

#4a Guide to Academic Resources for College Students with Idiopathic Hypersomnia

Education Platforms: Online Education

This portion of the [#4 Guide to Academic Resources for College Students with IH](#) is its own separate guide and is intended to provide general information about online learning and education. It focuses on four (4) areas to think about when screening for quality online courses and programs. It also provides suggestions for learning online (*Tips & More Tips*), suggestions that inform the faculty how to instruct online courses (*A Peek Behind the Professor's Door*), and commentary by students of all ages (*In their Own Words*).

CONTENTS:

- ❖ [Choosing Quality Online Education: What to Think About!...](#) Page 2
 - 1. [Think About the Schools...](#) Page 2
 - 2. [Think About the Transfer of Credits...](#) Page 4
 - 3. [Think About the Courses and Academic Programs...](#) Page 4
 - [Narrow the Search...](#) Page 4
 - [Focus on Quality of Instruction...](#) Page 5
 - [Eight \(8\) Elements Affect Student Engagement in Online Courses...](#) Page 6
 - 4. [Understanding the Terminology...](#) Page 8
 - 5. [Think About Campus Offices & Support Services...](#) Page 10
 - [The Admissions Office...](#) Page 10
 - [The Adult Services Office...](#) Page 11
 - [Support Services...](#) Page 12
 - A. [Technology Services...](#) Page 12
 - B. [Veterans Services...](#) Page 12
 - C. [Disability Services...](#) Page 13
 - D. [Academic Support Services...](#) Page 16
 - E. [Counseling Services...](#) Page 16
 - F. [Career Services...](#) Page 17
 - G. [Financial Services...](#) Page 17
 - H. [Health Services...](#) Page 18
- ❖ [Tips & More Tips...](#) Page 18
- ❖ [A Peek Behind the Professor's Door...](#) Page 19

- ❖ [In their Own Words...](#) Page 20
 - [Advice to Students of All Ages from Students of All Ages with IH...](#) Page 20
 - [Advice to Supporters from a Parent Experienced with Online Education...](#) Page 22
- ❖ [Sources...](#) Page 23

CHOOSING QUALITY ONLINE EDUCATION: WHAT TO THINK ABOUT!

Awake time is a challenge for the student with idiopathic hypersomnia (IH), so it is important to invest in a worthy, good-fit online program. Information, suggestions, and questions are offered here to guide students towards choosing their best online options.

1. THINK ABOUT THE SCHOOLS

- **Check the School's Accreditation.** Schools and their online programs should be fully accredited by their regional accrediting organization. Go to <https://www.chea.org> to find the regional accrediting body for your geographic area and check the status of the school on its website. **Caution is advised if considering courses/programs offered by a non-accredited school.**

Quick and easy litmus tests:

- *If the college offering the online program is accredited, then its online courses/programs are accredited.*
- *If your local public education institution — community college, state college, state university, research university — is willing to accept the course for credit, then the course is being offered by an accredited online school.* This is because public institutions can accept **only** courses from accredited institutions/programs. To determine the accreditation status of a school you are considering, contact the Registrar's Office at your local public institution and inquire whether a class from the online program/school that is of interest would be accepted for transfer credit. If the answer is no, ask why before moving on. It may be because there is no academic program on the public campus that offers such a course and so it can't be accepted for general education or free electives credit, OR – and this is very important – it's because the online school does not have regional accreditation. **Caution is advised if considering a course that is not transferable to a public institution.**
- **Select the School's Venue.** Consider programs that are offered by institutions or not-for-profit universities. Importantly, the school-of-choice should have the

academic program that matches the student's professional and/or personal goals. There often is no distinction between the online program offerings and the school's face-to-face (F2F) classes. Many online programs are offered by institutions that have had strong on-campus programs for decades and have expanded their portfolios to include online options. **Caution is advised if considering for-profit schools.**

- **Read the School's Reviews.** Many students use the College Board's search engine (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges>), which includes a comparison feature. Students also like College Confidential (<https://www.collegeconfidential.com/schools/search>), which has a search engine and online forums for students to discuss their experiences at the schools. Check out periodicals/online sites such as U.S. News & World Report (www.thebestschools.org, and www.gradreports.com). The U.S. News & World Report rankings allow you to compare the features/attributes of various online schools, which can be very helpful – it is perhaps the most well known of the sites. Other sites include www.petersons.com and www.gradschools.com, which can be searched for online programs, and the National Center for Education Statistics (nces.ed.gov), which is a repository of required reporting data from accredited institutions. However, Stanford University Graduate School of Education has released findings (2018), urging caution about relying on such rankings and offering three (3) factors to consider when deciding on your choice of school: <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/10/15/stanford-study-says-rankings-do-not-point-students-best-college-fit>.
- **Seek Student Feedback.** Ideally, you would want feedback from past and current students about the online program, being sure, of course, that the feedback is from actual students! Getting such feedback will be challenging if not impossible. General or program advisors at the college are good resources for the feedback. More and more colleges have general advisors, professional advisors, and academic coaches who are there to help prospective online students determine whether the courses are a good fit.
- **Verify Transcript Entries.** Most colleges do not make a distinction on their transcript between their online and face-to-face classes because the learning outcomes should be the same regardless of how the courses are delivered. However, you may want to verify how online classes are entered onto the transcript.
- **Know the Student Success Markers.** It is important to be aware of the retention rates of the school. A good source for that data is the National Center for Education Statistics (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>), which has a database of retention and graduation rates for all schools.

