



Virtual Campus Student Handbook

2009-2010

Virtual Campus
2370 Union Road SW
Atlanta, GA 30331
404-346-1970 ext. 120
virtualcampus@fulton.k12.ga.us

Table of Contents

	Page(s)
<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Myths about Online Learning</u>	4 - 5
<u>Admissions Policies</u>	5 - 6
Registration	5
Tuition	5
Drop/Withdraw	6
Payment	6
<u>Academic Policies</u>	7 - 10
Credit for Online Courses	6
Grading	7
Progress Reports	7
Final Exams and End of Course Tests	8
Academic Integrity Policy	8
Student Attendance and Participation	9
Homework and Absence Policy	10
Educational Program Accessibility	10
Technology Access	10
<u>About the Virtual Campus</u>	10 - 14
What type of student should take an eLearning course?	10
Are online courses for me?	11
Am I ready for Online Courses	12
Who are the Virtual Campus teachers?	12
Quality of Courses	12
How long with the courses last?	13
Technology Requirements	13
Hardware System Requirements	14

Introduction

Fulton County Schools is committed to providing its students with exceptional educational opportunities. The Fulton County Virtual Campus is another example of how we are striving to make the Fulton County School System the best in the United States. The Virtual Campus offers students flexibility with scheduling by offering online courses that can be taken anytime, any place, and at any pace.

Due to the asynchronous nature of the Virtual Campus, where students and teachers are not necessarily online at the same time, students can access their online courses anytime to read assignments, participate in discussions, and submit completed assignments. A master schedule for each course dictates assignments and expectations to help ensure that all participating students are able to be successful in the course.

Class size is limited to 20 - 25 students, depending on the course. Virtual Campus courses are based on a classroom model and differ in many ways from independent study courses. Each section has a single teacher for the duration of the course. In addition to teacher-to-student interaction, the Virtual Campus emphasizes student-to-student interaction.

The Virtual Campus courses are designed to meet the needs of a variety of Fulton County School students including:

- Students who have scheduling conflicts
- Students who wish to recover credit for courses not adequately completed
- Students who wish to fast-track their educational experience
- Students who wish to participate in courses for enrichment
- Students who wish to participate in Career/Tech opportunities
- Students who wish to participate in magnet opportunities
- Students who wish to participate in joint enrollment opportunities
- Students who wish to earn the Dual Diploma
- Students who wish to earn the College Prep Diploma with Distinction
- Hospital/Homebound students
- Traveling athletes

Myths about Online Courses

Myth: *Online courses are easier than traditional, face-to-face courses.*

Fact: Online courses are at the very least as rigorous as face-to-face courses. Students are actually more challenged by online courses because they are in charge of their learning. Because a great part of an online course is text based, there is a great deal of reading required. Students need to go into an online class knowing that the class will require as much, if not more, time and effort as any traditional class.

Myth: *Since there are no time or place limits, I can do all of my assignments at one time and not really have to attend class.*

Fact: It is true that students can access their classes at any time or from any place where Internet connectivity is available. However, online courses are structured and organized so that content is delivered on a set schedule to ensure active participation and maximum learning. Students need to go into an online class knowing that the class will require as much, if not more, time and effort as any traditional class. Deadlines for completing classwork are posted and expected to be met.

Myth: *Online courses are condensed versions of traditional courses.*

Fact: Online courses covered the exact same content that a traditional course covers.

Myth: *If my computer breaks down, the instructor will have to excuse me from an assignment or at least give me more time to complete it.*

Fact: At registration, students are asked for a back-up plan in case their primary computer malfunctions, they experience other technical difficulties, or they travel during the semester. Students are expected to follow the back-up plan when necessary so that they may continue their coursework. The need for an extension is a moot point. This type of critical thinking on the student's part is a necessary skill in dealing with technology in all facets of life today.

Myth: *Since I am taking an online course, the school or the school system will provide a computer for me.*

Fact: If you are taking your course during the school day, the school will provide a computer for you during your class period. If you are taking your course outside of the school day, you are responsible for providing the required technology.

Myth: *My online course will teach me everything I need to know about using the computer for this course.*

Fact: Students must have prior skills in word-processing, e-mail, Internet use and research. Because of the nature of online courses, the student is

expected to also have minimal typing skills. These are not skills that can be learned in conjunction with taking the class. They are skills that should be mastered before the class begins.

