

## Chapter 1

# Discovering What's Available Online

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Sorting through the various types of online programs and courses
  - ▶ Looking for courses in a variety of institutions
  - ▶ Surveying different online course structures
  - ▶ Establishing strategies for taking accelerated online courses
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**I**f your appetite for learning online has been whetted, where should you go to find the right course offering? You may be surprised at the variety of institutions that offer online courses and how these courses have been packaged together for degrees. This chapter walks you through the many places you can find different kinds of online courses and the various ways in which they are organized. Finally, it takes a look at accelerated courses and how they work online.

## *Examining Different Types of Online Programs and Courses*

If you avoid school because it means hard work, don't feel bad — you're in the majority. However, there are good reasons to continue learning, including job promotions, higher earning potential, elevated status, and personal enrichment. The surprising thing is that school and learning are becoming synonymous with online education. This section discusses aspects you should consider when looking at online programs and courses.

How important is it to you to earn college credit for your work? Do you have the time and resources to take enough courses to complete a degree? Or do you only need a few courses for professional development or skill enhancement? Would a specific certification be the professional seal of approval you need? How you answer these questions determines the kinds of online programs that are best for you.

## *Earning traditional credit*

If you've decided to take an online course, chances are good that you're looking to earn some sort of traditional credit for your work. This section describes the kinds of credit you can get for your efforts — specifically, credits toward undergraduate or graduate degrees and high school credits. You can earn traditional college credits at two-year and four-year higher education institutions (which are covered later in this chapter) if you have completed your high school education. If you're still working on high school, you can earn credits through accredited online programs that serve your unique needs.

### *Credits toward undergraduate and graduate degrees*

Yes, you can earn an entire degree online! You can find programs that award associate's (two-year), bachelor's (four-year), master's, and even doctoral degrees online. You also can use online classes to supplement in-person coursework at a traditional institution. If you follow the suggestions for searching for a course at different institutions (which appear later in this chapter), you'll probably see this in the marketing information you find.



Schools package courses together for an online degree just like they do for a degree you would earn in a traditional fashion. The degree consists of required courses (classes you must take) and a handful of elective courses. Only when you earn the necessary number of credit hours in the right mix of required and elective courses do you get the degree conferred. How many hours depends on the type of degree you're seeking, the state you're studying in, and the individual institution. However, in general, these are the expectations:

- ✓ An associate's degree typically requires around 60 credit hours and may represent the first two years of a bachelor's degree.
- ✓ A bachelor's degree requires 124–128 credit hours.
- ✓ A master's degree requires 32–36 hours beyond a bachelor's degree. Some programs require as many as 44 credit hours.
- ✓ A doctorate requires around 60–75 credit hours beyond a bachelor's, plus successful completion of a comprehensive examination and a written dissertation of original research.

When you enroll in a college course, the number of credit hours you'll receive upon completing it should be evident in the course schedule or the marketing information. Schools are typically very good about stating how many credit hours they attach to a particular course, because this can make a difference in the total number of hours awarded that count toward a degree. A typical semester course awards three credit hours. By looking at the course number, you can tell whether those credits are undergraduate or graduate hours:

- ✓ Anything with a 100–400 number (for example, PSY101) indicates undergraduate credit, which is what you need for an associate's or bachelor's degree.
- ✓ Courses with numbers 500 and above grant graduate-level credit, suitable for master's degrees and doctorates.

You may have heard radio ads claiming you can finish your degree in as little as 18 months. These programs target adults who have previously earned some undergraduate credit and are now ready to complete a bachelor's degree. This newer twist in online education is actually a continuation of a former adult education model. These models started a couple of decades ago and established a night and weekend schedule for working adults. Some programs “accelerated” their courses by compressing a 16-week course into 8 weeks, but not all. The point was that you could go to work during the day and catch up on coursework on the weekend. Today's model of online education offers even more convenience in that you don't have to push it all off to Saturday or Sunday. Because you work from the comfort of your home or office, you can engage in learning throughout the week.



