Not Yet Sold: What Employers and Community College Students Think About Online Education

A Taking Stock Report

September 19, 2014
We’re nonprofit and nonpartisan, and we help people navigate divisive, complex issues.

Through research and engagement, we provide people with the insights and support they need to arrive at workable solutions on these issues, regardless of their differences.

We work on lots of issues, but higher education is a big one.

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This Report

- Spring 2013
- Opinion research on the views of employers and students
- Funded by The Kresge Foundation
The Trends Are Clear

- More students are taking online classes

Percentage of students taking at least one class online

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3 Million Students Earning Degrees Online
In 2003, 57% of Chief Academic Officers said outcomes of online ed were the same as or superior to face-to-face.

By 2012, that number had increased to 77%.
But Faculty Are Skeptical

Only **15%**

Of faculty who have not taught an online course say they can achieve outcomes at least equivalent to in-person courses.
65% of online program graduates say their program was a worthwhile financial investment.
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31% say it was “somewhat” worthwhile.
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31% say it was “somewhat” worthwhile.

Just 4% say their program wasn’t worth it.
Diversity of Online Education
Online Education: Rapidly Evolving

As more people are exposed to more diverse forms of online learning...

...opinions are likely to change and develop quickly.
Employers

- What do they think of online education?
- How do they view applicants who completed their education online?
Community College Students

• Do they consider themselves well served by online education?

• Do they think they’re getting the same or a better learning environment?
Online Education: Rapidly Evolving

How must online education evolve...

...to best serve students and future job applicants?
Methodology

• Employer Telephone Survey
  • 656 HR professionals
  • Regionally representative
  • 50+ employees
  • Hiring for position that require post-secondary credential
  • Spring 2013
  • Private, public and not-for-profit sector
Some Facts About These Employers

23% have taken an online class.

76% say their company supports online professional development for their employees.
Most believe there is a niche for online education, especially for older students.

Percent of employers who say the following statement comes somewhat or very close to their views:

- Online-only degrees and certificates provide real opportunities for...
  - older students to get valuable college credentials: 80%
  - younger, first-time college students to get a high-quality education: 50%
Many feel online programs require extra discipline from students.
At the same time, many remain skeptical of the quality of online programs compared to traditional ones.
Most would prefer a job applicant with a traditional degree from an average school over an applicant with an online degree from a top university.
Views of Employers

Most view hybrid programs as better than online-only programs.

Percent of employers who say the following statement comes close or not close to their views:

- Hybrid programs that involve a mix of online and in-person instruction give students a better education than online-only programs.
  - Very or somewhat close: 82%
  - Not too or not at all close: 13%
Methodology

• Student Survey
  • 215 community college students
  • RDD telephone surveys and online panels
  • Spring 2013
  • Weighted against known demographics; propensity score matching
  • Margin of error of weighted data: +/- 7.9%
Some Facts About These Students

94% are working toward a credential.

6% are taking classes but not looking to graduate.
Most agree online classes require more discipline from students.
Views of Students

But they are split on whether online classes teach students the same or less than in-person classes.
Many say online classes are harder
Views of Students

About half take classes online
Views of Students

Though many wish they took fewer classes online.

Percent of community college students who:

- Want to take fewer classes online: 41%
- Want to take more classes online: 20%
- Say they are taking about the right amount online: 39%

Base: Community college students who are taking classes online.
What’s Next?

- **Employers:** Will they become more accepting?
What’s Next?

• **Students**: How can we ensure online education meets their diverse needs?
Thank You

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