

College Planning

College Degree Required For Sixty Percent Of U.S. Jobs By 2018 Four Factors To Consider When Contemplating An Online Degree

(NAPSA)—As a new year begins, we often evaluate our lives—where we are and where we'd like to be. It's no surprise that many Americans are making education a priority as they set their personal goals for 2012.

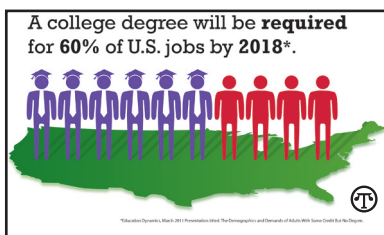
"The unemployment rate for people who have never gone to college is more than double what it is for those who have gone to college," says Dr. Mary Hawkins, president of Bellevue University. "And during the next 10 years, nearly eight in 10 new jobs will require workforce training or a higher education. These statistics make it clear that completing some form of higher education is the best tool to meet the challenges of a 21st century economy."

If you're considering going back to school, chances are you've wondered about online learning. Is it legit? Will I get the same quality education I would in a classroom? Will my degree be as respected as much as it would if I attended in person? The answer is, surprisingly, the same as with a traditional, in-class situation—there are varying levels of online degrees and you must do your research to find the best one for you.

Here are four factors you should consider if you're contemplating getting your degree online:

1. Just as with an in-class program, you want to make sure the institution you attend is regionally accredited. This designation is an indicator that the institution voluntarily reports on the quality of its programs and submits to assessment to ensure quality offerings.

2. Determine whether or not you must be online at a particular time each week; if you can enter the virtual classroom when it is most convenient for you. Based on your lifestyle, decide which of



these formats will best set you up for success. Maybe you have a hectic, unpredictable schedule and you need to do the work when you can fit it in. Or perhaps you are the kind of person who benefits most from a set time each week to attend class.

3. Online learning is still relatively young in higher education. Some institutions, like Bellevue University, have been offering online degree programs since the mid-'90s. It is important to make sure the school you choose has had time to optimize its online offerings.

4. Ask if the entire degree program is offered online or if it is just one component of the larger program. Some universities require both online and in-class participation within the same program. If you are interested in this type of blended program, make sure you ask how much content is delivered online and how much is delivered in class so that you can plan how you are going to fit the components into your life.

Lastly, please know that when you reach your goal, your degree will not indicate whether you studied online or in class. You don't need to worry about perceptions from those who still doubt online learning. What's most important is determining if earning your degree can get you to where you want to go and if online learning is the best way to fit getting a degree into your already busy life.