

# Career Education and Liberal Arts Education: Benefits and Drawbacks, Credit Transferability, and Online Degrees

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## Abstract

In a time of economic recession, many working adults pursue higher education. Those looking to go back to school must consider the benefits and disadvantages of both Career Education and Liberal Arts Education options. Transferability of credits earned, financial commitment, and the increase of online education are correspondingly discussed.

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Many working adults choose to go back to school. On the topic of furthering one's education, an important issue to consider is what type of education will bring the most rewards and the widest chances of employment. The following will examine the topics of both Career Education and Liberal Arts Education options. Within these institutions, the transferability of credits earned, costs involved, and the increased use and implementation of online education platforms will be discussed.

Traditionally, Career Education has provided a more immediate entrance into the job market than a Liberal Arts education. In 2007, the National Center for Educational Statistics stated that, in the United States, 385,530 people earned career and technical certificates, which took less than a year to complete (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, and Ginder, 2008). This can be appealing for mid-career adults managing work and family responsibilities (Neff, and Whithaus, 2008). In many cases, they are more affordable than a four-year Liberal Arts degree. Many career and technical certificate programs cost less in tuition and can be completed without needing a student loan, providing financial incentive to students to forego accumulating debt (Mitchell-Bentley, 2011). Career Colleges often have fewer course requirements. Degree coursework is generally focused towards trade-specific subject matter. One often does not have to take additional elective classes outside of their degree focus, but rather the classes that teach the skills needed for their career of choice.

Possible drawbacks of Career Education programs are that they typically focus only on specific skills necessary for certain positions. Students enrolled in these programs generally are not instructed in a wider-range of subjects and are limited to a certain type of employment. By comparison, a Liberal Arts education requires more

time to complete, costs significantly more, and provides the student with a wider knowledge of subject matter.

Advantages of a Liberal Arts education are that many occupations currently prefer one to have a four-year degree with no preference given for a specific field of study. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that only 55 percent of bachelor's degree holders are employed in their specific field of study and are more likely to be considered for promotions (Dohm, and Wyatt, 2002). The benefit of a Liberal Arts education is that it exposes students to a wide variety of disciplines, teaches them how to think both critically and creatively, and provides them with a wide range of skills that can be applied to a large spectrum of the job market. A Liberal Arts degree affords one more opportunities for employment in multiple industries. Possible drawbacks to a Liberal Arts education are that the skills one learns may not be specific enough for what employers are looking for (Daggett, 2008).

When considering advancing one's education, an important topic to consider is the transferability of credits earned to other schools and whether to attend classes in a physical classroom or in a virtual online setting. All reputable schools have some sort of accreditation. Regional accreditation is important. Major universities, private or public, plus community and technical colleges will hold regional accreditation. Courses taken at regionally accredited schools will transfer to other regionally accredited schools. It is difficult to transfer credits one has earned from a non-regionally accredited school (Smith, 2010). Even if a student receives a Bachelors degree from a non-regionally

accredited school, they might be unable to transfer their credits earned into a regionally accredited school to pursue a Masters or PhD program.

With the advancements of virtual learning platforms, the trend of pursuing education online has grown. More learners now desire flexibility in program structure to accommodate families, full-time jobs, and learning styles (Neff, and Whithaus, 2008). The Online Learning Consortium reported in 2004 that more than 2.35 million students enrolled in online higher education courses in the United States (Allen, and Seaman, 2006). With this growth in online enrollments, many institutions acknowledge that within the decade there will be more students than they will be able to accommodate (Howell, Williams, and Lindsay, 2003).

Student enrollments will surpass the capacity of traditional higher education models. Funding challenges are of concern for schools offering online programs. Most of the expense goes towards Internal Technology staffing. The cost associated with quality online learning programs can equal, if not exceed, the cost per-student of a traditional classroom (Howell, Williams, and Lindsay, 2003). The Chronicle of Higher Education states that enrollment in online colleges has grown faster than traditional models. For example, in February 2010, the University of Phoenix was the country's second largest higher-education institution, with 455,600 students enrolled (Wilson, 2010). With the growth of online learning, the question of its effectiveness is a consideration. At the present moment, academic achievement online verses the traditional classroom models have shown mixed reviews on student satisfaction (Kim, and Bonk, 2006).

In summation, there are pros and cons to Career Education and Liberal Arts Education. Adults looking to advance their education have more options and flexibility than ever before. They must consider the time and financial commitment involved, the transferability of credits, and if they wish to learn in a physical or online classroom. The current state of higher education is experiencing a dramatic shift in the learning options they offer the students they enroll. With all of these learning options, pursuing higher education, no matter which kind, continues to show employers that one is responsible, can manage priorities, and can meet deadlines.

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