



Learn How to Choose the Best Online College for You

Description

The advancement of technology allows a student to continue his studies virtually from the comfort of home.



The whole world is making the transition from physical learning to online education. Online schools, colleges, and universities are required in the wake of COVID-19. You will love to learn virtually through online programs. This is how you can choose the best online college for you.

1. Decide your major and degree program

The first step to choose the best online college is to select your major. Selecting a major can be hard. Some people are sure about their career for a long while others do not know even when they are about

to join the college. Students specialize in a subject of a specific area called a **major**. You have to study almost half the subjects of your major. **Minors** are those secondary fields which you have to study along with your major. Minors are not required for all degrees. These are steps that you can follow to choose the appropriate major for you.

Prefer in which you are interested Always prefer your interest while selecting your major. Figure out which subject you like and which you do not like in your high school. For this;

- You can make a list of things in which you are interested and you like doing in and outside class. This will take you to the majors of your interest. For example, you can choose graphic designing if you are interested in both arts and technology. You can choose biomedical fields if you like to help others and love doing research. Choose international business if you are interested in business and love to travel. Study economics if you are into banking.
- Consider your strengths and weaknesses to evaluate your inclination towards a major subject. Do not choose journalism if you cannot speak publicly with confidence. Avoid choosing mathematics if you are weak at calculations. But this does not mean you will live with your weakness throughout your life. You can build your shortcomings into your strengths by working on them. If you want to sing and you are not good at it, improve your skill by attending music classes. You will love this.
- Connect to career counselors to choose the best study area for you. You can also explore different internet sources and video interviews of professionals to make the best decision.
- After shortlisting subjects/study areas, make a list of career goals to specifically pick a subject from the list. Keep in mind the employment options and proceed accordingly. Specifying your career goals is important to choose the best online college for you.
- Select the best **degree program** according to your study area. Some students choose a two-year associate degree while other students select a bachelors' program. You can also select a joint degree that offers a combined bachelors' and a professional degree in less time. After selecting a major and degree program, search online colleges that are offering these degrees and make a list of good online colleges. Now you have to choose the best online college by excluding the choices according to the following criteria.

2. Investigate the accreditation status of online college

Accreditation is the official recognition of the institute from a federal/regional agency that permits attestation to confirm the credibility or competency of a particular institute. The accreditation of an educational institute provides value to its degree. A degree from an accredited online college can ensure the best career opportunities for you. Your career will be at risk if you are graduated from an unaccredited college. So, you have to learn how to investigate or check the accreditation status of an online college.

- Go to the website of the United States Department of Education (USDE) and search with online college name. You will be provided with the accreditation status of the respective college. You can also check the accreditation of the database of USDE.
- You can also investigate the accreditation status of online colleges by visiting listings of the Council

for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

Always keep in mind the difference between accreditation of institution and degree program.

Accreditation of educational institute This type of accreditation is provided to an educational institute as a whole. Specialized accreditation can be provided to different components of the institute for example centers, faculty, and colleges within the university. Online colleges can acquire accreditation which will improve their credibility. All programs offered by an accredited institute are not equally reliable.

Accreditation of degree programs Some programs are individually accredited by authority e.g., The Board of Engineering and Technology can provide accreditation to the degree programs of engineering, applied sciences, and computing. In the U.S. all degree programs approved by regionally accreditation agencies meet the same professional and academic standards either it is an online or on-campus program.

Regional and national accreditation Online colleges can be regionally or nationally accredited. Seven state agencies are working in the United States for accreditation of colleges or institutes which can attest to two- and four-year degree programs. Regionally accredited colleges provide better academic standards than most nationally accredited colleges.

3. Compare tuition fee, direct cost, indirect cost, and financial aid of online colleges

The cost of an online degree program significantly differs from on-campus degree programs. Traditional or on-campus degree programs demand more time and students have to leave their jobs to complete their degrees. Existing commitments with family and work do not allow them to take on-campus classes. So, studying online is the best method to pursue their degrees without any hurdle. Some online institutes charge more fees than traditional on-campus programs. Distant learners do not take advantage of on-campus services and resources including healthcare services, campus library, meal plans, and parking. So, you should consider the total cost of an online degree before selecting an online college. Most of the students check only the tuition fees of online learning and ignore the indirect cost. Check the indirect cost of the degree program before finalizing it based on the tuition fee.

