

Online Education Research Study: American Intercontinental University Online

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RUNNING HEADER: AIU Online

Abstract

There are a vast number of opportunities for students to complete their post secondary education online. This paper details the program of American InterContinental University Online; the programs available, accreditation, student population, course design, cost and length of programs.

Part I – The Institution and It's Programs

AIU Online (<http://www.aiuonline.com>), with main offices located in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, is the for-profit virtual campus for American InterContinental University, Dunwoody, Georgia. Established in 2001 (AIU Online Chat, 2007), AIU Online offers online Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's degrees in seven (7) disciplines; Business, Criminal Justice, Education, Healthcare Management, Information Technology, Marketing, and Visual Communications. While AIU Online was established in 2001, American InterContinental University was established in 1970. The school was subsequently accredited by the Commission on Colleges: Southern Association of Colleges and Schools in 1987 and is up for reaffirmation in 2012 (SACS, 2005).

AIU Online provides a 100% online experience, with no residency requirements for any of the programs. They operate on 10 week quarters which consist of 2 five week sessions. Each class is 5 weeks long. In the Bachelors and Masters programs students take one class at a time and in the Associates programs they take two. The design of the instruction is unique, in that each class is constructed of 5 one-week units, and the units are divided into five parts:

1. A direct instruction presentation
2. Support activities
3. An asynchronous component
4. A synchronous component
5. A constructivist exercise to determine whether the concept has been mastered.

The direct instruction presentation is a four part Flash movie. The first part is a 3-5 minute explanation of the topic. The second part is a series of question and answer exercise that reinforces the presentation. The third are activities for the unit and finally resources for research.

The four part presentation leads to the support activities. These are document based questions that require learners to research their answers and submit papers to their instructor via “drop box”.

The asynchronous activities are threaded discussions whose subject, or prompt, is determined by the instructor. Participants are required to research their response, respond to the prompt and then respond to another classmate’s response.

The synchronous activities are provided through a home grown version of “Elluminate”. As with Elluminate, band width is an issue and students are encouraged to have a high speed connection to be successful. However, it is not required.

Finally, the most important component is the constructivist. These are student directed activities designed to measure student mastery of the material. Each week usually builds on the previous. After five weeks students have a completed project representing their mastery of the content (AIU Online, 2007).

The length of each program varies, but a M.Ed. in Instructional Technology will take ten months. The Associates and Bachelors programs are designed to be completed in 13 months each. Therefore, assuming they passed all classes, a person could go from high school graduate to completing their Masters degree in 3 years (AIU Online Chat, 2007).

AIU Online has an enrollment of 32,880 students (Stateuniversity.com, 2007); all in an identified distance-delivered program. Full time Associate Degree students can expect to pay approximately \$20,480, Bachelor’s Degree students \$30,560 and Graduate students can expect to pay close to \$24,000. Programs at AIU are an “all inclusive package deal”; all costs associated with the program (books, software, etc.) are included in the price of tuition.

Part II: The Institution's Web Site

AIU's website is very colorful and pleasing to the eye, but the homepage is too cluttered. A first time user would find it difficult to find important information quickly. There are menus all over the page:

- A navigation bar at the top of the page
- A drop down box for the programs
- Bulleted lists for Prospective, Current, or Alumni

If this is designed to be an information page, they should provide a central menu to the left of the screen that is clear and concise as to what information is available. Keeping a similar continuity throughout the site would also be beneficial

The most positive aspect of the site is that they provide two easy ways to communicate with the enrollment advisors; Live Chat or give them your phone number and they will call you back. This is good, since much of the information isn't easily found on the site. The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) provide some answers, but it takes a great deal of digging to answer most of the 10 questions. During the 'digging' I was unable to find how many students are enrolled at AIU Online anywhere on the site, nor did the enrollment advisor have that information. I searched online and found one site that listed enrollment information for many schools. I'm unsure how accurate the information is, but assuming the numbers are correct it would rank in the same class as the University of Washington, University of Georgia and other large state schools.

I feel the best thing AIU could do would be to simplify their site, eliminate the fluff and give prospective students the easiest access to pertinent information. Make it easier for them to see the virtual classroom demos and most importantly, put the cost out their plan and simple for all to see.

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