Myth: *Because it is an online course, I can be invisible and remain anonymous.*

Fact: All Virtual Campus courses have two discussion components: threaded discussion and chats. Both of these components are secure areas from which only students registered for that particular class may access. Students are required to participate in online discussions. Most students enjoy getting to know their classmates through threaded discussions and chats. These discussions allow for an exchange of ideas in which “shy” students may openly speak up in a protective, non-threatening environment.

Myth: *In an online class, there is no teacher or the teacher doesn't really interact with the students.*

Fact: All Virtual Campus courses have instructors. Instructors log on daily to check on assignments and check for messages from students. Instructors contact students within 24 hours of a question or concern. Virtual Campus students take an active role in their courses and have even expressed that they feel more connected to their instructors than in traditional classrooms.

Admissions Policies

Registration

All students must be enrolled in a Fulton County high school to participate in the Virtual Campus program. To register, the students (and preferably a parent) will sit down with the school counselor and register online. Students may not register by themselves. Only a school counselor may register him/her. The student must be present during the registration process and provide all necessary information for registration.

Students may register for two .5 credit courses per semester.

Once the registration period has closed, no one will be permitted to enroll late.

Tuition

Students may take courses during the regular school day or outside of the course day. If a student takes a course during the regular school day during a regularly scheduled class period, there is no charge.

If a student takes a course outside of the regular school day, there is a course fee of \$250 per .5 credit course. Students eligible for free lunch status will pay a tuition of \$200 per .5 credit course.

Some courses may require a materials fee. Introduction to Art is one of those courses.

Students will earn .5 Carnegie Units upon successful completion of the course.

Students will receive registration confirmation in a course via e-mail, however, enrollment in the course is not final until payment is received (for tuition students). All courses require a minimum of 3-5 registrants to confirm the class. Students will receive notification in a timely manner and course fees will be returned if the required number of registrants is not obtained. Some courses close early due to excessive enrollment. Students who have registered but are not enrolled in a course due to excessive enrollment, will be notified and course fees will be returned (if applicable).

Students registered as Waitlisted students are not enrolled in the class (and cannot make tuition payments). They will be notified by e-mail if a seat becomes available.

Drop/Withdraw

The Virtual Campus drop dates are posted on the Virtual Campus Web site.

A request to drop/withdraw must be submitted in writing (e-mail and FAX are acceptable) to the Virtual Campus office.

Payment

Payment must be made online within 24 hours after registration. Payment must be made in the form of a credit card (Visa and Mastercard) and is automated through the registration process or after signing into the course.

Refunds are processed as a credit to your credit card.

Academic Policies

Credit for Online Courses

The Virtual Campus does not offer a high school diploma. It works in conjunction with the existing high schools in the Fulton County School System to offer a comprehensive curriculum that will include core courses required for graduation as well as elective courses to remediate or accelerate learning. Virtual Campus courses will be treated like any other course offered at the local school. Virtual Campus courses receive the same credit and are listed on the student transcript the same as traditional core and elective courses. Each semester course is worth .5 Carnegie Units.

Grading

Grades will be delivered to the home school as a numerical grade. All Virtual Campus instructors follow the Fulton County Schools Grading Scale:

90 -100 A
80 - 89 B
70 - 79 C
69 and below F

An "I" shall represent incomplete work. In order to maintain eligibility, a student has ten (10) calendar days after the close of the Fall or Spring semester to complete make-up work. He/she has three (3) days after the close of the Summer semester to complete make-up work. If a medical emergency exists, the Virtual Campus Administrator may extend this time period. The final grade will be the average of all grade-bearing activities required throughout the semester will include the End of Course Test grade if applicable. No Final is given early.

Progress Reports

The purpose of a progress reporting system is to provide communication to parents and students of the instructor's assessment of the student's performance in his/her course work.

Progress Reports will be sent to students via e-mail every four to five weeks and deficiency notices, if applicable, will be sent via e-mail to parents at those intervals. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers if they have any concerns regarding their student's success in the Virtual Campus. During the summer semester, progress reports will be sent every 7-10 days.

Final Exams and End of Course Tests

For all courses not requiring End of Course Tests, final exams will be given and will count 15% of the course grade.

