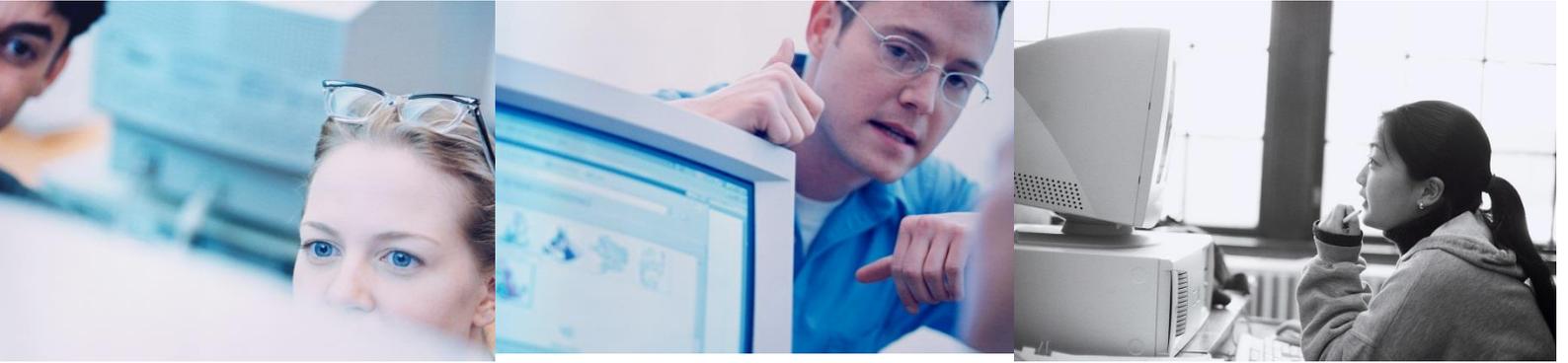


# *SW/WC Online Learning Community*



## *Student/Family Handbook 2013-2014*





## Table of Contents

Welcome .....	3
Mission Statement .....	4
Online Learning .....	5
Successful Online Learners .....	9
Study Tips .....	12
Online Learning Registration .....	14
Academic Honesty .....	15
Assessment/Grading Policies .....	16
Participation/Attendance Policy .....	17
Discipline Policy .....	17
Minimum Technical Requirements .....	18
Technical Support .....	18
Required Forms .....	18

# Welcome...

Dear Online Student:

Welcome to SW/WC Online Learning Community! We would like to thank you for choosing our program to meet your educational needs. We strive to provide a rigorous online learning community that meets Minnesota academic standards. This student/family handbook contains valuable information for you as an online learner. Keep this handbook for future reference throughout your coursework with SW/WC Online Learning Community. You can access your class anytime by visiting <http://moodle.swsc.org> Additional information is provided on our website for your review at any time by visiting [www.swsc.org/distancelearning](http://www.swsc.org/distancelearning) . You have or will shortly receive instructions on how to access your online course and log-in information. Please do not share your log-in information with anyone else.

You will never be alone when enrolling in our online learning community. Your online instructor, school guidance counselor and SW/WC Online Learning Community will be here to answer any questions or problems that may arise. We are committed to making your online learning experience exciting and rewarding.

Please take the time to ensure you have completed and submitted the following items for proper course enrollment:

- ✓ Review your school district and SW/WC Service Cooperative Internet Acceptable Use Policy
- ✓ Complete SW/WC Service Cooperative Online Learning Community Enrollment Form.
- ✓ MDE OLL Supplemental Notice of Student Registration Form

Sincerely,

*SW/WC Online Learning Community Staff*

# Mission Statement

SW/WC Online Learning Community will guide individuals in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and positive attitudes toward themselves and others, thus enabling students to become problem solvers, creative thinkers and life-long learners.

Vision: To provide educational opportunities through online learning and distance education that otherwise might not be available to the students of the district and the region.

In order to achieve our mission the administration and staff at SW/WC Online Learning Community will:

- Provide quality course content to all students that meets Minnesota academic standards
- Provide support to students to achieve their full potential
- Appropriately utilize technology in a new and innovative way

SW/WC Online Learning Community does not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, color, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation, physical, mental, emotional, learning disability or handicap in its programs.

