



Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department University

Everything Adult College Students Need To Know When Returning To School

Adults return to school to train for career advancement, a new career or promotional opportunities. This may seem like a difficult task to manage, but there are options concerning class types which can help you get the most out of your college experience. There is more than one class type when it comes to college courses, and you can choose traditional classes, cohort extended learning classes and online classes, depending on your preferences and the specific courses you are taking. There are some classes which are not available online, such as certain medical or science classes where labs and hands on training in the classroom are essential, but many classes can be taken online conveniently. Online classes may not be right for everyone, but they often offer the most flexibility for those with great self-discipline.

Most adults returning to school are pursuing a Bachelor's or Master's Degree program. Getting started is easy but does require some planning. Understanding your reason for pursuing higher education as well as determining what to major in is essential. Bachelor Degree programs do not require students possess an Associate's Degree prior to enrolling, however, completing lower division classes at local community colleges will make your schooling more affordable. Master's Degree programs do require students possess an accredited Bachelor Degree prior to enrollment. Once you've made to commitment to further your education there are just a few crucial steps left to take.

Associate's Degree Road Map

- Acquire transcripts from all colleges you have attended or possess credits
- Meet with a College Advisor at your local community college
 - Tell the College Advisor if you are plan on pursuing a Bachelor Degree program at the completion of your Associates Degree.
 - Tell the College Advisor which Colleges you are considering for your Bachelor Degree programs.
- Create a degree program plan (request a G.E. certified degree plan)
- Discuss options of taking online classes or classes at other community colleges.
 - Confirming acceptable transferable classes with the college you plan to graduate from is essential when taking classes at other colleges.

Bachelor's Degree Road map

- Acquire transcripts from all colleges you have attended or possess credits
- Attend college information sessions, review different programs and determine which type of adult learning program would work best for you (Cohort, online or a combination).
- Meet with College Advisors from the schools you plan to attend and discuss the programs that interest you.
- Consider completing lower division classes at a local community college.

What Program Is Right For Me?

Cohorts or extended learning programs are “accelerated programs” that enable students to obtain college degrees in less time than traditional programs. A “cohort” is a group of 10-30 students who enroll at one time and advance through a program taking the same courses at the same time. Students take one class at a time for a period of 4-8 weeks. Classes are run consecutively with minimal breaks throughout the year. Students and instructors convene at a predetermined location once a week. In order to accommodate working adults, classes generally convene for 4-6 hours during evening hours or on weekends. The combination of accelerated programs and cohorts creates a dynamic process that offers student a unique opportunity to achieve their educational goals. Cohorts afford students stability and continuity that the traditional college format cannot provide. Working with the same small group of individuals throughout the program and taking one course after another provides learning communities that bind adult students together in collaborative relationships that last through graduation and even beyond. The support offered by fellow students is essential for working adults.

Online programs are degree programs in which the majority of the course work and learning is accomplished online. Just because a class is taken online does not mean it will be easier, or require fewer hours each week and less work. Online classes can be convenient though, because there is no travel time and you can arrange your classes to fit your schedule. Some colleges require that you take a semester or two of traditional classes if you are going back to school, so that you are prepared before diving into online courses. To be successful at online courses you will need to be:

- **Self-motivated** – With online classes you will need to keep track of your work and requirements, without any reminders from the instructor during class hours. You will be responsible for knowing what is required and when.
- **Well organized** - Being well organized will help you keep track of all your assignments and class paperwork, so you can spend more time studying and less looking for the stuff you need.
- **Willing to spend the necessary time online** - While online courses are flexible, you will still need to participate in discussion groups and forums for many courses. If you do not spend the required amount of time meeting these requirements your grade could suffer, and you could possibly fail the course.

Some online classes may require you to physically go to the college occasionally, for tests or certain other reasons. This is not always the case though, depending on the specific class you are taking and the college rules in place. It is important for you to evaluate the type of learner you are, and which class type will work best for your individual situation and needs. If you are unsure if an online learning environment is right for you, try taking a free Massive Open Online Class. For more information on these free online classes, see the information on MOOCs on our website.

Many people find that online courses are ideal, but others may need the structure of the traditional classroom for the best possible learning environment. If you are not sure whether online classes are a good fit you can always take one online class initially, and see how you do. If this class type seems to work well for you then the following semester you can add more online course options to your schedule. This allows you to ease into the online learning environment, and prevents you from getting in over your head before you are ready, affecting your grades and education prospects.