

# **EXPOSED: The 6 Biggest Myths About Online Education**

## **Myth #1 – Classroom learning is superior to online learning.**

FACT: As anyone who's made it through high school knows, there are good classroom classes and lousy classroom classes. The quality varies according to the teacher, the classroom, and the attentiveness and interest of the students.

Likewise, there are good online courses and bad online courses. However, in a book entitled "The No Significant Difference Phenomenon," North Carolina State University Professor Thomas L. Russell studied no less than 355 different research papers on the subject of classroom vs. online learning. His conclusion: "no significant difference exists between the effectiveness of classroom education and distance learning" (find out more at <http://www.nosignificantdifference.org>).

As the evidence grows in support of eLearning, the question now is changing from, "Can distance learning be *as good as* classroom learning" to "Can technology help make online learning *even better* than traditional instruction?" Indeed, a 2006 study conducted at the world's largest university reported "... when [comparing] face to face education with Internet based distance education, there is a significant difference in favor of Internet based distance education."

Consider this: students come to class on Day 1 with different levels of knowledge, and they learn at different rates. Technology allows teachers to create customized learning and provide one-on-one feedback. Students can learn at their own pace, choosing the way they learn best.

One final difference between classroom and online learning: Traditional classroom learning tends to be *passive* and one-way. The instructor talks; the student listens. In contrast, online learning is *active*. In fact, *interactive*. All senses are engaged, with more opportunity for feedback.

## **Myth #2 – Online learning shortchanges learners by not allowing important teacher-to-student and student-to-student interaction.**

FACT: Have you ever been in a college lecture hall? Many hold 300-400 students or more. How many interactions between students and teachers occur in that environment? Not much. Even in smaller, more intimate classrooms, most classroom time is devoted to "the lecture," with little time left for questions and student-teacher exchanges. Excellent teacher-to-student interaction is more the exception than the rule.

With many online programs, evidence suggests that there are actually more opportunities for collaboration. Students can become part of a highly connected online community that includes friends and faculty from all over the country. Everyone is connected and everyone is encouraged to participate. Students get customized instruction and one-on-one teacher feedback. Through e-mail and discussion groups, students can stay in close contact with classmates and counselors, and build lasting relationships.

Furthermore, online learning can allow faculty to change their focus and become even more valuable to students. They can concentrate less on delivering lectures and devote more time to interacting personally with students—reviewing assignments, advising, tutoring and answering questions.

### **Myth #3 – Online learning is only good for certain types of students.**

FACT: Several million students will take an online course this year. Young and old. Men and women. Computer novices and computer experts. Casual learners and rocket scientists. City dwellers and country folks. Distance education has evolved to the point where it's so easy and intuitive that almost anyone can benefit from it.

Women and men who never had access to advanced education can now learn from the comfort of home, sitting in their favorite easy chair. Mothers with young children can learn while baby naps. People with full-time jobs who can't fit traditional classroom schedules into work and family life can learn a new career at times most convenient to them. Students who might have trouble keeping up in a traditional course can learn at their own pace and graduate instead of dropping out. Shy individuals who are uncomfortable speaking out in the classroom may feel free to be active online participants.

There's also evidence to suggest that online learning may be a better environment in which to learn for minority students. According to Dr. Benjamin Akande, dean of Webster's School of Business and Technology, online programs are beneficial to minority students because they are able to express themselves freely and openly. "I really believe that online learning is the biggest equalizer of all," states Akande. "The intimidation factor is non-existent. It's an equal playing field, where everyone comes to the table truly poised and committed to learn."

Perhaps most significantly, online learning means education is no longer a one-time event that ends at age 18 or 22. To remain competitive in today's global economy, America is becoming a nation of lifelong learners. Online learning makes it possible. Developing the expertise to be able to learn online will be an important life skill in the future. Having this skill will give you an advantage in the marketplace.

### **Myth #4 – Online learning is only good for certain types of subjects.**

FACT: This may still be true in some areas like engineering or certain sciences that require expensive calibrated equipment or laboratory equipment. However, even this will change over time due to advancements in computer simulations.

Today you'll find robust online programs in such diverse subjects as nursing, medicine, MBA's, teacher education, and even Ph.D. programs. Furthermore, even subjects that no one ever imagined could be taught online—such as personal training—are now available via distance education. There's even an online law school!

### **Myth #5 – Employers don't value web-based learning as highly as traditional classroom learning.**

FACT: While this might have been true a few years ago, it's certainly less and less of the case today. Especially since so many companies and health care providers are relying on the Internet for their own internal training. A 2005 survey by Eduventures showed that 62% of employers believe the quality of web-based learning is equal or superior to classroom-based learning.

According to Dr. Pamela Chandler-Lee, the associate dean of Regent University, employers today are

less concerned about whether a degree was earned online and more about the reputation of the school. They've discovered that online education is probably a bit more challenging than classroom-based learning.

What's more, employers value the success traits more commonly found in online students: independence, maturity, discipline, self-motivation, time management and goal orientation. Dr. Benjamin Akande, the Ph.D. from Webster's School of Business and Technology, asserts that it takes a committed student to succeed in an online environment.

"Those students that have the strength and capacity to successfully go through those online delivery processes are disciplined and know how to work through the confines of planned education," he states, adding that students who must balance work, life and school responsibilities often do well with online courses.

### **Myth #6 – Online learning is a quick and easy way to get a degree.**

**FACT:** Don't be misled by the few unethical "diploma mills" that promise quick, easy degrees and damage distance learning's reputation. These programs are not accredited (further evidence why you should never attend an institution that lacks accreditation), and do not reflect the high quality standards of most distance education programs. Generally, the evidence is that online students take longer, read more, write more and do more research than the same classroom student does.

Dr. Denise DeZolt, provost of Walden University, has noticed that graduate students who earned their undergraduate degrees at traditional schools are often surprised at how rigorous online learning can be. "It's not uncommon for a student to come to us and say, 'I thought this was supposed to be easy. I think it's even harder than a land-based brick and mortar institution,'" DeZolt states.