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Employers Perception of Online Degrees

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"I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in the preparation or completion of this manuscript. _____"

Abstract

This proposal will explain previous research conducted that has attempted to explain the difference of value between online and traditional degrees. The following questions will be reviewed and answered within the current paper: Do employers show more favoritism when they have received an online degree? Why do hiring managers consider online degrees to be less credible? What factors add to the value of an online degree? Does the institution in which the degree was received play a role in the acceptance of online degrees? Have employers' perceptions of online graduates changed as technology has become more advanced?

Keywords: employers', online degree, traditional degree, employability, perceptions

Introduction

The growing enrollment of online education amongst college students suggests that the value of online education should be distinguished amongst employers. As cited in Linardopoulos (2012) Allen and Seaman found that nearly 5 million college students are enrolled in at least one online course in the United States in the fall of 2009. There is a growing need for online courses and programs because they allow flexibility and they are less expensive when compared to traditional courses.

The intent of the current paper is to address previous studies and articles regarding employers perceptions of online education; evaluate factors contributing to employability; identify limitations within research presented; and propose that additional research be conducted regarding employers' perceptions of online education.

Review of Literature

The recognition of online degrees from hiring managers has been teetering on the scale of acceptance and studies prove this. Research collected in 2005 from Eduventures' Continuing and Professional Education found that from a total of 505 employers, nearly 60 percent approve of online education (Nance, 2007). In a study conducted by Adams and Defleur each candidate within the study shared the same experience which included recommendations, evaluations, etc. with the exception that the candidates were divided into groups, one group received a traditional degree while the other received a non- traditional degree. The study concluded that "the faculty candidate with a fully online doctorate was the preferred choice of only 2 percent of the respondents whereas the faculty candidate with hybrid doctorate was the preferred choice of only 11 percent of the respondent (Linardopoulos, 2012)." The acceptance of hybrid and fully online degrees were significantly lower when compared to degrees received traditionally which goes

against the research conducted by Eduventures' Continuing and Professional Education report. Another study found conducted by Trierweiler and Rivera revealed that over half of the executives surveyed believed it apparent that online higher education was of less value when compared to traditionally based programs (Metrejean & Noland, 2011). Online degrees are generally less accepted by employers' when reviewing the listed studies within the present paragraph.

Online degrees have been accused of being ineffective by preventing students from gaining problem-solving skills, social skills, as well as additional developmental skills that are received in a traditional setting (Marson, 2012). According to Columbaro and Monaghan employers concerns with online degrees include: "not enough academic rigor, not enough face-to face- interactions, more risk of cheating, relationship of diploma mills, and perceived lack of commitment due to not being willing to come to campus (Linardopoulos, 2012). The employers concerns previously listed value social skills as well as integrity when looking for candidates to hire. Ervin (2013) states; "We're talking about the human asset here. The human being likes communications (Carnevale, 2007)" (p. 111). So the risk that arises from online classes is that individuals will lack certain communication skills which could possibly be an issue when team work situations arise within the individuals future desired field of work. There is also the issue on the idea that a student is somewhat "purchasing" a degree due to fact that all classes without face- to face interaction. Guzman agrees by stating that non- traditional degrees are not of higher value than traditional degrees because it's almost as if a student is purchasing the degree received online (Carnevale, 2007).

It is believed that employers value applicants and their obtained skills through higher education. Throughout the present paragraph the exploration of the importance of those skills obtained will be reviewed. According to Harvey as cited in Silva, Lourtie, and Aires (2013)

higher education must be able to i) establish close links with employers, assisting them in identifying and adopting new strategies suited for overcoming any lack of qualifications; ii) contribute with solutions for education and training in high –skilled areas with a low number of workers; iii) prepare graduates with effective working skills, ensuring that the employability requirements are explicit in the study programmers (p. 109).

Silva, Lourtie, and Aires (2013) believes that high learning should not be judged based on where it was received but that the skills received should have a higher acknowledgement when being employed. They place the university responsible for the teachings of employability skills and focus on how universities can achieve the goal of teaching these skills. To ensure that employability skills are acquired while attending a college or university Silva, Lourtie and Aires (2013) find it fitting to embed employability skills in the curriculum. A study in which students and teachers were asked to rank ten employability skills taught in the classroom was conducted. There was no statistical significant difference between teachers and students and their views on the ten employability skills to be taught along with the curriculum. While nearly 91% of the students felt employability skills should be embedded into the curriculum; 82% of the teacher sample implied that employability skills were being taught; and nearly 91% agreed that the skills be taught within the course. In reference to the research presented teachers/ professors are preparing nontraditional students as well as traditional students for the workforce.

