Transformations:

A Guide to Online College for Adults

Linfield College Guide to Higher Education Online
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Chapter I: Introduction

For sheer drama and life-changing potential, one could hardly have asked for a more extraordinary moment. When information technology was introduced into the halls of higher education – when higher education went online – the power and promise of the internet were realized in ways unimaginable only a few decades ago.

As a result, millions of people – nurses and accountants, managers and information technologists, retirees and business consultants, people from every culture and corner of the globe can log onto virtual classrooms at all hours of the day and night. In the process, they are changing themselves and the world.

As more and more people look to online education to fulfill long-held dreams or to meet workplace demands, questions arise. Is online education the right path forward? What questions should be asked before making a commitment? How does online learning differ from face-to-face learning? What kinds of courses are available online? Which schools enjoy the best reputation? What is accreditation and how important is it? Are the degrees earned through online courses well respected and recognized?

Informed Decision Makers

The goal of this guide is twofold. First, this guide presents a comprehensive and detailed picture of what online learning is and what to expect in a college or university online learning environment. Second, by answering some common questions and by debunking some prevailing myths about online learning, this guide enables adult learners to become truly informed decision makers, fully prepared to transform their lives and their communities.

Designed for Adult Learners

This guide speaks to a wide range of motivated adult learners with the kind of day-to-day responsibilities that put face-to-face learning out of reach. A world of information exists online for post-graduate studies, but the focus here is on the adult learner who is considering a certificate program or wants to earn a bachelor’s degree.
A Revolution, Online

Online education is a revolution in the making. As access to higher education grows exponentially, online learning has the potential to affect millions of lives and to profoundly change attitudes and behaviors around lifelong learning and professional development.

Online learning delivers new ideas and leading-edge information to people faster and in different ways. At the same time, online learning is creating a shift. A longstanding tradition that places the teacher at the front of a classroom, the *sage on the stage*, who dispenses knowledge to a mostly passive audience, is being replaced by an entirely new approach, a *guide at the side*, who facilitates a journey of self-discovery and learning.

As new technologies merge with new teaching styles and new ways of delivering knowledge and information, a global community – connected via professional, personal, and educational networks – is logging onto the Web to satisfy a universal human desire to learn more.

So onto a central question: Is this brave new world for you?

Chapter II: Face-to-Face or Virtual? Is Online Learning for You?

At Linfield College and at other leading institutions, online learning offers committed adult learners an education that is equal to and, in some instances, more rigorous than one might acquire in a face-to-face learning environment. But there is an even greater promise to this revolution. Online learning is about access, flexibility, and community. It’s about personal transformation. Online learning delivers access and flexibility – the central promises of this entirely new and multifaceted approach to higher education – in ways not possible in face-to-face learning. On another level, online learning is about different methods of delivery.

This new way of learning allows a myriad of possibilities. You can continue to live, work, and manage your life while you “attend” classes and complete assignments. The old obstacles to completing your degree or seeking the personal and/or professional development you have longed for have disappeared. If you cannot find the time to attend classes on a Linfield College campus or any other campus, or you face other kinds of impediments to physically attending classes, there is good news. You still have access to knowledge. You still have access to some of the best minds and educational institutions available, anywhere, anytime. By any measure, this is truly revolutionary.

As people from different walks of life and different religious, cultural, or work backgrounds converge in an online classroom, the whole idea of how people learn and how we define a learning community changes. New possibilities and opportunities emerge. Doors open. The world changes for the better. Life is good.
And yet it is an indisputable fact that the online environment asks something different of you. It asks more of you in terms of self-direction, self-discipline, and participation. Face-to-face learning has a defined structure that is rooted in schedules, time, and place. You physically attend classes, labs, seminars, lectures, or workshops. You take notes and participate in discussions, and you may be called on to make presentations. That is a world most of us know very well.

As we’ll find out soon, online learning is distinctly different.

The Sage and the Guide

The notion of structure – the impulse to organize information, people, and ideas – is central to the concept of progress and modernity. But in higher education, many educators are now taking a different view of structure, especially traditional, face-to-face learning structures. Traditional approaches where students are presented with information and material by a person who stands at the front of a classroom, the “sage on a stage” are expanding to include blended classes that make use of various educational technologies. While online learning is a growing phenomenon, there is, coincidentally, a renewed interest in a different model: the “guide at the side” who facilitates a self-directed approach to learning, inquiry, and discovery. The individual is an active participant in his or her learning process. Online learning is tailor-made for this, and it should be noted, self-directed learning harkens back to a much earlier time when the individual was in charge of his or her own education.

Course Design

As is the case in face-to-face learning, educators who teach online courses have great latitude in designing courses that are uniquely their own, customizing the approach to fit the material and employing technologies that enhance learning – such as blogs, chat rooms, discussion boards, websites, simulations, streaming video, or podcasts – to engage and inspire their adult learners. Much of online learning is currently text based, but many schools have turned a corner and a wide, multimedia world is being explored.

Online learning is more than a little different. You must organize and structure your time. You are the seeker of information. Participation is not optional.

For many reasons, for many disciplines and for many people, traditional, campus-based learning environments will always play a significant role in higher education. For some adult learners, that kind of structure is both necessary and appealing.
A Smaller Carbon Footprint

The delivery of education via the internet has an additional benefit, not often discussed. In an age of global warming and volatile gas prices, online learning has something to offer the world: the creation of knowledge with a much smaller carbon footprint. As we become ever more conscious and deliberate about living and working sustainably online learning stands as a powerful, conscientious alternative to conventional brick-and-mortar classrooms.

