Questions You Should Ask When Enrolling In An Online Program

Are you considering enrolling in an MTSU Online program?

We want to help you prepare so that the program you choose meets your needs. The questions below are designed to help YOU do your OWN research, narrow down the choices, and find the right program for you.

What Do You Expect of the Program?
When it comes to selecting an online program, you should focus on your needs as a student. The best program will be the one that fits your requirements, academically, professionally, personally, and financially.

Program Expectations of Me

How long typically does it take to get a degree/certificate?
- Although MTSU offers seven-week courses in the online format, in addition to full-term programs, most degrees are earned in four years for students who attend full-time.

Does the program require me to go to the campus or other location for instruction, labs, internships, or other practical experiences?
- Online course professors may not require students to meet at specific dates/times online or on campus. Optional meetings may be offered but students are not penalized for non-attendance. Also, faculty may require proctored exams in their online courses, but students may take those exams at approved, off-campus locations during instructor-specified timeframes.

Your Expectations of the Program

How long has the institution offered the program online?
- MTSU Online has been in existence since 1997 with over 600 online courses, five undergraduate and seven graduate online programs developed from then until now.

What competencies and/or knowledge, skills, and abilities will I gain?
- Students will not only gain knowledge and competence in their chosen disciplines/majors, they will gain time management skills, an appreciation for a community of learners, technical skills, and cooperative and active learning skills.

Will the program acknowledge or credit me for prior knowledge, skills, military experience, or credentials I have in this field? What is the process for gaining that acknowledgement?
- MTSU is the state leader in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) opportunities for students. The process for this service is described at: [http://www.mtsu.edu/university-college/outreach/pla.php](http://www.mtsu.edu/university-college/outreach/pla.php).

If it is an out-of-state institution, does it have the proper approvals to serve students in my state?
- MTSU is an approved NC-SARA institution

Who is the typical online student at this institution and does that sound like me?
- Most undergraduate online students are from ages 18 to 34; most graduate students fall in to the 25-64 age range.
How flexible are the instructors with adult or non-traditional (such as adult, working full-time, or active-duty military) students?

- With the largest adult degree program in the State, MTSU has developed a streamlined program designed to help students finish as quickly as possible. MTSU’s Prior Learning Assessment Program (PLA) lets students earn college credit for what they already know. Because student backgrounds and ambitions are unique, MTSU provides students a special advisor to guide them through the process.
- MTSU also is home to the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center which provides a variety of support, services and resources for our military veterans.

Does the program address your time constraints?

- All online programs are completely online. Proctored exams may be required, but may be taken at approved, off-campus sites during an instructor-specified timeframe.
- MTSU also offers several hybrid programs which provide opportunities for students to meet each other and their instructors up to 15 hours a semester. Many professors use the time for orientations and/or exams.

What Learning Experiences Are Used in the Program?

The Overall Learning Experience

Will I learn on my own? Will I need to teach myself?

- Faculty teaching MTSU Online courses are required to provide students with an interactive learning experience by answering student questions with 24-48 hours and by providing timely feedback on assignments. Also, MTSU Distance Education Policy 254, under III. Academic Standards, states: “C. Each distance education course must provide for interaction and timely feedback between students and faculty member(s) teaching the course. As appropriate, these interactions may be individual, group, or mixed. They may take place electronically, i.e., by telephone, by computer, or by interactive video.”

How will learning take place? Will I be reading information, watching recordings of lectures, or participating in videos/simulations made especially for distance students?

- MTSU faculty develop their own online courses which are offered via Desire2Learn (D2L) learning management software. They may use a variety of sources to provide course content such as original, ePublisher, and open source content.

The Typical Course Experience

How many students are in the typical online class?

- The recommended enrollment in MTSU Online courses is 25, although this varies by discipline and course content.

Do the classes meet synchronously (faculty and students meet at the same time) or asynchronously (students do not have to meet at the same time)?

- MTSU Online courses are asynchronous although some professors may require proctored exams which may be taken at approved, off-campus sites during an instructor-specified timeframe.

