

Virtual Victory

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WRIT 101: College Writing

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March 8, 2020

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Many adults are finding themselves in positions requiring them to return to school. Because of their many obligations and responsibilities, it is often difficult to attend classes on campus. This problem has been largely solved by the alternative online and hybrid courses. With this rise of nontraditional student enrollment, many older students are struggling with the application of technology within online and hybrid courses. To help these students successfully overcome these obstacles, students and colleges would benefit from taking advantage of technology training courses, research strategy instruction, and tutoring and counseling services.

Online and hybrid classes make it possible for students to learn skills and earn degrees which would otherwise be unobtainable. Unfortunately, many are not aware of the amazing opportunities available within these class platforms. Online classes offer an incredible array of teaching and study tools. These include things like concept maps, videos, practice exams, and study materials. These tools are often underutilized because of a lack of student knowledge of available support. Nontraditional students need different support than traditional students. Many nontraditional students don't know how to use the available technology, so they struggle to learn concepts covered within their online course platforms. Because they don't know how to use these tools, they lose the opportunity to fully learn the material.

To help overcome this deficiency of student IT skills, online classes should have a basic technology-based understanding prerequisite. This would allow students to get the best use out of the online classes instead of wasting their time trying to understand how to navigate the system. Many nontraditional students are failing due to a lack of fundamental knowledge. According to one case study regarding on-line access by non-traditional students, "often the development of IT skills were seen as neither core nor essential and were therefore neglected" (Dearnely, Dunn, & Watson, 2006, p. 414). Though published fourteen years ago, this problem is still alive and well among students today as seen in the underutilization of available online tools and support in more recent studies (Cherrstrom, Robbins, Boden, & Bixby, 2019).

One way to ensure students' success is through research strategy instruction. It is often difficult for nontraditional students to know how to use the available technology to conduct research. "Juggling multiple roles and competing responsibilities, they frequently choose the convenience of the online and hybrid courses, simultaneously needing to learn technological requirements along with course content. Low efficacy with technology adversely affects non-traditional students' outcomes" (Cherrstrom, Robbins, Boden, & Bixby, 2019, p.118). More time is expended trying to navigate the online environment than in conducting actual research. Because available time is already at a minimum for many of these students, the result is often substandard coursework.

Tutoring and counseling services are available to help students successfully apply concepts and navigate available learning opportunities without wasting so much of their limited time. When students aren't aware of these services, they are unable to thrive in their on-line and hybrid courses. Like those involved in a case study exploring on-line access by non-traditional students, many lack skills and the time required to develop skills, so they did not fully engage in the process (Dearnely, Dunn, & Watson, 2006, p.413). Having a guide and teacher shortens the learning curve and makes it possible for students to accomplish more in less time.

With a continuing increase of nontraditional student enrollment in online and hybrid courses, students and colleges would benefit from taking advantage of technology training courses, research strategy instruction, and tutoring and counseling services to help students succeed. With healthy support and assistance, non-tradition students will experience more success in a world increasingly dominated by transformation and the need for continual learning. It is vital for colleges to maintain and develop new programs and services to support students within these platforms, as well as continue to improve the way students are educated about available opportunities.

References

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