

Industry Opinions on Traditional versus On-line courses in Geology

We recently queried the industry geologists of the Southwest Section of the Association of Environmental and Engineering Geologists (AEG) asking them to weigh in on on-line versus traditional classroom training. The following question was posed:

"... the Articulation Task Force and the Maricopa Geology Instructional Council would be interested in knowing your opinion of courses offered through Distance Learning programs. There are currently two types of non-traditional courses being offered or considered in our District. The first is called a hybrid course in which the material is delivered on-line but the students are required to take exams in a proctored environment. The second is a completely on-line course in which the material and the exams are taken completely on-line and in many cases anonymously. That is, there is no assurance that the person who registered for the class is actually the person who performed the assessments. We are interested in knowing whether either of these non-traditional distance learning formats would affect your decision to employ someone at the Associates degree level for say, a low level technical position. Would it be useful if the student transcripts distinguished whether the course was traditional, hybrid, or totally on line?"

Following a representative sample of responses

It is an essential part of any curriculum to have interaction with professors and teaching assistants. I personally would be wary of an applicant who had taken a majority of their courses online. However, I do believe some courses are less interactive and could be taught using online tools. As in most things in life, moderation is the key. A few online or hybrid courses would not discourage me from hiring a candidate; however, a majority of online coursework may require a closer look at other credentials.

I'm used to having students attend the university. They traditionally prove to be stronger candidates, in my experience exhibit better skills as trained observers, as I like to think of geologists. I'm a firm believer in walking with the old timers and learning from them in a traditional field setting more in line with university field programs.

The on-line course issue is a bit tricky. I know that I feel better about the idea of their being some form of accountability as well as the ability of a student to have an original thought, rather than something recycled. Facts and figures can always be looked up, but you need to know where to look and why to look. Problem solving and a fundamental base knowledge are of key importance.

I suppose that the most telling thing is that if I had two applications that are otherwise equal, and one went through a more traditional learning environment with the other from a 100% on-line environment, I'd almost certainly hire the one who went through a more traditional system.