One factor you may experience in online degree programs is the use of *cohort groups*. Simply put, this means when you begin a series of courses toward the completion of a degree, you progress with the same group or cohort of students through the entire degree. If John is in your first class, John should be in your last class — and every class in between! Many people believe that the bonds formed among a cohort group of students are more supportive and therefore more likely to influence students to positively persist through programs. If John is your friend, he might talk you out of dropping out when times get tough. Plus, from an administrative perspective, cohorts are easier to track and often allow an institution to offer more start dates so that students don't have to wait several months to begin taking classes.

### ***High school credits***

High school credit functions a little like college credit in that you need to earn the right number of course credits and the right types. This varies from state to state in the United States, however. For example, in one state you may need four years of English, whereas you may be able to get by with only three in another state. Depending on what state you live in and whether you're homeschooled or attending a traditional school, you could earn all or part of your high school credits through online schools.



Make sure that any online high school courses you investigate will count toward graduation in your state. Start by checking your local school district's policies in accordance with the state requirements. A trip or phone call to the district office should get you the information you need, but you can also search your state's Department of Education Web site for policy statements concerning online education.

## *Obtaining certifications*

Maybe you're interested in a career change or you want to branch into a new direction within your current field. A certification or endorsement may be just what you need, and you can earn many of these online.

Certificates are like miniature degrees that signify continuing education following a planned and purposeful curriculum. They offer only what you need for a specific professional field or task. For example, if you study for a certificate in Web site development, you don't have to take computer science courses in COBOL programming, but you do need graphics and multimedia instruction. If you're studying for a certificate as a dental assistant, you don't have to take an English composition course, but you need courses in radiology and diagnostics. Just the facts, ma'am.

Typically, a certificate is much shorter than a traditional degree. If you think of an associate's degree as a two-year degree (60 hours) and a bachelor's degree as a four-year degree (124–128 hours), the certification is a one-and-a-half-year degree. For example, you can earn a certificate in medical transcription for an average of 44 credit hours. Interested in private security? A certificate is available for as few as 50 credit hours.

Another point to keep in mind is that some certificates can lead to other degrees. For example, if you earn a certificate in e-learning, some of those courses may count toward a master's degree at the same institution. Ask the school officials about this if you think the certificate may take you further.



More and more institutions offer certification online, including traditional two- and four-year institutions. Quality programs are truly beneficial in that they allow students to extend their professional development while continuing to work full time. Every institution defines its own requirements for degrees and certificates. You need to compare carefully when looking at multiple programs. Drill down and see what courses are required and whether they hold your interest.



One of the best sources of information for a certification program is your professional association. Read professional newsletters and ask practitioners about the kinds of certificates and credentials valued in that field.

## *Continuing your education with a few classes for fun or profit*

Online courses are not limited to degree or certificate programs. You can actually have fun online! For example, you could take a course in feng shui, an ancient Chinese practice of orienting objects to achieve desirable outcomes. You also can further your professional skills or ensure that you're meeting critical standards in your field by taking just a handful of classes. Whenever you enhance your professional skills, you stand to profit through promotions and salary boosts.

### *Personal interest*

Ever wonder about your genealogy but don't know how to start researching and documenting your heritage? There's an online course for that. How about picking up a second language? Digital photography? These examples show the diversity of online courses.

What kinds of institutions offer such courses? To be honest, you may find a course for free or very little money by starting up your favorite search engine (such as Google or Yahoo!) and typing "online course + [name of topic]". Try it; you'll be surprised! These courses may not be supported by an institution, and you won't earn credit, but you will get the information you seek. For example, coauthor Kevin Johnson recently took an online photography course where he learned the nuances of digital photography. He paid a fee to the photography school and completed the work online.

If you're looking for an institution to back you, you may find that your local college (two- or four-year) offers quite a few online courses geared toward personal interests. Topics may include the ones listed earlier in addition to art history, nutrition, parenting, and much more. These courses are usually part of the institutions' "community development" catalog or noncredit courses.

