

# Online degrees: are they right for you?

By John J Peters

Computers are great - the Internet's even better! Now you can get your Bachelor degree online from the convenience of your own home. No need to move away or live on a costly campus to get a college degree. No need to even socialize too much with students if you prefer your education in the 'real' world!

More and more people are taking their degree online - especially more mature students who have built a family, home and a life in a certain area and who don't want to attend a traditional college environment. Perhaps they are studying alongside a job too. Online degrees have made that all possible. They don't require any great computer skill, so long as you - of course - have internet access.

But online degree courses are not for everyone. To undertake this kind of college degree program is a major step. Make sure it's right for you. Write a list of advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of online degree courses or any kind of distance learning might be that they are flexible so you can have some say over when you study; they are a less expensive way to get your bachelor degree; they avoid you having to socialize with hoards of young students; they allow you to work while attending classes - something which may be especially important to mature students with financial commitments, who have already climbed so far up the career ladder and don't want to jump off; there is no need - or less need, anyway - to put your children into daycare as you can study around their routine - and the mother of all advantages to online education - you can sit in front of the computer in your pajamas and no one knows or cares!

Is that all sounding great? Well, online degree programs certainly *can* be great, but there are some potential flies in the ointment which you need to watch out for. Firstly, if your online degree is to be worth the paper it is written on, you must find out if your college is accredited. That's the only way that the online degree you get will be any good to you in your future career. Carefully check the school's reputation because fraud is easier online. Check that your online degree will be the same as the degree given for on-site courses, not a watered-down version. There are plenty of universities and colleges out there which offer you the real deal, so you can afford to shop around.

Are you the sort of person who learns better alone than in a classroom environment? Be sure that you are and that you have the drive and energy and self-discipline to go the distance in online learning, which can sometimes be as lonely and dispiriting as a marathon run. Check out also if the online program actually offers occasional seminars or workgroups to meet up with fellow students. Some do - or they offer web- and telephone-conferencing as a good alternative to face-to-face classroom environments.

It won't always be easy to fit in the demands of a family, home and maybe even a job around a degree course, so don't kid yourself. But you CAN do it. Get your partner and/or wider family in on it and have them support you with some of the day-to-day chores, and give you some peace and quiet in which to study. You'll all be happier for you being fulfilled, in the long run.

Of course, student social life is legendary. You won't get this with an online degree, but if you're coming to education later in life or re-training in a different area and as for student parties, you've been there, done that, got the tee-shirt - online bachelor degree programs may be just what you are looking for.

So get writing your personal list of pros and cons and decide if an online bachelor degree is the right choice for you.

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