Jennifer, Kathy, and Fred – Adult Online Learners

Jennifer Rhafir, Kathy Attaway, and Fred Van Drimmelen are experienced online learners. They chose to complete their bachelor’s degrees through online education for important personal reasons. Before they enrolled, they sought answers to their questions, “How will I interact with my classmates and professors? How difficult and time consuming is the process?”

In a lot of ways, Jennifer, Kathy, and Fred are typical of a new breed of adult learners. They are seekers of information and knowledge. They are fearless and determined, motivated and self-directed. Throughout this guide, we’ll meet other individuals much like Jennifer, Kathy, and Fred, who are going online to change and to improve their lives.

We recently sat down with these three adult learners to discuss how they approached their online coursework. In this short video, you’ll learn what they discovered about The Online Learning Environment.

Do You Have the Profile of an Online Learner?

Each person is different. But briefly, below is a rough sketch of what types of skills, habits, and attributes make for a successful online learner. To discover if your temperament is conducive to online learning, take Linfield’s online learning survey.

Work and Study Habits

* You have the ability to log on regularly
* You have the time to study and complete assignments
* You are comfortable communicating primarily via electronic means
* You initiate communication with instructors and classmates as needed

Learning Styles

* You take responsibility for your own learning
* You are able to learn effectively from reading and writing
* You enjoy peer review, giving and receiving feedback from other students
Skills

* You know how to use technology properly
* You can address problems at a distance
* You have good time-management skills
* You have solid research skills
* You have the ability to work cooperatively online

What About the Technology?

Over time, the online environment has evolved. Cara Nicole Bruner, a Linfield Business Management graduate who lives in Spain, was an online student over several years and noticed the evolving of the technology in her classes. “The online classroom was a bit tricky when it first appeared. Now it’s a completely different world. It’s very easy to use.”

For most people, the online classroom is quite simple to navigate. Anyone with current computer skills, such as browsing the Web and using email, will have few problems. Here’s a small excerpt from a recent article in *U.S. News & World Report*.

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**How Much PC Skill Do I Need?**

Universities (and the developers of the learning management systems that they utilize) take great efforts to make the technical aspects of going to class online easy enough that anyone who has browsed the Web can do it. And any Internet-ready laptop or PC should be enough to tackle the class. That said, check your potential school’s site for its equipment recommendations, along with the hours of its technical support teams (and whether it offers tech support online only or also allows you to talk to someone on the phone). If you haven’t already upgraded to a broadband internet connection, you’ll definitely want to do that before starting a class.

In Chapter VIII, we’ll get into the specifics of technical assistance, how we help our adult learners at Linfield College, and what you should expect from any online learning program in terms of technical assistance.

**To Manage Your Time, Manage Your Life**

“*The bad news is time flies. The good news is you’re the pilot.*”

- Michael Altshuler
Depending on your circumstances, an online learning experience has the potential to test you in multiple ways. Your ability to effectively navigate all that you have before you will be a major key to your success. Steven Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* has tremendous value for anyone at any stage of life, but the book seems especially useful for someone seeking to build a new life and learning path. Covey’s advice goes well beyond time management to touch on life management. We offer this to you as both guidance and inspiration.

1. **Be Proactive.**

   Change starts from within, and highly effective people make the decision to improve their lives through the things that they can influence rather than by simply reacting to external forces.

2. **Begin With the End in Mind.**

   Develop a principle-centered personal mission statement. Extend the mission statement into long-term goals based on personal principles.

3. **Put First Things First.**

   Spend time doing what fits into your personal mission, observing the proper balance between production and building production capacity. Identify the key roles that you take on in life, and make time for each of them.

4. **Think Win/Win.**

   Seek agreements and relationships that are mutually beneficial.

5. **Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.**

   First seek to understand the other person, and only then try to be understood.

6. **Synergy**

   Through trustful communication, find ways to leverage individual differences to create a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts.
7. Sharpen the Saw.

Take time out from production to build production capacity through personal renewal of the physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

Chapter III: What Are Your Goals?

Begin With the End in Mind and Choose Carefully

As you begin the process of choosing a school or a program, consider Steven Covey’s second habit: Begin with the end in mind. This principle could hardly be more relevant. Here’s why. As you plan your future, ask yourself where you’d like to be after you complete your coursework. Is it enough to say “in business management” or “in nursing or the health care field”? Perhaps, but given how wide each of those fields is, perhaps not.

You should do everything possible to narrow your focus. Business management has many specializations, as do the nursing and health care fields.

When you finally do narrow things down, here are some ways to make sure that the school and the program you choose offer the focused coursework that you’ll want and need.

First and foremost, if you are working toward a degree, the school you choose must be accredited by a respected regional accrediting body. More information on accreditation is in Chapter VI.

Regardless of the path you take, your classes will not be inexpensive. Especially for those in pursuit of a degree, the costs can be significant, which means making the right decision is critical. You can reap a lifetime of benefits by taking the time for due diligence and research. After choosing a life partner, or a close friend, there is probably no bigger decision you can make. Choose carefully.
Three Steps – Review, Research, Ask Questions

Carefully review the school’s website and any web-based or printed materials that you can acquire. It may sound obvious to say so, but be sure to look not only for courses and programs that match up with your interests, but look beyond those concerns. Look for student feedback about their experience and faculty profiles if available. Many people assume that from an academic standpoint, one college may be roughly equal to another and that one academic department is like another. They are not.

