

Syllabus²⁰⁰⁴

A Comprehensive Plan for Preparing Online Students

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Despite the technical expertise of our students who travel the Information Superhighway with ease, they often face taking online courses with some trepidation. Berkeley College, therefore, devised a variety of ways to prepare their online students to assure competence, confidence, and a successful online course experience. Among these include a special distance learning site on the Berkeley College Home Page; an online degree orientation site; a required online preparatory course that prepares them to navigate the course management system and understand the requirements of an online course; an online library orientation; a special one-stop shopping center online degree site with weekly messages from advisors and student services; an online tutoring site that is always available to help students with course material and writing assistance; ongoing faculty assistance and frequent response; and prompt technical support through an excellent Help Desk and "Live Help" support.

Thus, in order to prepare our online students, Berkeley has devised a variety of methods.

Berkeley's distance learning site on the Berkeley college Home Page provides online students with an overview of the benefits, options, and schedules of its online program. It also offers a Student Documentation Site, which explains how to log on to Blackboard, report problems, change their password, and view and enter their courses. It also lists the computer requirements for online courses.

In addition, for our online degree students who, in many cases, are out of state or International students, Berkeley provides a media-rich online orientation that includes welcome video greetings from the President of the College. She welcomes them warmly, gives them information about the College, and wishes them every success. The Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs introduces them to Online Program and also extends warm welcome video greetings. Students are next introduced to the Deans and Advisors, In addition to video, pictures and voice messages personalize this orientation and add a level of comfort. Students are also introduced to the Chairs of the different Academic Department. The Directors of Student Development, Financial Aid, Career Services and the Bursar are also introduced. Pictures and Wimba Voice messages personalize these introductions. The Director of the Online Library has also developed a PowerPoint presentation to introduce online students to the

rich offerings of the Online Library. Finally, the Director of the Center for Learning and Student Success, CLASS, has also developed a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate all the many services of the Center. Online student will find study guides and tutorials on this site and will be able to sign up for online tutoring in subject areas and also sign up for writing assistance as they write the many papers and reports that will be expected in their online classes. They have access to Blackboard's Lightweight Chat and Virtual Classroom and tutoring is conducted using these two features. The Wimba Voice Conferencing feature is also used. Online students have every access to study aids, workshop material, and CLASS and peer tutoring. By logging on to the Berkeley College Orientation site, online degree students are welcomed, informed, and advised -- even before they begin their online course of study.

To make sure that all online students are able to successfully navigate Blackboard, Berkeley College's course management system, all new online students are required to take NC103: Road to Success in Online Learning before they take an online course. This short preparatory course guides them as they navigate through all the functions of the course management system; Students read announcements, access the syllabus of the course, access lectures and links; submit writing assignments; take a test; and take part in the discussion board. Since an online course is not the best option for all students, students are asked to question themselves before committing to an online course by seriously considering if they can work independently in a nontraditional way; can handle the significant amount of work that is required in an online course; are good time managers, and can learn without the structure of a onsite classroom. All in all, NC103: Road to Success in Online Learning prepares students for their first online course.

Online students are also welcomed by an excellent Help Desk staff, which provides technical assistance at all times. In addition to logging on for help via the Problem Log, the "Live Help" of technical experts is also available.

In addition, online degree students are introduced to a special Online Degree Organization site, a one-stop shopping center for online degree students where they can access up-to-the-minute information on a regular basis. Here students can log on anytime, anywhere and find out what is new at Berkeley College in online learning. Deans, advisors, faculty, Student Services, Library, all post messages to keep online students current and up to date on a regular basis. There is a message from the President of the College and a special survey for online degree students. Online degree students are able to access information about upcoming distance learning courses on this site. The upcoming quarter's course schedule is listed, along with the prerequisites for each course. The personal counselor maintains a "Weekly Wellness" section, which includes such topics as: Helpful Tips for Time Management; Goal Setting; What Gets You Going; Problem Solving; The Art of Conflict Resolution; Getting Past Anger; Am I Assertive? Saying No with Style; Listening Is Communication Too; Get Out of

That Rut; Decision Making; and Expressing Feelings. The personal counselor also maintains a "Thought of the Week" site, which offers pithy encouraging statements each week. Online Faculty also lead discussions in the Organization Discussion Board. This is an interactive support site that is always available for its online degree students.

Finally, as they take their online classes, online professors who are dedicated to making online education successful for their students guide online students. Most of Berkeley's online professors are not only academically qualified, but have taught successfully onsite and online for Berkeley College for many years. In fact there were nine department chairs that taught in Berkeley's online program in Spring of 2004. Professors, not only provide online courses with lectures rich in substance and scholarship, but also teach interactive courses in which students are encouraged to become active, not passive participants, in their own learning. Moreover, online professors communicate with their students frequently and are available at all time if students have questions, problems, or concerns.

A supportive administration: a dedicated faculty; a distance learning site on the Berkeley College Home Page, replete with Student Documentation and an Introduction to Blackboard, Berkeley College's course management system; an online orientation course; an online organization site; a required preparatory course, NC103: Road to Success in Online Learning; and the support of an excellent Help Desk all contribute to Berkeley's comprehensive overall plan for its online students and help them become competent online learners who experience a successful online experience.