[Back to Contents](#)

2. THINK ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF CREDITS

Transferring course credits can happen in two directions: either **to** the online campus or **from** the online campus. Regardless, you need to find out from the destination campus what paperwork and verifications are needed in order for that campus to accept the course(s).

- **Very importantly, be sure to ask about the policies affecting the courses you want to transfer into the academic major.** Many academic majors limit the number of credits that can be transferred into their programs (some do not accept any transfer credit into a student's academic major).
- **Be sure to ask as well about the maximum number of credits that can be transferred into the school and about AP classes from high school.** Schools have differing policies when it comes to accepting credits from AP classes. If a student is coming straight from high school or is transferring from another institution where AP credits were counted toward their degree, it is important to ask the destination school about their own policies on this issue. Schools can differ in how many AP credits the student can transfer, what score the student needs on an AP test to get credit, how the school accepts those transfer credits (i.e., awarding course credit vs. substituting transfer credits for a placement test or fulfilling a prerequisite course), etc.
- **Ask also about any CLEP credits** you may have earned and whether those can be transferred and, if so, how. If transferring **to** an online program, ask whether the online school grants the same degree to both their on-campus students and their online students. Most accredited campuses do, but it's important to ask.

[Back to Contents](#)

3. THINK ABOUT THE COURSES AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

- **Narrow the Search.** Choose a handful of online courses or programs, and check out the schools' websites to determine their compatibility with the student's needs and interests.
 - **Types of Online Programs/Degrees:** Associate's degree? Bachelor's degree? Master's degree? Certifications? Can the degree be earned entirely online or is on-campus participation expected (commonly referred to as a hybrid or blended course, if affiliated with a brick-and-mortar campus)?
 - **Class Size:** Just because the class is large doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of contact by the instructor. Some institutions that have large class sizes will have a main instructor and additional co-instructors, teaching assistants, or academic coaches who work with subgroups of the larger classes to ensure regular contact between students and instructor(s).

- **Types of Online Courses:** Check out course offerings to determine if the student's wants and needs are offered. For example, are there certification programs offered? Professional studies programs? Liberal arts programs? STEM programs?
- **Course Delivery Methods:** This refers to how the course is taught. This matters a great deal in terms of how compatible your sleep schedule is with the course. The question to ask is whether the online course is *asynchronous*, *synchronous*, or a mix of the two styles. The term asynchronous means that you can go online and work anytime that is best for you. The term synchronous means there may be specific times that you are required to be online with other students, when the instructor gives the class. Determining the nature of the course delivery is very important to your success in the course. See also: <https://www.elearners.com/education-resources/degrees-and-programs/synchronuos-vs-asynchronous-classes/>.
- **Course Assessment Tools:** This refers to the ways in which tests, assessments, or examinations are given: In-person? On campus? Or online? Also, consider how they are scheduled: Only at certain times? Or available for a 24-hour or 48-hour period? Some online courses may require you to do a proctored exam in a face-to-face session. Many online courses will have timed exams that need to be completed within a specified time period.

[Back to Contents](#)

- **Focus on Quality of Instruction.** Consider the instructors for each course and whether or not they are actively engaged in the course and with the students.
 - **Check Out the Instructors!** Most programs will talk about their faculty on their web sites. You may not get lots of details, but you should find out whether the programs use all adjunct instructors or a combination of full-time and adjunct faculty (practitioners), which is often the best. (Some full-time faculty are not the best online instructors!) If adjunct, you might be able to find out whether they are retired full-time faculty or full-time faculty at another institution. Review their resumes or brief bios, which likely are posted online. When it comes to the student's academic major, it's important to know the experience of the instructors in that area of study. If they are adjunct instructors, are they expert practitioners in their fields? *Very importantly, ask the advisors whether the institution offers training for faculty who teach online and whether that training is required of the instructors. If it is required, is it required periodically?*
 - **Make Engagement Happen!** Online courses can be an ideal way for students with IH to earn their degrees or certifications IF the courses are convenient and flexible and IF the student is *engaged* in the course. *Why is engagement important?* Because it fosters deep, not surface, learning. For

many students with IH, sitting in front of a computer screen that is not engaging can create a sleep-inducing environment. However, when the screen content is highly interactive and/or interesting, many students with IH are able to better engage.

