**Memorandum**

**To:** Prospective STEM Students

**From:**  Misha Ward

**Date:**  November 8, 2017

**Subject:** Online vs. Classroom Education

**Introduction**

As future STEM students, the choice between online education and traditional in-person options can be difficult, especially with all the options available to you these days. This memo compares and contrasts the two options, allows you understand your choices, and reach a decision that works best for you. *Table 1* contains a comparison based on the following criteria: quality of education, cost of attendance, convenience, employer recognition, length of program, effort needed to get into program, and social interaction.

**Comparison**

**Table 1: Differences and Similarities of Educational Options for Future STEM Students**

| **Criteria** | **Online College/University** | **In Person College/University** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Quality of Education**  **(lower rank is better)** | **159.2** average world rank: based on college/university rankings, online colleges tend to be ranked worse on average | **57.4** average world rank: based on college/university rankings, traditional options tend to rank better on average |
| **Cost of Attendance** |  |  |
| *While Working – Employer subsidized* | **$0-3,000**: depending on employer program | **$0-10,000**: depending on employer program |
| *While Working – Out of pocket* | **$1,000-16,000**: after loans and scholarships [3] | **$5,000-$30,000**: after loans and scholarships |
| *While Un-employed* | **$1,000-16,000**: after loans, grants, work study, and scholarships [2] [3] | **$5,000-$20,000**: after loans, grants, work study, and scholarships |
| *Additional Costs (Parking, student fees, etc.)* | **$0-$1,000**: some programs charge fees for technology, actives, and materials[3] | **$500-2,000**: parking, driving, student fees are a common element of traditional education |
| **Convenience Factor** | **86%** of surveyed online students felt that their degree was convenient to their lifestyles | **12%** of surveyed students felt that their degree was convenient to their lifestyles |
| **Employer Recognition** | **12%** of companies preferred online top college candidates to over top traditional institutions | **56%** of companies preferred candidates from average traditional universities over top online degrees[4] |
| **Length of Program** |  |  |
| *While Working – Employer subsidized* | **1 – 3 years** | **2.5 – 3 years** |
| *While Working – Out of pocket* | **1 – 3 years** | **2 - 3 years** |
| *While Un-employed* | **1 – 1.5 years** | **1.5 – 2 years** |
| **Effort Needed to Get Into Program** | **50-98%** acceptance rate: online colleges usually have limits on students but can accept more than traditional options[1] | **5-68%** acceptance rate: many institutions have limits on amount of students that can be accepted and programs be very competitive to get into[1] |
| **Social Interaction** | Surveyed students experienced an average of **2.1** personal interactions with other students per quarter | Surveyed students experienced an average of **157.6** personal interactions with other students per quarter |
| SOURCES*:*  [1] Friedman, J. (2017, January 9). 10 Things Employers Think About Your Online Degree. United States of America.  —. Compare Acceptance Rates at Online, On-Campus Colleges. 3 April 2017. News Article. 9 October 2017.  [2] Western Governors University. (2017). WGU is a Great Value. Retrieved from UGU Western Governors University: https://www.wgu.edu/tuition\_financial\_aid/overview#  [3] Hopkins, K. (2012, January 10). Consider This Before You Pay for an Online Degree. United States of America.  [4] Bidwell, Allie. *Employers, Students Remain Skeptical of Online Education*. 20 September 2013. News Article. 9 October 2017. | | |

**Conclusion**

Online and traditional programs vary considerably as seen from *Table 1*. To simplify the foremost concerns and help you chose, the main factors are listed below with suggestions.

* *Quality*: If you are concerned the overall quality of the program, you should consider traditional education.
* *Cost*: If cost is a major issue for you, online programs might allow you to save the most money.
* *Convenience*: If you are concerned with a having flexible schedule, an online degree would be the best option.
* *Employer Recognition*: If you are worried about the perceived prestige of the program from a future employer, the traditional path would be the best choice.
* *Program length*: If you want to receive your degree in a shorter amount of time, then choose an online program.
* *Effort to get into Program*: If you want to increase your odds of getting into a program, consider applying to an online program.
* *Social Interaction*: If you value talking to other students and meeting your professor, then attending a traditional college or university would provide this social environment.

# **References**

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**[Word count: 565] Note:** This count excludes any words from Memorandum header, Sources from *Table 1*, and *References*.