

Benefits and Challenges for the Online Learner

By: Prof. Héctor Álvarez-Trujillo

Technology has become the key to a new world of education. Online learning has become one of the most popular ways of gaining access to an education (Lewis 2005), especially to growing demand of an adult population that is trying going back to school. The reality is that because of technology the world we live today is much different than the one our kids live just 20 years ago. Our generation went from the time of the *'Eight Track*, leap to the times of the *Walkman, CD player, VHS and DVD.*' etc. But today's world is belongs to the *'i Pod, text messaging, Wiki's, Facebook and Blogs'* generation. These speedy changes have forced everyone, peoples or institutions to make immediate changes. Education institutions are too trying to pull alongside to these changing technological time. Consequently, these Institutions have not only changed their programs, curriculums, and offers; re-toll their faculty, etc., in order to facilitate access to a good education. Online learning offers new educational possibilities to all potential students: *"If you can't go to school, we'll send the school to you."* (Dwyer, Barbieri, and Doerr, 1995). In this essay we'll explore the benefits as well as the challenges posed by Online Learning might be to those looking for an education.

The rewards of online learning are too many to catalog in a short essay, so I'll mention the two I consider to be fundamental, mainly because they directly contradict the traditional educational model. The first benefit I will mention is the lack of physical setting and a time schedule. With online learning, if you can get your hand on a computer connected to the Internet, no matter what you do or where you are, you can get to class on time. (Coleman 2005). In this more true for the new older adult population that works full time, have a family and wants to get a college education. Traditional educational settings will give access to a courses and it's the materials at certain periods of time. After the school's building is close, you will not be able to have access most of the materials you need. And here is the second benefit of online learning, the student will be able to get in touch with all materials concerning a course at the time deemed more convenient him/her. *"When course content and activities are*

provided online, students no longer need to worry about accessing course materials."¹ Study or do you work when ever is more suitable to you, or when you may fell that you could be more creative or productive.

On the other side, online learning has also it challenges. One of the most important and direct contrast with traditional education, is having no set times for classes and no assign physical place to go. This means that if the student is not well discipline and can managed time in a reasonable manner, he or she might not be able to cope with the work. Another challenge posed by online learning is the comparability of the materials they'll use, text books, and others, etc. The instructor has to make sure that the materials being used in the online course equals in quality the traditional one and that it has been well adapted to the online course. (Li & Irby 2008). Lastly, probably the biggest challenge posed by online learning could be technology, at this might affect older adults even more. The problem may arise when the students' technological capabilities or training might not be enough to do what's expected. (Li & Irby 2008). Or in the other hand, if the student's equipment does not meet the technological requirements need it; it will not be able to work efficiently.

Finally, although getting an education is a very important requisite in today's world, is clear that this decision has to be well planned. This essay has only showed a small view of a complex subject matter. Before making a decision, the student has to look at both models of learning, *traditional* and *online*; balanced out all pros and cons and choose the program that meets his/hers expectations, needs and competence.

¹ *Educational Benefits of Online Learning*. Thomas Jefferson University. (2008).
http://www.strayer.edu/online_benefits

References

- Aguilar, Joe. *Navigating the Obstacles of Online Learning*. September 22, 2008, from, <http://www.bachelordegrees.net/onlinelearning/learning-online.asp>
- Chi-Sing, L. & Irby, B. *An overview of Online Education: Attractiveness, Benefits, Challenges, Concerns and Recommendations*. Retrieved, September 22, 2008, from HWWilson Database.
- Coleman, Stephanie. *Compelling Arguments for Attending a Cyber Classroom: Why do Students Like Online Learning?* Retrieved, September 22, 2008, from, <http://www.worldwidelearn.com/education-articles/benefits-of-online-learning.htm>
- Offerman, Michael J. *The Other 85 percent: Working adults and new world of higher education*. Retrieved, September 22, 2008, from, <http://www.theother85percent.com/?p=23>
- Online vs. On-Campus Learning in Teacher Education. *Teacher Education and Special Education* 26 no2 98-105 Spr 2003. Retrieved, September 20, 2008, from HWWilson Database.
- Trentin, Guidlelmo. *E-Learning and Teaching Quality*. Retrieved, September 20, 2008, from HWWilson Database.