### *Professional development*

In many fields, professionals are encouraged or required to complete professional development courses on an annual basis. For example, in the state of Illinois, per state funding guidelines for grant-funded adult education programs, school faculty are required to complete six hours of professional development per fiscal year. So if you want to keep your teaching job, you have to get those six hours of training somehow! If you're a practicing medical or dental professional and want to maintain your licensure, you have to earn a prescribed number of continuing education credits per year. These kinds of courses may be found at institutions that award degrees in those fields. For example, if you need credits for teaching, a college that awards degrees in education would be a logical place to look.

In addition, more and more professional associations offer professional development online. They know professionals appreciate the convenience of learning anytime, anywhere. You can find many opportunities by conducting a search for “[your field] + online courses.” For example, the Young Adult Library Services Association offers its members online courses related to their professional needs. You can find these opportunities by searching for “[your association] + online courses” in your preferred search engine.

Make sure that any professional development course credits you earn will be accepted by the professional association that requires you to earn them. To find out, visit the association’s Web site and search for statements concerning acceptance of online credit. For example, if you’re a dentist, you can visit the American Dental Association’s continuing education page to see a clear statement regarding states’ limits on the number of hours that can be earned through self-paced online courses.

### ***Compliance training***

In business and industry, compliance training accounts for most course offerings. What kind of compliance? It could involve ethics training, safety and material data, or emergency preparedness. Other examples include what to do with forms, processes for requisitioning funds, or must-know policies. You may find all of these courses online. The most common provider is your company’s human resources department.



Compliance training works very well as a self-paced course, so don’t be surprised if you’re in a course all by yourself. However, keep in mind that your participation, what pages or content you read, and how well you do in follow-up tests may be reported back to the company. Self-paced courses are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

## ***Finding Out Which Institutions Offer Online Programs and Courses***

Whether you’re interested in taking one or two online courses or completing an entire degree online, the process of searching for online education offerings isn’t much different from researching traditional education options. First you need to determine what kind of institution best meets your needs. Are you seeking a bachelor’s degree or higher? Then you need at least a four-year school. This section walks you through your choices according to the type of institution so you know what to look for.

## *Four-year colleges*

Many four-year colleges and universities, both public and private, offer bachelor's degrees and graduate degrees online. They may also offer certificates and personal enrichment courses. Some are traditional schools with real brick-and-mortar campuses; others are completely virtual with no physical place to go. The following sections discuss how to get course information from both of these types of schools.



Hold on there! Before you go randomly searching, considering the following recommendations may save you time:

- ✓ **If you're completing a degree you previously started at a traditional school:** Go back to the institution where you were a student and talk to them about what may be available online. Jump to the section "Brick-and-mortar schools."
- ✓ **If you're starting an entire degree from scratch:** You have to decide which of the two types of institutions you want to earn it from: brick and mortar or wholly online. Read both of the following sections to find out how to get necessary information.
- ✓ **If you simply need a course or two for personal interest or professional development:** Look at your local state institutions. Not only do you keep your money in-state, but you're closer if you need to drive to the campus for any reason.

### *Brick-and-mortar schools*

If you type "online courses" into a search engine, some of the schools in the resulting list will be traditional institutions with physical campuses. For example, you may find Colorado Technical University or DeVry University, which offer their programs and classes both on traditional campuses and through online counterparts.

Traditional brick-and-mortar schools, such as your local state university, don't seem to pop to the top of the search results. They're competing against the online giants and their marketing dollars aren't going as far. However, these are still worthy of consideration — you just have to follow a different process to get the information you need:

#### **1. Rather than conduct an open search, go directly to the local school's Web site.**

Once there, look for links to online learning, online education, online courses, distance learning, or distance education on the home page. If they aren't obvious, look for a link to academics or future students and see whether online courses are mentioned there.

Book VII

Going  
Further to  
Get Ahead

2. **Know what kind of degree you're looking for and the school, college, or academic department it typically falls under.**

For example, if you want to become a teacher, look in the College of Education or something similar. If you want a degree in business, look for the College of Business or something to that effect.