In some ways, colleges can be compared to hospitals. One hospital may have an excellent reputation for managing cardiac care, but is less proficient in neonatal care. Conversely, one college may own a sterling reputation for nursing education, but is working hard to strengthen its information technology program. It’s your job to learn as much as you can about the school of your choice. Ask, and ask again.

Jeremy Gingerich: Online Learner

Jeremy is a Certified Public Accountant who practices in a busy CPA firm in Canby, Oregon. He spent over ten years in the same industry and gradually realized that it was not the industry where he wanted to spend the rest of his professional life. With the support of his wife and two children he decided to seek an opportunity to make a change in careers. He chose the accounting profession and that meant that he would have to return to college to gain new knowledge and credits toward becoming a CPA. He enrolled in the online Post Baccalaureate Accounting Certificate program at Linfield.

“Reputation was one of my biggest factors for selecting Linfield over another program,” Jeremy said. “Linfield was recommended to me at the time by my boss so that carried quite a bit of weight with it. And Linfield has a very good reputation. I know other people who have gone to Linfield and have been satisfied with their experience.”

A person seeking a Post Baccalaureate Accounting Certificate would look for a school or program that is well respected in accounting. Faculty members should be known in their field and have significant experience and accomplishments.

Likewise, if you are seeking a BSN, you want faculty members who have relevant nursing and teaching experience. Find out as much as you can about who teaches the courses you are interested in taking. An easy first step is Google. It’s an amazing research tool, and it’s free. Use it.
Guadalupe Gabba: Online Learner

Like many adult learners, Lupe always seems to have her sights set on a goal and for her, the goal when she enrolled at Linfield was to earn her BSN. While working as an ER/ICU nurse at Kaiser Permanente, she moved into practicing nursing with clients in an outpatient pain management clinic and discovered that she loved the work. Lupe graduated from Linfield College’s RN to BSN program and continued soon thereafter to earn her master’s degree in nursing.

Speaking candidly about online learning, she said, “I do miss the back and forth personal interaction of a traditional classroom,” she said, “but the flexibility of being able to work while going to school overrides that concern.”

Not only has her level of patient care and nursing leadership increased, but Lupe said she has grown as a person. The process of becoming a better educated person has opened her mind to global perspectives and she relishes being connected to new ideas in literature, in science, and the arts.

The U.S. News & World Report Education website is a great resource. It’s where Sue Ingersoll, a FedEx station manager in Seattle and Linfield College graduate in Business Management, got the information she needed to make her decision. It’s a treasure trove and an excellent place to begin your research.

The Online Learning Consortium has an enormous library of relevant articles about online education. While much of the material is geared to administrators and policy makers, much of it is fascinating, informative, and best of all, free. Take advantage of this site.

Admission Advising

The most important thing you can do is to ask good questions of an admission advisor. Ask about admission and technology requirements, and ask for an introduction so that you may contact members of the faculty directly to ask them about their approach and experience. Find out how previous adult learners have fared in their chosen professions. Keep asking questions. A good admission advisor is worth his or her weight in gold and can mean the difference between a great experience and a poor one.

Keep in mind that the competition for adult learners is very robust and that every school wants you as a student. Every effort should be made to answer your questions. If you have trouble getting clear, quick responses to your questions, that might be an indication that student support may not be what it should be.
The Importance of Setting Goals

As an online student, your life is distinctly different from a student who attends a classroom. In a physical (but not virtual) sense, you are somewhat alone. You don’t have the normal structures of traditional learning environments that can be helpful in keeping you on track. You have to do that for yourself. That’s where the importance of setting goals comes in.

Here’s an idea that you may find useful, and it doesn’t take more than ten or fifteen minutes. Each and every day, take a blank piece of paper and write down what your goals are for that day. You might also think about developing longer-term goals and writing those down as well.

What Distinguishes a Goal Setter?

- Goal setters have a purpose.
- Goal setters are planners.
- Goal setters have clarity.
- Goal setters take responsibility.
- Goal setters are problem solvers.

A Harvard Business School Study on Goal Setting

Why Write Your Goals Down?

A ten-year Harvard Business School Study showed that people who wrote out their goals earned ten times as much as people who didn’t.

Chapter IV: What Should You Look For in a School?

In Chapter III we talked about narrowing your focus and choosing schools that have programs and departments that fit your goals. As you move through the process of evaluating schools, your primary focus in choosing a program should always be quality.

That’s easily said, but how do you assess the overall quality of a school? Quality is a work in progress at every institution, and each school defines quality according to its own specific mission. However, the Online Learning Consortium has developed a guide by which an institution can measure its own progress and be gauged by others. The guide is known as the Five Pillars of Quality Online Education. Don’t let the title intimidate you. This framework is largely just common sense. It’s entirely fair, not to mention sensible, to ask your advisor any questions you have that involve these five pillars.
1. Learning Effectiveness
   The school can demonstrate that online learning outcomes meet or exceed institutional, traditional programs.

2. Scale (Cost Effectiveness and Commitment)
   The school continuously improves services while reducing cost.

3. Access
   All adult learners who wish to learn online have the opportunity and can achieve success.

4. Faculty Satisfaction
   Faculty achieves success with teaching online, citing appreciation and happiness.

5. Student Satisfaction
   Adult learners are successful in learning online and are typically pleased with their experiences, including interaction with instructors and peers, learning outcomes that match expectations, services and orientation.

Each of these metrics is more fully developed than what we have presented here, but this provides a relatively quick and straightforward framework to help you think through your assessment. The entire document can be found at The Online Learning Consortium.