Employers also look at the university or college to define the reputation or accreditation which allows employers to hold the degree at a certain value. The reputation and quality of the

institution are held at a higher standard than online and traditional degrees. It is noted by Adams that when a student earns an online degree from a well known traditional institute it is typically overlooked by the employer that the student was in fact an online student and will assume the degree received was traditional (Carnevale, 2005). Employers who are aware of criticisms towards an institution, as well as the institution being distant from the employer tend to have negative perceptions of online degrees (Amaro & Fitzgerald, 2009). Adams and DeFluer (2005) conducted research that assessed employers and their thoughts on hiring online verses traditional degrees. Carnevale (2005) included the following in her questionnaire: “the type of college or university from which the applicant obtained his or her degree would be of no importance as a hiring criterion in our organization” (p. 134) Carnevale (2005) also indicated that “nearly 75 percent disagreed with that statement” (p. 134). One can assume that the institution of where the degree was received from and how the degree was received has a significant role with the employability of a candidate.

As technology continues to grow and become more and more popular amongst the current generation, it can be assumed that the acceptance of online degrees is rising amongst employers’. As cited in (Nance, 2007) Professional Education Report indicated that out of 505 employers nearly 60 percent of employers show favoritism towards individuals who have receive online degrees. The report also indicated that most employers hold online degrees and traditional degrees at the same standard. However, less than 50 percent of students are utilizing online programs that offer degrees (Nance, 2007). It appears that although online degrees are gradually gaining acceptance students still prefer traditional degrees.

Many of the studies discussed within the current paper had limitations within the research. This was mainly due to low levels of participants within each study. As cited in

(Carnevale, 2005) reports that when 1,285 questionnaires were sent to companies only 269 of the participants responded. Since the number of participants was extremely low the survey he used was not able to be used as a definitive sample. The information still provided an understanding of employer's attitudes towards online degrees. No other limitations were truly listed within the studies provided. The participants that were questioned on their preference of online or traditional degrees could possibly be biased. An employer who has received a fully traditional degree may not understand the rigor associated with obtaining an online degree. Therefore, they may have bias towards the online degree and not hire them. The same situation applies to employers who have received online degrees.

Discussion of Sample Survey

The present paper discovers the general preference of employers when hiring graduates with traditional or non- traditional degrees. The sample will be derived from current employers in North Carolina who require a higher level of education (college degree) for that particular job. The sample size (N) 500 employers will be surveyed while the population size (n) will be around 10,000, this translates to 1 in 20 employers. All employers will be listed and assigned consecutive numbers from 1 to 10,000. Using computer software the 500 employers will be randomly selected by their number. The present sample discussed is called a cluster random sample which "is not the the units of the population to be sampled but groupings of those units" (Bryman, 2012). The simple random sample is a probability sample so the subjects cannot be selected more than once and are randomly selected

Questionnaire

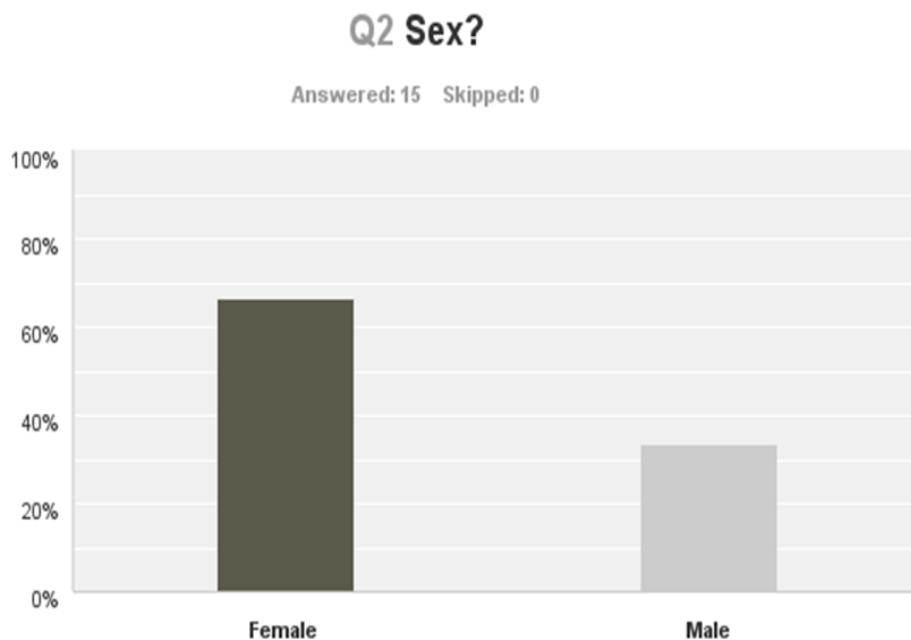
The questionnaire begins with 8 demographic questions, which allow background information of the surveyor to be reviewed. Questions include race, gender, age, highest level of

