How to prepare for an online course

1. Prepare your computer. Make sure that your computer can handle whatever demands will be required of it during the course. You may need to configure your computer browser so that it can access the course management system. Go to E-town's ITS website to verify that your computer meets the hardware and software requirements. Do this well in advance of the start of the course so that if you need to make changes or upgrades to your computer, you have time to do so. Consider what you might do for a back-up if your computer fails you part way through the course.

2. Establish a calendar that lists the start and end dates for the course and, as soon as you have them, add the due dates for all course assignments. It will be your responsibility to ensure that you meet these deadlines. Spend some time thinking about when you will do the reading and studying for this course. Map out a realistic plan that will allow you to devote 8-10 hours, or more, per week to your course. Depending on your background for the course, you may need more or less time to successfully master the course objectives.

3. Some instructors require students to come to campus to take a final exam or present a final project. This information can be found in the "Notes" section of the Master Schedule. Be sure you are aware of any on-campus requirements and can meet these obligations. If you have any questions or concerns about these, contact the professor of the course before you register.

4. Take a tour of your classroom before the course begins. This means using your user ID and password to log into the course management system--Blackboard. Look at the layout to familiarize yourself with the various options. Make sure that your email account is active and working. Know how to access the High Library and all of its electronic databases. Ask questions about these facilities before the start date for the course.

5. As soon as the course begins, log in and check the Announcements. Your instructor will likely have an announcement and introductory information on getting started. There will also be a syllabus. This will be your roadmap to the course. Make sure you read it at the start of the course and consult it often throughout the course. Remember that you have to do more to keep yourself on track in an online course than in a course that is structured around 2 or 3 weekly face-to-face meetings in a classroom.

6. Keep track of your progress toward the learning goals of the course. If you find yourself getting off track, then take immediate steps to self-correct. Don't wait too long. If you experience problems and can't self-correct within a short period of time, communicate early and often with your instructor.

7. Let your instructor know of any illness, vacations, or other factors that might interfere with your ability to regularly participate in the class. Just as responsible students keep their regular classroom instructors informed of necessary absences from class, you should similarly keep your online course instructor informed of your "absences."