3. **Once you find your way to the correct department, begin sorting through the course listings.**

Look for links to course schedules rather than the course catalog.

A school's catalog tells you what courses you need to put together for an entire degree, but it may not tell you whether the entire degree is available online.

4. **See whether the school gives you the opportunity to sort through the ways in which a given class is offered.**

The best schools state clearly and unquestionably when a class is offered online or in a blended format. (Blended learning — a combination of online and traditional teaching methods — is explored a little later in this chapter.)

5. **When you have an idea that the school offers online courses or a degree in which you're interested, follow up.**

Send an e-mail or make a telephone call to the department you're interested in. Ask for more information.



### ***Wholly online schools***

When you do a search for “online courses” online, other names besides those of traditional institutions pop up. Schools like University of Phoenix, Kaplan University, Capella University and other entirely online four-year schools have grown in popularity, and are now mainstream in the media and online search worlds.

Listings from the major players will come up in a general search for “online courses” plus the field you're interested in, as well as agencies that market online programs for a variety of schools. An example of an agency is EarnMyDegree ([www.earnmydegree.com](http://www.earnmydegree.com)). This particular Web site represents universities you may recognize as well as some that may be unfamiliar.

In most cases, you're asked to complete an online form with your name, e-mail address, and some other basic information such as the type of program you are considering. You will then receive more information by e-mail.



## College: One word, two meanings

College of Lake County and College of Education both use the word *college*, but in different contexts. Here's the lowdown:

- ✓ **The word *college* can be part of the name of the institution.** In North America, smaller schools, two-year schools, and schools that focus on undergraduate education are often named as colleges.
- ✓ **The word *college* can also describe a group of departments or programs that offer degrees with the same foundations but distinct expertise.** This is often the case at larger institutions where degrees are more highly differentiated. An example would be a large university that's divided into multiple colleges, including a College of Business that offers degrees in entrepreneurship, administration, marketing, and accounting.

This is a direct method of finding out what's available, but it has the following drawbacks:

- ✓ You're put on everyone's mailing list, and your e-mail inbox grows exponentially.
- ✓ You begin receiving phone calls during the dinner hour.
- ✓ You may hear from institutions that are not accredited (see the next chapter for the importance of accreditation).
- ✓ You may have so many choices that it becomes overwhelming!

## *Two-year colleges*

If you're looking for a two-year (associate's) degree, you'll have an easier time with your search process than you will with other types of institutions. Why is this? The short answer is that two-year brick-and-mortar colleges (also known as community colleges or junior colleges) have had the most experience with online courses. In fact, according to the researchers at the Sloan Consortium, a professional group of institutions and individuals focused on quality online education, almost half of the students enrolled in online courses in 2007 were studying at two-year colleges.

The search process for online courses at a two-year college is very similar to what you would experience for a four-year school, but you're more likely to be able to go directly to course listings that specify online delivery. In short, you might see a glowing icon that says *Online Courses Here!* on the community college's home page. That means you won't have as much difficulty finding information about what online courses are available.

If you don't see an obvious link to online learning, online education, online courses, distance education, or distance learning, follow the same steps that you would for a four-year brick-and-mortar school (listed earlier in this chapter).

## ***Other institutions for certificates, professional development, and training***

Finding an online certification program is very similar to searching for online courses through two-year or four-year institutions. Again, you have to know what you're looking for, and you have to know what kind of institution will serve you best.

Suppose you want to earn a certificate in a new career field. Using your standard search engine, you find that you can earn such a certificate through two- and four-year schools, some with brick-and-mortar operations, and others that are wholly online. (You even find programs that are sold by companies and don't offer traditional credit, but those aren't recommended.)

Here are a few pointers to help you decide:

- ✔ **Is your area of study mostly introductory and associated with a two-year degree, such as medical transcription or allied health?** If so, look to a two-year school.
- ✔ **Is your area of study more closely aligned with a field requiring a bachelor's degree?** This would include fields like computer science or education, where certificates and endorsements often mean job promotions. In this case, look to a school that can offer graduate degrees.
- ✔ **Do you need to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to maintain a license or for employment?** Maybe a professional association in your field has recommended schools. Start with the association's Web site.
- ✔ **Has your employer recommended specific skills training (for instance, database management)?** Your human resources department may already have a subscription to a provider that delivers such training online. This is big business!



