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Learning at a Distance

A Student’s Guide to Online Learning at Framingham State College

If you are reading this document it assumes you are enrolled in an online class or you have an interest in taking an online class in the future. This document was developed to help prepare students to make the transition from sitting in a classroom to the online learning environment. Please reference this information at any time.

# Framingham State College

**Framingham State College** first offered classes online in 1998. In 2000 the College adopted Blackboard as its learning management platform to enhance all web-based courses. Since that time we have enrolled thousands of students from this country and around the world in our online courses and programs.

The growth of online education at [Framingham State College](http://www.framingham.edu/) is attributed to a dedicated group of online educators, strong administrative support, and students like you. As Director of Distance Education I thank you for being part of this exciting learning experience.

*Robin S. Robinson, Director Distance Education*

# How to Succeed Online

Students who succeed in an online class often share these characteristics.

* Independent
* Self-Motivated
* Self-Disciplined
* Good at time management
* Have a keen interest in the course

Learning online may require you to adopt new strategies to succeed. Most students find that taking online courses requires a high level of personal organization and self- discipline. Practicing good study habits is a place to begin.

## Strategies for Success

**If you have a question, ask**. Remember that most classes meet only online. Be clear with your comments and requests and keep your instructor informed if you have questions or experience any difficulties.

The College provides 24/7 toll free Blackboard support. Call 1-866-361-8970 if you have questions about using Blackboard or experience any technical problems.

Address your academic questions to the Course Instructor or the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education (DGCE). The Division may be reached by calling 508 626-4550 x9.

Questions about the online learning experience may be addressed to Academic Technology and Distance Education (ATDE) at 508 626-4927.

**Become familiar with** [**Blackboard**](http://framingham.blackboard.com/), the Learning Management System used to support online learning at Framingham State College. If this is your first online class, review the Blackboard [Student Tutorial](http://www.academicsonline.org/studentguide/) before the class begins.

**Log into Blackboard** early. All online students receive a welcome message before classes begin. If the email does not arrive *before the course begins,* contact the Blackboard support line, 1-866-361-8970, for your username and password.

**Familiarize yourself with your course site and instructor expectations.** Your instructor will email a welcome message when the course is opened (not always before classes begin.) Open each menu option listed in your class site so that you become familiar with the course tools. Find the course syllabus, schedule, class requirements, methods of communication, and know where to go for help.

**Review course expectations**. Although most online courses are taught asynchronously, some professors do schedule real-time online collaboration sessions or ask you to meet on campus to review course material or to take an exam. If you are unsure of the expectations, ask.

**Be organized**. Many students find that online courses are at least as time consuming, perhaps even a bit more, than face-to-face classes. Schedule time to log into your course site on a regular basis, participate as requested and stick to your schedule for the duration of the course. If you allow too many days to pass by you may find it difficult to catch up.

**Complete all assignments on time.** *Online courses are not self- paced*, but they are flexible. If it works better for you to complete your work in the evening, that is perfectly fine as long as it meets the due date set by your instructor. Become familiar with the course syllabus and know when your assignments are due.

**Be an independent learner**. Online courses require that you work from written directions or written communication from your instructor or classmates. Participate in the online discussions as directed by your professor and share your views to broaden your understanding of the course material. Some students have said that online collaboration often provides more opportunities to explore the course content in-depth than is possible during an in-class discussion.

**Communication skills are a key factor** in an online class. It is important to write clear and concise statements when you communicate online. Remember the person reading your comments does not see your expression or hear your tone of voice. Take advantage of the environment and prepare your comments in Word before posting them online or sending an email to your classmates or instructor.

**Become familiar with communication policies** for your course. Most instructors will reply to your emails within 24 to 48 hours. Knowing the preferred method of communication will help alleviate the feeling of isolation when taking an online course.

**Reward yourself occasionally!** Online courses are as in-depth as a face-to-face class. Plan to do something special for yourself after you have studied or worked hard on a project.

