

## Taking the Fear out of Online Classes

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As teachers we must continue our education in order to maintain our denominational certification. Until recently, our options for taking courses have been quite limited. Most teachers take the summer and travel to either Canadian University College or to Andrews University to continue their education. This past spring, I have been involved in an online course offered through the University of Western Ontario Education Department and it has been a great experience.

As a graduate of Canadian University College, I know what a great place CUC is; however, as the mother of a small child I know how difficult it can be to uproot part of your family and travel across the country for the summer. That is the great thing about online classes. They can be done on your own time right from the convenience of your own home.

In addition to the convenience of staying in your own home, you can also take classes all year round. Most universities offer their distance education programmes in the fall, winter and spring sessions each year. Some universities even offer a summer session for those who want to wait until school is out before starting any classes.

As universities have become more comfortable offering distance education, they have expanded the number of courses that they offer. At La Sierra University for example, there are twenty-five classes available through distance learning. There are also many more courses available through the public education system to continue teacher learning.

In the programme offered by the University of Western Ontario, the only things that you need on your computer are a word processor, internet access with a browser, and e-mail to send your assignments to the professor. Everything for the class is web-based and lecture notes are posted on the web site in PDF format that you can download and print them out. Basically, the students are divided into groups that meet in specific chat-rooms. In the chat-rooms, the students discuss pertinent material to the lecture notes and case study for that week. Thirty percent of our grade for the course comes from these "class" discussions while the remaining sixty percent is from assignments that we turn in weekly and then our final research project. Each assignment is relevant and practical in nature and then submitted to the professor through email.

In addition to the actual class work, students also have access to the computer technology department if they run into computer problems. Help is usually only a phone call away, which is great when you are having difficulties loading the web site or sending in your assignment.

Online classes are also a great way to make contacts with teachers all over the world. In my class there are people from Hong Kong as well as places like England and Australia. It is a truly wonderful experience to share ideas and experiences with people from different cultures.

When I began the course I was a little worried about what was involved in online course work; but as I got more into the course, I found it to be a refreshing change from normal classroom settings. The course

work, while challenging, was very practical ideas that I could take into the classroom and use right away. Also, the opportunity to learn both the course work and become more comfortable with the computer was the best part of taking the class.

While I recommend that teachers attend CUC for the experience and masters programme studies; I would recommend taking online classes to anyone not able to go out to CUC. Once the fear of being on the computer is gone, it is truly an unforgettable and enjoyable experience.

**Sites for Online Education:**

- [University of New Brunswick](#)
- [McGill University](#)
- [University of British Columbia](#)
- [La Sierra University](#)