Federal law prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, sex or handicap.

SW/WC Online Learning Community courses are designed for students who:

- Have scheduling conflicts
- Hospital/Homebound students
- Students who need credit recovery
- Students who need advanced placement courses
- Students who wish to fast track their educational experience
- Students who travel or miss school extensively

# Online Learning

Online courses are an excellent opportunity for students, but they are not for everyone. Students who take online courses must be able to take responsibility for their own learning, be motivated and organized. Online courses are rigorous and require students to put in just as much time and effort as a traditional course. At this point you should have already visited with your school guidance counselor and taken the Washington Online assessment at <http://www.waol.org/getStarted/IsOnline4Me.asp> to determine if online learning is a good fit for you.

SW/WC Online Learning Community is committed to providing students with an exceptional online program. Our instructors receive training to ensure they are properly equipped to teach in the online environment. We work closely with the schools, administrators and instructors in the area to ensure students get a quality online experience. The online learning community provides flexibility for students allowing course materials to be available from any location and at any time where the student can access the internet.

Because of the asynchronous nature of online classes, students and instructors do not necessarily need to access the course at the same time during the day. While students must adhere to deadlines for things such as assignments and quizzes, they maintain the freedom to choose the time that works best for them to read assignments, participate in discussions and submit assignments.

Online course materials are easy to access and use. SW/WC Online Learning Community uses the Moodle course management system. You will find student tutorials available to assist you with using Moodle on our homepage at <http://moodle.swsc.org>.

## Myths about Online Learning

LEARNNC

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education

<http://www.learnnc.org/support/fourmyths-online>

**Myth #1: Online courses are just online textbooks.**

I'm not one of those students who can learn from a textbook. It's a nice supplement, but I need to have demonstrations, practice, and I have to apply that knowledge with projects and teamwork.

It's true that some online courses just provide the same materials a textbook would, but those are, more often than not, the least successful online courses on the Web. A good online course provides the complete instructional package, and is heavily committed to collaboration among students and applying knowledge to develop skills.

A complete online course goes well beyond just text and pictures; it harnesses the best that the Web has to offer. It is constantly changing, being updated, linking to new sites. It may include audio, video, or animation. Students may interact through e-mail, threaded discussion, collaborative Web spaces, chat clients, or in person, which leads us to the next myth...

### **Myth #2: Online courses will keep students glued to the computer.**

In the traditional classroom, we've always encouraged students to think beyond the four walls. We utilize other resources in our school, have students investigate from home, or participate in field studies. An online course is no different—just because a course is delivered via the Internet doesn't change the educational mandate to have kids exploring the world around them.

A good online course asks students to conduct interviews or case studies, take samples from the field, read great novels, or practice the skills they have learned. Teachers in online professional development courses might be asked to use the skill they are learning in the classroom and report their findings. An environmental science student in an online course might have to collect data from her yard. Students in a language course might be expected to meet with other students or a facilitator for speaking practice. In some cases, online courses don't even happen entirely online. Some courses use a blended or hybrid method of instruction, where some of the learning happens online and some of the learning happens in short face-to-face sessions.

### **Myth #3: Online courses are easier than face to face courses.**

People often worry that an online course can't provide the same educational experience as a face-to-face course because they simply can't see how the same

wide range of activities could be delivered online. And they're partially right: not everything that can be done in the classroom can be done online. However, the converse is also true; online activities often open up a wide range of educational experiences not available in the traditional classroom.

Instructors report that designing an online course is much more difficult and time-intensive because there's so much less room to improvise in an online course. The entire curriculum and all of the directions have to be devised and tested for clarity before the students even begin the course. The instructor has to anticipate any problem areas and create supplemental activities in advance, because developing content is time-consuming.

Students have to work harder as well, because in addition to the learning the content of the course, they must continue to write more clearly than they may be used to doing. When the majority of the communication is written, students are consistently practicing the art and process of writing for a variety of purposes: academic, social, formal, informal.

#### **Myth #4: Online courses are isolating and lonely**

It's hard to imagine that a course that takes place on the Web could possibly provide the same rich social and collaborative experience that the traditional classroom does. But they can. In fact, online courses may be more interactive for some students.