Keep in mind that in many situations, it is the instructor who is central to the student engaging with the course. That said, engagement is not something students can actually “see” prior to being in the course, but students can ask about this important issue. For example, students can talk with general and program advisors about the school’s/program’s commitment to faculty interaction *with* students. Students should ask whether they are expected to move through the classes on their own or whether an instructor will be *present* and *active* in the course. And students should carefully review the course syllabus in order to gain additional information about requirements and how the course is structured.

Eight (8) elements affect student engagement in online courses (Canney, 2015), and being aware of them allows the student to make informed decisions about enrollment. Those eight elements are as follows (see also <https://www.hypersomniafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Elements-of-Engaged-Online-Learning.pdf>):

- 1. The Instructor’s Presence Is Evident.** Is the instructor 1) participating in the course on a regular basis via email, 2) posting in the announcement section of the course platform, or 3) being active on the discussion board (at least weekly in a 15-week class, or 2-3 times weekly in a 5-to-7-week course) by providing, for example, positive reinforcement of the student’s work, adding to the course discussion, posing questions, or providing additional resources?
- 2. The Instructor Responds and Provides Feedback in Timely Ways.** Does the instructor respond to questions on a regular basis and within 48 hours? Does the instructor inform the class of the response time for assignments? If traveling for work, does the instructor inform the class how travel will affect these response times?
- 3. The Instructor Facilitates Peer Interaction Among the Students.** Is the course structured to require interaction between students? Is that interaction meaningful for the students? Is there a feeling of working collaboratively with peers? Is the instructor posting thoughtful prompts on the discussion board, and is the instructor making *real* meaning of the content?
- 4. The Course Promotes Deep Thinking, Critical Reflection, & Learning from Others’ Perspectives.** Are there separate discussion board questions? Can assignments be conducted outside of the discussion

board and then posted so that other students can read and comment on them? Are connections made between class content and contexts beyond the course?

5. **Connections Are Made Between the Course Content and Personal Experiences.** Are there questions posted to the discussion board that specifically require the student to link the course content and readings to their professional/work or personal experiences? Does the instructor encourage students to make such connections between their assignments and their lives beyond the class — personally and/or professionally?
6. **The Course Is Organized.** Pay attention to these three (3) areas in the syllabus:
 - a. **Navigation Tabs:** Are there left-hand navigation tabs? Can students find, for example, under a single tab, all of the materials and assignments related to the work of each week? Are the assignments pulled out into weekly units in separate tabs? Are there weekly assignment lists with details posted on the week's discussion board?
 - b. **Course Content:** Is all content available at the beginning of, or prior to the start of, the course (even a few days, if not a few weeks, before the start)?
 - c. **Assignment Links:** Are the links for each assignment submission set up at the beginning of the course, so assignments can be submitted when completed, keeping students organized and feeling like they are making progress throughout the course?
7. **Course Expectations Are Clearly Conveyed.** This element is very important to students who struggle to stay focused and organized. Think about these questions:
 - Does the instructor use the announcement section of the course platform to remind students of assignments on which they should currently be working?
 - Are additional details about the assignments provided at the same time that reminders are given?
 - Does the instructor provide assignment procedures or examples within the assignment tab?
 - Is screen capture or other technology used to facilitate the review of complex projects? Is technology used that incorporates the instructor's voice, walking the student through each individual

procedure while providing greater detail and examples? Does the instructor post audio files with the instructor's voice, explaining written materials and reviewing course content?

- Are there separate discussion forums for student questions, so students can help each other to obtain greater clarity of expectations?
- Is there a separate and central forum for questions, with an organized design that could be returned to at a later date for reference?

- 8. The Course Is of Interest to the Student.** If you must take this course, and you are not looking forward to it, do either the title or content description tap into your interests at all? If not, check out the required and suggested readings. Can they be useful to your work or to your life beyond the course? Are there aspects of the assignments that pique your curiosity or interest? Can you find any value in the course beyond it being a required course?

[Back to Contents](#)

4. UNDERSTANDING THE TERMINOLOGY

The growth of online learning has resulted in significant changes on campuses throughout the country.

- All campus offices are being asked to recognize online students of all ages, not only older students, and to provide all students access to the same services. (Glenz, 7.16.18)
- There is new and changing terminology that reflects those changes.
- It is important to know which terms are used at the student's school and what they mean.

These terms are used to describe and differentiate among the types of students who attend college, the courses that are offered, and the venues for learning.

- **On-campus Student, Brick-and-Mortar Campus, Seated Student, Face-to-Face Student, and Hybrid Course**
 - **On-campus Student:** One who attends a school with a physical presence (can be an online student).
 - **Brick-and-Mortar Campus:** A school with a physical presence (for example, buildings and classrooms).