Are courses primarily text-based or do they include multi-media?

- This varies depending on the subject and the faculty course developer preferences. MTSU provides a multi-media specialist to assist with course development, and more faculty are providing those types of learning experiences in their online courses.

Do courses use innovative modes of instruction, such as virtual reality, game-based instruction, or project-based learning?

- This depends on the subject and the preferences of the faculty course designers.

How often will I interact with faculty? …with other students?

- Interaction with your professor should be frequent, 24-48 hours; interaction with fellow students depends on the course design and content, although best practice mandates that course design build student-to-student
interaction into them.

How are tests/other assessments handled? Am I required to go to a specific testing location or to use special testing software? And is there an addition fee or cost for this?

- Some MTSU Online professors may require test proctoring which they conduct. For students who cannot come to campus to take proctored exams, they may take them at approved, off-campus sites. These sites may charge testing fees.

How is the course content accessible to those with disabilities?

- Professors are required to make course content accessible and are provided various training opportunities, resources and an Accessibility Specialist to assist in this effort.

Instructor Experiences and Credentials

Have instructors been trained in online teaching?

- All MTSU Online faculty must receive technical and instructor training before teaching.

What experiences and/or credentials do the instructors have?

- Academic departments hire all online professors and vet each one per SACSCOC (pg. 17) faculty credentialing requirements.

Do they know how to use the course technologies?

- All MTSU Online faculty must complete training on the various tools available in the learning management system, D2L, prior to teaching.

Do my instructors have prior teaching experience at the college or university?

- Most do, but new professors are required to complete training prior to teaching and are paired with an instructor mentor during their first semester of teaching online. All online faculty are hired and vetted by the academic departments for which they teach.

Student Support Services

Orientation

Is there an online student orientation on how to succeed in distance learning?

- An online orientation and getting started webpage are provided for students by MTSU Online and Distance Education Student Services.

Is there training on how to use the technologies that will be employed in my courses?

- D2L Video tutorials are available as well as a D2L student support webpage

Student Support

What student support services are available at a distance, such as registration, financial aid help, bookstore, library, tutoring, and advising? Do I have to go to campus for these services?

- Most of these services may be completed online through the MT One-stop.

If I am enrolling in a certificate or degree program, how will I access academic advising to make sure I stay on track to meet my goals?

- Information about academic advising is available on the Academic Advising website.

If I am sight-impaired, hearing-impaired, or have other accessibility needs, what services are available to assist me?

- Students with disabilities may register with the MTSU Disability and Access Center (DAC) for accommodations, and the Adaptive Technology Center (ATC) provides alternative formats of print material, adaptive
hardware/software, and any other form of access via technology that is within its ability to offer.

Are there support services for active-duty military, their families, and veterans?
- MTSU is home to the Charlie and Hazel Daniels Veterans and Military Family Center which provides a variety of support, services and resources for our military veterans.

Can I participate in student clubs and activities?
- Students may participate in online workshops and review upcoming cultural events at TRIO Student Support Services.

Money Matters
As you know, your education is an investment and you need to understand all the costs associated with your education. Whether face-to-face or online, there are often fees and other items you may need to acquire (such as a computer), in addition to tuition.

How much will I spend in tuition?
- Undergraduate tuition and graduate tuition rates are available at MT One-stop. MTSU also offers an e-rate for students enrolled exclusively in online courses and who are classified as non-Tennessee residents.

How much will I spend in fees? Are there special fees I must pay as an online student?
- All student fees are listed on the MT One-stop website; a distance learning fee of $30 per credit hour is charged per undergraduate and graduate online and hybrid course.

Am I required to pay fees for services I won’t access as an online student, such as the campus gym or parking?
Are there any special fees or costs, such as for proctoring, software, hardware, video cameras, or travel to campus or a specific location?
- Semester fee charts and miscellaneous fees are available on the What Does It Cost? Website. A fee of $30 per credit hour is charged for online and distance courses. MTSU students are not charged for use of the Test Center. Distance students visiting campus may obtain a free visitor’s pass for a specified length of time in lieu of purchasing a pass. Program Services fees are found on the Registration and Mandatory Fees chart.

