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Problems with Online Education

Throughout the twenty-first century, students’ and educators’ view of education in the United States has dramatically changed. Formal education in the United States, which began during the mid-seventeenth century and continues up to the present time, has been consistently taught in a traditional setting (Gelbrich). To condense traditional education into a few words, it is an education style that emphasizes direct instruction, includes lectures, covers multiple subjects, and involves students working in a classroom while all being taught the same material (Gelbrich). In contrast, online educationrecently began to arise and was introduced in the United States during the 1960s (Smarty).TheBabson Survey Research Group states that“…over 5.6 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2009 term; an increase of nearly one million students over the number reported the previous year[…]”(Allen andSeaman). Therefore, in the United States there is an increasing amount of students beginning to take online courses.However, there are still many problems with online education that must be resolved before online education can be equal in value compared to traditional schooling. Although online education has many positive characteristics, it lacks credibility, provides little or no opportunities for social learning with educators or students, and creates problems with scheduling in real time.

Online education, when compared to traditional schooling, lacks the credibility needed for job employment. In 2013, competition is rising in the work force and obtaining a degree is vital for one’s success. The question that seems to surface is whether a degree obtained at an online institution is credible or not. To answer the question, many universities have completed collaborative studies with many employers on the issue of online education’s credibility. For example, Calvin D. Fogle, of Western Governors University, and Devonda Elliott, Doctoral Candidate of University of the Rockies, did a collaborative research study comparing graduates from primarily online universities to graduates from non-online universities. The research question was “In your perception, which candidate would you hire? (All candidates possess equivalent experience and degree) (100% On-Campus, 100% Online, or Hybrid (50% Online, 50% On-Campus)” (Fogleand Devonda). Of the results, just over half, 50.1%, sided with the 100% on-campus, 36.5% sided with the hybrid, and only 12.6% sided with the 100% online (Fogle and Devonda). These facts begin to show how many employers do not have enough trust in the online schooling system and view this form of education as non-credible. In addition, the University of Oklahoma did a research study in 2006, and each employer was asked to choose between two hypothetical applicants. The first applicant had an online degreeand the second applicant had a traditional degree; the candidate with the traditional degree was chosen by 96% of respondents (Seibold). Thus, to employers, online education is not comparable to a traditional on-campus education or degree.

Another problem with online education is that it limits social learning due to the lack of face-to-face interactions with educators and other students. To illustrate, Texas A&M University-Commerce did a study including females and male students to compare online test scores with face-to-face live interaction test scores. The total number of students involved was 234, and the course of study was a junior-level business economics course. After gathering all of the facts, Texas A&M University stated in their conclusion that “When comparing online and face-to-face scores overall, without taking into consideration gender, live face-to-face course, students scored significantly better than online students” (Flanagan). This is a clear example of how a student’s success can be affected by the lack of face-to-face interactions with educators. Furthermore, many students feel that taking classes online is much easier because they can work at their own pace and because ofits convenience. This is not the case because without the opportunity to interact socially with other students and educators as in a traditional or conventional classroom setting, one must read the lectures on one’s own instead of simply taking notes in a face-to-face interaction. In addition, while moving through an academic career, some students may have questions that need answers or clarification for problems that cannot be solved without seeking others’ help. This is not an option for students taking an online class, and there are no students to lean on in class to answer these questions. Contacting a professor is near impossible when taking an online class, and, depending on the class size, it may not even be an option.

Alongside the lack of face-to-face interaction with educators and students, online education also creates problems with scheduling in real time. For instance, students need to contact professors by email to inform them that in the coming weekthey will be going on a business trip and now desire to reschedule an exam. However, the professor’s reply to the email maybe two days late. The time has already passed and the answer is useless now. As another example, in the article “The Pros and Cons of an Online College Education”, it states, “When you have a question, you're trapped waiting for answers via e-mail or student forums” (Poisse). Therefore, the difficulty of contacting a professor is being replaced with student forums that essentially do not add up to the quality of direct contact with an instructor. This begins to create problems with scheduling within the deadlines of online courses. As another example, Jon Kolko in the article “Problems with Online Learning” states, “When working through a problem in real-time, the content acts as the mediator between teacher and student”. Thus, when problems or questions arise, the professors lean toward a source of content and never give the opportunity for an easy line of communication, disrupting the students’ scheduling in real time.

