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**Virginia College Online School Faculty Develops Unique Teaching Methods To Involve
Students In Online Classes**

By Andy West

As more and more students turn to the Internet to advance their education, instructors at Virginia

College Online have developed some different ways to help students gain knowledge as they pursue their online degrees. And some of them really put the "distance" in distance learning!

For example, Dr. Ann Peterson, a faculty member in the online business programs, feels that it is important to communicate with students who may be anywhere in the world, and who may be completing assignments at any hour of the day or night.

"I use a .PDF file so students can check to see if they are completing their word processing assignments correctly," she says. "I've also built a grading rubric to tell students how assignments will be graded, why points came off, and how they could have made a higher score."

Dr. Peterson adds, "These are good ways to keep the communication open with students I don't usually get to see face-to-face."

That's the case as well with faculty member Claudine de Nava, who teaches online classes for Virginia College Online from her home in Mexico. Ms. De Nava is a fulltime English instructor there, after completing her master's of education degree in Atlanta. She was also a research assistant for NASA and one of her projects flew on a space shuttle mission in 1996. She enjoys writing and plans to do a book about living and working in Mexico.

Online MBA class instructor Susan Sasaidek has developed an innovative idea to keep her far-flung classes engaged and involved.

"For the group project in Management 441, I have created a scenario of a business located here in Tucson, Arizona," she says. "The mock business is facing some serious competition from a giant company moving in. The students are asked to provide ideas and suggestions on ways to turn things around for this small 'mom and pop' shop to make it successful again. It's amazing to see them taking

what they are learning in a small business class and applying it to this scenario."

In another of Ms. Sasaidek's classes, students learn how to put together a business plan. Each week the plan is built upon. By the end of the quarter the students not only have a complete business plan, they have a solid foundation to start the process to entrepreneurship should they choose to do so.

Ms. Sasaidek recently had her dissertation submitted for publication with Proquest.

Faculty members at Virginia College Online all emphasize the importance of one-on-one interaction with their students—whether they are in the same city or halfway around the world. They strive to assure that the online learning experience is as good as—or, using today's technology, even better than—traditional on-ground classes.

Andy West is a freelance writer and communications specialist. For more information regarding Virginia College Online, please visit

<http://www.vconline.edu>

5 Questions To Ask Yourself Before Taking Your First Online Class

By Kris Bickell

Just a few short years ago, the idea of taking a college course through the Internet was something online "techie" considered. Now that people realize how convenient it is to take a class without leaving home, more and more people are taking advantage of using their computer to learn.

But while the technology used for online classes is so simple just about anyone can become an online student, you should ask yourself the following 5 questions first - and save yourself a lot of stress!

1) Do you have the time? Many people think - mistakenly - that online courses are "easier" than traditional campus classes. But most online classes require regular participation. So, you must have the time to "log on" to your course several times each week, complete the assignments and do your homework, and interact with the other students.

All of this takes time...and, you have to account for the time you would normally have spent in the classroom. If you have the time, you will find taking an online class to be very convenient!

2) Do you have the discipline? Sure, most online classes don't require you to be on the computer at a specific time (although some do). So it is up to you to make sure you check in on your class several times each week. With a busy work schedule, sports, hobbies, housework, kids, it's easy to put your class low on your priority list. And that could mean big trouble when it comes time to get your grade.

It's not the teacher's job to remind you to keep up with your work - that's your responsibility. A simple

way to make this work is to create your own schedule, so each week you know exactly when it's time to "go to class"!

3) Do you have the money? While there are many free or low-cost online "self help" courses available, college courses almost always cost the same whether you take them on-campus, or online. Colleges have to buy the software, train their faculty, and offer student services after hours - so expecting online courses to be less expensive is not reasonable.

On the other hand, the same financial aid is often available for online classes, just as with campus classes. So, money should not stop any student from furthering their education!

4) Do you have the right technical skills? Fortunately, you don't have to be a computer "genius" to take an online class. The technology has become very simple for students and teachers to use, so that students who can "surf the Internet" and use email usually have the necessary technical skills.

Before getting started, the school offering the course should have a sample course, tutorial, or other training to help you determine if there are any skills you need to learn, so you can become a successful online student!

5) Do you have the right computer equipment? Since most online classes are taught through the Internet, students usually don't need any special computer equipment. However, most online classes require students to have reliable access to the Internet, an email account (and the knowledge to use it), a word processor (such as Microsoft Word), and antivirus software. Check with your school to see if

there are any other requirements.

A high speed internet connection is usually not required, but if instructors use graphics, videos, audio lectures, or other big files, a high speed connection (such as DSL or cable) will help you open the files, and do your work, more efficiently!

Are you ready now to take your first online class? Then it's time to contact your local college, or search the internet for an online class directory, and see what online courses you can take!

Kris Bickell is the owner of Hi-Speed-Internet.com, a helpful site for consumers comparing high speed internet services. For information on high speed DSL, Cable, and Wireless Internet, visit:

<http://www.Hi-Speed-Internet.com>

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