Great Advice from Online Student Kaitlyn Banister

What is your educational background?
I started off my college career in 2009 as an international business major at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse; however, I quickly changed to a communication major. In 2011, I returned to Brazil to study for a year (one semester of Portuguese and one semester of public relations). I returned to La Crosse for a semester and was then offered a scholarship to study in Wuhan, China, for a year to learn Mandarin.

How did you decide to take classes online?
Outside of my original plans, I got pregnant while in China. My mother suggested me coming home to live and finishing my degree online so that I may have help with my son while I studied and worked. As a full-time employee working overtime every week, online classes were the most feasible and enabled me to spend time with my son.

Where are you employed?
I work at Enstrom Helicopter Corporation. My current position is in the stockroom. I have worked to improve and develop the processes for drawings, hardware, and ordering parts as well as miscellaneous jobs for both my department and others. I recently created an organization guide of twenty-two pages to be used in setting up the new plant over in China.

How did you find the University of Minnesota Crookston?
Google. LOL. While in China, I typed in “online communication degree university” and UM Crookston was the first school to pop up. I knew I didn’t want to attend an online university and I was entirely impressed by the level of care as well as response time from every staff member I contacted at UMC.

What do you enjoy about the major and about learning online?
Honestly, I miss the interaction of class time and presentations. After having a lot of these professors, I wish ever so badly that I could have had the chance to study under them in person.

To me, there isn’t much to NOT like about being a communication student. I’ve always been fascinated by the way people interact with each other and why people (and processes) do and do not work together. Trying to find ways to better relations, improve productivity and efficiency, and make things more organized is a great joy! Communication is vital, yet still highly dismissed and/or ill understood.

Learning online is great as I am able to continue on with my busy life while still getting a degree. When looking at the lives of my fellow online classmates, I am amazed at what they are able to accomplish while taking these courses. I also think I’ve built stronger relationships with my online classmates than I did while present at the university.

Do you have any favorite classes?
I don’t know that I can say I have a favorite class. Any of the courses that involve my major, I have absolutely loved.
More so, the professors that I have make me love my courses. Getting to know my professors has been great.

**Where do you like to study best?**

Personally, I love getting to study at the library. It’s a place meant for focus. But, that is a rare gem getting to go there. I study wherever and whenever I can including places such as my desk, on breaks at work, friends’ houses, and restaurants.

**What advice do you have for students who want to take classes online?**

Studying online is great, especially when you have a busy schedule. There are three keys to taking courses online:

- **Organization.** It’s vital to keep calendars and checklists of due dates of all the assignments and re-check to make sure you don’t miss any discussions. Some of the projects can require a lot of time, so trying to bust projects out at the last minute are easier said than done.

- **Time management.** When you have a busy schedule, it’s important to find times that you can get homework done. Short breaks at work might allow you to get the small details of a large project prepared or get a chapter read as opposed to trying to sit down and do it all at once. Preparing in stages and picking small tasks first will help larger assignments to go smoother and quicker.

- **Get to know your professors and classmates.** This is key! The help I’ve received and given to other students has been amazing. There were a couple classes outside of my major that I would have struggled to get a passing grade in if it weren’t for the help of my classmates alone. Also, professors are a lot more helpful and understanding when they know your story.

**How do you manage your time?**

I do a lot of my work in small segments. During work breaks I would read and highlight notes I would need to write a paper or read chapters. I make lists galore. Lists of when all my assignments are due and revise these lists as the weeks go on. But understanding the assignment size as well as due date, I can prioritize when and how long I have to focus on a given assignment. Sundays have been my best days for getting homework done as it’s a rest day for myself and family. I know that my day will revolve around church, school, and breaks to play with my little guy.

**What surprised you the most about taking classes online?**

The thing that surprised me most was the level of understanding and grace I have received from my professors. I will not lie and say that I am meant to be an online student; I thrive in the classroom.

Learning to balance a full-time job, my son, and all the other responsibilities of my all too busy life, I have struggled for a lot of my time online. I started at UMC at the end of my pregnancy and returned to my second semester with my son being only two weeks old. I was used to balancing school, work, and life, but adding a child to the mix was something I couldn’t handle as well as I thought I could. Without the professors that I’ve had at UMC, I don’t think I would be able to finish my degree.