education the employee size of the business, and the length of time an employer has currently been working at the agency. The following 10 questions were replicated from research previously conducted by Fogle and Elliott (2013). Fogle and Elliott presented 10 questions that were eligible for Liker Scale answers. The survey is currently housed in surveymonkey; the findings of the research can be viewed by using the current URL

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/MySurveys.aspx> . My survey is located in the Appendix.

Results and Findings

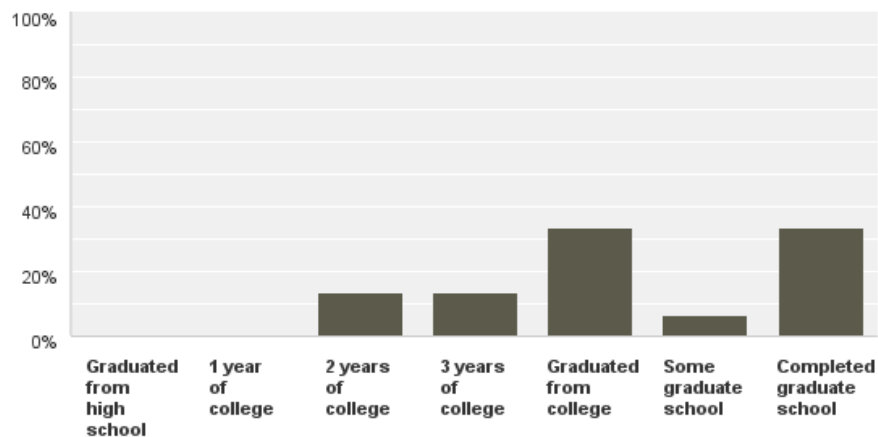
The survey had a total of 500 employers' at during the administration of the survey. The amount of female responses was higher than with 67% of the participant's women and 33% of who were men. The average age was around 33 years, the youngest participant was 21 and the oldest was 63 years old. The majority of the participants ranged from 20- to 35 years of age.



The majority of participants had graduated from college and had received some or completed graduate school. This is crucial because, with their educational experience they most likely understand the value of education. They would also have a clear understanding of the skills that are obtained throughout the college experience.

Q5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

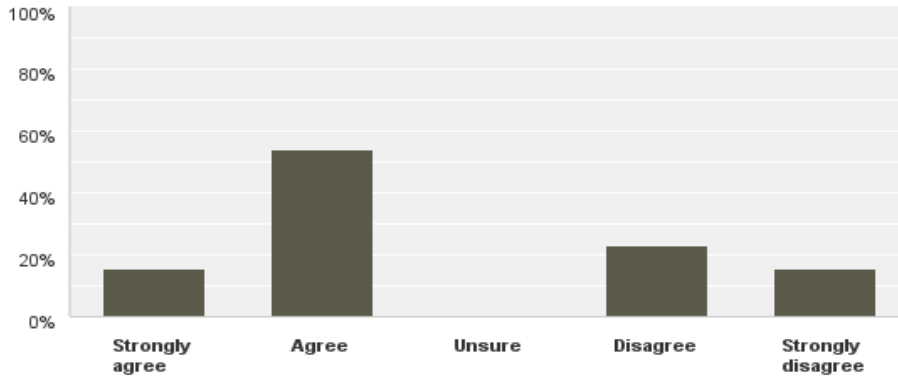
Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



The survey revealed that more than half of the participants view online and traditional degrees are of equal rigor and offer the same course material. This is most likely due to 66% of the participants stating that they have taken an online class while receiving their education.

Q9 Online and traditional universities' degrees are equal rigor.