When you search for any individual course, read the prerequisite information carefully so you know whether that course is available to you independently or whether you can only take it if you're enrolled in a specific degree or certificate program.

## Checking Out Different Structures of Online Courses

After you know that you can find a class you need at your institution of choice, your next consideration should be the structure of the class. Structure refers to whether the course is completely online or a blend of online and face-to-face time, instructor led or self-paced, and real-time or asynchronous. If you have recently searched for a college course, you may already recognize that quite a variety of structures is available. This section helps you sort through some of the differences.



Before getting to the different course structures, it's worthwhile to establish a baseline for classes in general. Every course typically has two components:

- ✓ **Content:** The guts of the course, or what you are to learn. The content of an accounting course is accounting. The content of a history course is the history of whatever you are studying, and so on.
- ✓ **Evaluation:** A nice word for figuring out what grade you earn. In many cases, testing determines your grade, but it may also be determined by a final paper or project.

Ideal courses also include a third component: practice. In other words, somewhere between content and evaluation, the student gets to practice what is being learned, either through homework assignments, short papers, or other activities.

### *Just you and the monitor (fully online) versus blended courses (partly online)*

One big consideration for courses should be whether they're completely online or a blend of online and traditional class time.

- ✓ A *completely online course* means just that. You complete all the work online. You could enroll in a course at a school that's physically located across the globe because you won't need to travel. Because of the popularity of online courses, institutions readily identify which classes are online.

Book VII

Going  
Further to  
Get Ahead

✓ *Blended courses* are a combination of online screen time and traditional *seat time* (the amount of time a student sits in a seat in a classroom). Faculty appreciate blended formats because they can move portions of instruction online, thus freeing up class time for other activities. For example, the instructor may ask you to read articles, complete quizzes, or watch prerecorded lectures online. In the class time on campus, she may have groups work on projects, conduct a lab, or host a class discussion.

The major advantages of blended courses are human contact and accountability. Students aren't likely to slip through the cracks or procrastinate when a teacher has real face time with them every week. And yet, the student can work on other available course materials when it's convenient for them and may benefit from the independence and reflective thinking that often accompanies online courses.

An obvious disadvantage of the blended format is that you need to live close enough to drive to campus for the regularly scheduled meetings. If you enroll in a course at a college that is three hours from home, this could be a significant nuisance, not to mention an undue expense.



Some colleges fail to advertise the blended requirements of traditional classes appropriately. For example, you could enroll in a business management course that meets Mondays and Wednesdays, only to learn during the first week that you're also required to log in twice a week and complete activities online. For this reason, be sure to ask about the structure of a course before enrolling and putting your money down. If the academic advisor or registrar can't answer your question, go directly to the instructor.

## ***Instructor-led courses versus self-paced courses***

*Online education* is about connecting the student to educational materials by way of the Internet. As shown throughout this chapter, online education can happen in a variety of forms and fashions, but the underlying use of the Internet and its technologies are fundamental. Lessons, communication, and assessment (grading) all happen by way of the World Wide Web. The following sections describe the two major models for this communication and assessment: instructor-led and self-paced.

### *Instructor-led courses*

An instructor-led course is just what you think it is; an instructor determines what happens with the content, pace of instruction, and evaluation. Here are a few distinguishing traits of this type of course, which is the most common type out there:

- ✓ **In an instructor-led course, there is a distinct schedule, and the whole class works through the content at the same time.** While you are reading and completing activities for module two, so is the rest of the class. Typically, you find the schedule posted as a calendar or within the class syllabus. If you're a procrastinator, an instructor-led course can keep you on task.

- ✓ **Not only do you interact with your peers, but you have regular communication with the instructor.** The instructor is present and virtually "visible" through regular announcements and interaction in public discussions.