- **“Seated Student”**: A term used by campus staff to refer to a student who attends classes at a brick-and-mortar campus, where the classes are held in classrooms and there is personal contact with other students and the faculty.
- **Face-to-Face Student**: Refers to a seated student.
- **Hybrid Course**: One in which some classes for a course are taken at a brick-and-mortar campus as a seated student, while some classes are taken online.
- **Nontraditional Student, Adult Learner, Online Student**
 - These terms refer to the online student, though not all campuses agree on what these terms mean or how they are being used. The terms “nontraditional” and “adult learner” are also being used at some schools, when referring to their on-campus students.
 - Some institutions refer to a *nontraditional student* or *adult student* as having a gap of at least 3 years between high school and college and/or being at least 22 years old.
 - Some campuses use a broader description that includes all *online students*, full or part-time, regardless of age or life circumstances. (Ross, 7.13.18)
 - Some online-only schools refer to all students as “learners” to underscore how people learn throughout the lifespan.
 - Some Admissions professionals prefer to focus on the types of programs, rather than the types of students, and stress that the same varieties of students are enrolled in online, face-to-face, and hybrid programs. (Glenz, 7.16.18)
 - See also “The Myth of the Nontraditional Student”:
<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2016/08/05/defining-students-nontraditional-inaccurate-and-damaging-essay>.

- **The Non-degree/Visiting Students**

These terms refer to those students who take courses but who do not enroll in or declare an academic major. Non-degree, or visiting, students might want to think about these issues:

- How many credits are you allowed to earn as a non-degree/visiting student? (*Many schools allow a maximum of 30 credits.*)
- Are you eligible for financial aid?
- Are there classes in which you may not be able to enroll?

- Please note: The non-degree online student may not be able to access courses required of students enrolled in a given academic major because first seats go to students in that major, or in related majors requiring the course. Once the major and major-related students have enrolled, access to the course may open up to other students. Such courses with restricted access may be referred to as closed, locked-down, locked-out, or major-only courses. Students may need to seek permission of the professor to enroll.
- What if you can't access a class because you are not in that academic major?
 - If there are classes in which you are not yet able to enroll, think about classes that you can access which interest you, such as 1) classes in another major, 2) classes with topics which have appeal, but which you would otherwise not consider, or 3) classes that introduce you to a totally new field and stretch your thinking.

[Back to Contents](#)

5. THINK ABOUT CAMPUS OFFICES & SUPPORT SERVICES

A broad array of services is available, whether you attend a seated college (brick and mortar) or an online program or university. Those services are provided through such campus offices as Admissions, Adult Services (on some campuses), and Support Services (e.g.: technology support and services for veterans and those with disabilities; academic, counseling, and career services; financial support; and, health services.

- **The Admissions Office.** Admissions Office staff typically review the student's application for online education and determine admittance to the *school*, whereas the academic faculty determine acceptance into the *academic program*. CORI (Criminal Offender Records Information) checks are not requested by Admissions Offices, but an academic major, such as education or nursing, may request them. (Glenz, 7.16.18)

When working with the Admissions Office, think about these issues:

- Is there a list of campus services with contact information available to the online student?
- Does that list indicate which, if any, services that are provided to on-campus, seated students are NOT provided to online students?
- If you disclosed a need for specific services, did the Admissions Office provide you with information about how to access such services?
- If you are a GED student, or were homeschooled, and your documentation is complete, will the Admissions Office accept your documentation regardless of your home state?

- If you are a veteran, is there an office or specific staff person at the school responsible for services to veterans? Were you referred to that office or person?
- If you live in a rural area, or more than an hour's drive from a college, you might find this link interesting: "Who Lives in Education Deserts?" – <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/education-deserts>
- Recent changes in reciprocity agreements between states are found here: State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) - APLU.
- <http://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/center-for-public-university-transformation/sara/index.html>

[Back to Contents](#)

- **The Adult Services Office.** Some campuses have an Adult Services Office, where the staff works specifically with students who do not attend seated classes (and this includes all online students). If you plan to take online courses at a school that has this office, then this office should be your first stop (which may be a virtual stop for online students). It offers advising services for prospective students and prepares the student for the Admissions process. (Ross, 7.13.18)

Be sure to consider these issues when connecting with this office:

- Will the staff work *with* you to prepare you for any interview with Admissions? (You should have an interview with Admissions, and if you are not offered one, ask to schedule one. This Office can help arrange that for you.)
- Will the staff review your paperwork (e.g., GED, homeschooling, veterans, transfer credits) before submitting it to Admissions?
- If you have transcripts, will a staff person assess your prior coursework/experience for acceptance as General Education classes, Free Electives, and/or classes in the academic major?
- Will the staff verify prerequisite coursework for course registration and for meeting course requirements in categories of mandatory areas of study (e.g., diversity, civic engagement, global cultures, etc.)?
- Are you able to schedule an appointment with an advisor to discuss your questions and concerns? (*Completing a checklist and being referred to financial services is not a conversation!*)
- Does the Office connect with students by text messages and provide 1) reminders about appointments, 2) follow-up information, and 3) easy access to the Office's calendar?
- Does the Office publish a newsletter or have other means for communicating information about, and links to, services and resources, such as 1) the course listing and academic calendar, and 2) contact information for both the

academic advisor AND a contact person in the academic department if the advisor is not available?

