

A Guide to **Online Learning**

Advantages, the CSP Student Experience,
and Keys to Success



CSP

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Advantages, the CSP Student Experience,
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Online college education has experienced a surge in popularity over the past few years, and that trend looks poised to continue in the future. As a result, an increasing number of students, ranging from young high school graduates to their parents, have discovered that remote learning programs can offer them the same quality of education as on-campus options — with greater flexibility and convenience and at a significantly lower price point.

This guide to online learning is for graduating high school seniors, transfer students, undergraduates who are rethinking plans, and graduates looking to continue their education. It's intended to provide an in-depth look at the experience and benefits of online education at Concordia University, St. Paul, so that prospective online students can learn more about our programs and how our robust curricula and coursework will allow them to achieve their academic and career goals.

Part I

Busting the Myths About Online Degree Programs

There is a widespread misconception that online learning is a backup plan — better than nothing in an emergency, but not as good as an on-campus education with face-to-face instruction. Unfortunately, this viewpoint is based on a few false beliefs:

- Internet-based classes are just virtual substitutes for in-person courses, delivered online when meant to be attended in the physical classroom.
- Instructors who run online classes are not as accomplished, knowledgeable, or experienced as professors who teach on-campus courses.
- Online college students are not as satisfied with their education as on-campus learners.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, an established online degree program is every bit as compelling and rewarding as an in-person program.

Digital Classrooms

Colleges and universities offering web-based education have programs that are designed to be completed via the internet. They utilize dedicated learning management systems (LMSs) built solely for online schooling, which function as virtual classrooms that enable instructors to provide students with full support, comprehensive assessments, and plenty of opportunities for engagement, just like in regular on-campus courses.

The professors are well trained in this technology before classes begin, so by the time they're teaching with the LMSs, they know how to use the systems seamlessly and can lead just as effectively online as they could in person.

CSP's online programs offer a virtual new student orientation, including introductory training sessions to help you become familiar with the LMS. That way, when you're watching and listening to lectures and doing your coursework, you can entirely focus on those tasks instead of trying to figure out the system while studying. The school also provides 24-hour tech support to answer questions, walk you through processes, and solve problems as needed.

Thus, as an online student, you are not at any disadvantage compared to on-campus learners. You have the added advantage of taking classes and completing coursework from any location where you have a reliable internet connection because the LMSs are accessible from any connected device: smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop PC.

High-Quality Instruction

Instructors in CSP's online programs are of the same high caliber and possess the same level of knowledge, expertise, and real-world experience as the professors who teach the in-person courses. Online educators often teach classes in person as well. In addition, they're available to communicate with remote learners like yourself via phone calls, virtual visits during office hours, emails, and discussion forums.

Taking online classes does not mean compromising the quality of your education or sacrificing the interactive nature of your studies; it means receiving access to the same great learning opportunities with added flexibility and convenience while benefiting from online resources that are always at your fingertips.

Student Satisfaction

Remote learners across colleges, in general, are happy with their online higher education programs, viewing them as valuable experiences that encouraged growth and expanded their knowledge base and skill set.

A survey of online students completed by Andrew J. Magda, Jane Sadd Smalec, and the Aslanian Market Research team revealed that 88% of learners at 19 different schools agree or strongly agree that they are satisfied with their decision to enroll in their school program.²

In another study of over 1,500 students in various online college programs across the U.S., conducted by Magda, Aslanian, and David Capranos, 79% of learners reported that they believe the value of their degree equals or exceeds the price they paid for it.³



Seventy-eight percent of students who have learned in both settings assert that their online education experience was as good as or better than their on-campus experience; 41% said it was better.³

Ninety-one percent of surveyed learners agree that online programs challenged them to do well in their studies, while over 90% also say their programs pushed them to grow both personally and professionally.²

In an additional study of more than 1,800 people, performed by BestColleges.com and published in a report by Melissa A. Venable, Ph.D., 95% of students overall — and 83% of remote learners — stated that they would recommend online education to others.⁴

Eighty-six percent of respondents indicate that online programs lived up to their expectations.²

Eighty-two percent agree that they received online resources and other help that supported their online studies.²

And 82.8% say faculty are available for consultation, tips, and advice.²



Part II

Advantages of Learning Online

Flexibility and Convenience

An increasing number of students now prefer online education to on-campus options. Most of those surveyed were able and willing to study in the classroom but chose to do so online because of the greater flexibility, convenience, and time savings that made this remote option a better fit.