Luckily, we live in a time where communication is changing. Think back ten years, and you probably remember a time when you didn't have e-mail. Your primary modes of communication over a distance were letters and the telephone. But now, you often use e-mail because it's easily archived, quick, and doesn't even require the other person to be present when you send it.

Communicating in the digital age is getting easier and easier, and more and more of our K-12 students are becoming proficient with instant messaging clients like AOL Instant Messenger or chat applications. Teenagers have a very active presence on the Internet, through online games, chats, and Web pages, and that participation can also be leveraged into a learning environment for synchronous or asynchronous learning.

Consider also that the classroom can be isolating and lonely. Do you remember a time when you gave the wrong answer in class? When people may have laughed or

made faces, or even made comments to you later? That kind of negative reinforcement didn't make you want to participate much the next time a class discussion rolled around. And you probably had to give that answer quickly—the classroom often doesn't give you a lot of time to think before you have to give an answer. Or what if you had the right answer? You might have still gotten laughter or dirty looks for being an "egghead" or a "nerd." You may have refrained from talking the next time, or "dumbed down" your answer.

In an online course, you are free to research, to think, and to edit before you post your comments. You won't hear any immediate response, so while it may be a while before anyone answers, you won't get any laughter or dirty looks. You're more likely to get a well-reasoned, well-researched response from a classmate or instructor. Isn't that a more comfortable learning community? And because students have so much more leeway to open up, to express themselves, and to articulate things just the way they wanted to, instructors in online courses report that they know their students as well as or better than students in the traditional classroom.

# What Makes a Successful Online Student?

## ILLINOIS ONLINE NETWORK

[HTTP://WWW.ION.UILLINOIS.EDU/RESOURCES/TUTORIALS/PEDAGOGY/STUDENTPROFILE.ASP](http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/tutorials/pedagogy/studentprofile.asp)



Like the facilitator, the online student possesses unique qualities. The online students of today consist primarily of working people who are trying to better their opportunities. This however is changing, as more and more young and older people become aware of the online model. The traditional school will never go away, but the virtual classroom is a significant player in today's educational community. Corporations are using the online model to train technical professionals while private and public universities redefine the world as their markets. The market for students is expanding rapidly. In general, the online student should possess the following qualities:

1. **Be open minded about sharing life, work, and educational experiences as part of the learning process.**

Introverts as well as extroverts find that the online process requires them to **utilize their experiences**. This forum for communication **eliminates the visual barriers** that hinder some individuals in expressing themselves. In addition, the student is given time to reflect on the information before responding. The online environment should be open and friendly.

2. **Be able to communicate through writing.**

In the Virtual Classroom, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that students feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing. Many students have limited writing abilities, which should be addressed before or as part of the online experience. This may require remedial efforts on the part of the student.

**3. Be Self-motivated and self-disciplined.**

With the freedom and flexibility of the online environment comes responsibility. The online process takes a real commitment and discipline to keep up with the flow of the process.

**4. Be willing to "speak up" if problems arise.**

Many of the non-verbal communication mechanisms that instructors use in determining whether students are having problems (confusion, frustration, boredom, absence, etc.) are not possible in the online paradigm. If a student is experiencing difficulty on any level (either with the technology or with the course content), he or she must communicate this immediately. Otherwise the instructor will never know what is wrong.

**5. Be willing and able to commit to 4 to 15 hours per week per course.**

Online is not easier than the traditional educational process. In fact, many students will say it requires much more time and commitment.

**6. Be able to meet the minimum requirements for the program.**

The requirements for online are no less than that of any other quality educational program. The successful student will view online as a convenient way to receive their education – not an easier way.

**7. Accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process.**

The learning process requires the student to make decisions based on facts as well as experience. Assimilating information and executing the right decisions requires critical thought; case analysis does this very effectively.

**8. Have access to a computer and a modem.**

The communication medium is a computer, phone line, and modem; the student must have access to the necessary equipment.

**9. Be able to think ideas through before responding.**

Meaningful and quality input into the virtual classroom is an essential part of the learning process. Time is given in the process to allow for the careful consideration of responses. The testing and challenging of ideas is encouraged; you will not always be right, just be prepared to accept a challenge.