[Back to Contents](#)

- **Support Services.** Campuses usually consider online students as “their” students and offer most of the same services to their online students that they offer to their seated students. These 4 questions can guide your thinking about services, availability, and delivery:
 1. What are the actual services available to the online student?
 2. What services are not usually available to online students?
 3. How does the online student access available services?
 4. Are there fees for the services?

A. Technology Services:

Campuses provide computer and technology services to their students. Of concern to the online student, especially given IH symptoms, is the availability of those services at the times the student needs them. Be sure to consider these issues:

- Does the online student need to register in any way to receive tech services?
- What is the range of services that are provided?
- Are there restrictions on the type of technology with which the staff can assist the online student?
- Is there a fee for such services?
- Are technology services available 24/7, or only during certain hours?
- If the hours for the technology services are limited, is the disability services provider able to assist or advocate for the student with IH when the times to access and use technology services are not compatible with the student’s sleep schedule/needs
- How does an online student access these technology services (for example, through an online chat window or some other means)?

[Back to Contents](#)

B. Veterans Services:

Veterans seeking online courses need to connect with the designated veterans’ support center on campus. The veteran will be assigned an advisor, who will work with the veteran and the local office of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (<https://www.va.gov/>), to provide information about

educational benefits, including “the checklist” that guides the veteran through the process of becoming an online student.

Issues to think about:

- What are the conditions and requirements that veterans must follow in order to access veterans’ educational benefits? See www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/vba-22-1990-are.pdf.
- As a veteran, are you allowed to be a 100% online student? Or must you take a seated course in order to receive full veterans’ educational benefits?
- If there is no visible/separate veterans’ support on campus, which office on campus provides that support or assistance? (*If the school does not provide any guidance on this issue, contact the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Administration [va.gov] to locate an advisor in your geographic area.*)

[Back to Contents](#)

C. Disability Services:

This entry is intended to identify some of the issues an online student with IH may face. Knowing and understanding these issues will help the student make a more informed decision about an online school or program.

The online student with IH can expect the same types of services (including an interview, a planning meeting, paperwork, and all other services from the disability services office) as are given to on-campus or seated students. Keep in mind that higher education campuses differ and often have approaches unique to their schools when working with online students with disabilities.

- See Guides #1 [[Student Guide to Thinking About Academic Adjustments](#)] and #3 [[Guide to Requesting Academic Adjustments](#)] for information about contacting the disability services office, documentation of the disability, the required forms, and the types of services offered. ***Students are advised to review those Guides and become familiar with the overall process of working with a disability services office.***
- Online courses can involve heavy workloads and be time-consuming. Enrolling in too many courses may overwhelm the student’s organizational and management skills and may be physically demanding for a student struggling with fatigue or sleepiness. ***Students are advised to carefully consider the number of academic credits and types of courses that they think they can manage in a single semester.***

- Communication between the online student and the disability services office may be by phone, email, or other face-to-face technology (such as Skype, Facetime or Google Hangouts), or, if the student is local to the campus area, in person.

If the student decides to register with the disability services office, the student will want to think about the following issues and questions:

- How much information does the website for the online school or program provide about registering with the disability services office?
- If the website references certain documentation and/or forms, are those easy to find and access?
- Overall, how easy is it to locate and understand information about disability services on the website?
- Is the online student entitled to the same accommodations as an on-campus student? If not, what is different, and what are the reasons for those differences?
- What system is in place to ensure that the instructor is informed that the disability services office has determined the academic adjustments and that they are in place?
 - Is the disability services office solely responsible for that communication, or does the student have a responsibility to do something as well?
 - Remember... although the student must disclose their diagnosis to the disability service provider in order to receive services, the student is not required to disclose the nature of the disability to the instructor or other campus staff. They are only required to disclose what the academic adjustments are. (See Guides [#1 Student Guide to Thinking About Academic Adjustments](#) & [#3 Guide to Requesting Academic Adjustments](#).)
- If the on-campus student **chooses** to disclose to the faculty the *nature of their disability* (i.e., the diagnosis or the clinical symptoms), the student often does it in person during the instructor's advising hours. How is an online student expected to convey this information to the instructor?
- If the student needs or wants the Disability Service Provider to work with the student and the professor on an issue, such as disclosing the nature of the disability or a problem meeting deadlines,
 - Who takes responsibility for setting up the meetings?
 - How do such meetings occur? By conference calls? Face-to-face technology? Email? Other?

