Pros and Cons of Online Education

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Introduction

The term of online was not very appealing in 1970s and 1080s just like an airplane in the beginning of the 20th century. Internet was in development stage in early 1990s compared to now and the conventional wisdom about the online courses was different in 1990s than today. We are in the 21st century where everything is possible and acceptable. For example, students are studying at home/work place utilizing computer which is called online schooling/learning.

There are several factors contributing the growth of online enrollment including the following:

- Younger people are choosing non-traditional education to start and advancing in their careers while completing and furthering their education.
- Severe recession of 2008 has created poor economic situations where people are upgrading/changing their career through online educational/training programs.

Online method of education can be a highly effective alternative method of education for the students who are matured, self-disciplined and motivated, well organized and having high degree of time management skills, but it is an inappropriate learning environment for more dependent learners and has difficulty assuming responsibilities required by the online courses.

The Boston-based consulting firm Eduventures, Inc.(2006) found that about half of institutions and more than 60 percent of employers generally accept the high quality of online learning, but students' perceptions differ. Only about 33 percent of prospective online students said that they perceive the quality of online education to be "as good as or better than" face-to-face education. At the same time, 36 percent of prospective students surveyed cited concern about employers' acceptance of online education as a reason for their reluctance to enroll in online courses.

Varieties of online educational methods have been developed, but the potential students should consider some identifiable factors common to all types before enrolling in any course/program. Generally all these factors are not applicable to every online learning situation, but they do apply to most. You as a student should more closely examine the online programs that most interest you and be sure that the program fits your life, career needs and job.

As an educator, your approach to this new paradigm might be with varying degree of enthusiasm and/or concern. Ask yourself a few questions:

- Are you optimistic or skeptical about Online learning?
- Are you interested in knowing how delivering courses online can improve your teaching and offer excellent learning opportunities for your students?
- Do you want to know what you will be up against as you plan and deliver your classes online?

It is critical to consider both the pros and cons of online learning so you can be better prepared to face the challenge of working in this new environment and embrace the new opportunities that it has to offer, and that is its Strengths and Weaknesses. The following is a good listing of these pros and cons of online education:

Online Education Pros: Can be divided into four groups.

- *Convenience*
- *Less Expensive*
- *Technology*
- *Additional Benefits*

Convenience: This convenience is in relation to study location, time, course duration, etc.

- No commuting/traveling time to a campus
- No geographic location constraint in selecting the learning option(s)
- No learning pace constraint, you can learn at your pace and study at your convenience
- No verbally expressing constraint, you can express yourself in writing rather than verbally
- You can have virtual discussion rather instructor-led lecture
- Course work and instructions can highly be customized to your field and subject area
- High quality dialog: Learner is able to carefully reflect his/her quality thinking on each comment from others before responding or moving on to the next topic.
- Student centered: Students are expected to read all of their classmates' contributions, but they may actively engaged only in those parts of the contribution most relevant to their needs.
- Access to resources: It is easy to include guest experts or students from other institutions as well as access to resources and information around the world.

Less Expensive: Generally these courses cost less than regular classroom academic or trade school course.

- No travel and housing costs to classroom
- Class attendee can continue to work at his/her job while taking classes

Technology: You can work on the course just about anywhere you have computer access. Online courses provide an opportunity to learn new technologies and practicing the use of office software, Internet, etc.

Additional Benefits: There are numerous additional benefits.

- You will work with classmates not only from all over the U. S. but could be around the world.
- No discrimination among students due to race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, age, dress, physical appearance, etc.
- Equal participation from all classmates and the most outgoing student will not monopolize the discussion.
- These courses are better for those people who are introverted as well as who learn through visual cues and require more time in understanding the material.
- No immigration problems
- Synergy: High level of dynamic interaction between the instructor and students as well as among the students themselves. Ideas and resources are shared, and continuous synergy will be generated through the learning process as each individual contributes to the course discussions and comments on classmates' work.
- Creative teaching: In the adult education class with the interactive learning environment may contribute to self-direction and critical thinking. Especially the nature of the semi-autonomous and self-directed world of the virtual classroom makes innovative and creative approaches to instruction even more important.

Online Education Cons: Can be divided into four groups

- ***Limited Social Interaction***
- ***Technology Cost and Scheduling***
- ***Effectiveness of Assessments***
- ***Problematic for Instructors***

Limited Social Interaction: There is a limited opportunities to interact face-to-face to professors and other students.

- Especially in self-paced courses – difficult to develop relationships with classmates
- Possibility of limited local networking opportunities
- Most of the communication through e-mail, chat room or discussion groups, but no offline get-together
- No personalized attention from instructor with regards to face-to-face interactions and feedbacks
- No campus atmosphere to create social interaction

Technology Cost and Scheduling: Some of the key elements are –

- Computer boot-up time, software programs, and connection to Internet
- Students may be required to learn new or enhanced computer and troubleshooting skills
- Additional cost of high-speed Internet
- Log into your class while at work (unless your employer permits you to complete your course work at the office)
- Plan and adjust your studying schedule around instructor's assignment due date. For example, east coast versus west coast in the U.S., International course or student, etc.

- If a student is scheduling to study in the night then he/she will have to wait for response from the instructor or classmates by next day

Effectiveness of Assessment: Most educators agree that memory testing is not the best measure of learning in any environment, but classroom tools are difficult to apply. It is difficult to measure program results. Question remains: are students learning what instructor is saying that they should be learning?

Problematic for Instructors: As software is getting more and more advanced, instructors are constantly trying to learn how to keep up.

- Traditional instructors believing in lectures and handouts may have tough time in adopting the system and software.
- Student must be self-motivated and disciplined to progress through his/her program in a timely manner

Summary

The facts are that there are advantages and disadvantages to every type of learning environment. Students have to analyze both the pros and cons factors which contribute greatly to making an informed decision about the direction of his/her career path. Students have to decide, how they are going to accomplish their goals: online, in the classroom or a combination of both.

However, in some situations the inconvenience of maintaining a consistent school schedule prohibits potential students from furthering their education. It is also true that learning is highly dependent on the individual's motivation to learn. So the bottom line is that the efforts any student puts into their education that eventually determines how much he/she will retain and how beneficial the overall experience was to his/her future career.