The Cohort Model – What It Is and Why It’s Important
A cohort can be defined as a group whose progress is followed and measured at different points in time. At Linfield College, an adult learner who is enrolled in the nursing courses in the RN to BSN program, for example, would enroll as part of a cohort. This means that you join a group that progresses through the same coursework together.

This is important because nearly every industry now asks employees to work in teams. The cohort model in the Linfield College RN to BSN program emphasizes this collaborative approach and provides adult learners a strong social support system.
Maureen Fox, RN, BSN, Mixed Online Learning with World Travel

Maureen Fox, RN, BSN, is a recent Linfield graduate who transferred her credits from her associate degree to Linfield and received credit for prior learning in recognition of her license as a registered nurse. She completed the Linfield RN to BSN program online, as a member of a cohort. In the final nursing course, Integrated Experiential Learning, Maureen carried out a Service Learning Experience in Kenya. While she could have met the assignment in her local community, Maureen chose to spend two weeks living and working with clients through a health care agency in Eldoret, Kenya with whom Linfield has an agreement. “Traveling internationally for service learning is a rare opportunity and one that I’ve long wanted to do,” Maureen said. “It was the right time for me. My children are older. I have vacation time, and I can afford it.” RN to BSN students journal about their encounters and insights while carrying out the service learning experience, and have online class discussions to support one another in meeting the service learning goals of the course.

When Paying for Higher Education, Buyer Beware

Linfield College employs a “pay as you go” financial arrangement. This means that you pay for only the credits that you are taking that semester. You can pay the entire amount up front, or you can pay the balance on an installment plan. Some schools require that you pay all program costs up front. If you register for a four-semester degree or certificate program, you may be committed to the entire program cost whether or not your interests change or you find the program not to your liking. Again, it pays to ask questions.

Is an Online Degree Legitimate?

One of the central components of legitimacy is this: the worth of the degree you earn online measured against a similar degree you can earn in a face-to-face environment. If you can determine that an online bachelor's degree measures well against a similar bachelor’s degree earned on a campus, you’ve answered the legitimacy question.

Now to answer the question directly: Yes, a degree that you earn online is legitimate. In every way that matters, a degree that you attain by taking classes online is legitimate if that degree has been awarded by a regionally accredited institution. Are there caveats? Yes, based on accreditation issues and variations in quality. Are there some who question the legitimacy of degrees acquired online? Yes, but
the number of dissenting voices are few and continue to drop every year.

**Are learning outcomes in online comparable to face-to-face?**
Over 82% of academic leaders in U.S. institutions of higher learning that offer online education, rate the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face instruction.

“Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States,” 2013, Babson Survey Research Group with data collection in partnership with the College Board.

Michael Florea did have concerns about legitimacy when he was considering a college for completing his bachelor’s degree. Now a graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Information Systems, he is Senior VP and Chief Information Officer of Columbia Credit Union in Vancouver, Washington. “With the reputation Linfield has, my degree has given me advancement opportunities in my career.”

The **online BIS program** is designed with career advancement in mind. Martin Dwomoh-Tweneboah, Chair of Linfield’s Computer Science Department, says: “We belong to alliances with Microsoft and Oracle that equip our students with industry strength software for success in our online Business Information Systems courses.” This type of cutting-edge mentality has benefitted BIS students like Michael Florea.

**Interesting Historical Fact**


The date? 1989.
Chapter V: An Interactive World: A New, Dynamic Way to Live and Learn Emerges

During the fall of 2013, more than seven million people were enrolled in an online class in colleges and universities in the United States, according to the Babson Survey Research Group’s report, “Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States, I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, 2014. The report on tracking online education in the U.S. has been compiled every year since 2002. The enrollment in online classes in fall 2013 represents an increase of 6 percent over the previous year. To understand the dramatic growth in online learning, since 2002, there has been a compound annual growth rate of 16.1 percent in students taking online courses. For comparison, the overall higher education student body has grown at an annual rate of 2.5 percent during this same period – from 16.6 million in fall 2002 to 21.3 million for fall 2012.” (Allen and Seaman, pg 15, 2014). The proportion of students enrolled in colleges and universities who are taking at least one online course stands at 33.5 percent.

In a new national survey by the Pew Research Center to mark the 25th anniversary of the Web, "The Web at 25 in the U.S.,” Susannah Fox and Lee Rainie of the Pew Research Internet Project report, “The overall verdict: the internet has been a plus for society and an especially good thing for individual users.” The rapid growth of the internet has had a significant impact on how people learn, which is the focus of this guide.

Online learning now has a potentially huge and rapidly growing audience in higher education more sophisticated tools, and a more user-friendly and interactive platforms. All of which means a far richer and deeper experience awaits adventurous online learners and educators.

Online learning has the ability to connect ideas and people to one another and to deliver information to anyone, anywhere, and at any time.

Depending on course design, online learners in colleges might participate in discussion groups with fellow learners of wide and varied experiences who could be anywhere in the world. They might watch videos and create some of their own. They might listen to or create podcasts; upload their creative work for feedback from classmates and their instructor; share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on relevant subject matter via discussion boards; visit websites and blogs, and engage in a robust back-and-forth exchange with an instructor. They may collaborate in teams while running a business simulation or conduct research at the British Museum. Times really have changed.

Information Currency – A Growing Variety of Source Materials

It used to be that knowledge was disseminated through traditional channels: textbooks, journals, and other types of scholarly publications. All of that has changed. One of the great advantages of online
learning is immediacy and variety. Academic papers, breaking news, articles by innovative thinkers and journalists, and video lectures are all available instantly. Far gone are the days when it took nearly two years for a published article or a breakthrough idea to make its way to readers.