- In what ways does the disability services office work with the student when challenges develop?
- Is it possible for the Disability Service Provider and student to discuss with the instructor a way to manage the many projects due at the same time at the end of the semester? For example, would it be possible to arrange staggered dates for those projects
- On-campus students are able to go to the adaptive technology (AT) office on campus and arrange for AT supports. What responsibility, if any, does the Disability Service Provider have in making that happen for the online student?
- On-campus students are able to request an Incomplete grade for a course, so long as specific requirements are met. What role, if any, does the Disability Service Provider have in working with the online student (and the instructor, if the online student wishes) to request a grade of Incomplete for a course?
- If the online student with IH is enrolled in a *synchronous course* (or a mix of synchronous and *asynchronous* courses), then attendance can be an issue. (For more information about these terms, see above, section 3. [Think About the Courses and Academic Programs, Course Delivery Methods.](#))
- What kind of support can online students with IH expect from the disability services office when the students need:
 - More excused absences than are allowed for the course due to the unpredictability of their IH symptoms?
 - More late arrivals to, or early departures from, classes due to the unpredictability of their IH symptoms?
- If the online course has a weekly quiz due every Friday, for example, can the student get extensions/extended time if needed? Similarly, can the student get extensions/extended time for papers or projects?
 - What is the process for getting these extensions/extended time?
 - Who is the proper person to contact? What is the preferred means of contact (email, text, phone call)?
 - How much lead time is needed to ask for an extension?
- What is the philosophy of the disability services office when there is an issue with the instructor related to the online student's IH symptoms?
 - Does the disability services provider do more than ***liaison*** work with the faculty on behalf of the online student?

- Does the disability services provider also **advocate** on behalf of the student with the instructor, and, if so, in what ways?
- Many schools are trying to catch up and become ADA-compliant with their online courses.
 - Ask whether videos are provided in the online course, and, if so, are they closed-captioned?
 - What other steps have the online programs taken to become ADA-compliant?
- What is the responsibility of the disability services office when an online student with IH expresses a need for emotional support, such as wanting to develop stress management skills?

[Back to Contents](#)

D. Academic Support Services:

Academic advising, e-tutoring, library support, technical services, 24/7 technical support systems, and academic success coaches are examples of academic support services. For all of these academic services, the online student needs to find out what services are available to them and how they can access those services.

[Back to Contents](#)

E. Counseling Services:

Counseling Center websites often include resource information or tips to promote student well-being, personal growth, and academic success, among other personal development topics. As for actual counseling services for online students, they may not be available. However many campuses do offer a variety of self-help resources, including “wellness apps,” which are accessible through students’ smartphones, tablets, and computers.

Questions to think about:

- What are the policies of the Counseling Center when it comes to working with online students?
- Are online students eligible for in-person services at the Counseling Center? Are there services via the Internet (email, IM, “Counselor Chat,” Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, etc.)? If services are provided electronically, how is confidentiality protected?
- If such counseling services are provided, are there costs associated with them? Is insurance accepted? If so, how are students provided with this information concerning costs and insurance?

- If counseling services are *not* available, is the student provided with information about, or given a list of, regional counseling services to contact?
- How do I find out more about the self-help resources and the “wellness apps” offered by the counseling center?
- Can the online student access crisis support and counseling 24/7? If so, what are the procedures for the online student to follow?
- Who is the best person at the Counseling Center to answer questions the online student may have?

[Back to Contents](#)

F. Career Services:

You definitely will want to know the policies of the Career Services Office when it comes to providing services to online students.

Ask about the following:

- Does the office offer telephone or video chat appointments with students?
- Are workshops delivered as online webinars? Are they recorded so students who cannot log on in real time can watch them later?
- When it comes to on-campus recruiting, can an online student attend an interview virtually? If so, will the Career Services staff advocate for the online student with the company? Note: Ultimately it is the company that decides if it will accept a virtual interview; however, some companies have moved the first round of their recruitment process to online or video interviews.
- When it comes to job fairs (which are historically in-person events), are online students welcome to participate if they can get to campus? Does the office offer a virtual fair in addition to the in-person fairs?

Be sure to find out the Career Services policy for after the online student graduates. For example, is the online student able to access Career Services staff similarly to an on-campus “alum”?

[Back to Contents](#)

G. Financial Services:

Basically, if the school is accredited and is authorized to award financial aid, students enrolled in online programs should be treated the same as those enrolled in on-campus programs. Contact the school’s Financial Aid Office for specific information.

- Ask about the kinds of financial support available to online students, such as financial aid, scholarship assistance, and grants from the school or the federal government.
- Ask about FAFSA: All online students should become familiar with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), Office of the U.S. Department of Education.
 - “To apply for federal student aid, such as federal grants, work-study, and loans, you need to complete FAFSA. Completing and submitting the FAFSA is free and easier than ever, and it gives you access to the largest source of financial aid to pay for college or a career school.
 - In addition, many states and colleges use your FAFSA information to determine your eligibility for state and school aid, and some private financial aid providers may use your FAFSA information to determine whether you qualify for their aid.”

