

Why not try distance education?

By Anne McDonagh

Although distance education can refer to correspondence courses, increasingly it is coming to mean online courses. You learn from study guides, textbooks, CD-ROMS, videos and Web pages rather than from a teacher in a classroom. In most of the courses you communicate with the teacher and other students using the telephone, fax or Internet.

There is one great advantage to distance education. Distance education means that you can learn at any time and anywhere that is convenient. You can maintain your career or your part time job much more easily than working it around classes you must attend in a regular college or university program.

On the other hand, there are several caveats to keep in mind. Some students fare much better than others with distance learning. It is almost a cliché that you must be committed to your learning and self-motivated; otherwise, you will find distance learning very difficult. These qualities will keep you doing your assignments even when there is no peer pressure or encouragement.

Another factor in your success or failure at distance learning is your own personality. You may just miss being with other students. If you enjoy being with other people and the cut and thrust of intellectual discussion, you may find distance learning too isolated even though there are on-line discussion groups and instructors readily available to answer your questions. If, on the other hand, you don't mind working on your own—in fact, enjoy it—distance learning may suit you just fine. You probably already know whether it will work for you.

One CGA student, who has almost finished her CGA after eight years of online courses, has this to say, “I really enjoy being able to work at home. I would really hate having to go out to a class in the winter after work. One thing I have learned, though, is that doing a little bit of studying every night, even though it is hard to make myself do it, makes the whole process much easier.”

The following websites and/or educational institutions can give you more information regarding distance education in Canada.

University of Waterloo (www.uwaterloo.ca) offers over 250 degree credit undergraduate degree credit undergraduate courses. You can complete all the requirements for a UW degree in Arts, Science, and Environmental Studies.

Athabasca University (www.athabascau.ca) is Canada's leading distance-education and online university: Canada's Open University. It currently serves in excess of 24,136 students per year. Created by the Government of Alberta in 1970, Athabasca University offers a high-quality university education and is nationally and internationally recognized as a leader in open and distance education.

Canadian Virtual University (www.cvu-uvc.ca) is a partnership of 13 Canadian universities offering over 250 programs available through the Internet or by distance education across Canada, committed to delivering university-level programs that can be completed from anywhere in the country or beyond.

Simon Fraser University (www.sfu.ca/cde)

The Centre for Distance Education program at SFU is one of the largest in Canada, with 12,000 course enrolments a year in 118 credit courses providing degree, diploma and certificate completion opportunities in a variety of disciplines.

Distance Education Opportunities at Ontario Universities (www.ocull.ca) is a

searchable database of over 2,800 distance education credit courses that's maintained by the Network for Ontario Distance Educators.

Distance Education Opportunities at Ontario Colleges

(www.ontariolearn.com) is a consortium of 22 Ontario Community Colleges who have partnered to develop and deliver on-line courses.