Be sure to read the regular announcements posted by the instructor. Doing so not only keeps you on task and on time, but also helps you avoid looking silly by asking a question she has already addressed.

**You also see the instructor through private communication.** As you complete assignments and turn them in, the instructor communicates with you and provides feedback. This may come via private e-mail or by way of the electronic grade book. This communication reminds you that the virtual classroom has a live instructor and you're not alone.

- ✓ **You don't see the whole course at once.** This fact may be one of the most distinctive features of an instructor-led course. Many instructors prefer to time-release the content according to when the students need it. In other words, if you're in the fourth week of an eight-week course, you may not be able to see the content for weeks five and beyond. You only see the week you're working on. This strategy keeps all the students in the same place and prevents discussions from becoming disjointed and confusing.



If you find yourself in a course that uses the time-release method and you know in advance that you'll be traveling, let your instructor know the dates you'll be on the road. Ask whether it's possible for you to view some of the content in advance so that you won't fall behind if you experience technological difficulties getting connected to the Internet.

Book VII

Going  
Further to  
Get Ahead



Three basic components of an online course are mentioned earlier in this chapter: content, evaluation, and practice. An instructor-led course is more likely to have the practice component than a self-paced course because someone is available to check your homework and smaller assignments. Your learning can be evaluated through means other than traditional testing. It takes the capacity of a real human to read someone's essay and determine whether it makes sense. A computer can't possibly evaluate that kind of assignment as well as an instructor. If practicing what you're learning is important to you, an instructor-led class is right for you.

### ***Self-paced courses***

In a self-paced course, you're on your own to determine your schedule, so if you're a self-starter, you may find this type of course to your liking. The content, or what you're going to learn, is predetermined. When you access the course, you usually find that it has been divided up into modules or units. You click on the first unit, read the content, and move through the course at your own pace. You can spend more time in the challenging areas and breeze through those that are easier for you.

In a business setting, self-paced courses are often prepackaged with very simple software interfaces.

These courses have navigational tools to help you move through the content. You'll probably see arrows at the bottom to help you advance and a menu on the left. You use these tools to help you move through the content at your own pace.

Just because a course is self-paced doesn't mean there isn't an instructor standing by in the wings to help you with questions or concerns. Consider the case of Carrie. Wanting to learn better keyboarding skills, she enrolled in an online course through her local community college. The introductory information came from an instructor who guided Carrie through the process of downloading and installing special software for working through the lessons. All the lessons were made available when the course started, and they could be completed any time during the eight-week period. There were no scheduled meetings, and Carrie could work at her leisure.



Even self-paced courses often have instructors assigned to monitor what's happening, but before enrolling, find out what that person does. Will you have regular contact throughout the course or just at the beginning or end? Can you call with questions? When you identify a potential self-paced course, see whether the instructor has an e-mail address available and ask! If no instructor is assigned to the course, be wary.

What about evaluation? How does the person in charge know that you learned the content? In the business world, most often this comes through traditional testing. After you read or listen to a portion of the content, you take a short quiz that's embedded in the program. These quizzes test your ability to recall or apply what you learned.

### ***Determining whether the course you want is instructor-led or self-paced***

How do you know the difference between an instructor-led course and a self-paced course when you're doing the research described earlier in this chapter? This is where you need to drill down to course descriptions. See whether they include terms like *instructor-led*. If nothing is mentioned but the name of the instructor is listed, e-mail that person and ask whether the course is self-paced. This information helps you succeed because you know what to expect. It also makes you look very savvy in the instructor's eyes!



Sometimes schools don't mention that the courses are instructor-led, and a lot of students sign up thinking they'll be taking independent-study courses. It's worth asking about before you register so you don't waste time or money.

### ***Asynchronous (on your schedule) courses versus synchronous (real-time) courses***

Most online courses are *asynchronous* in nature, meaning you do the work when it's convenient for you. As long as you meet the deadlines for assignments, all is good. However, instructors may also have *synchronous components* to their courses, such as weekly meetings, and some instructors require attendance or participation. For example, an instructor may host a weekly office hour during which he reviews assignments and introduces extra material.