Adult Learners and Students - Readers and Writers
Earlier in this e-book we discussed the concept of the guide at the side and the sage on the stage. We pointed out the distinction between the traditional lecture format and the guide at the side who facilitates self-learning and discovery of knowledge.

In part, it is the guide-side phenomenon – that quality of self-direction, motivation, and responsibility – that online learning demands and that drives the use of the word “learner” instead of “student” in many discussions of online learning. This is not to suggest that students are not learners or vice versa, only that the online environment suggests a distinction.

Jennifer Rhafir: Online Learner
Jennifer enrolled in the Bachelor of Science degree program in Marketing at Linfield, while caring for her infant daughter. With her husband’s support, she knew that earning her degree would open up career opportunities that could better the life of their family. She learned the value of initiating contact with her professors and classmates in order to further her ability to learn within the class framework. “Sometimes I have to take it upon myself to research exactly what I’m looking for and it’s made me a stronger learner,” she said. “I’ve become a stronger researcher, and I know that if I’m not comprehending something, that I have the tools to go out and find exactly what I’m looking for,” she continued.

While increasingly there is a rich, multimedia aspect to online learning, much of the online learning experience still involves reading and writing. Online learning makes for better readers and writers simply because the process is largely text based and demands clarity of thought and expression. Online learners should expect to read and write a great deal.

Context and Community – Merging the Virtual and the Real
The online learning community is unusual in that participants are generally a bit older than average college-age students and are career based. The average age of an online student at Linfield College is thirty-seven. That means that on any given day in any given class, the potential exists for a truly varied and exciting network of adult learners who bring a rich mix of life, work, and personal experiences to the group. The cross-pollination of cultures, ideas, strategies and new ways of thinking alter our understanding of what a community of adult learners looks like and acts like.
Chapter VI: Legitimacy: Accreditation and Reputation

One distinction about accreditation should be understood at the outset. For degree seekers, accreditation is critically important.

The reason is that accreditation confers value and worth. Accreditation equals legitimacy. Any college must have accreditation from an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to be eligible to participate in the administration of federal student aid programs. The gold standard is regional accreditation. Regionally accredited institutions do not accept credits earned at unaccredited colleges. Attending a regionally accredited school is an important consideration if you think you might want to transfer credits to another school. Virtually all graduate schools require graduation from a regionally accredited school. In the eyes of potential employers in government, science, law, academia, health care, business, and every other field imaginable, the accredited degree that you worked so hard to earn is accepted, recognized, and respected.

Imagine learning that after years of hard work, the degree you earned is not recognized or accepted by potential employers. It can and does happen.

Regional Accrediting Bodies
There are six regional accrediting bodies that have been evaluated and approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, the Higher Learning Commission
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges has two separate commissions; one for senior colleges and universities and one for community and junior colleges.

WASC - Senior College and University Commission
WASC - Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges

Questions to Ask
With regard to accreditation, there are two key questions that you need to ask as you evaluate a college or university.

1. Is the school of my choice accredited by one of the six regional accrediting bodies listed above?
2. Is the program I am interested in recognized by its relevant professional association?
Linfield College is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities and offers three undergraduate degrees, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

In the latest edition of "America's Best Colleges" published by U.S. News & World Report, Linfield College has been listed alongside the best liberal arts colleges in the United States, which confirms Linfield's growing excellence as a selective undergraduate college.

The online degree program at Linfield College was rated one of the Best Online Bachelor's Degree Programs in the nation in a recently released U.S. News & World Report survey. Linfield was one of only four schools in the Pacific Northwest included in the rankings. The rankings are based on criteria which include student engagement with faculty and classmates; faculty credentials and training; peer reputation; diverse online learning technologies that allow students greater flexibility; and student services that provide a strong support structure.

Professional Accreditation
When considering earning a degree in nursing, professional accreditation is essential. A learner attending Linfield College’s RN to BSN program is attending a regionally accredited college and a nursing program offered by The Linfield–Good Samaritan School of Nursing that is approved by the Oregon State Board of Nursing and accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE). The college and the nursing program are both accredited.

State Authorization
States expect colleges and universities that are located outside of the state to be in compliance with the relevant state office that authorizes higher education, prior to performing any activities such as advertising or enrolling students in distance education programs. Some states have laws in place that require out-of-state schools to apply for and obtain authorization in order to enroll students into a distance education program. Other states do not require authorization by out-of-state schools and therefore, schools are exempt when enrolling students in distance education programs.

State authorization is part of consumer protection and is important to know about when you are exploring enrolling in an online degree program. Upon request the school must make available for review, a copy of the documents describing the school’s accreditation and its State, Federal, or tribal approval or licensing. The school must also provide you with contact information for filing complaints with its accreidtor and with its State approval or licensing entity and any other relevant State official or agency that would appropriately handle a student's complaint.

Most schools' websites will have a section devoted to State Authorization that will provide you with a list of states in which the school is "Authorized" or "Exempt" from authorization. If the school is "authorized" by the state where you have your legal residence, it means that all degree programs
being offered are approved and may be taken by out-of-state students who enroll in distance education programs at that school. If the school is "exempt" by the state, it means that the school may enroll students in distance education programs and they are not subject to the state's rules and regulations.