How much will I spend on my course materials, such as books or online resources?
- A student estimated annual budget, including books and tuition, may be found on the cost of attendance website.

Are “open” or low-cost textbook options available?
- Textbook selections are dependent on faculty preferences, but MTSU’s Phillips Bookstore provides a selection of new and used books, and some faculty use ebooks in their online courses.

What financial aid options are available?
- Financial options are available at MTSU’s Financial Aid website.

Technology
To be successful in your courses, you will need certain technologies, such as a computer and a reliable internet connection. If you can’t make that purchase now, make sure you can study, access classes, and complete assignments at a public library or other public access location. Make sure their operating times are convenient for you.

What are the specifications for the computer and software required for me to participate in my course?
- A systems check may be run on your computer the first time you log into Desire2Learn (D2L), the online course learning platform. The systems check ensures that students have installed everything needed to run D2L.

What level of internet access will I need?
Students require a reliable computer and Internet connection to successfully complete an online course. Students who do not have a computer may access their courses at the MTSU Walker Library (with an MTSU ID), MTSU computer labs or at a
local public library. (Note: Some public libraries block certain web addresses; students should verify with the library’s IT support if unable to access. Also, some libraries may charge usage fees and may have time limits on their computers.)

Browser checks should be conducted when using the following MTSU systems:

- Desire2Learn (D2L) learning management system
- PipelineMT - Students register for classes, pay fees, check email, keep a calendar and access personal data at the MTSU online portal. The browser check may be conducted at the login site by selecting the Quick Links and Supported Browser links. Free Technology Tutorials on internet basics and systems are also available at GCF LearnFree.org.

Does the institution have discount programs for purchasing computer hardware and/or software for online students?

- The Dell College Store provides information on student discounts for computers. MTSU’s academic system has many software programs available for student use. The University participates in the Microsoft Imagine Academy which allows STEM students access to several Microsoft products. Students will register using their MTSU email account.
- Other software is available for download, including ftp and telnet clients and web browsers.

Can I participate on my mobile devices?

- Online courses may be taken on iPads and cell phones with the recent upgrade to D2L Daylight.

Is technical support available 24/7 or, at least, the hours that I might need it?

- The MTSU Help Desk provides multiple services for distance learners including tutorials and D2L support. Additional services are available at ITD. Help Desk hours and contact information follow.

  Hours
  - Sun – 2:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
  - Mon – Thursday – 7:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.
  - Fri – 7:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
  - Sat – 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

  Contact Information
  - Phone: (615) 898-5345
  - E-mail: help@mtsu.edu
  - Location - KUC 320.

Outcomes

Students attend college to pursue degrees for many reasons. To be sure that you realize your personal goals upon obtaining your degree, you are encouraged to explore how the schools you may be considering will help you reach your desired outcomes.

Career Placement and Development

Are career services available to online students to seek and be placed in jobs after graduation?

- The Student Employment Program is a new resource for students searching for employment during summer months. Career services following graduation and Career Planning materials including resume/cover letter writing, career advising, and diversity resources are available.

What percent of students are placed in jobs?

- Employment outcomes are found on the Lightning CareerLink Outcomes webpage.

Does the career services office assist entry level as well as experienced students?

- Currently enrolled students may take advantage of the services offered on the Career Services and Lightning
Once I graduate, will I still be able to utilize the services of the career services office?
- Yes, please review information at Alumni Services.

Are all career services offered virtually or are some face-to-face?
- Services are offered on-ground and online.

Does the program or school have an alumni network of potential employers? Is it active?
- CareerShift and Career Management Community may be used through the MTSU Alumni Association in the search of new employment.

Am I qualified to sit for a professional licensure exam in my field?
- Licensure requirements are based on individual fields. Advisors in the Career Center Student Advising and Programs office may assist students in answering this question.

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Closing Thoughts
Taking classes online is an excellent way to complete coursework and work toward a degree or certification. We hope these questions help you consider your needs as a student in an online world. Best wishes as you begin your educational journey!