Source: FAFSA website <https://fafsa.ed.gov/help.htm>, verbatim.

[Back to Contents](#)

H. Health Services:

Does the online student have the option to purchase the college health insurance plan? If so, is the online student entitled to the same insurance coverage as the on-campus student? If so, is the online student entitled to health services on the school’s main campus, on the school’s satellite sites, or at some other location(s)?

[Back to Contents](#)

TIPS & MORE TIPS

You need only to enter “tips for online students” in your Internet browser to have pages of resources at your fingertips. A few of these are listed here and reflect the variety of campus resources that provide guidance to the online community.

- **Student Tips for Online Learning Success** North Hennepin Community College
<https://www.nhcc.edu/student-resources/online-learning-d2l/tips-for-online-learning-success>
- **Five Essential Online Learning Strategies | Advanced Academic** Johns Hopkins
<http://advanced.jhu.edu/5-essential-online-learning-strategies/>
- **Tips for Success in Online Learning** Boise State University
<https://ecampus.boisestate.edu/students/support/tips-for-success/>

- **Netiquette Rules for Electronic Communications** Boise State University
<http://edtech2.boisestate.edu/frankm/573/netiquette.html>
- **Successful Online Learning** Northeastern University
<https://www.northeastern.edu/online/online-learning/>
- **Online Learner Readiness Questionnaire** University of North Carolina Chapel Hill
<https://www.unc.edu/tlim/ser/>
- **Study Skills needed for success in online or hybrid courses** York College
<https://www.york.cuny.edu/academics/academic-affairs/ctlet/for-students/online-hybrid-course-support/study-skills-needed-for-success-in-online-or-hybrid-courses>
- **Strategies for Online Learning Success** Brown University
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/professional/faculty/online/online-strategies.pdf>

[Back to Contents](#)

A PEEK BEHIND THE PROFESSOR'S DOOR

Faculty who teach online courses are referred to as instructors or professors. They are expected to know how to teach and use the best principles and practices of online learning. Sites like these below are typical of what informs the work of online faculty. You should expect your classes to reflect these best practices.

- **Best Practices for Teaching Online** Brown University
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/professional/faculty/online/best-practices.php>
- **Ten Principles of Effective Online Teaching** Developed by Penn State World Campus
https://www.mnsu.edu/cetl/teachingwithtechnology/tech_resources_pdf/Ten%20Principles%20of%20Effective%20Online%20Teaching.pdf
- **Teaching with Technology** Minnesota State University, Mankato
<https://www.mnsu.edu/cetl/teachingwithtechnology/>
- **Strategies for Creating a Successful Online Classroom** Faculty Focus
<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/strategies-for-creating-a-successful-online-classroom/>
- **A significant resource for online teaching strategies is the website**
www.facultyfocus.com

[Back to Contents](#)

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Advice to Students of All Ages from Students of All Ages with IH

These entries were written by students of all ages who have IH and who have used the online platform to take academic courses, professional seminars, or competency-based training – or who have given a lot of thought to doing so.

1. *I have taken several online classes from a community college. The thing I really liked about it was the ability to set my own schedule for not only what classes I should take, but also the times that I work on the classes. My IH gives me only certain times of the day when I am awake enough to work on the classwork. The online schedule allows me the flexibility to work at my own pace. This school gave the students the ability to set their own schedules with only one deadline – the class must be completed by the end of the semester. This works well unless you procrastinate as I found out one of the semesters.*

I found that some of the classwork was more taxing than others – sometimes this caused some issues with my IH symptoms. I was able to work with my school and advisers for accommodations that helped a lot. Overall, I feel that online classes can work well for students with IH if they are serious about schooling and are willing to put in the effort required.

College Student, Young Adult

2. *I have never taken a class or certification online, because I think it would be harder to stay awake during an online course than it would during a course taught live. One reason is that the computer doesn't care if I fall asleep - it won't hold me accountable. If I had a live teacher, on the other hand, I would feel really guilty about falling asleep; the teacher's mere presence in the classroom would be enough to motivate me to try my hardest to stay awake. Another disadvantage of online courses is that I would be unable to participate verbally during class, and participating in class is one activity that helps me stay awake.*

Professional, Young Adult

3. *Although have not taken an online course for academic credits, I have taken online continuing education seminars for my professional licenses. What works is when I can go at my own pace and time of day. What doesn't work is that sitting in front of the computer is very sleep inducing for me (and I assume others with IH.) When I take an online seminar I generally make sure that I have enough time to complete it and can start and stop as often as needed.*

Licensed Professional, Adult

4. *My first online coursework experience happened accidentally. Normally, my coursework was through traditional classroom participation, which I tried to schedule around life demands. A required course I needed was already filled but there was an online version with openings. At first I was apprehensive but I needed the credit so I took the leap. To my surprise, I found the online instructor engaging and the format both user-friendly and stimulating. It not only offered me a viable opportunity to earn credits but the flexibility worked brilliantly with my best functional times - classroom "hours" were not set with the exception of post by dates and bonus, no one cared or even knew that I was in my pajamas.*

