

Your Complete Guide to Online Education

Five things you should know
about online learning in 2021.



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
ONLINE

1 Understand the gap between online education and improvised remote learning.

Beginning in March 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic gained momentum in the United States, schools across the country started closing their doors and shifting to remote learning.



By early April, millions of U.S. students became first-time online learners and thousands of teachers became first-time online instructors.

Young people across the nation got the chance to see what online education is all about. But this rapid shift didn't actually give them the full online learning experience. Far from it.

It's important to understand the differences between improvised remote learning and online programs that are carefully developed over the course of months. The quality of instructional design and curriculum delivery are simply not the same.

98%
of U.S. institutions
had moved the
majority of in-person
classes online, as of
April 2, 2020.

Source: educationdata.org

Fully Developed Online Course	Improvised Remote Course
Development Time: 6 - 24 months	Development Time: 1 - 3 weeks
Delivery Mediums: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-recorded and live video presentations• Interactive multimedia content• Audio recordings• Group message boards• Discussion forums• Video conferencing• Email• Chat	Delivery Mediums: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-recorded and live video presentations• Video conferencing• Email• Chat

2 The online student experience is actually better than ever.

Although “e-learning” has existed for more than 30 years, the technology used to create and deliver online education has evolved significantly over the last 10-15 years. Even by the late-2000s, most online classes consisted of pre-recorded lectures, assigned readings, papers, and proctored tests. Although this method of distance education gets the job done, it often fails to create highly engaging learning experiences.

Fortunately, modern technology makes it much easier for students to participate in collaborative online learning. Features like group discussion boards, video conferencing, and instant messaging allow students and faculty to connect regularly and easily. Contemporary learning management systems also make it easier for instructional designers to build online courses that are interactive, accessible, and impactful.



A 2018 study conducted by Learning House, Inc., showed 85% of students who had previously enrolled in both face-to-face and online courses felt their online experience was either the same or better than the classroom course.

Source: Forbes

What great online courses look like today:



Course content combines short video lectures, visual presentations, images, articles, case studies, data visualizations, and other interactive learning content.



Students collaborate through a variety of interactive applications, building relationships with peers and gaining communication skills as they learn.



Instructors and students have access to user-friendly communication and data-sharing tools.



Smaller class sizes and virtual office hours give students regular access to instructors.



Enhanced learning with modern technology and instructional design

As experts in both education and technology, instructional designers work closely with teachers to develop new online courses or transform face-to-face curricula into virtual lesson plans. Instructional designers often incorporate videos, motion graphics, charts and graphs, interactive quizzes, games, and other media to create a challenging but engaging learning experience.



"As instructional designers we collaborate with faculty to develop engaging, interactive content using technology and e-learning tools, to guide students towards achieving their academic goals. We create excellent active-learning experiences that include current content, professional videos, authentic assessments, and research-based best practices. Every course is reviewed before being released to ensure accessibility and quality, in service to the CSU community."

Megan H.

Instructional Designer at CSU Extended Campus

"There are important curricular, financial, accessibility, technical, and communication needs that influence how online courses should be designed. It's essential that instructors stay connected to their students by personalizing the learning experience as much as possible and frequently tracking how students are doing in relation to course engagement."

Chris LaBelle

AVP for Engagement and Extension and Senior Director for the CSU Extended Campus



3 Students expect more, and schools are listening.

Many of today's students are more selective when choosing an online degree program. This is a good thing because it forces institutions to:

Provide the flexibility students need

Adult learners value the flexibility and autonomy of online education, which allows them to balance academic, career, and family obligations.

Before you choose a program, take a close look at course delivery. Can you complete lessons on your schedule (asynchronous learning), or are you required to attend lessons in real-time (synchronous learning)? Some programs feature a combination of both.

Make online education more accessible to all

Today, many higher education institutions – especially larger colleges and universities – are much more aware of ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessibility standards. If you have a disability, be sure to ask if all course materials meet ADA standards before selecting a program of study.

