study skills and other learning strategies.

success@montana.edu

(406) 994-ROAR (994-7627)

montana.edu/success

CAREER, INTERNSHIP AND STUDENT EMPLOYMENT SERVICES -

Students can access all resources for employment and

internships on hireabobcat.com and meet in person or over the phone with career coaches to discuss career planning, résumé and cover letter review, and interview preparation.

careers@montana.edu
(406) 994-4353

OFFICE OF FINANCIAL EDUCATION -

Financial Coaches can meet with online students in person or over the phone to discuss scholarships, loans and loan repayment, financial aid and budgeting.

makechange@montana.edu
(406) 994-4388

SMARTYCATS TUTORING - SmartyCats offers tutoring services to help you reach your full potential or if you just need a bit of help. Contact Smarty Cats for information on current services.

success@montana.edu
(406) 994-7627

montana.edu/success/tutoring/tutoring.php

Office of Disability, Re-entry and Veterans Services

DISABILITY SERVICES - If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation(s), you are encouraged to contact your instructor and the Office of Disability, Re-entry and Veterans Services as soon as possible.

drv@montana.edu
(406) 994-2824

montana.edu/disability/

RE-ENTRY SERVICES - Non-traditional aged students can contact Disabilities, Re-entry and Veterans Services staff member regarding options for degree completion.

drv@montana.edu
(406) 994-3661

montana.edu/reentry/

VETERAN SERVICES - MSU believes in providing access to quality education for all veterans. To simplify the process for veteran students, MSU combined Disability, Re-entry and Veteran Services into one office to offer a seamless experience. Contact the Office of Disability, Re-Entry and Veterans Services for more information on services available.

drv@montana.edu

(406) 994-3661

montana.edu/veteran/



Other helpful information

STUDENT TECHNOLOGY RESOURCES -

Services available to distance students include student email account, Information Technology Center Help Desk, and free antivirus software.

montana.edu/itcenter

MSU STUDENT CONDUCT CODE - All

MSU students must abide by the MSU Student Conduct Code, which includes responsibilities and expectations for students and instructors, plus information about academic decisions, records, confidentiality, and other policies and procedures. The Code is reviewed and updated regularly.

montana.edu/policy/student_conduct/

TEXTBOOKS - Textbooks are available at

most online retailers. Some textbooks are available as electronic copies. Books can also be purchased and shipped to you through the MSU Bookstore. msubookstore.org

REGISTRATION HANDBOOK - This online

document is updated each semester and includes important dates for the semester, registration instructions and deadlines, and other important information.

montana.edu/registrar/Handbooks.html

Becoming an Online Student Checklist

- Tell your family, friends, co-workers or anyone who is part of your support network that you are determined to further your education. Stating this commitment out loud is the first step toward your educational journey!
- Research the program or programs that interest you.
Find out:
 - what degree or certificate will you earn?
 - how many credits is the program?
 - how much will it cost?
 - what are the prerequisites for the program and courses?
 - how many classes do you need to take?
 - will any existing coursework transfer in?
 - how do you apply?
 - what are the admission dates?
- Apply for admission or submit an Intent to Register form if you are a returning MSU student.
- Set up an advisor appointment.
- Prepare for your advising appointment by getting your transcripts together and researching what classes you need to take.
- Start organizing your time, physical space and life commitments.
- Submit immunization records. All students, whether online or on-campus, must submit these.
For more information, call **(406) 994-2311**
or visit **montana.edu/health/immunization.php**
- Find out when class registration opens.
- Apply for financial aid:
Email **finaid@montana.edu** or call **(406) 994-2845**
- Register for classes.
- Confirm your bill.
- If you have a disability, contact Disability Services:
drv@montana.edu or **(406) 994-2824**
- If you are a veteran, contact VA and Re-entry Services:
drv@montana.edu or **(406) 994-3661**
- Order textbooks.
- Log into D2L and MyInfo.
- Sign up for the D2L student overview class.

"I have dreamed about getting my graduate degree for many years. The online program gave me the opportunity to accomplish this dream and I am forever grateful to MSU for creating this program, for the selection committee for accepting me into the program and for all of my professors for helping me along my journey...it has been positive in every way."

Every path in life is unique

Reach your goal

with online learning at Montana State University



67% of students in a survey of online undergraduate MSU students said completing their degree was their life goal.



You can do it!



MSU Extended University Online Student Support
(406) 994-6683 | distance@montana.edu
montana.edu/online