

5 QUESTIONS (and Answers!) About Taking Labs with an Online Course

We receive a lot of questions about how labs that accompany our online science courses actually “work.” Here are answers to the 5 most common questions prospective students have about our labs in Anatomy & Physiology, Biology, Biochemistry, Microbiology, Chemistry, and Physics. Many students are required to complete one or more of these labs prior to attending graduate school in **Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Osteopathic Medicine, Physician Assistant Studies, and many other health professions.**

1 How do “online labs” work?

We actually try NOT call them “online labs” anymore; what we are really talking about is completing laboratory study from a distance; which doesn’t always happen “online.” The purpose of labs, wherever they are conducted, is to bring the science to life.

To conduct your prerequisite science lab from a distance, you will order the custom lab kits designed for each of your lab courses. All the materials and instructions you need are shipped directly to you so that you can set up your labs in a location that is convenient to you.

After reading about how something happens in your course text, when you conduct the lab, you follow the instructions in the lab kit to make the science happen, while you observe and measure what happens as the experiment progresses. When the experiment is complete, you revisit your results and use them to compose a lab report.

2 Will distance labs prepare me for graduate study in the health professions?

Yes! You are doing the same sorts of experiments that you would be doing in a face-to-face (f2f) lab. You are using the same equipment that you would use in a f2f lab.

The added value of the distance labs is that you are learning to direct your own learning: when you conduct your labs, they become your learning experiences. Owning your learning; leading it, directing it, and understanding it well enough to share it with others are precisely the abilities that graduate programs—especially in health care—desire in their applicants and students.



Unpacking a pre-packaged lab kit at home
(Photo courtesy of eScience)



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3 Will I Gain the Same Experience and Understanding in a Distance Lab as in an On-Site Lab?

Yes!

Even though you are conducting the experiment in a location that is convenient to you, you are not learning alone in a vacuum. Your lab instructor will provide information to help you connect what you are doing with what you have been studying. In many distant courses, you will discuss your laboratory experience as it is happening with your instructor and classmates as you share photos or videos of your lab in progress. Through this ongoing communication you get help, advice and support from your classmates as well as your instructors.

And No!

No, in that no one has set up your lab for you. You are responsible for envisioning, planning, and preparing for the experiment. Because you are involved in every step, you learn the value of the methodical study of science. You will use this same step-by-step method in evaluating your patients/clients and planning your care as a health provider.

“I am impressed at the ability to do a lab course independently, while still having a community feel and communication with classmates and instructors.”

– MGH IHP Online Lab Student

4 Are Distance Labs More, or Less, Valuable Than On-Site Labs?

They are different. And, they are not for everyone.

However, if you like your independence balanced with flexibility within a defined time frame, you will find added value in learning this way.

In return for taking increased responsibility for your learning, you will build a methodological approach to study, the ability to observe and discuss what you have seen, and the confidence in your own ability to learn and understand.



Conducting an experiment for an online Chemistry lab
(Photo courtesy of eScience)



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5 Do Distance Labs Cost More Than On-Site Labs?

When you take a lab course on site, you pay a lab fee that covers not only the space, but the equipment and the instructor time.

When you conduct your lab, you pay only for the materials. So, there is an additional cost which tends to range between 100 -200 dollars.

"I've liked how the course material in lab dovetails nicely with the lecture. It's been fun doing labs at home and having the luxury of taking some extra time if needed, whereas in a physical lab your time is only allotted to the course period."

– MGH IHP Online Lab Student

View a Brief Video of Dr. Sandra Buerger Demonstrating What It's Like to Conduct a Lab Experiment at Home.



Student performing a titration for an online Chemistry lab (Photo courtesy of eScience)



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