Prioritize academic rigor *and* high-quality instruction

Curriculum and instructional design vary greatly from school to school. Before you enroll, ask if the institution you are applying to adheres to a specific quality control framework for online courses.

Colorado State University Online uses the [Quality Matters](#) framework.



“Every time I log into the computer, when I’m ready to do my school work, I feel like I’m in the classroom.”

Kim H.

Online Graduate Student at CSU

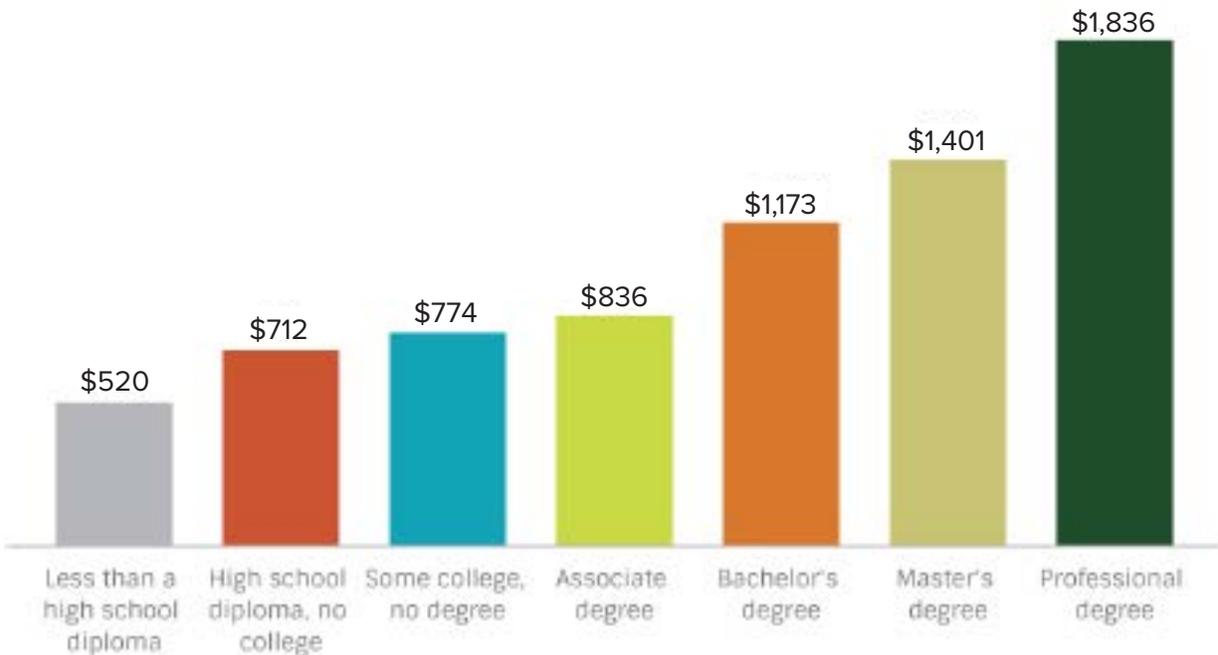
4

Having a college degree still matters.

Education level can have a significant impact on your ability to advance professionally or pursue a better career. Earning a degree doesn't just provide opportunities for professional development. It opens doors to impactful learning experiences and cutting-edge research.