Seventy-seven percent of online learners are employed, 59% working full-time, and 18% working part-time. Given that a typical learner must dedicate about 30 hours a week to their coursework, administrative staff and faculty at CSP understand that students must study on their schedules and save time. Therefore, the school's online degree programs adhere to an asynchronous learning approach, which means students don't have to log in at specific times to attend classes and complete assignments (as would be the case were the program synchronous). Instead, they can access course materials and lectures and do their schoolwork whenever they wish while adhering to fixed deadlines and due dates.

Some CSP online programs do have a synchronous component, though. Most students appreciate this because being in class with their fellow learners from time to time helps instill a sense of community and prevents them from feeling isolated. However, even when programs are entirely asynchronous, many online students who live in the same city or area will occasionally get together in person to study and enjoy that physical interaction and camaraderie.

Seventy-one percent of surveyed students attend school online full-time, while 23% do so part-time. CSP's programs are tailored to working professionals, and instructors and support staff work with you and your fellow learners to ensure that you can successfully balance all of your family, career, and school commitments.²

Affordability

Online higher education programs have reduced the cost of learning for millions of people. As a rule, the tuition cost per credit tends to be the same regardless of whether students attend school in person or remotely. However, tuition is only one of the costs (and sometimes not even the highest one) involved in pursuing an on-campus college education; there are substantial added fees for housing, meal plans, transportation, and more. Another hidden expense is the opportunity cost of losing the flexibility to work and earn income.

Online students such as those at CSP do not have to pay for room and board or trips to and from campus. Asynchronous learning also provides more options to work or take on family obligations, e.g., childcare, thus further decreasing the financial burden on learners' families from educational and living expenses. This also means it's quicker and easier to reach the break-even point on college investments.

As mentioned earlier, the results of Magda, Aslanian, and Capranos's study of over 1,500 learners from colleges across the country show

that 79% of students agree that the value of their online education equals or exceeds the price they paid for it.³

According to findings from the previously mentioned survey by Magda, Smalec, and Aslanian encompassing scholars at 19 different colleges, 67% of students say tuition at the online school they enrolled in was higher than some alternatives. Still, the convenience, format, schedule, and location were ideal and well worth the cost.²

Twenty-eight percent of online college students indicate they did not incur any debt from their education. Of those who did have debt, more than 25% report that the total was \$5,000 or less.³

Sixty percent of students actively working report that their employer offered them tuition reimbursement, and 43% say the school they selected gave their company a tuition discount.³ Check with your manager or human resources department to find out if your employer will partially or fully reimburse you for the cost of your CSP education.

Professional Focus

Another significant advantage of an online higher education program through CSP is developing in-demand professional skills and advanced industry knowledge applicable to the workforce post-graduation. Through career-focused coursework and professors who are real-world experts in their fields, you will acquire invaluable experience and information that will fully prepare you for success in a rewarding job.

Additionally, you'll benefit from access to both virtual and in-person networking opportunities with your faculty and fellow students. These circumstances will facilitate the development of solid connections, which will lead to good job prospects and recommendations and introductions to hiring managers and other influential people who can help advance your career.



Part III

Concordia University, St. Paul's Online Student Experience

CSP is proud to provide students with an experiential online learning environment based in the Christian liberal arts. Supportive, knowledgeable faculty promote academic, interpersonal, and spiritual growth.

CSP has been accredited by the Higher Learning Commission since 1967 and is a member of the North Central Association. Additionally, it has received the following accolades:

- Recognition as one of U.S. News & World Report's Best Colleges for Veterans (2020) and Best Value Schools (2019 – 2020)
- Designation as a Military Friendly® School for 2021—2022
- The rank of #13 among OnlineU's Best Online Bachelor's Degrees for ROI for 2021

How Our Online Programs Work

1 Self-Directed Education

CSP gives online learners the freedom to study on their schedule and organize their week in whichever way works best. Most of our students are also employed, so they often select three to four days a week to devote to schoolwork. Typically, one can expect to spend at least six to nine hours per course each week, though this varies based on the online classes.

2 Accessible Online Resources

Intuitive course management tools, including the virtual classroom interfaces Blackboard and Blackboard Collaborate, are available to students. These applications offer interactive whiteboarding, chat, real-time feedback, and breakout group features, as well as recordings that are instantly available once sessions end.⁵ Learners can seamlessly take exams with Respondus Monitor⁶ and access library resources and services 24/7.

3 Easy Communication

Students communicate with their professors through video conferencing, online lectures, digital course activities, and correspondence via their CSP email accounts. If they choose, they may also visit the CSP campus to meet instructors in person during office hours.