This information should be available in the course description. However, be sure to ask an academic advisor about this possibility if you don't see any reference to synchronous sessions. Better safe than sorry!

## ***Finishing Your Schooling Faster with Accelerated Programs and Courses***

Teachers would love for you to believe that learning is fun, but the truth is that it can be a major headache and very disruptive to real life! For that reason, you may really appreciate the speed at which you can finish schooling online.

Now that colleges and universities have discovered a ready market of busy students who want to learn on their own time, they want to enroll and keep those customers. A great way to achieve this is to make sure the courses hold the students' interest and move quickly. With this in mind, many institutions offer *accelerated courses*, which are traditional 16-week semester courses that have been condensed into half the time. Eight weeks is a common length for an online course.

Book VII

Going  
Further to  
Get Ahead



Do course catalogs and descriptions specify which courses are accelerated? Nope, not necessarily. It's up to you, smart reader, to do the math. If you see a three-credit-hour course with start/end dates indicating that it runs 8 weeks, it's accelerated. A traditional course would extend a semester, or 16 weeks.

Also, if you see marketing materials that recommend only taking one course at a time, it's probably because the courses are accelerated and very demanding. After all, you're fitting 16 weeks' worth of content into less time.

This section describes the pros and cons of accelerated online education and provides a few pointers for surviving such programs and courses.

## *The benefits and challenges of accelerated programs*

The good news is that accelerated courses generally teach you information you can apply right away. Have you ever heard the phrase “use it or lose it”? That's the mantra of instructional design for accelerated courses. Courses require students to apply the content right away through ongoing assignments. The more you use the information, the more likely you are to learn and retain it.

Obviously, if a course is accelerated, you get more information in less time. In theory, you can complete a degree in half the time. However, the reality is that how much information you take in depends on your own capacity to absorb information. In other words, if your jug (brain) is full of holes (distracted or disorganized), it won't matter how much water (knowledge) you pour in. You'll never hold it all!



So yes, with accelerated courses you receive more information in less time, but you have to be sure you have the time and the study strategies to process this information.

## *Tips for successfully completing accelerated classes*



So how do you succeed in an accelerated course? Here are a few handy guidelines:

- ✓ **Enroll in only one course at a time until you know what you can handle.** You may even find degree programs that limit the number of courses you can take simultaneously at first for this very reason.



- ✓ **Establish a definite schedule for study.** Procrastination doesn't work well online, even for self-paced courses. Log in daily.
- ✓ **Set reasonable goals for participation.** You don't have to answer every post. Check your course requirements and exceed them slightly, but not extremely!
- ✓ **If you're really crunched for time and have discussions to read, hit the first posts from the original authors.** Unless your instructor says "you must read every post," you can get by skipping a few responses here and there.
- ✓ **Develop a method for saving links and resources that you want to go back to later.** For some people, this means keeping a running document where they paste links and URLs. For others, it means opening an account on a social bookmarking tool like delicious ([www.delicious.com](http://www.delicious.com)). The point is that you don't have to read everything immediately.
- ✓ **Save projects from one course to the next.** This isn't necessarily so you can repurpose them, but so you can draw on the resources, methods, and so on that you've previously utilized.
- ✓ **Work ahead if you can.** Take advantage of a slow week to get a head start on the next one.
- ✓ **Keep in mind the intensity will only last eight weeks!** There's great comfort in knowing that it won't go on forever, even if you love the class.
- ✓ **If you're working on a degree that involves a thesis, try to connect all your assignments to your thesis.** Pick a topic early in your studies, and investigate different angles throughout the various courses.
- ✓ **Set time aside at the beginning of the course for the basics.** Read your syllabus, become familiar with the course navigation, and begin reading the text.
- ✓ **Take advantage of synchronous tools.** When you're conducting group work, using the phone and Web conferencing tools is more productive than writing e-mails, especially during the organizing process.