Median weekly earnings by educational attainment in 2017

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



Benefits of continuing your education



Higher Average Salary

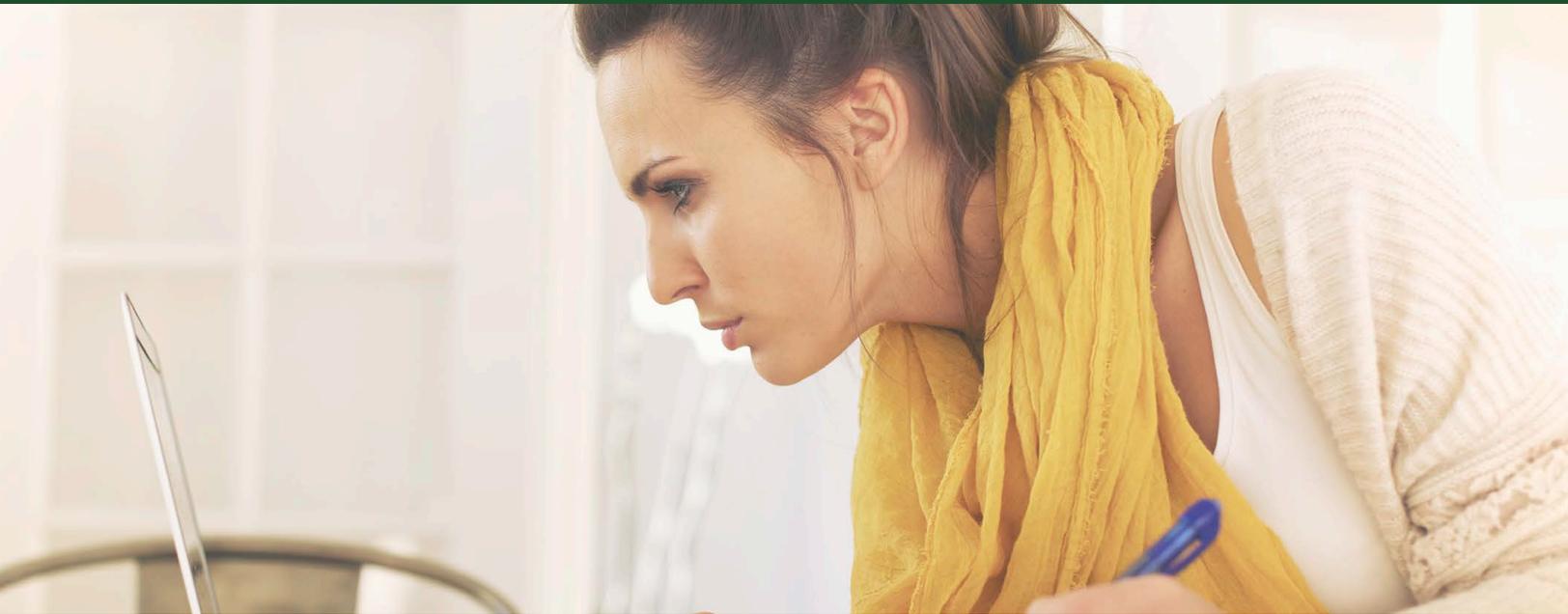


Advanced Knowledge



Personal Growth

5 How to choose and apply to an online degree program:



1. What do you want to do with your degree? Choose 1 - 2 careers you think would be right for you. If you're not sure, contact a few people who work in those careers and pick their brain, or talk with an academic counselor.

2. Find degree programs that match your career priorities. Research job descriptions and find programs that provide the skills and credentials you need. Look for programs that showcase both the learning experience and student outcomes.

3. Double check admission requirements and application deadlines. Make sure you read the "fine print" so you only apply to programs that will likely accept you based on your education level, GPA, and other criteria. Not sure if you meet the requirements? Contact the admissions office.

4. Once you narrow down your list, rank the programs you selected based on:

- Quality and reputation of the program and faculty
- Reputation of the college or university
- Career outcomes
- Student services and support
- Tuition cost and fees

5. Talk with a student success coach or admissions advisor before applying. They may offer some advice that could increase your chances of being accepted, or they may know of a similar program that will be a better fit based on your goals. A coach or advisor can usually provide details about financial aid availability, too.

6. Apply to your top 3 - 5 programs. Application fees can add up, but it's worth applying to a handful of programs so you have options. Make sure you apply well before the application deadlines to give yourself the best chance of getting accepted into the program(s) you really want.



Still on the fence about online learning? Talk with a student success coach about your educational goals.

At Colorado State University, nothing matters more to us than your success. When you contact us, we'll listen, learn, and help you find the *right* program for *you*.

Connect with a coach and find a program that can help you take the next step in your career.

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