

Big name state universities: 5 relatively cheap online bachelor's degrees

By Paul Barnette

Let's face it. With so many options available on the internet, choosing an online bachelors degree program can be a daunting task. Try a little test. Type "online bachelors degree" into Google and glance at the results. Many "featured" programs on various degree websites usually include names like University of Phoenix, Walden University, Kaplan University, and Capella University.

Based on the test mentioned above, it should come as no surprise that these for-profit universities also rank in the top twenty of the largest online student bodies in the United States. According to the latest data from U.S. News & World Report, University of Phoenix served over 187,000 online students during the 2006-2007 school year. Significant online enrollment figures were also reported by Walden University (22,138), Kaplan University (22,000), and Capella University (13,726) for the same time frame.

But other non-traditional students take a slightly different approach to earning their degrees via online college courses. Instead of completing a 4-year degree through a for-profit online school, degree completion programs offered by well-known state universities are attracting considerable attention.

To meet graduation requirements, many non-traditional students with little time for on-campus classes use inexpensive local community colleges as stepping stones to state universities. The reason: more public two-year colleges now cater to working students than in previous decades.

Three factors appear to be driving students back to long-established public and private universities, some of which are represented by a few big names. For starters, several institutions have adopted special tuition rates for distance learners that are not only less expensive than those for on-campus classes, but also considerably cheaper than the big for-profit universities. Comparable fees for in-state and out-of-state residents at these big schools are becoming more commonplace.

Next, to meet rising demand, more traditional universities are responding by increasing the variety of online classes and degree programs. For example, the Cincinnati Post recently reported that enrollment in online-only programs at the University of Cincinnati is up 257 percent over the past 4 years. In another recent article, the Tuscaloosa News cited enrollment figures from the University of West Alabama for the 2007 Fall semester. A staggering 47 percent, or almost one-half the entire student population at the Livingston, Alabama university take only classes held online.

Finally, the thought of having a resume tossed by corporate human resources staffers because the degree was earned through an online-only university may simply be too much for some students. In 2006, career information provider Vault Inc. surveyed hiring managers about how they view applicants with degrees that were earned online. A whopping 77% responded that they believe an online degree granted by an accredited institution holds more credibility than one from an internet-only school. As one unnamed HR professional confides, an online degree obtained from a well-established, traditional university stands a much greater chance of escaping the "correspondence school" stigma.

A related factor, branding, appears to heavily influence school choices as well. Listing a highly-respected, name brand college degree on a resume usually proves advantageous when competing for positions, especially in tight job markets, according to some career coaches. Similarly, nearby lesser known universities are also thought to carry considerable name recognition among prospective employers.

In other words, when choosing an online degree program, choose wisely. The opportunities to earn college degrees from highly-respected schools are many. Spend a little time and do some research. Yes, the larger online-only colleges and universities appear more often in Google searches. But it is highly unlikely that their exposure level is close to what the major state universities receive on those memorable autumn afternoons during college football season.

Below, you'll find five solid bachelor's degree completion programs that are fully capable of sprucing up many resumes with eye-catching credentials. Each degree is attainable through numerous options that can include CLEP exams and liberal college-credit transfer policies. Tuition rates, except where noted, apply to both in-state and out-of-state residents. For more information, please visit the respective university's Continuing Education or Extended Learning website to learn more.

Colorado State University - Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts - \$223 per semester hour

Indiana University - Bachelor of General Studies - \$145.06 (in-state)/\$164.22 (out-of state) per semester hour

Texas Tech University - Bachelor of General Studies - \$189 per semester hour (includes fees)

University of Iowa - Bachelor of Liberal Studies - \$224 per semester hour

University of Missouri - Bachelor of General Studies - \$247.60 per semester hour (includes fees)

Above information current as of September, 2007.

Paul monitors online college degree programs in the USA. His blog, e-Learning Pundit, focuses on the many distance degree opportunities that are often lost in cyberspace.

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