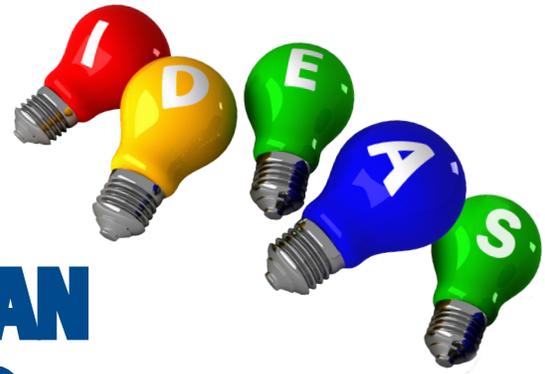# 10 WAYS TO MAXIMIZE SUCCESS IN AN ONLINE MASTERS PROGRAM

1. **Work ahead.** Many e-learners count on their weekends for the bulk of their school work. If that sounds like you, use the weekend before a Unit begins to do the readings and prep so you'll be ready to join discussions, engage in activities, and begin assignments early in the Unit.

2. **Be strategic.** Yes, all "required" readings, tasks, and assignments need to be completed, but not all deserve the same amount of time or energy. Skim course notes, assignment descriptions, and discussion questions to determine which course content can be scanned more superficially and which needs to be mastered at a deeper level.

3. **Block out "school" time.** Schedule chunks of time throughout the week, not just in 1 - 2 days. Leave flex time or "white space" at the end of the week to accommodate projects that took more time than anticipated or to make up for time blocks that got hijacked by other demands.

4. **Spend your time wisely.** Know your own "peak" times and use them for tasks that require your deepest focus and highest energy. Use lower energy times for tasks that need your attention but that you find a bit easier to do.

5. **Do the Math.** Carefully examine assignment descriptions and grading rubrics. Although each grade may be reported out of 100 (i.e., as a percentage), it may be worth very little of your total for the course. If discussion participation is worth 20% over 5 weeks, for example, that means each week contributes a maximum of 4 points to your total grade. Earning 70% instead of 90% translates to a grade of 2.8 instead of 3.6 out of 4, just over half of one percent difference! This isn't intended to minimize the value of discussion participation – many students report that the discussions are where their greatest learning occurs. However, it is intended to decrease your stress on the occasions when you receive a lower grade than you'd hoped for.

6. **Allocate time and assignment "real estate."** Grading rubrics provide clear guidance about how assignment components are weighted or prioritized. Use rubrics as planning tools to determine relative amounts of time and space (e.g., pages) to devote to each section or task.

7. **Access support.** Find out what help is available to you through the program and, if required, seek out additional support online or within your community. Your instructor, teaching assistant, or student advisor all want you to succeed. Ask them for feedback about the types of supports that might be helpful (e.g., writing lab, study skills tutorial, editor, connecting with a research librarian), as well as for suggestions about where to find those needed resources.

8. **Jump in early.** We're aware of preliminary research that clearly indicates a correlation between how actively a student participates in the first few days of online course discussions and the final grades they receive for that course. It may be that students who are actively engaged in discussions are customizing their learning, resulting in higher achievement – or it may simply be that students who don't procrastinate do better!

9. **Read – and learn from – feedback.** Instructors use a variety of approaches and tools to provide feedback (e.g., "track changes" and/or comments within a document; comments on the grading criteria or where assignment grades are uploaded). If you don't see detailed feedback, ask for it. Then, apply it to your next assignment.

10. **Buy a style guide.** There are a variety of style guides that shape academic and professional writing (e.g., APA 7th Edition, Chicago, MLA). Clarify whether or not a specific style is required for your program and purchase the actual guide (rather than relying on snippets of information from various websites). If no guide is specified, choose one style, buy the guide, and use it to apply the style consistently.

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