

7 Myths About Online Education



While many students assume online learning is easy, it can actually be quite challenging, experts say.

Online education is becoming commonplace. About 5.3 million U.S. students took at least one online course in fall 2013, according to a [recent study](#). Yet, while [online education](#) is growing in popularity, myths and misconceptions abound. Below, experts separate the fact from fiction.

Myth 1: Online education is easy. It's [not easier to earn a degree online](#) than in a traditional brick-and-mortar setting – just different, says Lynn Atanasoff, a career counselor at [Pennsylvania State University—World Campus](#). Students may have flexibility regarding when they study, but it also comes with challenges.

"At reputable institutions, students have to complete the same material as in-person, except they also have to really manage their time because online no one is reminding them when assignments or projects are due," she says.

Marci Grant, director of the Center for Distance and eLearning at [Southwestern Oklahoma](#)

[State University](#), agrees. "Online courses require more self-direction than a traditional course where face-to-face instructors are available," she said in an email.

Online education can also be quite labor intensive, requiring at least as much time as an on-campus course, Grant adds.

[See [how to tell a good online program from a bad one.](#)]

Myth 2: The quality is lower. While academic standards for online courses may vary from school to school, Grant says the [online faculty](#) and online courses at her institution go through a rigorous certification process to ensure they understand the academic standard that all online courses must meet.

In some cases, the instruction in an online class might be even better than in an on-campus course, says Ramin Sedehi, the director of Higher Education Consulting at the Berkeley Research Group.

"It requires the teachers to communicate differently," he says. "Some teachers suggest it forces them to think about effectiveness and engagement far more actively and makes them better teachers."

Myth 3: Online credits will not transfer to another school. Some students may have problems [transferring credits](#) regardless of whether they complete their study online or on campus, says professor Michael Bitter, chairman of the M.E. Rinker, Sr. Institute of Tax and Accountancy at [Stetson University](#).

"You sometimes see transferability issues with certain for-profit institutions or with certain types of courses/programs," he wrote in an email.

In many cases, Bitter says, an institution would have no way of knowing whether a course they are considering for transfer credit was taken in a classroom, online or some combination of the two.

Overall, though, he says credits from online programs are not any harder to transfer than on-campus credits.

Myth 4: Online courses are not accredited. As with traditional courses, accreditation may vary from school to school. But a fair number of online programs are accredited. "If a student attends an unaccredited school, credits may not transfer, federal and state financial aid may not be available and employers may not recognize their credentials," says Christine Broeker, interim executive director of eLearning at Seminole State College

of Florida.

[Understand [how to tell if an online program has the right accreditation.](#)]

She says students can turn to the Council of Higher Education Accreditation, which publishes [a list of recognized accrediting bodies](#) that evaluate colleges and universities.

Myth 5: Cheating is more common in online courses. [Cheating can occur with online courses](#), but experts say that is not more likely to happen with online courses than with traditional courses.

"There are websites that any student can use to have papers written for them," says Dani Babb, an online instructor and founder and CEO of The Babb Group. "Since online professors have tools to help them spot plagiarism, in some ways we have more defenses against this than traditional education where a student hands in a paper."

In addition to plagiarism detection software, some online programs require students to take a test at a physical location, or to use a webcam while completing an exam. In both cases, students need to show proof of identification.

Myth 6: Online students can't meet with the instructor. Although it might be impossible for students to physically be in the same place as their instructors, there are opportunities for meaningful interactions.

[Find out [how to tell if you have a bad online instructor.](#)]

"While students may not meet faculty in person, they do have the opportunity to interact with them, whether it be by phone, by e-mail, by Skype or during on-line chat sessions," Bitter says.

One way Bitter interacts with students is through online chat sessions, which are held twice a week when his course is in session. He also says that some [online faculty](#) have online office hours each week.



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Myth 7: Employers don't like online degrees. This may depend on the individual employer.

"Some employers, like the general population, hold positions on online education that tend to be rooted more in 1990 notions of online learning than on current trends and realities," says Marty Lawlor, director of the online executive MBA program at the Rochester Institute of Technology's [Saunders College of Business](#).

However, he says that in his experience, [employers will support employees](#) who are enrolled in programs that have unimpeachable academic credentials.

Some companies even sponsor online students. For example, last year, Starbucks announced that they would pay partial tuition expenses for employees enrolled in [Arizona State University's](#) online undergraduate program.

I believe this is more dependent on the reputation of the school delivering the program and the quality of the program itself," says Bitter.

Trying to fund your online education? Get tips and more in the U.S. News [Paying for Online Education](#) center.