End of Course Tests will be given for selected courses and will count 15% of the

course grade. During Fall and Spring, all End of Course Tests will be given in a face-to-face setting at the student's home school. During Summer, the End of Course Tests will be given in a face-to-face setting at a designated school and may occur after the last day of scheduled Virtual Campus classes.

Courses requiring End of Course Tests: Algebra I, Applied Algebra, Geometry, Applied Geometry, Physical Science, Biology, Economics, U. S. History, Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, American Literature and Composition.

Academic Integrity Policy

As members of the learning community of the Fulton County Schools, students have a responsibility to conduct themselves with the highest standards of honesty and integrity. Academic honesty is of utmost importance to the personal success of our community members as well as the community itself. The Virtual Campus provides students an opportunity to achieve academic success through an online environment. For this reason, a key component of the Virtual Campus is academic integrity. All students must be honest and forthright in their academic studies. Students are expected to do their own work and neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance. Falsifying one's research, stealing the words or ideas of another, cheating on an assignment, and/or allowing or assisting another to commit these acts corrupts the educational process. Any violation of this standard will be considered dishonest behavior and will be dealt with accordingly by the instructor and administration.

Dishonest behavior includes, but is not limited to:

1. Plagiarism.

Plagiarism can be defined as the inclusion of another's ideas, words, expressions, or data in writing or presentation without properly acknowledging the source.

2. Unauthorized use of another person's password/login.

Student logins/passwords are confidential information that should not be Shared with others.

3. Cheating.

Cheating can be defined as the act or attempted act of deception by which a student seeks to misrepresent his submitted work as uniquely his own completed without assistance. Cheating includes copying another student's work and submitting it as your own.

4. Impersonation.

Performing work or taking an examination for another student or allowing someone to do so for you.

5. Falsification and/or misrepresentation of data.

This can be defined as the submission of false or contrived data or sources.

6. Computer crimes.

This may include damaging computer programs, hacking, constructing viruses, introducing viruses into a system, copying programs, etc.

Academic dishonesty will result in one or more of the following actions:

- Loss of grade points
- Removal from the course
- Failure to receive credit for the course
- Loss of eligibility to earn credits through the Virtual Campus

Virtual Campus instructors have the authority to require that students perform other tasks or undergo additional assessments in proctored situations. If a Virtual Campus instructor suspects that there is a problem with academic integrity, the administrators of the local school and the Virtual Campus will be informed and action possibly taken.

Student Attendance and Participation

Virtual Campus students are expected to attend and participate in their online education courses as fully as they would attend and participate in a traditional classroom course. At a minimum, Fall and Spring students are required to log in and perform work in their online courses **at least 4 times a week**, dispersed throughout the week (i.e., not five visits in one or two days). Summer school students are required to login and perform work **at least 5 times a week**. If there is no activity or login from a student in one week, the Virtual Campus Administrator will be contacted. Unless prior communications have been received from the student, parent, or home school regarding the student's absence, **a student who fails to log in and participate in his/her online course for two weeks may be dropped from the course (with no refund due to the student).**

Attendance is measured by contributions made through communication via discussion threads, e-mails, Drop Box, chat sessions, and/or through the submission of assignments, projects, and tests. Each time a student enters a Virtual Campus course, participation is automatically recorded and the length of time in each area is noted.

Homework and Absence Policy

Students are expected to log into their online course at least 4 times a week (during Fall and Spring and 5 times a week during Summer), spread throughout the week, unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. It is the nature of online courses to be structured by tight deadlines to facilitate the movement through the

course. Homework is to be completed by assigned deadlines. **If work is going to be late, it is the responsibility of the student to contact the instructor prior to the due date.** Assignment sheets and calendars are provided to assist the student with benchmark dates set for completion of unit assignments. All work assigned during an allotted time period must be completed within that time frame. In cases of extended student illness (five days or more), the student may either contact the online course instructor directly to notify the instructor of any delay in providing assigned work or the parents may contact the Virtual Campus Administrator to make arrangements for work that will need to be made up. A doctor's note is required.

Educational Program Accessibility

The Fulton County Schools prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, religion, sex, or disability in the provision of educational programs.

