Research programs carefully to understand the total cost of the program

Comparing Costs in Tuition and Fees:

Bachelor's Degree in Psychology

- UMM (120 ch) = $256 per credit hour T & F + app + orientation fees = $30,885
- U of Phoenix (120 ch) = $616.66 per credit hour T & F = $74,000
- Kaplan (180 ch) = $371 per credit hour + app & tech fees ($100 X 15) = $68,325

Associate's in Business

- UMM (60 ch) = $256 per ch T & F + app & Orientation fee = $15,525
- U Phoenix (60 ch) = $425 per ch T & F = $30,885
- Kaplan (90 ch) = $371 per ch T + app and tech ($100 per term; average 8 terms) fees = $34,325
- DeVry (65 ch) = $37,157

Does one credit = one credit when comparing costs? Clearly not.

- Also see what **state, local, and school-specific scholarships** are available at UMS or local private colleges; many for-profits do not offer more than federal grants and loans. **Total student debt at the end of the degree** is the real issue.

Transferability of credits

- make sure the school is regionally accredited, or that the student will never want to transfer the credits
- content for core credits similar to that in other programs

Does the program need to be approved for state certifications in career path?

- Check to be sure any career certifications or licenses will accept the degree
- If the student will be moving to another state, check there as well
- Maine is currently approved in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont

What kind of career does it prepare you for? Look for

- graduate placement data
- student testimonials
- ask employers if they are familiar with and would hire from this program

Student preparation is critical:

- Take Placement tests at a site or center (unless student has previous academic, AP, or CLEP credit or recent SAT/ACT scores in English and Math)

- The online format is **not at all ideal for developmental courses**; there is also limited availability of these courses in the UMS system

- Students who cannot place into college level English **should not** take online courses (refer to College Transition or Adult Ed or onsite learning)

- If math placement is developmental, student should **strongly** consider options to learn with an online program like ALEKS, or have access to face-to-face courses at a center, site, or through adult education.

- Any student with **time management or organizational issues should never enroll** in online coursework without a trial run.

- Try a free course first if student is doubtful (Massive Open Online Courses, UMPI)

- Online courses take **more** time than face-to-face; few students can successfully complete more than four at a time; if working, students should consider taking only two at a time.

- Differing log-in and participation requirements, as well as weekly schedules, make online learning in UMS system more complex to manage than face-to-face courses or taking fewer, shorter courses.

- Student must be able to advocate well for self and be pro-active, or must learn these skills quickly.

Online Students should:

Order textbooks as soon as possible! If they need a voucher to use their financial aid, or a PO from an agency, this needs to be arranged well before classes start. Students need to be aware that instructors expect students to have their textbooks on the first day of class.

Learn to navigate the student records (MaineStreet in UMS) and learning management systems (Blackboard, Moodle, etc.) before classes start.

Learn what support services are available to them (including those at the nearest UC center or site in the UMS system).

Know how to contact the instructors and distance learning support staff.

Read the syllabus for each course closely. IGNORE THE SYLLABUS AND FAIL!

Using the syllabi information, create a calendar/schedule that works to organize their studying and assignments and fit in with their other life responsibilities.

Know what their grade is based on; use the rubrics or instructions that the instructors provide when completing any assignments or discussion prompts.

Know that they cannot BS Blackboard or Moodle. Instructors and Instructional Technologists can track everything that a student does (or doesn't do) while logged in.

Keep in touch with their advisor, and sign up for next semester's courses as early as they can.

Take advantage of any internship or community service experiences that can happen in their local community to become networked with local employers/agencies.

Tips from a successful online student:

1. Online courses are a great way to get your education when you have a busy schedule with work, family, etc. It allows you to work on courses around your own schedule.

2. That being said, you have to be very diligent, or it is easy to fall behind when you are not meeting face-to-face in a classroom.

3. Set aside specific times that you can do coursework, and stick to that schedule as much as possible. For instance, I work full-time, plus have my granddaughter every Thursday to Sunday. So I dedicate my evenings Sunday through Wednesday to getting my work done, and I pretty much stick with that.

4. Don't wait until the last minute to do your assignments. It's too easy for something to come up suddenly and get you off-track if you've waited until the last day the assignments are due.

5. Participate in the on-line discussions. One of the most frustrating things for me is that I try to post early in the week, and when others wait until the last minute, you are left hanging when part of your grade is based on your online discussion. It is hard to have a discussion by yourself!

6. Don't expect the professor to participate a lot. This has been one of my pet peeves. I've had some professors that have participated in the online discussions, but several have not and you are left wondering what his/her thoughts are on the subject, and how you are doing with little to no feedback. So you need to be motivated enough to stick with it without someone constantly telling you how you are doing.

7. Overall, my distance education experience has been great, and I've been at it for several years, slowly working on my degree. For anyone that can't do day classes, it really is the way to go if you are determined to take college classes.

Useful links:

- **Online Maine** is the place to shop for distance programs from the UMS system   http://online.maine.edu/

- **University College** website has lots if information for the student about programs, what is available at sites and centers, and student support resources   http://learn.maine.edu/ Also, here is a link to their Steps for Successful Online Learning http://learn.maine.edu/get-started/steps/

- **Western Governor's University,** competency-based, accredited; charges by time period not unit completion; Bachelor's and Master's in Business, IT, Health, and Education http://www.wgu.edu/

- **Maine Department of Education** certification information http://www.maine.gov/education/cert/index.html

- **Mental Health Rehabilitation Technician** program and course guidelines http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/cfl/MHRT/community_guidelines.htm

- **University of Maine System's MaineStreet portal**, with public access to Transfer Equivalencies and class searches https://peportal.**maine**.edu/

- **Student Guide to MaineStreet** http://www.maine.edu/system/mainestreet/infoforcurrentstudents.php

- **Student Guide to Blackboard** http://learn.maine.edu/services/student-services/quick-guides/bbguide/