Direct cost includes tuition fee, application fee, and the admission fee for online distance learning courses. Similarly, you have to pay technology and distant learning fee also often referred to as e-tuition fees. Online colleges may charge for enrolling in different courses, and additional charges for not meeting the deadline of paying tuition fees. Always contact the financial services of online college to learn about the total cost of the degree program before choosing it for your studies.

Indirect cost includes charges for course materials and books. Before finalizing your online college, you must consider these expenses which you have to pay to complete your degree in an online college. To complete your assignments and class discussions, you must have access to the required resources. Online colleges have libraries that you can use to get free books and study material but you need to purchase a certain repository of books, articles, and workbooks.

Financial aid may seek to continue online college and university programs if you cannot meet your college expenses. Many financial aid options are available for online students. Some colleges offer financial aid to enrolled students only while some limit access to the students attending on-campus

classes. Federal Pell Grants are available for distant learners so, keep in mind the financial aid option before applying to the online college. You can follow these steps to get financial aid in an online college.

- Many funding agencies use FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) to determine the eligibility of a student for financial aid. So, first of all, complete FAFSA.
- Check the deadline for the respective academic year.
- Apply and check the status by making an account.
- You will receive a student aid report, check mistakes, make corrections and again submit it.
- The award letter will be issued by your college.
- Carefully review your award letter and select aid option according to your requirements

4. Choose the online college with good quality of the curriculum, faculty credentials, graduation rate, and technology for virtual learning

Quality of curriculum

Always explore the description of degree programs, course contents, and their attributes before applying. Evaluate if the program is dynamic to increase student's knowledge or not. A proper online course should include live classrooms, discussion forums, video lectures, study material, virtual labs, online library, quizzes, exams, and assignments. Students learn more from different sources. Dynamic course contents ensure student learning instead of merely getting grades. Find out the difference between the curriculum for an online degree program and its on-campus traditional counterpart. You should choose the degree with the same credentials which are offering to on-campus students. Never compromise the quality of courses and always keep learning.

Check Faculty credentials of online college Faculty is the backbone of the college. You must check the faculty credentials of an online college before joining it. Is there the same faculty available for both online and its traditional counterpart? Do they have experienced teaching staff? Are they comfortable teaching online? Teaching through virtual classrooms is not easy for all faculty. There is a digital divide which makes it difficult for some faculty members to use new technology. Newer or younger teachers find it more convenient to teach through new technology. Younger faculty is more familiar with making multimedia presentations, take virtual classes, and communicating with students from the comfort of their homes. So, professional and younger faculty is preferred for online courses.

Graduation rate Always chooses the online college with a high graduation rate. Students who graduated from online colleges with vast alumni networks find more career options and get a job more easily. Good online colleges arrange workshops, lectures, interviews, and symposiums with their notable alumni to provide insight on career options. They can guide you to choose the right path towards your career. Experienced professionals will give the best advice and help grow your professionalism.

Technology Online colleges should offer quality education by effective use of technology. The success of an online degree program depends upon the smooth delivery of lessons, classes, and all

sources. Online students do not deserve passive learning so proper use of technology and tools is important for active learning.

5. Check the Student services of online college

Check out the student services provided by online colleges. Students also need assistance in academics, and career counseling in addition to getting an online degree. Online colleges provide academic advisors, competent tutors, career counselors, writing assistance, and health services. Academic advisors can help you to decide your subjects, select course work, and assist you throughout your degree. You must know writing to succeed in an online college. Writing assistance provides guidance and assist you individually to write properly with citations and references. Career counselors in online colleges may guide you to polish your skills, highlight your strengths to improve your resume. They can also organize virtual job fairs to introduce you to new concepts and can conduct mock interviews to build your confidence. They can also help you choose the best career option.

Although online students do not need physical health services from college, counseling for mental health issues of students should be provided by online college. Non-academic issues that can affect the mental health of a student should be addressed by mental health counselors. The best online college will offer all these health services to you. They can even arrange sessions with specialists according to the nature of the health problem.

The best online colleges will provide you all the above-mentioned services whether you are an in-person learner or an online learner. Both types of learners should have equal access to sources in a good online college. You can review these services on the student affairs section of the college website.

After investigating all the above-mentioned essentials,

- Narrow down the list accordingly to select the best online college.
- Now check when the admission window will open in the selected college.
- Confirm the procedure for applying either this is entirely online or you have to mail documents.
- Prepare your documents before reaching the deadline. Some online colleges require recommendation letters, prepare these letters in advance.
- Read instructions and guidelines carefully and apply.

Category

1. Education

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