A Community of Learners Unrestricted by Geography and Lifestyle

Going to college online at CSP creates unique opportunities to build a network that transcends geography and life circumstances. The online classroom truly brings together students from all walks of life, across the country and beyond, and places them in an environment where everyone has a voice.

The format lends itself to community learning, conversation, and consensus-building, as each student has an equal opportunity to contribute their unique point of view to the discussion. In addition to providing more diverse perspectives on the subject matter, online learning builds relationships between this diverse array of students, creating a more robust post-graduate network when those students enter the job market. You may be physically remote from your fellow online students, but you are far from disconnected.

And, in a lot of cases, you and other CSP learners are not as physically distant as you think because it's pretty standard for online students to live close to the campus. This means in-person meetings between classmates residing locally can occur as needed or desired, further demonstrating that the online format is not limiting to students.

These interactions extend to faculty, too. As an online learner, you have access to office hours, on-campus meetings, and more, just like students pursuing on-campus programs.

Evidence also shows that people who take classes online form a relationship with their alma mater that persists after graduation.² Nearly half of current and past online students have expressed interest in taking more courses at the same college in the future, and about a third intend to refer other students or join the alumni association.



Seven Reasons to Enroll at CSP Online

- 1 Over 40 online programs:** CSP offers an expansive, diverse array of programs that provide opportunities to explore various areas of interest. Available on a full- or part-time basis, these options can be customized to meet each student's professional goals. With associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, and certificate programs available, there's something for every learner, no matter where they are on their educational journey.
- 2 Flexible learning format:** Scholars can study and work on their schedules, with part- and full-time options available in a convenient asynchronous setup.
- 3 Personalized attention:** Individualized support from expert faculty is available to each student. Instructors are personable and happy to help with academic questions and issues to resume reviews and references.
- 4 High-quality education:** Online learners at CSP get the same respectable, rigorous education and dedicated support that on-campus students receive, with the same knowledgeable, experienced instructors.
- 5 All the benefits of on-campus learning:** CSP lets remote students take advantage of the same privileges and opportunities that in-person learners enjoy, including the ability to visit the campus and engage in networking opportunities.
- 6 Tuition discounts and financial aid:** College is made more affordable for learners and their families with discounted tuition and multiple other options for reducing education costs, including scholarships, federal assistance, and military benefits. The cost per credit at CSP is competitive, ranging from \$395 - 1,050 and averaging \$498.
- 7 Accreditation:** CSP is regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. This accreditation applies to the school's overall quality, academic offerings, governance and administration, mission, finances, and resources.⁷

Part IV

Career Outcomes of Online Education

Return on Investment

Over 95% of surveyed online college and university graduates report a positive career outcome post-graduation — discovering a more fulfilling path, making a vocational change, earning a promotion or salary increase, or developing an updated skill set.⁸

Within one year of completing their programs, 95% of CSP graduates receive job offers. Additionally, CSP grads earn 44% more in salary than the national average.

When asked to rate the importance of their online education to their success, about 85% of remote students who found a more fulfilling career give their degree program a “4” or “5,” with “5” meaning “very important.”⁸

Soft Skills

Over 60% of online students say that their online education helped them improve soft skills that employers desire, such as critical thinking and problem-solving.⁹

Eighty-five percent attest that their online education improved their attention to detail, time management, and critical thinking; 79% indicate that it enhanced their writing skills, while 69% and 62% report that it further developed their teamwork and oral communication skills, respectively.⁹

Career Services

Most online colleges and universities offer career services, including advisors, job search websites maintained by the schools, and resume help, and 84% of students report that such resources are available at their schools.³

Part V

Best Practices and Keys to Success

In this chapter of our guide to online learning, we cover the various strategies, techniques, tips, and traits that can aid college learners in their goal to not only survive online classes but excel in them.

Here are some of the top online learning tips:

Use Resources and Ask for Help

You need not be an I.T. wizard to thrive in online schooling, but you should actively use available resources, including tech support, advisors, and instructors. Online learning can feel isolating sometimes, and education professionals often see that learners who need the most assistance don't ask for it, even though it's available.

If you don't understand an assignment, tell your professors and ask for clarity. If you need more intensive help, tutoring is accessible. In addition to allowing you to get the support you need, the interaction with other people will let you feel a greater sense of community and know you're not alone.

Form Study Groups

Online learners are encouraged to reach out to their peers in their classes and schedule some time to work together. And while this can be done virtually on the computer via Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and other programs, or on the phone via FaceTime, the fact that it's an online school doesn't mean you and your fellow students can't gather in person, especially if you live close to one another. Physically meeting up once in a while can be very beneficial, as it is another factor that helps you feel a sense of belonging to a great community.

