

Does Distance Education Really Work?

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As an old hand at DE, the simple answer to this question is “No”.

I have a regular BScE from UNB 1991 with a 3.0 GPA from Canada’s second leading engineering school UNB in Fredericton. I also have a distance Diploma in Urban Land Economics from UBC’s Sauder School of Business 2005. I have two professional designations. I scored 1120 on the GRE – top third in quantitative; top half verbal. My IQ is in the 89 percentile.

I have attempted distance degrees from Mt Allison U Calculus course; Heriot Watt MBA; U of London External MSc Finance; UBC AACI and CRA designation. I failed at all the above university programs.

I was shocked to receive a 28% grade on a paper by a tutor from UBC after having an A- average on 12 of their courses in the same program. How could one go from an excellent performance in the same course over 10 assignments and one project to a 28%? I flunked out in the 13th of 14 courses despite an A-average! As a friend said, I could have gotten that grade and I’m not taking the course. Complains were levied to no avail at the highest levels.

At U of L, a tutor gave me a grade of 40% on a paper. The first paper in the same class I got a 60%. 40% is a failure and only 1% above the lowest possible graduation.

Then I tried the CFA program before the market crash. In a popular prep sample exam provided with study guides, I scored 1000 questions correct out of 1300 questions-77%. The pass mark was 70%. When it came time to write the CFA exam, I scored below 30%. Obviously, DE didn’t work there either.

This is despite the fact that I was able to teach myself Mortgage Math, Real Estate Economics, and Real Property Law with excellent grades.

I’ve applied to DE programs in Australia, the ASU, and John’s Hopkins. The professors told me that I’d have to go to Australia to take their degree despite the advertisement that they offered distance degrees. I was told by Arizona State University that the program tuition was doubling 3 days before the program started. The second program I had applied to was cancelled the date of registration I was finally notified. I had to fight to get my application fee returned.

Government Student loan programs don’t cooperate with DE programs. Royal Roads U wanted me to pay the tuition before they would complete the student loan form, yet before I knew if I were to get the loan. They would not, could not complete a one page form requesting tuition and program name just to assess my need. I had to fight to get my application fee back with the Provincial ombudsman’s office.

In a job interview with a local large oil company, the mature woman said to me in regards to the DE MBA, “So you’ve proven you can learn from a book. What else can you do?” In another interview, I was told I’d be paid only at a level of my engineering degree; not the DULE that took me 5 years to complete.

I kept at the distance routine until I realized I was beating my head against a wall with SFU in their SCD program. I was counselled by an academic advisor to take the last course in the program first and the first course last. If I waited until the first course was offered by distance, I’d have to reapply!

The problem with DE is that low level employees with big titles have too much say on who passes and who fails. They are simply not up to the task intellectually. Most of them are young women who are Jungian “Feelers” in the administration. The tutors seem unhappy with their status and take it out any way they can. I say forget about DE. If

Universities don't improve their performance, I can't see how it will last. Ah, but the next program around the corner is much, much better!

Distance education doesn't work. Employers don't value it. Professors don't like it. I believe that one can learn more by teaching one's self which is what university is all about anyway. But overall, Distance Education doesn't work.