**10. Feel that high quality learning can take place without going to a traditional classroom.**

If the student feels that a traditional classroom is a prerequisite to learning, they may be more comfortable in the traditional classroom. Online is not for everybody. A student that wants to be on a traditional campus attending a traditional classroom is probably not going to be happy online. While the level of social interaction can be very high in the virtual classroom given that many barriers come down in the online format, it is not the same as living in a dorm on a campus. This should be made known. An online student is expected to:

- Participate in the virtual classroom 5-7 days a week
- Be able to work with others in completing projects
- Be able to use the technology properly
- Be able to meet the minimum standards as set forth by the institution
- Be able to complete assignments on time
- Enjoy communicating in writing.

The online learning process is normally accelerated and requires **commitment** on the student's part. Staying up with the class and completing all work on time is vital. Once a student gets behind, it is almost impossible to catch up. Basically, the student needs to want to be there, and needs to want the experience.

# Study Tips

## **Peterson's Distance Learning Advice: Study Tips for Distance Education**

<http://iiswinprd03.petersons.com/distancelearning/code/articles/study.asp>

### **Tools**

Before enrolling in a course, make sure you have access to the tools necessary to complete assignments. A word processor can help you to organize your work and communicate your thoughts more clearly. A computer with adequate hard disk space and modem for e-mail transmission are "musts" for many classes.

### **Schedule**

Set aside a regularly scheduled time for study. If you have not been involved in academic pursuits recently, you may find that your career, family, hobbies, and social and civic commitments leave little time for studying. To help you fit studying into your schedule, keep a record for a week of how you spend your time, and then decide what you are willing to give up. Schedule your studies for a time when you are mentally fresh and able to devote at least one hour to your work. Think of the hour as "reserved time." If you miss too many study periods, revise your schedule.

### **Where to Study**

You will find it easier to focus in an appropriate environment for study. Find a place that is free from distractions. You might consider work--before or after hours and on your lunch hour--a public library, or a separate room in your home.

### **Reading Skills**

You must comprehend and retain what you read for real learning to take place. Reading skills can be developed by concentrating on what you read and by taking frequent pauses to organize and review the material in your mind. At the end of a study session, review everything you have read, making special notes of important points. Reading a computer screen can be hard on your eyes; it may be necessary

to download hard copies of reading assignments and communications from your instructor and coworkers.

### **Communication Skills**

It can be intimidating to speak into a microphone in a video or conference call, but your communication skills are an important part of any assignment--on the job, at home, and at school. Distance learning provides the opportunity to enhance these skills. Pay careful attention to instructions and be certain that you understand what is being asked. It often helps to develop a brief outline before responding to questions whether they are submitted in writing, via e-mail, orally, or on video/audio tape. Organization, grammar, and the appropriate style are important whichever medium you choose.

# Online Learning Registration

Steps to Register for an Online Course:

- I. Meet with your school guidance counselor to look at your options and course offerings
- II. Fill out the SW/WC Online Learning Community application and MDE Online Learning Supplemental Notice of Student Registration and submit them with your parental and school authorization to [desupport@swsc.org](mailto:desupport@swsc.org)
  - Within ten days of receiving a completed application for admittance SW/WC Online Learning Community will send a letter informing you if you have been accepted to the program. At this time a letter is also sent to the enrolling district informing them of your acceptance.
- III. You will have ten days upon receiving admission to SW/WC Online Learning Community to notify SW/WC Online Learning Community of your intent to enroll in a course. In order to fulfill this requirement you will need to send in a completed enrollment packet to SW/WC Online Learning Community at:
  - 1420 E College Drive  
Marshall, MN 56258

## Dropping a Course

If for some reason you decide to drop an online course you will need to submit a written request to be dropped from the course within two weeks of the start date of the course by mail, email or fax to SW/WC Online Learning Community. If you choose to drop a course you may either enroll in a different online course or choose to take a traditional course from you enrolling district.

SW/WC Service Cooperative

Attn: Online Learning

1420 E College Drive

Marshall, MN 56258

Fax: (507) 537-6985

[desupport@swsc.org](mailto:desupport@swsc.org)

# Academic Honesty

As a student enrolled in SW/WC Online Learning Community you do hereby agree to follow the academic honesty policy listed below.