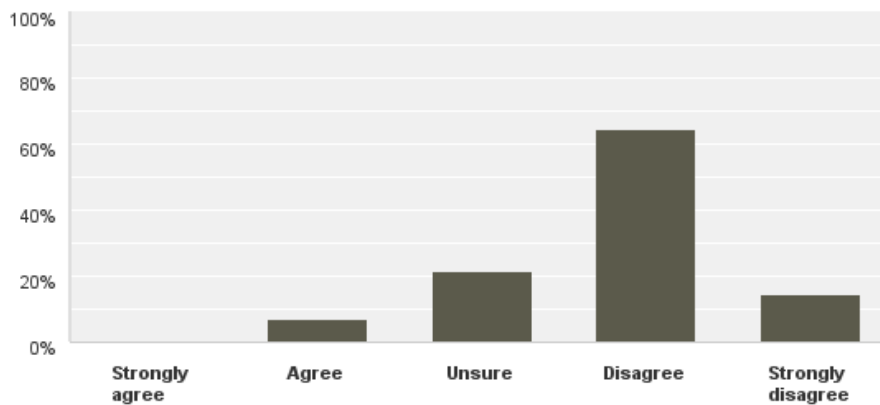
Answered: 13 Skipped: 2



The majority of employers' also viewed the online degree employees to not be unsuccessful within their particular industry. In fact only 1 participant agreed that the employees within their industry were unsuccessful.

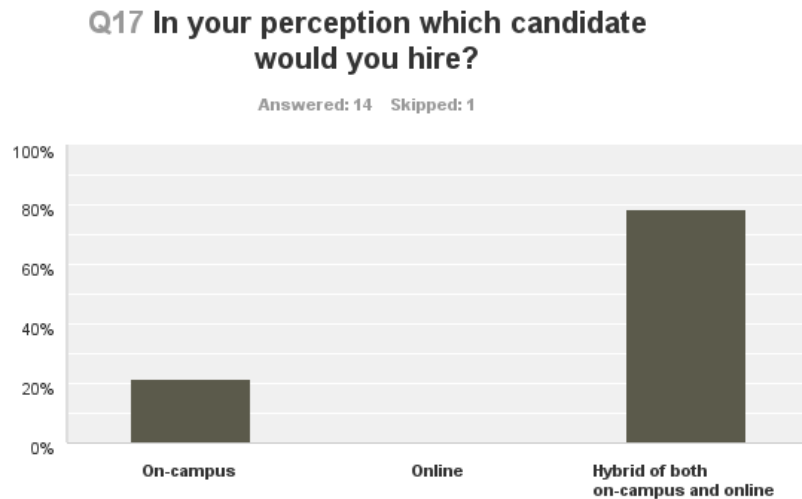
Q12 Graduates with online degrees have been mostly unsuccessful in my industry.

Answered: 14 Skipped: 1



When asked which candidate the employer would hire none felt the online candidate should be hired. In fact 78% said they would hire the hybrid candidate and 21% said they would hire the candidate who received an on- campus degree. Although, the majority of employers'

had stated that they disagreed with the statement “I would not hire someone with an online degree” when asked who they would hire their



answer changed dramatically. This is somewhat confusing because the majority of the employers’ felt that online degrees were held at the same level as traditional degrees and only one participant said that an employee would be unsuccessful. I would like to take a more in depth reason for as to why employers’ would not hire the online candidate if they believe the academia of an online graduate to be the same as a traditional graduate.

Summary

The research of employability amongst online degrees and traditional needs further evaluation. Limitations due to low levels of participation, lack of knowledge on online degrees as well as lack of understanding the rigor and skills obtained provide reasoning for the need of further evaluation. The advancements in education must be recognized, and not be solely tied to traditional institutions. These advancements will lead to more individuals receiving online degrees in the future and they will seek employment. It is crucial that employers’ views on online education be studied and evaluated to determine the success rate of employability of amongst online graduates.

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Appendix A

Sex? Male or female
Race? American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, White or Caucasian, from multiple races
What is your age? _____
What is the highest level of education you have completed? Graduated from high school, 1 year of college, 2 years of college, 3 years of college, graduated from college, some graduate school, completed graduate school
How long have you been working with this agency? Years _____ Months _____
What is your educational experience? I have never completed an online course, I have completed an online course but my degree was not online, I have completed an online course and my entire degree was online
About how many employees work at your company? _____
Online and traditional universities' degrees are equal rigor? Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree
In hiring decisions, I would consider a degree from on line and traditional universities the same. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree
I would NOT hire someone with an online degree. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree
Graduates with online degrees have been mostly unsuccessful in my industry. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree
Online and traditional courses offer the same flexibility Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree
Online and traditional courses offer the same course material. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree
Online and traditional courses offer the same learning experience. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree

The type of college or university from which the applicant obtained his or her degree would be of no importance as a hiring criterion in our organization.

Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree

In your perception which candidate would you hire?