Professionally Retired and Student for Life

5. *I am attending a small community college in another state. The school I am attending not only has a student adviser that assists in planning classes and schedules, but also a director of disabilities (success coordinator) that advocates for me. If I am struggling with a class schedule, having difficulty understanding some of the course material, or need accommodations of any type, I can reach out. The college has a formal process for applying for any accommodations. As part of my orientation, I asked specifically about this process and was provided with the information required.*

I applied for extended time on tests. This accommodation was granted almost immediately and with very little question. As a student with IH, I let the advisers know that my disability will, at times, force me to sleep even when I don't want to do so. In the past, this occurred particularly when I was under stress. Because this was an online class and the testing was also online, the school made a modification to the testing software that would allow me to "pause" the test and pick it up at a later time if needed. This was particularly helpful to me.

I also applied for extended time to complete some of my course work. For this school, the only deadline that was provided for the course work was the end of a semester. Twice, I applied to extend the deadline for the coursework, as I was unable to complete it before the end of the semester. I did have to demonstrate that I was working on the course regularly and that my disability was the major cause of the delay in meeting the deadline. This accommodation required an agreement with the course faculty as well. I also was required to provide a "final deadline" that I needed to meet for the course in order to finish. Part of this accommodation also stated that my grading would not be penalized for the extension of the course. I was able to successfully complete each of these courses with the extended time.

If I were to recommend anything to other students with disabilities, it would be this: Do not be afraid to ask for help or accommodations. Your advisers and your school want you to succeed. I would also recommend carefully selecting your school. During your search process, ask how and if they are accommodating to students with disabilities.

Part-time Public College Online Student, Young Adult

6. *When I first sought out online education it was to gain eligibility for a student internship program after I had just graduated from college. Because of that, the course itself was not my priority, enrollment in an accredited institution was the ultimate goal. I looked for an accredited school and chose a course offering that was of interest to me thinking that it was as simple as that. It was not. Although I was enrolled in an accredited course, I was not enrolled in an academic major. So, I was not considered a “matriculated” student and therefore eligible for the internship which apparently the internship program required. Long story short: paid for the course, applied for the internship, still ineligible. It stung more because the eligibility was my only obstacle since the interviewer told me that I would have been accepted to the program otherwise.*

While I did not get my desired outcome, in the process of taking the course I immediately saw the benefit of online education for anyone living with IH. I could work in the moments that I had the most energy and focus instead of constantly worrying that I would not be able to make it to a class and, when I inevitably couldn’t make it, working hard to make sure that I was not penalized for my absences. After four years of dealing with that worry and struggle it was truly a relief.

A couple years later, when I was looking to get a professional certification in CAD programming, online education was the first place I looked. This time around, I was focused on finding the right course to prepare me for a test and provide me with all of the materials that I would need to succeed. I enrolled in a course designed for continuing education at a trusted institution and went on to get my certification the first time I tested for it.

Ultimately with online education, as with any education, it is about finding the right fit for you and making sure that the path you have chosen will provide the right outcome for you.

Certified Professional, Young Adult

[Back to Contents](#)

Advice to Supporters from a Parent Experienced with Online Education

- *Consider taking an online course at the school before your student does; this is especially important if you have any reservations about the quality and fit of the online courses/program.*
- *For a student who can't attend on-campus classes because of IH symptoms, an online education program can be a “godsend” as long as these questions are considered:*
 - *Is it a good-fit program for the student’s IH symptoms and needs?*
 - *How self-directed and motivated is the student? You must consider that there are no peers to encourage, support or direct the student to stay on top of the assignments, readings, or test preps.*

[Back to Contents](#)

SOURCES:

- Ashcraft, E., personal communication, December 28, 2017.
- Bridger, L., personal communication, April 20, 2018.
- Canney, C., personal communication, January 3 – May 9, 2018.
- Canney, C. Elements That Affect Student Engagement in Online Graduate Courses. Unpublished dissertation. New England College, 2015.
- Glenz, B. Copper, personal communication, July 16, 2018.
- Liu, R.J., personal communication, July 24, 2018.
- Ross, J., personal communication, July 13, 2018.
- Savoca, M., personal communication, April 19, 2018.

[Back to Contents](#)

**Approved by Hypersomnia Foundation Board of Directors and
Reviewed by a separate education legal counsel.**

**Vetted in parts by Leah Bridger, MA, Catherine Canney, EdD, Jessamine Griewahn-Okita, MEd, Tyler Kimmel, Olivia Robbins, BA, and Diana Wagner-Kimmel.
Leah Bridger, MA, also contributed to content development.
Olivia Robins, BA, also contributed to technical development.**

Last Updated: 10.18.18

Copyright © 2018 Hypersomnia Foundation, All rights reserved.