Prepare Effectively for Classes

Another of the most crucial online learning best practices is making sure to do prep work before courses start. Getting all textbooks ordered a minimum of two weeks before classes begin, or earlier if possible, is best. You should also make sure to register for online courses as soon as possible, so you're not stuck scrambling to sign up. And then, a week before your courses start, it's a good idea to log in, take a look at the syllabus, and get a sense of what each class is going to entail.

Students are also encouraged to talk with a tuition and financial aid planner well ahead of time to ensure all billing requirements are set up. By taking care of all of these things in advance, you won't have to rush to do them when the term starts; instead, you'll be able to focus on your classes.

Practice Self-Motivation

Discipline, drive, and the willingness to hold oneself accountable are standout traits of a successful online student. In addition, remote learning is self-paced and asynchronous most of the time, so being able to take a syllabus, build your study schedule, set intermediary

goals, and work towards completing assignments will help you get all of your work done well and on time.

It's also essential that you stay inspired by remembering the reason(s) why you are working hard to complete your program — especially when times get tough. That motivating force may be the desire to earn a big promotion at the office, land a better job at a different company, transition to a new career altogether, or show your children how to follow through and persevere in the pursuit of their goals and dreams.



Develop a Growth-Oriented Mindset

Online education is a process, and it takes time to become at ease with it. You need to be okay with being a little uncomfortable initially, knowing that learning is a skill that will continue to be developed if you stick with your studies.

Especially if people haven't been in school for 10 or 15 years, which is often the case with online learners, nervousness is quite common at the start. But as long as you are open to taking advice, adapting as you go, and sometimes adjusting your expectations for online learning, you will benefit significantly from the growth you experience in the educational process.

Plan and Manage Your Time Well

As a student, it's advantageous to have a good understanding of what you will have going on in your life for the two to three years in your program and how long it's going to take to get all of your schoolwork done.

Part of the beauty of online learning is that students often have flexibility. When you begin your studies, you may have time to do two courses simultaneously; then, as life events happen, including those that defy expectations, you might have to adjust your schedule. In remote education, you can decrease the number of classes, take a break, or do whatever you need to adapt to changing circumstances outside of school.

In some online education programs, the curriculum is set, and students follow it and take all the same classes in order as part of a cohort. However, other programs afford learners more freedom of choice regarding which courses they take at which time. In these cases, one of the recommended online learning best practices is properly planning your schedule to end up with the right mix of general education and major requirements.

Related to planning and equally important, time management is among the best skills to help you learn online. One of the most valuable tips in this area is determining and significantly reducing the behaviors, actions, and external factors that cause

minutes and hours to be wasted.¹⁰ For example, deactivating notifications and logging out of the apps on your smartphone is a great way to help yourself stay on task. Another one is turning off your T.V. while studying; you'll be much more productive this way, and you can watch television during a scheduled rest period as a reward for your hard work.

Additionally, it's best to avoid multitasking: As the American Psychological Association has reported, studies have found that the practice of doing multiple tasks concurrently, especially to a heavy degree, has a detrimental impact on productivity.¹² Thus, concentrating on one activity at a time is another of the strongly recommended online learning best practices.

