

## Five Critical Points To Consider When Choosing Online Degree Programs

The Internet and other technological advances have made distance learning a viable option for many people otherwise unable to further their education. Choosing which online degree program to participate in, however, is still a difficult decision. How can a person be sure their tuition and time will not go to waste? Will employers recognize the degree? Here are a few things to ask when investigating whether or not an online school is reputable:

**Accreditation:** A diploma from an online degree program is generally viewed as equal to a diploma received from a traditional school. However, this is not necessarily true if the online school is not accredited by a regional association. It is important to investigate before beginning any online degree program whether or not the school is accredited. Be aware that there are some sketchy accreditation organizations out there as well. There are online programs that create bogus accreditations simply to prey on unsuspecting students. In the United States, the Council for Higher Education is the agency that oversees all legitimate accrediting agencies.

**Track Record:** It is important to take into consideration how long a school has been operating an online degree program. Well-established programs have had the experience of trial and error when it comes to their online curriculum. A recognizable and desirable university name does not necessarily mean that their online program is equally as distinguished.

Researching drop out rates is one way to measure an online degree program's success. If the program is unable to retain students, then it is most likely not reputable - no matter what university's name is attached to it.

**Class Size:** Even in the online classroom, the size of the class is an important factor. Most universities offering a low teacher to student ratio for their online degree programs display this fact prominently on their websites. While an online program can typically handle enrollment higher than a traditional classroom, there is a limit to how many students can receive quality instruction from the faculty running the program. If a school is unable or unwilling to quote class size, then this may be a sign of a questionable online degree program.

**Teacher Certification and Training:** Teaching a course online and teaching in a traditional classroom are two totally different beasts. An amazing and dynamic college professor in person may not be able to translate that same enthusiasm through a computer screen. When considering an online degree program, find out if the teachers have been specially trained to teach their courses online. It is important to determine if the teachers are certified or experienced in their fields as well. Most reputable universities with online degree programs will list their teacher's certifications.

**Curriculum:** A well-designed online course is crucial to student success. This means that the course is well organized with clear goals and objectives. Online courses should give students the opportunity to interact with each other and become active learners. The course website content should be clear and easy to read. There should also be an adequate amount of technical support available and suitable flexibility for completing assignments.

Online degree programs are a wonderful way for today's busy students to receive a quality education from anywhere in the world. There are many incredible online degree programs available today offered by some of the nation's top colleges and universities. Choosing a reputable online degree program can quickly open the doors to career advancement, higher income, and a more satisfying career in an exciting new field.

### About the Author

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