“In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education issued a regulation tying an institution's ability to offer federal financial aid in a state to the institution being authorized in the student's state. The regulation was subsequently "vacated" by federal court ruling and is not currently being enforced. The Department is currently in the process of reinstating the regulation. Regardless of the status of the federal regulation, states still expect institutions to follow their laws and regulations,” according to WCET, a division of the Western Commission for Interstate Higher Education.

The Linfield College web page on State Authorization is updated regularly and provides you with an example of the information that you will want to know before you enroll in an online degree program.

How To Evaluate the Student Experience
Most schools that offer online courses offer technical support, virtual library support for research, advising services, online academic tutoring, and so on. The quality of that support, from your initial inquiries to questions that may come up once you are enrolled, are key indicators of the level of commitment that the school has toward adult learners.

Responsive faculty – teachers who promptly respond to communication from their students in the online classroom – are another indicator of a supportive, student-oriented institution. On to Chapter VII. How does all this work, and what does it all look like?

Chapter VII: How Does Online Learning Work? What Does It Look Like?

It’s going to be difficult to truly know what online learning is like until you take a course. However, there are a few simple ways to introduce the concept. To help you gain some familiarity with the process, we’ve provided a simple introduction in this chapter.
Online Learning at Linfield College

- Online courses are perfect for students with schedules that demand flexibility.
- Online instructors will usually set requirements to post assignments by a certain time each week. You can do most of the coursework on your own schedule.
- Blackboard (BBLearn) provides you with separate links for submitting homework, group discussion, and personal communication with your instructor, and tests are usually taken online.
- With internet access you can work from anywhere in the world. This is an ideal program for those who travel.
- Expect to spend the same amount of time in an online class as you would in a face-to-face class, and to meet similar homework deadlines.

Where it Begins: The Linfield Blackboard Page

Illustration 1 depicts “My Linfield Blackboard Page” for a student. Blackboard is a popular, widely used learning management system that Linfield College and many other institutions use to deliver online educational content. The courses are Transition to Professional Practice, Creative Development Studio, Blackboard Student Orientation, Drug Use in the U.S., and Nutrition.

![Illustration 1. My Linfield Blackboard Page With Course List](image)
Illustration 2 shows the Blackboard Student Orientation online classroom. Take note of the navigation menu on the left side of the page; Finding Your Way, Learning Online, Getting Organized, Communicating, Collaborating, Taking Tests, Assignments and Grades. These items will guide you through a self-paced tutorial on the path for your success as an online learner at Linfield College.

![Illustration 2. Blackboard Student Orientation](image)

Illustration 3 shows the Information screen that appears after selecting NURS 308, Transition to Professional Practice. In this example, the Information screen gives you an overview of the course. Notice how the instructor has organized the course to provide you with more information at your fingertips; Syllabus, Course Schedule and Due Dates, Faculty Bio, Managing your Personal Home Page, and Linfield Resources. Each instructor will organize the information to suit the aims of the course. While all course pages in Blackboard will have similarities in appearance, each instructor will customize the online classroom.
Illustration 3. Information. NURS 308. Transition to Professional Practice

Illustration 4 shows a content page in the course. In this example, take note of the Learning Objectives and Learning Activities and Assigned Reading for that particular module.

Illustration 4. Content Item
Illustration 5 depicts a portion of the Discussion Board showing how the instructor has mapped out discussion topics for the semester. As in the previous illustration, instructors will organize the discussion boards in different ways. Some topics will be graded and have points assigned to them.
Illustration 6 shows the landing page that a student comes to after selecting the course, Creative Development Studio. Note links to the Course Syllabus and Schedule, and contact information for the instructor are clearly visible.
Illustration 7 shows the creative work submitted by a student in the course, Creative Development Studio.

Student projects are shared in this online class providing student-to-student and instructor-to-student critique of the development of the students’ work.

Illustration 7. Creative Development Studio Creative Work by Danielle Bertrand

Blackboard allows for a clear, intuitive and user-friendly approach to managing and organizing a great deal of information. While it may take some getting used to, most online learners – from California to New York, from the Pacific Northwest to Pennsylvania, to Azerbaijan - find it easy to navigate.

What Surprised Kathy Attaway?

There was one thing about online education that surprised Kathy who was working full-time as an RN and returned to school to complete her RN to BSN degree at Linfield. “I really believed online learning would be getting an assignment, completing it on my own and then uploading it to some site. I had no idea that there would be so much interaction, not only with the professors, but with my fellow students,” she said. “I think the most useful part of online learning as opposed to a classroom is that you get a chance to interact with everyone.”
Fred Van Drimmelen: “You get out of the process what you put into it.”
Fred is a recent Linfield graduate who earned the Bachelor of Science degree in Management. He works for Cisco Systems. “The phrase that you get out of the process what you put into the process is very true in the online learning community. If you go into it wanting to absorb and learn, it is a very effective toolset,” he said. Fred travels regularly for work. “The satisfaction of being able to do an online course whether I’m in Oregon, in Ireland, in Israel, or in Arizona, is very helpful to the learning process to accommodate my schedule,” he said. One of Fred’s favorite quotes from Albert Einstein applies to his approach to life and learning, "Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning.” Albert Einstein

It’s Still College, Only Different
On one level, learning online is similar to face-to-face learning. You have reading assignments to complete, lectures to read or listen to, papers to write, and material to learn. “But it is different,” said Professor Janet Peterson, who teaches in Linfield’s Health, Human Performance, and Athletics Department. “There are opportunities for learning in face-to-face and online environments. But some people cannot learn online and others find that online is the best option for them.” Professor Peterson has been teaching online for a number of years and was open to the concept from the beginning. Her openness to alternative methods may have come from her own family. “Years and years ago, my mother got her college degree from a correspondence school, and I was somewhat dismissive about that path. Then I realized that she was able to secure the same kinds of jobs as other people. Later, in graduate school, I came to believe that there are many different teaching formats that are effective beyond the traditional ones.”

