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Distance Learning Programs Benefit Rural Students

It used to be the fodder of comedies about the country kid coming to the big city to make his future. What many may not realize is it underscored something that is endemic of the 20th Century, i.e., rural settings have struggled for years to provide career opportunities for their children. Unless they are going into agriculture, when country kids graduate from high school they can't find jobs around their home towns. Many times they have to move even to go to college, which also tends to center in metropolitan areas. Some demographic experts call this out-migration. This is changing and a student can now earn anything up to and including a distance learning phd.

But that was a whole different millennium. A solution is starting to establish itself since the start of the 21st Century: online education. Rural students are earning [degree on line](#) through virtual colleges. The solution even comes with a side advantage - graduates improve their recruiting desirability in the comfort of their home.

There innumerable studies proving online degrees give any graduates a leg up in the employment world. A number of corporate recruiters will testify online graduates have a matching skill set for a profitable worker, including good time management abilities, strong self-motivation skills, and technological know how.

The only problem with all this is access. Many rural districts are missing one critical element for distance learning: broadband access. They lack the needed communications infrastructure to move beyond dial-up modems to DSL or T-Lines. Most online schools require high speed connections for many of their educational tools to work effectively such as streaming video, real-time chat sessions and downloading textbooks in a timely manner. Broadband allows students to hookup from home without having to worry about cable, putting them on an equivalent playing field as his or her classmates. Further, once they graduate they can now find jobs that require telecommuting, or web-based jobs, instead of having to move to the big city for employment.

Another factor making online education a natural fit for rural America is cost. Recent studies show virtual schools cost about 40% less than their brick-and-mortar counterparts, even though the price of advanced education is still considerable. This is particularly critical for rural areas, which tend to be economically depressed.

Going to an online college is a way to drive that cost down, since these students also have financial difficulties that force them to choose between work and school. Many online students can continue to work at their jobs by day and take classes over computers at night.

That leaves only one last obstacle. Many new applicants, especially rural ones, may not have the right tools for online education. They are not accustomed to communicating with fellow students and professors they haven't studied with face to face. That problem should be temporary. Social networks such as Facebook have become a fact of life. Further, millions of children are already taking either fully online or blended online/in person [distance learning college degree](#).

It can even mean that going to the big city is a road that doesn't need be taken. Many will go on in their education into [distance learning programs](#), allowing them basically global employment. Whether associate or [bachelors degree](#), online education is a large part of the future.

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