The opposing side believes that online education provides convenience for many students’and is less expensive compared to traditional schooling. By students having the opportunity to study in their home or anywherethey can connect to the Internet, it helps the students by eliminating the stress of driving to certain locations, worrying about being late or on time, and sitting in classrooms for long periods of time. To illustrate, Keystone University said, during an interview“Online courses are delivered over the Internet and can be accessed from a computer with a Web browser (ex. Internet Explorer)” (“Online Learning Defined”). Furthermore, all classes can be accessed through the Internetwithout driving to an on-campus school. Likewise, because online education does not have large fees from maintaining a large campus and its classrooms, it is able to pass the savings onto students of all ages. For example, North Central University states, “…because an online university does not have the fees of maintaining a large campus and its classrooms, it is able to pass the savings onto students of all ages” (“Online Education Versus”). Hence, students are able to save money compared to a traditional school where all of the original fees remain. While these statements are true, when analyzed in depth many problems begin to surface. To illustrate, as already explained, students have little-to-no communication with a professorwhile taking an online course. Throughout the semester or even the school year, one will definitely come to a point where direct connection between student and teacher is necessary. Fitting this into a busy instructor’s schedule is anything but convenient. Secondly, while money can be saved with online education, having to provide one’s own technology, for example, a laptop or desktop computer, to participate in an Internet coursecan be costly. There are a few online institutions that are very expensive. For instance, Devry University ranks as one of the most expensive online schooling programs and is priced at 609 dollars per semester credit hour (Schuessler). Depending on the amount of classes one chooses to take, this can add up quickly and be just as expensive as a traditional school, if not more so.

Henceforth, there are some solutions to these problems that can improve the quality and efficiency of online education, bettering it for many current students and the ones to come. One solutioncould be for online institutions to create large conference meetings or gatherings via online programs that could accompany many students at one time; this provides the perfect opportunity for questions and answers from professor to student with the additional convenience of not having to traveling to the campus and being able to broadcast worldwide. Although there are already programs created that can create conference meetings, they cannot accompany large groups of students without malfunctioning. As a result, if this was created by the online universities or institutions, it would attract students looking to apply and possibly entice universities to all allow online degrees to be obtained, thus making online education extremely credible and equal to traditional residential education. By attempting to solve these minor issues, online education would soon be the new form of education due to the Internet’s massive amounts of influence in the twenty-first century.

To conclude, although online education has many positive characteristics, it lacks many things, including credibility and face-to-face interactions, andits riddled with scheduling problems. Online education has come far, but it must continue to grow and repair its flaws before it is compared side-by-side with accredited universities. Many employers still do not see the two types of education as equal. Another one of the major points is that without face-to-face interactions, students tend to struggle a lot and must be very independent workers, be well-organized, and require very little assistance when completing new material. Without being able to reach out to the professor and being limited to a student forum, students have difficulty finding proper information. Lastly,real-time scheduling is completely out of the question due to limited contact with theinstructors via email.In addition, time scheduling is just too difficult when relying solely on an email that may not be answered. As can be seen, online education has many drawbacks or negatives and must be improved. Although there are many positive claims about online education, in fact it still remains that traditional or conventional education gives students the best opportunity for success in the United States, and until changes are made, continuing to attend school on-campus is a student’s best options. Technology is always improving and growing in new directions to better the world and provide opportunities that were never imagined, but with the new technologies comes the unknown, and until the unknowns of online education are discovered, it will lack the consistency of a traditional brick and mortar school.

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