

AZ Parenting Online Education Article

By Chris Marek

There are no more excuses: Online education blows open the doors of possibilities for busy adults who want to continue their education. Dreams of career advancement or re-careering, unimaginable to many before the onset of online education, are coming true for people worldwide.

Mattie Wheeler, a single mother and grandmother from Scottsdale, can no longer find a reason why she should **not** continue learning and advancing her career. It's all because of the way online education works.

“The flexibility of online education is what makes the difference,” says Mattie with a giggle of joyful pride. “It’s amazing how I take my lunch breaks and turn them into college credit hours.”

Online education is no longer in its preliminary development stage. It has proven to work for thousands of people, increasing their employment options and their value in the workplace along with the degrees that they earn.

University of Phoenix President Laura Palmer Noone, recently announced that their Online Campus, one of the largest in the world, has approximately 109,749 enrolled, with 73,098 undergraduate students, 34,615 graduate students and 2,036 doctoral students.

This is definitely not your mother's distance learning. The student, allied with the personal computer can experience how distance learning has advanced to a new and limitless level. According to the online education website www.elearners.com, there are currently 111 accredited online colleges and schools offering 838 degrees from associate degrees to doctorates.

An avid advocate of online education, Mattie will tell anyone interested about the impact that online education has had on her life and those watching her progress.

"Two years ago I was a psych technician at Banner Good Samaritan," Mattie said. "I wanted to take on more job responsibility and patient care and earn more money. My initial goal was to become a psych registered nurse so I went to my local community college.

Going to night classes several times a week, plus working full-time and parenting was too hectic. The science classes were difficult, too, making Mattie lag behind. She was struggling and discouraged.

After she looked into online education classes, checked accreditation standards and compared nursing programs, Mattie chose Rio Salado College Online and her employer, Banner Good Samaritan, approved the education program by reimbursing her for the classes.

From that point on, the online classes became a part of her life. Mattie studies on and off during her workweek making it fit in her schedule.

“Sometimes I learn at work during breaks and other times I learn at home, nights and Saturday mornings. But it’s not all the time.” she said. “The best part is that it’s at my time and pace.”

Tina Benally, wife and mother of two from Apache Junction, also found taking campus classes to be hectic and unproductive.

“For my accounting classes, I was attending the private business school in Gilbert and it made life really difficult at home and work,” said Tina.

“Taking online classes from the University of Phoenix has given me more balance and time management control. I work the weekday mornings in our home office for our construction business and in the afternoon I have time for my accounting classes. I love how I can switch gears quickly, turn around and have time for my family. Plus, there are no extra gasoline bills. It’s definitely a win-win situation,” she said.

When asked students asked if they prefer online learning to standard classroom attendance education, many students are remarking that they like the online education more.

Taking that first step to choosing the right online education organization is a crucial part of the initial decision-making process. There are numerous types of online education programs, referred to as “e-Learning” including instructor led, web based instruction and mentor supported. Each of these types may use a unique combination of delivery and collaboration technologies such as threaded discussion, video, or virtual classrooms. Consideration of the students’ learning style and situation and comparing it with the various types of “e-Learning” offered by the higher education organization is vital to finding a good match.

E-learners, Mattie and Tina cite the advantage of one-on-one attention from their instructors when taking online classes as compared to the standard classes. They also mentioned that there was free tutoring offered and there was even communication support from their classmates.

“My classmates are from all over the world and it’s so cool when they send you messages of support or feedback,” said Tina. “Sometimes, my classmates that live in the Valley meet at a coffeehouse, too. The camaraderie is awesome.”

Rio Salado College Coordinator of Academic and Transfer Advisement Rachelle Clark notes that the average e-learning student is 32 years old and her college is enrolling more females than males.

Rio Salado College, founded in 1978 as one of the first non-traditional “college without walls” is currently celebrating its 25th year as a distance learning pioneer. “We are all about being flexible for the student,” said Rachelle. “Rio Salado’s frequent start dates don’t follow traditional semester patterns. In fact, the majority of Rio Salado’s online classes have start dates that begin as often as every two weeks. This allows students to start a new class, complete it and move on to the next at their own speed and time.”

Online education programs have developed ways to continuously support the educational needs of the student at all times. “Having someone to help me is such a relief, ” said Mattie. “When I run into trouble I can “Beep a Tutor” seven days a week at no additional charge.”

The “Beep the Tutor” program, develop by Rio Salado was the nations first.

When it comes to testing procedures online students receive a variety of methods depending on the subject. In most cases, the tests are delivered in the same manner the homework does with online instruction. Time limits are usually required.

Instructors rely on the honesty of the online student to complete the test without assistance. E-learning students understand fully that they only cheat themselves if they are not committed to doing their own work.

Choices for higher education with online education degrees are vast ranging from health and medicine to law and justice, art and design to science and technology. The list goes on and on.

For instance, a subject as challenging and visual as chemistry is offered online.

“Getting credit for that type of class was a big deal to me, “ said Mattie.

“A few times we did have to go to a lab workshop to complete the assignments but other than that the class was all covered online. I couldn’t believe it. It was great to see that I could do it.”

Completing the class and receiving the degree has rewards. It is proven that when education levels are increased monetary increases follow. Median annual earnings for year-round, full-time workers with bachelor's degrees are about 60 percent higher than earnings for those with only a high school diploma, according to the *Trends in College Pricing - The College Board, 10/24/02*

Getting in the right online education program and staying with it is the key. University of Phoenix reports approximately 65 percent of students who remain enrolled after the third online class, graduate from University of Phoenix Online.

This past May, Mattie proudly put on her Royal Blue Rio Salado College graduation robe and received her online education Associate of Arts Degree in General Studies. From that education achievement, she received a promotion at her job and is earning more and enjoying her career more as a Case Management Technician.

The next step for her is to take the Research Coordinated Program through Gateway's Online College, which on completion brings her one-step closer to her career goal of becoming a Research Registered Nurse.

E-learners, like Mattie and Tina are finding the degrees earned are part of the education package. They are also earning respect from those watching them achieve their goals.

“My daughter, 21 and son, 17 say I have inspired them to set more education goals. And my mom, who is retired, starting taking online education classes, as well.

Many limits have been erased with online education leaving the e-learning student free to make the toughest decision of all: “What do I want to be?”

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