



The Attributes of Successful Distance Learners

Distance learners must sustain a diversity of traits in order to find success in online courses. Unique characteristics are possessed by online learners. Distance education is addressed by all ages. Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvack recognize accurate educational setting, prior knowledge, and learning styles as indicators of successful distance learners (2009). Successful distance learners must possess time management, be self-motivated, and communicate their needs. Acknowledging these attributes can provide learners with the confidence in their ability to succeed an online education despite the subject.

First and foremost, being a busy professional, it is vital to possess time management as a distance learner. The ability to manage time is the major factor of encouraging students to succeed as a distance learner. As a distance learner, it is vital to know that you will not receive persistent reminders about quizzes that are coming up, projects that are scheduled, or deadlines for papers that must be submitted. This must be done in a respectable amount of time prior to the due date and in a way that endorses knowledge continuation. This means that goals should be set as well as utilize some sort of time management system in order to keep track of everything. Having a time management strategy can help an individual avoid procrastination. Organizing a plan will provide a guide to be followed so that a learner will not waste valuable time deciding what to do next. This will promote motivation and allow one to be more successful in their distance learning courses. As Garcis (2010) points out, “Good distance learners never put off their work.” This ability to remain accountable for completing course work in a timely manner is an attribute that distance learners must acquire in order to be successful. Distance learners must know how to manage their time as well as improve study habits in order to be a successful online learner.

In order to be successful, distance learners must be self-motivated. Since students are not forced to attend classes, therefore they find it extremely difficult to stay on top of their work

because there is no one to keep them on task (Wilkinson, 2010). Distance learning is a great opportunity for those who have the ability to motivate themselves, especially when they are influenced by certain barriers that prevent them from attending a traditional classroom. Distance learning transfers the encumbrance of motivation from the structure of the classroom onto the shoulder of the learner. Learners must obtain the initiative to login the course in order to complete their work. Learners must go by the syllabus and prepare for coursework, quizzes and exams without the close guidance of the course instructor. Any learner who lacks the self-discipline and self-motivation to do this on a frequent basis right from the start of the course is liable to fall through the cracks of the distance learning structure. Distance learning requires learners to be self-motivated because they are affected by other responsibilities, have no one to provide encouragement, distractions, and lack of guidance. As the University of Otago indicated, “effective distance learners become and stay responsible for themselves” (2011).

In order to be successful in online courses, distance learners also must have the ability to communicate their needs. As mention early in the course, distance learners have various needs. A distance learner is identified with a profile that is possibly similar or diverse from that of others. Holmberg (1995) specifies, “These learners are very heterogeneous” (Smaldino, Albright & Zvack, 2009, p.47). Because distance learning is done in the course of group interaction, instructional designers will be required to put forth an enormous attempt to integrate the technologies to meet the needs of distance learners and foster collaboration and interaction among these learners (Chaney, J., Chaney, E. Stellefson, and Eddy, 2008). Distance learners who are not proficient at navigating through wikis, blogs, and discussion boards must communicate their need for tutoring to their instructor and course administrator. According to Bray, Harris, & Major, (2007) distance education endeavors can be hindered by technology itself. As Wilson

(2001) states, “reliable technology with readily available support is vital for success” (Bray, Harris, & Major, 2001). Furthermore, online learners are expected to utilize the provided library resources as well as write their course assignment in a professional manner. Students often have difficulty in understanding their tasks, therefore email and chats are useful in communicating with the instructor for helpful information. In my experience, I find communicating your needs is vital to being a successful distance learner.

The aptitude to thrive in distance education is current in students who have the abovementioned attributes. They must possess time management in order to complete work in a timely manner that does not obstruct other commitments. In order to be successful at completing assignments, distance learners must be self-motivated so that they are able to work at their own pace and be a successful independent learner. If these characteristics are not being assessed in earning a degree, then learners must be capable of communicating their needs to the correct supporting system that will support them in achieving success.

References

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