As a student in SW/WC Online Learning Community you have the responsibility to conduct yourself with the highest standard of integrity and honesty. All students are expected to complete their work on their own and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance. Cheating, plagiarizing, falsifying research and/or enabling another student to violate academic honesty policies will not be tolerated.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Plagiarism – using someone else’s ideas, words, expressions without proper citation of the source.
- Cheating – deception in which a student seeks to misrepresent the work of another individual as their own.
- Impersonation – completing work or taking an assessment for another student or allowing someone else to complete your work
- Unauthorized use of another person’s login information – Student login information is provided on an individual basis and they are not to be used by another individual
- Falsification – the submission of false or contrived data or sources

Academic dishonesty may result in one or more of the following actions:

- Loss of grade points for an assignment or assessment
- Failure to receive credit for the course
- Removal from the SW/WC Online Learning Community course
- Loss of eligibility to take courses through SW/WC Online Learning Community (you would then need to select a course from your enrolling district to replace your online course)

# Assessment/Grading Policies

## Assessment

Assessments will vary from course to course depending on the nature of the course. These include, but are not limited to, assignments, quizzes, tests, electronic presentations, online labs, essays and formal papers. Your instructor may elect to implement time limits, require passwords and/or require that the assessment be proctored. If an assessment requires that it be proctored it is the responsibility of the student to locate their own proctor. Instructions will be provided by your teacher to assist you in this process.

## Grading

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	59 and below

If students are receiving a failing grade (60% or less) in one or more of their online courses the student's online instructor will contact the student's school guidance counselor and together with the online instructor, school guidance counselor and the student a plan needs to be developed to improve their academic standing in the course or the student needs to consider withdrawing from the course.

At the end of the semester a final grade will be submitted to the student's enrolling district for inclusion on the student's academic transcript. If you believe your grade was incorrectly reported you should contact your online instructor and school guidance counselor for further assistance.

## **Participation/Attendance Policy**

Participation is essential in the online learning environment. Students are expected to participate in activities assigned by their instructor. This may include, but is not limited to, chat room discussions, discussion boards, email and collaborative assignments. Students are expected to log into their course at least once per day during the school week to check for course updates, assignment deadlines and any other information provided by the teacher. Students who do not participate in these required activities may lose grade points. If a lack of participation becomes excessive the student may be dropped from the course.

Attendance is derived from students logging into their course as well as the submission of assignments and assessments by deadlines determined by the course instructor. Students who do not regularly check their course homepage may fall behind the others in the class and become at risk for failing the course.

## **Discipline Policy**

The discipline policy for students enrolled in an online course through SW/WC Online Learning Community will be in accordance with the student's enrolling district. Any inappropriate behavior will be reported to the student's enrolling school and be dealt with accordingly.

Students not covered under an enrolling district's discipline policy should refer to the SW/WC Online Learning Community's discipline policy posted on the SW/WC Online Learning Community homepage at <http://moodle.swsc.org>

Repeat or serious offenders may be removed from their online course at the discretion of SW/WC Online Learning Community.

# Minimum Technical Requirements

- ✓ A reliable PC running Windows 98, 2000 or XP
- ✓ Internet access (cable, DSL preferred)
- ✓ 256 MB RAM (more is recommended)
- ✓ Internet Explorer 6.0 or higher with Java and JavaScript enabled in your browser
- ✓ A valid e-mail address (if this changes it is your responsibility to update this on your Moodle profile immediately)
- ✓ Microsoft Word
- ✓ Adobe Acrobat Reader
  - Free download at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

\*Check with your instructor for more details on your particular course requirements

## Technical Support

Technical support is available through SW/WC Online Learning Community for students enrolled in an online course. You may access Moodle tutorials under the technical support link on our homepage at <http://moodle.swsc.org> . If you are in need of further assistance please contact SW/WC Online Learning Community's distance education support desk at [desupport@swsc.org](mailto:desupport@swsc.org) or by phone at (507) 537–2259.

## Required Forms

Please ensure that you have submitted the following forms:

- ✓ Signed SW/WC Online Learning Community Enrollment Form
- ✓ Signed OLL Supplemental Notice of Student Registration

\*These forms may be found on our website at [www.swsc.org/distancelearning](http://www.swsc.org/distancelearning).