Technology Access

Virtual Campus courses are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to any registered student who has a computer and an Internet Service Provider. Students may log into their courses any place that they have access to a computer and an Internet Service Provider at anytime of the day or night.

About the Virtual Campus

What type of student should take an eLearning course?

Characteristics of a successful Virtual Campus student:

- You are self-disciplined. You do not need to rely on your parents or teachers to keep you on task and involved in the course.
- You are able to communicate through the computer. Remember that all of your communication takes place through a written format.
- You are well organized.
- You are willing to ask questions immediately if a problem occurs with either technology or the course content.
- You are comfortable reading information. Remember that you must read all coursework and communications from your instructor.
- You are willing and able to work in your Virtual Campus course for a minimum of 5 to 7 hours per week.
- You are prepared to participate in your Virtual Campus course at least 4 days a week.
- You are able to complete assignments on time.

- You are aware that an online course is not easier than a traditional course. In fact, many students say it requires more time and commitment. Successful students view online courses as a convenient way to learn – not an easier way.
- You are comfortable working alone without daily teacher and student intervention.
- You are aware that technology can be both a convenience and a frustration.
- You are aware that online learning is not for everyone.

Are Online Courses for Me?

To determine if you are a good candidate for a successful online learning experience, take the self-assessment inventory below.

Online Course Self-Assessment Inventory

Answer the questions below and score your answers. Your scores are just an indicator as to whether you are a good candidate for online learning. This assessment **will not** tell you how successful you will be in an online course.

Personal Attitudes

Please rank yourself on each item using the following system:

Never = 1 Rarely = 2 Sometimes = 3 Usually = 4 Always = 5

1. _____ I complete my homework and other assignments on time with little or no supervision.
2. _____ When I work individually, I complete the task successfully and on time.
3. _____ Written instructions are easy for me to follow.
4. _____ I consider myself to be a good reader.
5. _____ When I complete my work, I can move on to the next assignment while I wait feedback.
6. _____ I believe that the person most responsible for my education is me.
7. _____ I enjoy the challenge of learning new skills and technologies.
8. _____ I consider myself a highly independent person.
9. _____ If I have difficulty with an assignment, I ask for assistance.
10. _____ I answer e-mail in a timely manner.

*Attitudes cannot be learned or changed easily. If you scored less than 40 points, you may not be a good candidate for an online course. If you scored less than 25 points, you **should NOT** take an online course.*

Technology Skills

Check the boxes next to the skills you presently utilize:

- Word Processing
- E-mail
- Copy and Pasting of Text
- Attaching and Sending a File via e-mail
- Internet Research
- Downloading a File from the Internet

If you did not check every box above, you need to improve your technology skills prior to beginning an online course.

Am I Ready for an Online Course?

Virtual Campus students must agree to the following statements:

1. I must have reliable **daily** access to a computer with Internet access. It is my responsibility to have a back-up plan in place in case of computer or Internet issues. The Virtual Campus provides technical assistance through the Help Desk. Computer difficulties do not excuse me from instructor directed due dates and deadlines.
2. I will maintain an active e-mail address and check it **daily**.
 - a. It is my responsibility to notify my instructor and update User Profile settings if my e-mail changes during the course.
 - b. It is my responsibility to turn off all e-mail blockers related to my e-mail account.
3. I must attend the mandatory face-to-face first and last day of class sessions with my instructor. The final exam is administered on the last day of class. It is required that I take the final exam in a face-to-face setting to earn credit for the course.
4. I must attend any other mandatory face-to-face meetings required by my class (CPR session, Labs, etc.)
5. The instructor may ask for any assignment to be taken in a proctored setting.
6. If there is a discrepancy in the quality of work I complete online and my achievement on the face-to-face exam, my instructor may require me to re-take any assignment in a proctored setting.
7. I am expected to log in to my course at least one time per day.
8. I may be withdrawn from a course if I do not meet the participation requirements.
9. I will dedicate a minimum of 5 hours per week for course work. Additional time may be spent on homework, studying, and reading.
10. FAILURE TO ATTEND any required meetings will result in withdrawal from the course. The first and last days of class are mandatory face-to-face sessions.
11. All work I submit for my online course will be completed without outside support and resources unless specifically allowed by the instructor.
12. Due dates are clearly outlined in the course and I am expected to meet those dates.
13. I understand I must return issued materials to my instructor at the end of the semester or earlier if I drop the class. I will not be issued new materials from my local school until this matter is cleared through the Virtual Campus. Grades, diplomas, or certificates of progress may also be withheld.