Oznur Root: Online Learner
Oznur Root lives in Azerbaijan. In addition to working full time, she is a wife and the mother of two children. The family likes to travel when school is not in session. “Online classes provide flexible studying hours that allow me to continue with my work, family, and travels, says Oznur Root, Linfield Bachelor’s degree in Accounting student. Regardless where I am around the world, as long as I am connected to the internet, I am able to be in the classes, anywhere, anytime. The flexibility aspect of online classes is of great value to me,” she continued.
“Through internet search I found what I was looking for in a school of choice at Linfield, with tremendous amounts of professional help. Linfield pays close attention to its students while having
appropriate accreditation to provide academic classes that are competitive,” said Oznur.

Ray Schroeder: Online Educator
Ray Schroeder is Associate Vice Chancellor for Online Learning at the University of Illinois, Springfield, and Director of the UPCEA Center for Online Leadership and Strategy. Ray thinks a great deal about and communicates frequently on topics regarding online learning.
Ray wrote recently in his “Monday Briefing” about happiness as it relates to online students’ learning experiences. Citing a poll by Gallup/Purdue University conducted with 30,000 college graduates, they found that happiness had a lot to do with the engagement in learning, college debt incurred, perceived quality of teaching and depth of learning. “In sum it seems the path to online learning happiness is paved with lower costs, greater student engagement, affective approaches, and quality teaching,” Schroeder wrote. Examples of affective approaches to learning include helping learners identify achievable aims and working toward autonomous learning. He encourages faculty to remember these as they design and deliver courses and curricula online.

A Key Distinction: Term-based and Self-paced Education
Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of degree and certificate programs: term-based and self-paced. A term-based program is what it sounds like – there’s a time limit that ranges from five to fifteen weeks from the beginning of a course to completion. A self-paced program is wide-open, with loosely defined time frames for learners to complete their coursework. At Linfield College, we offer term-based classes.

Online classes at Linfield College are term-based.

Chapter VIII: Resources to Help You Succeed
Five Avenues of Support
Strong, supportive institutions have excellent technical, research, faculty, tutoring, and advising support systems. These avenues of support are designed to help you succeed as an online learner. When you are considering the school where you will enroll, it’s a good idea to ask about these resources. Let’s explore these a little further.

What About Technical Support?
It’s easy to be amazed by the growth of millions of people going to college online. It’s less easy to create the institutional capacity to consistently and effectively deliver those courses and materials online. Both students and faculty must be sufficiently trained, equipped and supported so that the learning – not the technology – is at the forefront. Students (and faculty) must know that in the event
of a problem, they can find solutions quickly and easily. Faculty members have to learn to build classes in new ways. The fact that “new ways” keeps evolving and changing complicates matters. The best schools are staying current with new developments in order to enhance the learning experience.

At Linfield College, technical support is available to online students as they need it; the school has continued to increase bandwidth, adopted more advanced versions of Blackboard (BBLearn) which allow online class participation through mobile devices as well as laptop and desktop computers.

Brett Hardee is the Division of Continuing Education’s head of Technology and Blackboard Administration. He said that the most frequent issues with newer students are user-name and password problems. After that, issues related to browsers cause problems. Plug-ins are add-on programs or applications that are needed to connect browsers properly to BlackBoard, such as Java and a pdf reader. Several methods are available to help learners, from talking them through the necessary steps over the phone to using a computer program to connect to the student’s computer and installing these applications remotely.

Online Tutorials
Colleges provide different ways for students to become familiar with the online classrooms before the course is underway.

At Linfield College, learners have the option to view an online tutorial in BlackBoard Learn or to attend a free online demonstration course, either face-to-face, or virtually through a simulcast. The online demonstration classes are offered before the start of each semester, in order to help students become familiar with the learning management system. During the online demonstration course, classes for which you have registered will be available for viewing. Strategies for successful online learning will also be discussed. Faculty have workshops and consultants to help them stay current with existing and developing technologies.

Research Support
In a connected world, research librarians must be aware of the ever-expanding abundance of information and a growing array of tools to reach learners and help them become information literate. The proliferation of valuable online content has created a diverse and rich world to explore. In most ways, this is a good thing. “One of the biggest challenges facing librarians now,” said Beth West, Linfield College’s Teaching and Online Learning Librarian, “is to help our learners evaluate the material they find online to insure it is the best possible information for their research.” West would like online students to know that even though they don’t come to campus, they still have access to a wealth of library resources and to a librarian dedicated to meeting the particular needs of online students.
Just a few links bring forth an astounding amount of useful information.

Linfield Libraries Search  Find books, articles, media & more
Everything scope includes access to materials via Linfield and 36 other academic libraries regionally. Additionally, the WorldCat scope finds books & media worldwide
EbscoHost  Journal articles in academic disciplines
Lexis-Nexis  Newspaper articles and legal resources
CINAHL  Articles in nursing and allied health fields
Articles and Library Databases  Complete list by subject

Many courses taught through Linfield College’s Division of Continuing Education (DCE) have a Library Class Page which provides a comprehensive look at how a person might begin to use library and online resources to conduct research for a given course. These pages include guidance on how to use the library’s resources to find and acquire the information you need, and how to evaluate and use that information. There is a world of information literally at your fingertips, and a librarian is there to help you learn to navigate through it.

