The importance of a Course Certificate and the future of higher education

Things are rapidly changing in higher education. Take it from me, I've been an undergraduate instructor in engineering for over a decade, and speculation abounds as to what a college degree will look like in 5, 10, and 20+ years. I personally believe that nothing will replace the final 1-2 years of many degree programs, like engineering degrees, because many very important skills like teamwork, peer-to-peer communication, and oral presentation abilities can only be learned in the presence of others. However, _I am a strong believer that many of the lower level higher education courses will just as effectively (or more effectively) be taught using online courses_; this is the primary reason that I personally am interested in online education. Online education will save dramatically on higher education tuition costs and the skyrocketing costs associated with room-and-board at existing "brick-and-mortar" facilities.

Many of you are working professionals seeking advanced knowledge, either as a "quick fix" to an immediate problem or to learn more about Excel/VBA for your general career. However, many of you are in the early stages of your career. Some of you may not even have a career yet; therefore, you are seeking to gain advanced knowledge through online education, such as Coursera. This is great! In my opinion, the "brick-and-mortar" colleges and universities are going to be radically transformed in the coming decades. Online certifications and degrees, often earned at small fractions of the prices of typical college and university degrees, will begin to compete with standard college degrees. Hybrid degrees (e.g., 2 years online, 2 years at the college/university) will become commonplace.

Why are current degrees from "brick-and-mortar" universities so valuable? One answer is the accreditation process that goes into these degrees. For example, ABET accredits engineering programs through a stringent process. I have a lot of experience going through their tenuous process as the ABET coordinator in our department for the last 10 years. Once an accreditation and certification process makes its way into online education, online degrees will become extremely valuable and will compete with traditional college and university degrees. _Accreditation and certification is right around the corner for online education!_

Already, Coursera offers Course Certificates. _You will put a lot of effort into this course_. You can always come back and re-take this course in the future, but you will likely have forgotten many of the details (or, hopefully not if I've taught you well!). While you are devoting so much energy and focus into this course, I would strongly recommend that you spend the nominal fee so that you can be granted a Course Certificate. The cost of an equivalent course from a "brick-and-mortar" college would be somewhere between one and two orders of magnitude higher than the cost of a Course Certificate! Undoubtedly, as evidenced by your desire to take this course, you are serious about investing in your future. I hope that you decide to invest in your educational future and purchase a Course Certificate!

Thanks,

Charlie Nuttelman