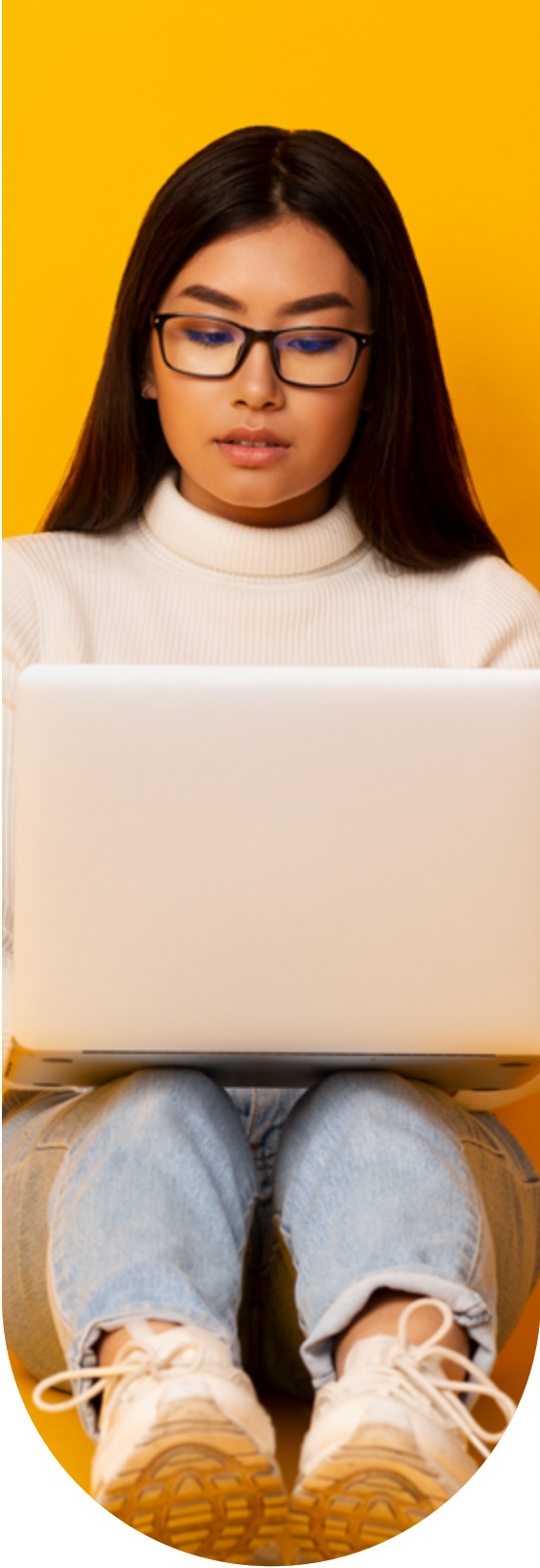
Structuring your study time will also serve you well. For example, time blocking, one of the most successful online learning strategies for time management, involves segmenting the day into chunks, typically by the hour or half-hour, and dedicating each piece to a work-related task or break.¹¹ An added tip is that this technique becomes even more effective when you pick the best time to study, based on the specific hours of the day when you have the highest levels of energy and motivation. Try to get your most difficult tasks done during this window of greatest alertness and cognitive functioning.

Experiment With Various Techniques

Different study methods are going to work well for other students. For example, one person might do well by taking lots of handwritten notes and re-watching full lectures. In contrast, another might do better just listening and reading in spurts of 10 minutes here and there as they're absorbing information. Others may prefer and do better with a more interactive approach, such as applying knowledge from courses in hands-on lab work and other activities, or discussing course material with classmates and taking turns asking and answering questions.

Therefore, among our online learning best practices is the recommendation to try out a few things and see what works best for you personally. And if you're still struggling, talk to your instructors about it. They can either assist you in using those strategies and techniques more effectively or suggest alternate methods that may be more conducive to your understanding.





Study in a Dedicated Space

Having a designated quiet study space is an essential part of all successful online learning strategies.¹³ It gives you a clear separation between your school and personal lives, reducing distractions and allowing you to maintain a productive mindset and stay in the zone mentally. Even if you live in a studio or one-bedroom apartment and create a makeshift study area with a foldable desk, it will help you concentrate better.

Particularly in situations like that, a pair of noise-canceling headphones can go a long way. Wherever you learn, it's crucial to ensure a reliable internet connection, so you won't have to deal with many interruptions or a lot of lag time when working on the computer.

Take Care of Yourself

While people typically don't think of self-care as a guide to online schools, all students eventually realize why this is such a vital part of the learning process.

Fatigue, illness, and negative feelings such as stress and worry can all lead to procrastination.¹¹ Even when students are not putting off schoolwork, these factors make it difficult to concentrate and be productive, significantly increasing the time it takes to complete assignments. Considering the great importance of time management for students, it's crucial to take care of yourself¹⁴ by eating nutritious meals, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep, which will improve your focus, energy level, and mood.

Meditation is another practice that makes time management easier by refreshing students mentally and physically, allowing them to stay calm, increasing their awareness, and expanding their capacity to resist distractions.¹⁵ Perhaps most importantly, meditation helps learners be more mindful in the present moment, rather than losing time as their thoughts vacillate between the past and future, so that they can devote more attention to their work.

Should an Online Degree Be Your Next Move?

If you're ready to advance your career and seize the limitless opportunities afforded by high-quality college education, explore Concordia University, St. Paul's online programs [here](#) and discover the possibilities.

With over 50 programs spanning associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees and certificates, CSP offers something for every learner, wherever they may be on their educational path. A flexible format with full-

and part-time options ensures that you can succeed in earning your diploma, regardless of your schedule, obligations, or other life circumstances. Following the online learning best practices and further developing the traits of a successful student referenced in this guide will serve you well in that endeavor.

To learn more, please fill out the form [here](#).

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