Online Graduate Program Survival and Success
Facilitated by D'Arcy Hutchings, AkLA 2014 Conference

Select the right program for you

- Make sure the program is accredited and reputable in your field (for libraries, ALA-accredited)
- Ask many questions about the program delivery
  - Are classes typically synchronous or asynchronous?
  - Are any on-site visits or residencies required?
  - What technology skills do I need to be successful?
- Decide whether an online program is right for you
  - Need to be tech savvy
  - Need self-discipline and dedication to keep yourself on track
- Review ALA’s “Guidelines for Choosing a Master’s Program” for evaluating factors that are relevant whether attending via distance or on-campus

ALA: Guidelines for Choosing a Master’s Program in Library and Information Studies
http://www.ala.org/accreditedprograms/guidelines-choosing-masters-program-library-and-information-studies

ALA: Searchable Database of ALA-Accredited Programs
http://www.ala.org/accreditedprograms/directory/search

Prepare

- Expect rigor (online programs are not easy or easier – for some, it’s harder)
- Expect to spend a lot of time on your coursework (online classes don’t take less time)
- Make sure you have a reliable computer and internet connection that meets the graduate program’s system requirements (highly recommend having your own laptop or a computer at home)
- Have a good microphone, headset, and webcam – even if your program is asynchronous
- Take the time to learn the technology you will be using in advance (as soon as you know what you will be using) – don’t wait until you need to use it
  - CCourse management system (such as Blackboard), university email, and other course-related web tools
- Identify and set up a study space that is free from distractions
- Block out time to devote to class
- Log in to each class in advance of it starting (review the syllabus, gather or start on readings, calendar assignments, see what technology will be used)
- Bookmark the websites you will need regularly for each class (recommend Diigo or similar)
- Develop an online filing system to organize your coursework and documents (recommend Google Drive or similar)
- Set up a system for planning your time and tracking deadlines
Day to Day

- Log in to class at least twice a week, close to daily is better
- Keep a positive attitude
- Set deadlines for yourself
- Make sure you fully understand the professor’s expectations
- Actually do your reading, activities, homework, discussion posts, etc.
- Invest – you get out what you put in
- Don’t fall behind!
  - If something happens, speak to your professor immediately
- Get involved in your school/program as well as your profession locally
  - Think resume-building and networking! A degree alone is not enough.
  - Sign up for program and campus list-servs
  - Seek out or start an online student’s club
  - Join campus clubs that allow distance participation
  - Do internships and volunteer work locally
  - Make local connections and seek out mentors

Communication

- Ask questions and communicate openly and frequently with professor and classmates
- Share your unique perspective and experience, encourage others to do the same
- Develop your professional network
  - Make connection with your professors
  - Make connections with your classmates behind the scenes (Facebook, list-serv, calls, direct emails, chat, etc.)
  - Find and connect with other local distance grad. students
  - Don’t let yourself feel distant...
- Remember that text-based communication loses the nuances of verbal communication
  - Give classmates/professors the benefit of the doubt
  - Think carefully about your wording
  - Use emoticons
- Always be polite and respectful (and DO challenge what others say or offer alternative views!)
- Always use full sentences, watch your spelling, use proper grammar, etc.