Faculty help students succeed
Faculty responsiveness is a key benchmark in evaluating a college. Instructors who are responsive provide a preview of the course syllabus or outline of topics to be covered, before the term begins so that adult learners may anticipate what the online coursework will require of them. During the course they will keep in touch by being readily available for interaction. Melissa Jones, Nursing faculty and RN to BSN Coordinator said, “It is essential to maintain regular contact with students so that they don't feel isolated in the online learning environment.”

“Adult learners enrolled in online classes need to know that the faculty will respond to their questions in a timely manner, will maintain a presence in the online classroom, and will be there if they experience challenges with the online learning experience,” she continued.
Academic Tutoring Support
Online tutoring enhances your academic experience by providing trained tutors who are prepared to help you. Linfield belongs to the Western eTutoring Consortium, a large group of colleges, each providing experienced academic tutors who work with students online to help you improve your performance in your courses. The services include the Online Writing Lab, Live Tutoring through eChat, and Offline eQuestions where you can leave a question and an experienced tutor will respond.

The Shortest Distance Between Two Points: Academic Advising
Moral support – from friends, life-partners, fellow students, and especially, from academic advisors – plays a big role in the life of a successful adult learner. One purpose of academic advising is to help students develop educational plans that will be compatible with career. Another is to encourage the intellectual growth of learners and serve as rich resources of information. Still another, and perhaps the most important is this: A great academic advisor can save a student enormous amounts of time and money by being a wise and knowledgeable guide through the thickets of higher education and personal aspiration.
Kathy Attaway found her advisor to be a valuable resource in navigating the RN to BSN degree program.
“Having all of my past experience and education count was so much easier than I expected,” she said.
“Really, it was all done for me. I was contacted immediately and given plenty of information and just walked through the whole process,” she continued.

Academic advising at Linfield is mission driven, designed to promote intellectual growth, critical thinking, thoughtful dialogue, and lifelong learning. Academic advisors mentor students, support them as unique individuals, and use their specialized knowledge to benefit students.

We recently sat down with Joanne Swenson and Janielle Losaw who are experienced with advising adult learners at Linfield to discuss some of the common concerns prospective students have about going back to school and how advisors will work with you to overcome any challenges you feel you might face, in this short video, Academic Advisors: Your Advocate through Graduation. We encourage you to take a look.
Chapter IX: How Much?

Value Defined
When you evaluate the cost of paying for college tuition, it’s important to keep in mind what you are paying for. If you are pursuing a bachelor’s degree or certificate with academic credits, you are paying for accreditation (and all that entails), reputation, distinguished faculty, support services (like research libraries), and current technologies. You are paying for all that goes into the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge in both traditional and non-traditional ways.

Cost Considerations
The cost of your education, as in tuition and fees, should be easy to find on the school’s website and when communicating with admission and financial aid resource people. If you have difficulty locating this information after a reasonable attempt to obtain it, this is a reason to be cautious about enrolling in that school.
By any measure, the Linfield College online adult degree program is affordable. Because Linfield online tuition charges are determined by the number of credits taken each semester, students are charged tuition on a pay-as-you-go basis. Students may also elect to pay their tuition in installments during the semester. Tuition charges are competitive with those charged by public higher education institutions, and, in many cases, below other private institutions. The Linfield program has been approved by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for eligible veterans pursuing a degree.

Financial Aid
Through the Financial Aid Office at Linfield, adult learners can apply for, and become acquainted with grants, and federal and private loan programs and scholarships. Federal Pell Grants, Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Direct Stafford Loans, the G.I. Bill, the Oregon Opportunity Grant and various private scholarships are some of the financial vehicles that help adult learners fund their education.

Sandra Tello is a Linfield Financial Aid Counselor. “A common misconception among some adult learners has to do with scholarships. You don’t need to be right out of high school to apply for scholarships,” she said.
Sandra recommends the Path to Scholarships® workshops and webinars offered by Linfield, to learn how to successfully apply for scholarships. Sandra covers some of the most frequently asked questions that adult learners have in a short video, Help Financing Your Education.

For more information, the Financial Aid web page is a good resource about financial aid that is available to eligible degree and certificate-seeking adult learners in Linfield’s online degree and certificate programs.
Linfield College Online Costs
An up-to-date schedule of [Linfield online degree and certificate tuition and fees](#) is available.

Compare and Contrast
One way to establish that you are receiving good value is to [compare the tuition costs](#) of one school and another.

Textbooks, online and lab fees, travel costs, etc. are not included in the tuition. The fees are listed in the class schedule. Prices to purchase or to rent textbooks (both “new” and “used”) and e-textbooks appear in the [Linfield College online bookstore](#).

Chapter X: Lifelong Learning
When we asked our graduate, MaryHelen Clausing, who was kind enough to offer her insights and experiences for this e-book, if she had something she might want to say to an audience of potential online learners, she said:

“I really think, in nutshell, it’s a fabulous way for an adult to go back to school. And that it’s a fabulous feeling as an adult. Something you think is so out of reach – you get caught up in your job, you think, ‘I wish I would have, or I could have but I can’t now, there’s no way.’ The thing is, you can. And it’s hard. But it’s so, so great.”

We live in extraordinary times. The world needs thinkers and problem solvers and go-getters and self-learners and lifelong learners. The world needs you. Thank you for reading this e-book. We leave you with a great line from a great English writer:

It’s never too late to be what you might have been.

- George Eliot