## About the Technology

**Experience with Blackboard, the learning management system, is not necessary**, *but you do need basic computer skills to succeed in an online class*. If you know how to navigate a web site, use a drop down menu, browse for a file on your computer, have used a word processor like Microsoft Word, and are able to send an email with an attachment, then you have the technical skills needed to take an online course.

**Use a Blackboard preferred browser** to connect to the Internet. The features and functionality in Blackboard require that you use an updated internet browser capable of running JavaScript and Java and that Cookies are enabled. Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE) is the preferred browser of the College, but Netscape or Firefox are acceptable too. *Other browsers like AOL or Opera may function but are not supported by Blackboard and are not recommended.*

**Access to a computer is required**. An internet-ready computer (PC or Mac) with high-end capacity in terms of speed and RAM is needed to access Blackboard course material.

When working at home, most faculty and students find that a 56K modem provides acceptable Internet access but cable or DSL will work faster.

If you use a Macintosh computer it is important that you are running OS X. Older Mac operating systems do not work well with Blackboard’s online collaboration tools.

**Become familiar with the technology requirements** for your course. Some professors require that you use specific word processing applications like Microsoft Word or that you have access to applications like Microsoft PowerPoint or Excel. Other professors use real time collaboration tools like Skype or Elluminate and may require you to purchase a microphone. These expectations are outlined by your instructor with their course information. If you do not see a requirement listed, ask.

# Getting Started with Blackboard

[**Blackboard**](http://framingham.blackboard.com/) is used at Framingham State College to complement and supplement our online course offerings. All online, hybrid, and Web-enhanced courses are hosted by Blackboard on a dedicated server, accessible from any internet ready computer - PC or MAC - at any time, and from anywhere.

**Features of the system include:**

* Customizable course menu options
* Content links to course information
* Communication and Collaboration tools
* Survey and Test assessment tools
* Gradebook and assignment options
* Links to the Blackboard Content System e-Portfolio and e-Reserve tools

Note: Not all professors use Blackboard in the same way. If you experience a problem contact the 24/7 Blackboard support line at 1-866-361-8970 for assistance.

**Standard usernames and passwords** are used to connect you to Blackboard, the campus network, library databases, myFSC portal, and web email. Your account information is sent to you in a letter and also emailed to you before classes begin.

To login to Blackboard:

* Go to: <http://framingham.blackboard.com/>
* Enter your assigned username and password.
* Click Login or [Enter]

## Blackboard Frequently Asked Questions

**Review the information** on the academicsonline.org Web site for answers to Blackboard Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.academicsonline.org/FAQ/> . To get you started we included the questions asked most often.

#### Q. I forgot my password, now what do I do?

From the login page click "Forgot your password." An email will be sent to you with new password information. Still having problems? Please call our 24/7 Blackboard support line at 1-866-361-8970 for assistance or stop by our office in **Hemenway Hall G05-G09.**

#### Q. My email changed. How do I update my address on Blackboard?

Use the Personal Information Link from the Tools box of your Blackboard home page to update your email address, change your password or set privacy options.

#### Q. My Course is not listed on Blackboard, now what do I do?

Your welcome letter is your confirmation that you are enrolled in your online course. If you log into Blackboard and your course is not listed, chances are your instructor has not made the course site available. If you wish to confirm your enrollment, call our 24/7 Blackboard support line at 1-866-361-8970 for assistance, contact DGCE at 508 626-4550 x9, or contact ATDE by phone 508 626-4927 or email academicsonline@frc.mass.edu.

# Academic and Technology Resources

Online courses are exactly the same as their in-class counterparts except for the method of delivery. Our online courses are designed to meet the same accreditation standards as in-class courses. All of the support services available to on-campus students are also available to students who take classes online. Become familiar with these resources.

## Division or Graduate and continuing Education (DGCE) - (508) 626-4550 x9

At the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education at Framingham State College you’ll find that excellence goes hand-in-hand with intellectual development and enrichment. DGCE provides a comprehensive range of study including graduate, undergraduate and certificate programs, noncredit courses, and programs for educators. Whether you take classes on campus or online, you’ll get personal attention and practical training.

