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Student Perspectives - Aaron Aldrich [1]

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As we seek to provide top-notch courses and programs in the online environment, we must remember that the experience of designing and implementing is only half of the equation. On the other side are the students – our partners in education. But we don't always know much about what online looks like from the student perspective.

So how do we learn more about what happens on the other side of the screen?

We ask! Today we are featuring an interview with Aaron Aldrich. Aaron is a recent graduate of CU Denver's Information and Learning Technologies Master's program.

Hi Aaron! Thank you for agreeing to talk about your experience as an online student. Before we start asking questions, please tell us a bit about yourself.



Aaron Aldrich

I am an education professional with graphic design experience. My background in graphic design and education led me to pursue a Master's degree from the University of Colorado

Denver in Information & Learning Technologies. I look forward to continuing my learning journey in an instructional design role.

Now that we know a bit about Aaron, let's jump into some questions.

Aaron, what brought you to an online degree program?

I had a family member that needed extensive and extended home health care. I chose to put my employment on hold and learn how to provide the care needed. This experience led to contemplation of how I could use this experience within a career or how I could redesign my career. I considered a few disciplines within the medical field and then later realized I love learning and I have many interests. I wondered how could I combine education and graphic design background.

Becoming an online student allowed me to reach my academic goals within a schedule that fit into my busy life. I would not have been able to fit a traditional face-to-face (f-to-f) schedule into my situation. I am very thankful that going back to school online was an option for me.

What did you expect from the online learning experience? And how did the actual experience measure up?

I wasn't sure what to expect. I had taken one course online very early in the online course era. Afterwards, I vowed to myself I would never again take online courses. I preferred courses in the classroom. I couldn't stand the dreaded threads of regurgitated information. The LMS wasn't the problem, it was the design of the course.

Never say never – I was pleasantly surprised with my online experience at UCD. I felt like part of a community and that the assignments were typically relevant, rigorous, and engaging.

Can you give us an example of an excellent learning experience you had online?

Giving one would be a challenge. I had several. I enjoyed the opportunity to work with teams to help solve real-world problems as well as using a variety of tools (some new to me and I had opportunities to continually refine my skills with other tools).

How about the biggest challenges you encountered?

Working with teams is a great experience that can present various new challenges in a virtual environment. There were many opportunities to work with people I may have never met before. Team projects presented time zone challenges and differences of engagement levels online. There were a variety of course development styles, themed courses, more traditional, and a combination of both. I enjoyed the variety of styles, but I occasionally had difficulty either finding information or figuring out the true expectations when courses were a bit more creative in their basic format/layout.

What advice would you give to someone teaching online?

Try to be more intentional about developing a rapport with your students and establishing a learning community. A f-to-f classroom can be changed into a successful online experience with a bit of community building, creativity, and engaging activities. Have clear goals/learning

objectives, rubrics, and expectations for your students. Don’t forget that a lot can be lost in virtual classroom translation. Always be on the lookout for new ways to bridge the gap.

Thank you, Aaron! Learning a bit about your experience has been insightful, and I appreciate the time you’ve given us.

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