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Online Learning

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By Matt Krumrie, Star Tribune Sales and Marketing

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Remember when you were in school and you were too shy or afraid to raise your hand and answer or ask a question, even though you had an opinion you wanted to express? That's no longer a problem when taking classes online.

"Online courses give students the ability to carefully think about and construct their thoughts before sharing them with the rest of the class," says James Falkofske, instructional designer/trainer with the Center for Online Learning at St. Paul's Metropolitan State University.

Other benefits? No commute, no parking headaches, no waiting in line to register, and best of all for adult learners — you can attend class at the time and place most convenient for your own schedule.

Taking classes online appears to be here to stay. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 65 percent of colleges and universities are now offering online courses and degree programs. In fact, one out of every eight college students will attend online by 2008. According to career publisher Vault Inc.'s 2005 online degrees survey, 86 percent of employers would be willing to accept a job applicant with an online degree.

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“Online learning has become the dominant area of growth in the higher education arena as personal lives have become inundated with longer work hours and busy personal schedules,” says Joe Cockrell, director of public relations for the University of Phoenix www.phoenix.edu, the largest, private, accredited online university in the United States.

Online learning “makes it possible for students to achieve their goals and fulfill their aspirations without compromising their quality of life,” says Irene Silber, director of public relations for Capella University www.capella.edu, an accredited online university that offers a variety of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degree programs.

But just because you’re taking a class online doesn’t mean the course work is any easier. Regular participation, contributing to lectures and completing assignments on time are still the name of the game. But if that’s done, online learning can provide a way to climb the career ladder.

“Online learning is becoming more and more mainstream, and we believe it is the college experience of the future,” says Cockrell.

This is a weekly column devoted to career betterment. Matt Krumrie is a freelance writer from Inver Grove Heights, and has eight years of experience reporting on the employment industry. The first Sunday of each month this column will answer readers’ questions. E-mail questions or subject ideas to askmatt@startribune.com.

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