DGCE is located on the fifth floor of the College Center. You will also find the office online at <http://www.framingham.edu/dgce>. Contact DGCE if you have questions about your program of study or wish to speak to an advisor. Direct email questions to dgce@frc.mass.edu.

## Academic Technology and Distance Education (ATDE) - (508) 626-4927

ATDE provides students and faculty with academic support for software, online courseware and instructional applications. The office is located in Hemenway Hall G09. The online address is <http://www.academicsonline.org>. Contact ATDE at academicsonline@frc.mass.edu or call 508-626-4927 if you have questions about the online learning environment or have questions about Blackboard.

## Whittemore Library[www.framingham.edu/wlibrary](http://www.framingham.edu/wlibrary)

Off-campus Library Access is available to all online students. The Whittemore Library at Framingham State College is a member of the [Minuteman Library Network](http://www.mln.lib.ma.us/), which has over 5 million books and multi-media materials between the member libraries. Whittemore Library has over 200,000 items in the general collection, and subscribes to an array of databases and full text electronic journals.

All of these materials are available to online students. Books can be either mailed or picked up at a convenient location, upon request.

**Electronic resources** are available through the Library’s web page at: <http://www.framingham.edu/wlibrary>.

The library subscribes to a number of online databases and other electronic resources. Using the Off Campus Access button on the library home page, you will be asked to login.

Click the link to the Whittemore Library from Blackboard or go to the library web site to get started or go to [http://www.framingham.edu/wlibrary/offcampus\_login.htm](http://framingham.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_147_1).

**Reference librarians** are also available to help you choose appropriate resources for a particular research topic. Please call 508.626.4654 to speak with a reference librarian or e-mail the librarians at: reference@frc.mass.edu. Reference librarians are available to hold classes on introduction to library resources and research techniques during the day, evenings and weekends.

## Presidium Learning 24/7 Blackboard Support Toll Free 1-866-361-8970

Presidium Learning is an extension of Academic Technology and Distance Education. Its purpose is to provide technical assistance to both students and faculty. Blackboard Support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week online or by calling our toll free support line **1-866-361-8970.**

To access Blackboard support tools, chat with a technician or report a technical problem, visit the [Blackboard Online Resource Center](http://supportcenteronline.com/ics/support/default.asp?deptID=850). Or, use the Blackboard Support TTY (Teletypewriter) Access Number is 703-464-0515 to contact Presidium, if needed.

## Online Student Center

**The Online Student Center** is open to all students taking courses at a distance. Whether you are new to online learning or a returning online student, we invite you to visit the site often and participate in the discussion boards, review the information posted online, and share your experience with other online students.
To access the information log into Blackboard and click the Tab titled Online Student Center then click the link to the organization site of the same name.

# Additional Web Resources

ATDE
[www.academicsonline.org](http://www.academicsonline.org)
508.626.4927

Blackboard
[framingham.blackboard.com](http://framingham.blackboard.com)

24/7 Blackboard Support
[Online Resource Center](http://framingham.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_1_1)
866.361.8970 or for TTY assistance 703.464.0515

DGCE
[www.framingham.edu/dgce](http://www.framingham.edu/dgce)
508.626.4550

DGCE Calendar
[www.framingham.edu/dgce/calendar/](http://www.framingham.edu/dgce/calendar/)

eFollet Bookstore
http://www.efollett.com/

eTutoring
[www.etutoring.org](http://www.etutoring.org)

Framingham State College
[www.framingham.edu](http://www.framingham.edu)
508.620.1220

myFramingham
my.framingham.edu

Student Help Center
508.215.5950 or email: *shd@stumail.frc.mass.edu*

Student Blackboard Tutorial
[www.academicsonline.org/studentguide/](http://www.academicsonline.org/studentguide/)