Who are the Virtual Campus instructors?

All courses are taught by certified Fulton County instructors. Teachers receive training in the pedagogy of online course development and instruction and in the use of the software platform used to support Virtual Campus courses.

Quality of Courses

Virtual Campus courses conform to the Essential Principles of Quality: Guidelines for Web-based Courses for Middle and High Schools, recently published by the Southern Regional Education Board (www.sreb.org) and the standards endorsed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Each course has been reviewed by Curriculum Coordinators for alignment with Georgia GPS and QCCs and Fulton County course objectives. With the goal of making the experience successful for every student, the Virtual Campus staff continues to work closely with course developers and our local schools.

How long will the courses last?

Fall and Spring terms coincide with the regular FCS calendar. Generally these courses begin about one or two weeks after the Fall and Spring terms begin and end about one week before traditional courses. Even though students can work on their classes at anytime and any place, there is a pace set by the teachers to encourage successful completion of the course. Summer term lasts 5 weeks.

Technology Requirements

- A primary computer and a back-up computer
- An Internet Provider (IP)
- A telephone or cable line to connect to your IP
- You will need to have Netscape 4.7 or higher or Internet Explorer (IE) 5.0 or higher. Java and javascript must be enabled in your browser (this should be the default in current releases). You must also set your browser to Accept Cookies (again, the default in current releases). Refer to **Checking Browser Settings** below for details if you have trouble with your course loading properly or problems with any courseware features.
- An e-mail address. All blockers must be removed.
- A word processing program (Ex: Microsoft Word).
- Use an anti-virus program & update it regularly. This type of program, if kept upto-date, will protect your computer from viruses that could damage your hard drive or data files. Some common sources for contracting a virus include; Internet downloads, floppy disks, and e-mail attachments.

You should also install the latest release of **Adobe Acrobat Reader** on your system (your instructor may post assignments in pdf format and this software will allow you to read these documents). This software is available for download for free at: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>

Checking Browser Settings

Mac Users:

Netscape 4.x -- Look under Edit/Preferences/Advanced (click on Advanced and select Enable JavaScript and Enable Java, and Accept only cookies that get sent back to the originating server, and click OK)

IE 4.x and higher -- Look under Edit/Preferences/Web Browser/Java (click on Enable Java and OK), Edit/Preferences/Web Browser/Web Content (click Enable Scripting under Active Content, then click OK), and Edit/Preferences/Receiving Files/Cookies (just be sure Never Accept is NOT selected).

Windows Users:

Netscape 4.x -- Look under Edit/Preferences/Advanced (if you must reset an option, click on OK, and then close and reopen Netscape to enable the changes)

IE 5.x -- Look under Tools/Internet Options/Security then click on the globe that says Internet to highlight it, then click on Custom level. Scroll down to Cookies/Allow cookies that are stored on your computer and Allow per-session cookies (not stored) and make sure that Enable is selected. Scroll down to Java permissions and make sure High Safety is selected. Scroll down to Active

scripting and make sure that Enable is selected. Scroll down to Scripting of java applets and make sure Enable is selected. If you have changed settings, click OK then click Apply then click OK.

Important Message for AOL, Prodigy, and CompuServe, Users:

AOL, Prodigy, and CompuServe are Internet Service Providers. As part of their software they each provide a customized internal web browser that may not allow you to use all the features with Blackboard. You may have trouble altering settings. It may be necessary for you to download and configure the latest version of your preferred browser (Netscape or IE) and launch it for course access in lieu of the preconfigured browser in AOL, Prodigy, or CompuServe.

NOTE: When the AOL, Prodigy, or CompuServe (ISP's) internal browser is not in use, the ISP will consider the user inactive and may disconnect you after a period of time. To remain active, you may want to return to the main page of the ISP every half hour or so and click on a link or check your e-mail. This will reset the ISP's "inactivity timer". Then minimize the screen again and go back to work on your online course.

Hardware System Requirements

- A PC running Windows 95,98, 2000, or Windows NT 4.0
- Reliable Internet access
- Printer