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## Joyce Lain Kennedy - Careers Now

by Joyce Lain Kennedy

Kennedy has been an authority on employment for the last three decades. Her Q&A column provides advice on jobs and career development, addressing common work-related problems: demotion, layoffs, discrimination, specialization, keeping up with technology and networking at trade conventions. Great for classifieds.

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CAREERS-1

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CAREERS NOW: E-LEARNING: NO-FRILLS EDUCATION FOR GROWN-UPS

By Joyce Lain Kennedy

Tribune Media Services

DEAR JOYCE: Do employers accept an online college degree as readily as a traditional (bricks-and-mortar) degree? At 34, I realize I need to complete my education, but I work part time and have two children.

I regularly receive spam offering degrees at an "accelerated pace without classroom attendance that will advance my career." But I need reassurance that e-learning will be worth my time and investment. Your opinion? - E.R.S.

Awareness and acceptance of e-learning - the online medium in distance education - is gaining ground as you read this. An industrial-strength study of employers' views hasn't been done for a couple of years, but a recognized authority on e-learning, Vicky Phillips, CEO of GetEducated.com, says the perception of how people feel about the virtual venue has shot way up during the last five years.

Phillips' company began surveying the relationship between employers and distance learning students in 1989; another big survey is in the wings for early next year.

**POWER POINTS.** Acceptance of distance ed has grown steadily. According to Phillips, it really took off when the Internet bloomed as a delivery method in the late '90s. E-learning is getting another shot in the arm with the entrance of name-brand colleges into the virtual space - Harvard, Brown, MIT, Stanford, Duke, University of Maryland, Indiana University, University of Phoenix (a pioneer) and Colorado State, for instance. In fact, about 90 percent of traditional colleges and universities offer at least one online course, and a growing number offer full degrees.

Cyberdegrees from campus-based institutions are more readily accepted than degrees from Internet-only institutions. Accreditation is critical. "Provided an institution is accredited by a recognized agency, greater than 85 percent of those surveyed two years ago believed that quality should not be an issue," Phillips says.

**YES, BUT.** Corporate managers go down hard on the assessment of distance degrees. In 2000, GetEducated.com found that 79 percent rated a distance degree "as good as" a residential option - up from less than 50 percent in 1989. But within this critical group, the approval rating surpassed 90 percent when the name of the institution offering the degree is immediately recognizable to the prospective employer.

**Tip:** Do not list "online degree" on your resume, but don't evade the fact if asked, and answer with confidence. What you learned is more important than where you learned it.

**FOR YOU?** Convenience is the main reason to learn online and why so many adults, especially career-changing hopefuls, choose the option. Often the no-frills approach is cheaper but not always. Still, the online dropout rate is higher than the campus dropout rate, and students may need the stimulus of a classroom and on-site professor.

"Many students simply learn better in a face-to-face, personal-interaction environment," says Drema Howard, director of the Career Center at the University of South Florida. "The nature of today's changing job market makes accessibility to campus-based career counseling and job search training especially valuable," Dr. Howard explains.

**ONLINE RESOURCES.** Don't waste your second-chance years by making basic education mistakes: Find out what's new since you were in school. For classroom study, start inquiries at your local postsecondary institutions, both academic and vocational. For online study, here's a starter panel of places where you can load up on what you should know going in.

- GetEducated.com. This quality Web site offers a menu of free online guidebooks for undergraduate and graduate study. Also free: Details of more than 100 accredited online degrees (associate and bachelors) in management and business areas will be released in November.

- U.S. News' 2003 E-Learning Guide. Find this free resource on usnews.com; click on Education, then on E-Learning. Read articles, see directories of online offerings and, most especially, review the e-learning student forum messages

from the cyber-trenches.

- Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Open CourseWare site - [ocw.mit.edu](http://ocw.mit.edu) - is a unique resource for a superb free education. The bad news is you don't garner a college degree, nor interact with faculty or other students. The good news is it doesn't cost you \$41,000 a year. What you get for free is a Web bonanza of syllabuses, readings, handouts, assignments and tests. If you're excited by education for education's sake, choose from 500 MIT courses in 33 disciplines.

**PREDICTION. I expect the coming years to be a golden age for education - both on ground and online - as Americans compete with others all over the globe who want their jobs.**

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E-mail career questions for possible use in this column to Joyce Lain Kennedy at [jlk@sunfeatures.com](mailto:jlk@sunfeatures.com), or mail her at Box 368, Cardiff, CA 92007. Sorry, the volume of mail makes personal replies impossible.

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