

Free research paper on a brief overview of online colleges

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Online colleges are becoming a trend these days as more college students opt for this method of learning instead of the traditional face-to-face instruction at school (Bakia, Shear, Toyama, & Lasseter, 2012, p. 2). It has allowed more people who missed out on their educational opportunities in the past to start again and complete their degree (Robinson, n. d). Online colleges are schools that offer classes online apart from the traditional classroom set up. Typically, these colleges usually offer " certificate, associates, bachelors, masters, doctoral, and professional programs" (Allen & Seaman, 2006, p. 4) where classes are purely conducted through the web with 0% - 20% face-to-face interaction, if any (Allen & Seaman, 2006, p. 4). What students need to understand when adopting this educational method is that they have to consider whether the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (Robinson, n. d) accredits the chosen school. This is crucial when choosing online schools because having an accreditation means the school met educational requirements set by the accrediting body. This guarantees that the education or training an online student receives is at par with the nationally recognized standards, including meeting the standards employers look for in graduates (Federal Student Aid, n. d.). Attending a non-accredited educational institution could mean nullification of any diploma or certificates awarded to students after completing a course. In addition, it could also pose difficulties in finding employment, as employers are very particular about educational credentials (Federal Student Aid, n. d.). Although the method of teaching and the materials and resources used in online classes differ than in regular classroom set ups, the amount of learning as well as the results is almost the same as with students enrolled in

face-to-face set ups (Schaarsmith, 2012). Millie Rodriguez, the executive director of California University of Pennsylvania's Office of Web-Based Programs claims that like typical students, online students have " weekly assignments, readings, lectures, class discussions and even group projects" (cited in Schaarsmith, 2012).

Schools use online instruction programs called " Moodle" (Schaarsmith, 2012) to enhance student learning. This program allows posting of various educational resources such as essays, articles, videos, and podcasts, among others, and has an email facility, too, for easy communication among online students, aside from using chat and teleconferencing methods (Schaarsmith, 2012). Other resources that can be used aside from Moodle include Wikis, ATutor, Docebo, Claroline, and ILIAS, among others (Sampson, 2009).

Why are online colleges becoming a popular option for students and career shifters? For one, online colleges cater not only to a select group, but include high school graduates wanting to acquire a degree, working college students, career shifters, mothers who want further education, current employees who want to go up the career ladder and increase their salary, and more (Serlin, 2005, p. 4). These types of students appreciate the flexibility and convenience that online education provides in terms of managing their schedule and time as it allows them to complete their educational requirements without having to resign from work or leave their homes (Serlin, 2005, p. 4). Students can study at their own pace and at a time that is most convenient for them.

Students also appreciate that online classes are less intimidating than regular, face-to-face set up, thus, students participate more during online

discussions. Those who appreciate small, intimate discussions about their subjects will find online discussions more appealing. This gives way to thorough discussion of subjects that need further clarification as instructors and students have more time to digest the topics and can go back to previous discussions if necessary. In addition, because students' interactions are confined through chat and emails only, the feeling of anonymity helps in making an otherwise shy student to voice out his or her opinion (Serlin, 2005, p. 2).

Another strength of online learning is it allows an individual to enroll in a college or university of choice in any part of the world. This gives students from less-developed countries an opportunity to study at excellent institutions that can further stimulate and challenge the knowledge they already have. In addition, it helps students to develop appreciation of other cultures through their interactions with online instructors and fellow students (Serlin, 2005, p. 8).

Despite the many benefits of studying online, some academician's concern about online colleges pertains to the measured and slow-paced discussion considering that both parties (instructor and students) have more time to prepare their answers. Thus, responses can be slower than in face-to-face set ups where discussion flows freely (Serlin, 2005, p. 9). While online classes allow one to manage his or her time, this requires strict discipline when it comes to carrying out activities related to studies (Serlin, 2005, p. 9). Per employers' perception of graduates of online courses, some still raise issues regarding the veracity and competitiveness of applicants vying for positions in their companies (Washington, n. d.). This, despite the positive

feedback received from Chief Academic Officers vouching that online learning is " as good as or better than face-to-face [instruction]" (Allen & Seaman, 2006, p. 11).

On the other hand, among the flaws considered to be the most damaging reason why educational experts question the authenticity of online colleges is related to " academic dishonesty" (Serlin, 2005, p. 4). Students take non-proctored final exams that allow them to have their tests answered by someone else. This also goes for assignments and other exercises. Because it is difficult to prove that a student cheated on an exam or assignment, suggestions to have students take final exams in a proctored environment are being suggested (Serlin, 2005, p. 5).

Regardless of negative opinions about this method of learning, online colleges are here to stay and in fact, will further grow and develop in the years to come. Considering that more people are benefitting from it as it provides avenues for everyone to complete their education, students and jobseekers will continue to support this type of learning system.

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