

LEARNING MODALITIES

Kaplan University students have three modalities from which to choose to engage with their curriculum. Each provides specific benefits to students depending on their personal characteristics and learning and pace preferences.

Traditional Online Modality

This is the modality Kaplan University has been refining over the past 15 years and the one we use to deliver more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs. It combines the best elements of traditional campus-based instruction with online learning and collaborative tools.

The focal point is the online classroom — a virtual classroom students access from a desktop or mobile device. It is where students access their course materials (e.g., syllabus, grading rubrics, course readings) and check their grades at any time. Students are also required to perform learning activities each academic week in the online classroom. First of these is the discussion board. On the discussion board, students and faculty post and reply to each others' entries in text about important course concepts, exchanging ideas and deepening understanding through these virtual dialogues. Second, students access and take quizzes in the online classroom as a useful diagnostic tool to gauge learning progress. Third, students submit assignments of written work such as essays or projects in the online classroom to demonstrate learning of key concepts. If they need help, students can reach their instructors in their virtual office in the online classroom.

In addition to the online classroom, courses offered in the traditional online modality typically include seminars. Seminars are online sessions in which students meet with their instructor in a virtual room to review important topics from the week's readings. Instructors present material via PowerPoint, video, whiteboard, etc. and students can ask questions about it via the chat window. Seminars provide opportunities for consistent student–faculty interaction and collaboration — a major part of the traditional online modality.

Students' performance in the traditional online modality is measured in two ways. First, instructors score their students' weekly learning activities against a scoring rubric and assign grades on a scale from "A" to "F." Course grades are the cumulative sum of all grades on learning activities students earn in a course. These grades are transcribed along with the cumulative grade point average earned across the program.

In the second, instructors assess the extent to which students demonstrate mastery of competency-based learning outcomes (course outcomes, General Education Literacies, and Professional Competencies). These describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors a student is expected to master upon completion of a course and are built into every course at Kaplan University. To denote the extent of learning outcome mastery, instructors assign a descriptor/number on a scale from "No Progress/(0)" to "Mastery /(5)" using a tool called "Course-Level Assessment" (CLA). CLA scores are not transcribed but made available to students in a Competency Report. Students can share their Competency Report with prospective employers to convey how their learning translates into work-related competencies.

Students best suited for the traditional online modality are those who prefer a structured online learning environment characterized by a fixed schedule of required learning activities and regular interaction with faculty and classmates.

ExcelTrack™ Modality

In March 2017, Kaplan University has begun offering some of its programs on a competency-based model, “ExcelTrack.” In accordance with the principles of competency-based education or “CBE,” the ExcelTrack modality is designed to enable students to:

- acquire real-life, career-oriented skills
- acquire and demonstrate skills at their own pace without “seat time” requirements
- save time and money if they can accelerate their path to degree

Because Kaplan University’s traditional online modality delivers programs with curricula already built upon competency-based learning outcomes, the ExcelTrack modality uses the same curricula to help students acquire real-life, career-oriented skills. It also uses the same grading scale and CLAs. However, the ExcelTrack modality differs from the traditional online modality in important ways.

While the traditional online modality offers students highly structured learning, the ExcelTrack modality offers them highly flexible, personalized learning. There are no required weekly assignments or class time per course in the ExcelTrack modality — just one grade on a final comprehensive project. While students access the same online classroom containing the same readings and kinds of learning activities as offered in the traditional online modality, students in the ExcelTrack modality decide which and how much of them to complete to master course concepts. Indeed, they are able to skip material they already know to focus on what they do not know.

Likewise, students in the ExcelTrack modality decide how much and when to work with their instructor and classmates. While students can collaborate with their instructor and classmates in discussion boards and the online seminar, attendance in neither is required. The role of the instructor therefore shifts to a coach who teaches each student according to what they need. Last, in the ExcelTrack modality, courses are divided into small one-credit pieces of courses, “competency modules,” of which students can decide how many to take each term. Students can even add more competency modules to their course load as they progress through a term if they choose.

The flexibility in the ExcelTrack modality offers students opportunities to accelerate the pace of their learning toward their degree. Without the seat time and course registration constraints of the structured traditional online modality, students in the ExcelTrack modality can complete more credits per term than they normally could in the traditional one. Because the tuition model for the ExcelTrack modality is a flat rate, students stand to achieve significant savings if they can accelerate their pace toward degree completion. As in the traditional online modality, students in the ExcelTrack modality can also reduce the cost of their degree if they earn transfer credit from completed coursework from an accredited college or university.

Successful students have some professional experience and are required to have previous college experience to draw upon. They should be extremely self-reliant, driven, and able to closely manage their study schedule. The traditional online modality is a better fit for students who do not fit this profile.

Currently, the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in Information Technology are offered as ExcelTrack options. Other programs will follow in 2018.

Open College @ KU Modality

Open College @ Kaplan University (OC@KU) offers students a cost-effective means of earning a degree by tying together their learning achieved through:

- Successful completion of open online courses offered at OC@KU and elsewhere
- An experiential portfolio based on applicable professional experience
- Transfer credit from accredited colleges and universities

Open online courses offered through OC@KU go a step beyond typical massive open online courses (MOOCs). While there is no cost for taking open online courses at Open College, students pay a \$100.00 fee to take the corresponding course assessment to demonstrate their mastery of the open course material. If they pass the assessment, credit for the course is applied toward their degree. As with typical MOOCs, students may review material in open online courses at Open College as much as needed and consult whatever resources they need — from within and outside Kaplan University — to solidify their grasp of course concepts.

To help them master the course material in their open online courses, students in the OC@KU modality work with their faculty advisor. In addition to coaching students, the faculty advisor plays another vital role: helping students customize their degree with an individualized learning plan (ILP). Together, students and their faculty advisor choose up to two focus areas that align with their professional and personal goals, as well as a planned course of study. The ILP maps out the coursework to be completed as part of the degree plan, both core requirements and electives. Throughout their program, students work with their faculty advisor to update and make changes to their ILP. However a student's degree is customized, it is based on professional knowledge and skills, problem solving, and strategic planning that culminates in a capstone class with a portfolio project.

In addition to working with faculty advisors, students in the OC@KU modality work with faculty subject matter experts to determine how best to incorporate previous professional experience, including professional training such as military training, into their customized degree through an experiential portfolio. In an experiential portfolio, students show how their prior learning from work and life experiences translates into credit toward their degree. Faculty subject matter experts review and assess submitted experiential portfolios to determine how much course credit can be applied toward the degree.

As in the other modalities at Kaplan University, students in the OC@KU modality who have completed coursework from accredited colleges and universities are encouraged to submit official transcripts of that coursework to apply for transfer credit.

Currently, Kaplan University offers the Bachelor of Science in Professional Studies (BSPr) in the OC@KU modality. Consisting of a minimum of 180 quarter credit hours, the BSPr contains the following discipline-specific program outcomes: knowledge and skills, problem solving, strategic thinking, continuous improvement, and a career outcome. In addition to the discipline-specific outcomes, General Education Literacies and Professional Competencies are integrated throughout the BSPr.

As with the ExcelTrack modality, students best suited to the OC@KU modality are self-driven, career-focused students with college and professional experience from which to draw. The student profile is reflected in the tuition model: a monthly rate of \$195.00 that rewards students who can consistently invest great effort into their studies and accelerate the pace of their learning.

