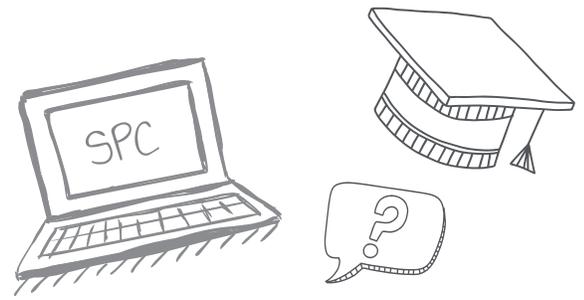


# 10 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING AN ONLINE COLLEGE



## 1 ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is a sign that a college complies with rigorous standards and has a high commitment to quality. Choosing an accredited institution is important if you intend to transfer to another college or pursue additional degrees. Financial aid requires college accreditation.

## 2 COST/FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS

Cost is usually a big consideration when you're choosing a school, and it's important to weigh the cost of your education with your potential salary. There are many forms of financial aid available, including federal or state grants, institutional grants and scholarships, work study and student loans.

## 3 FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING OPTIONS

Not all online classes are the same. Term lengths may vary. Shorter terms generally mean a heavy workload over that shorter timeframe. Some courses have weekly requirements; others are self-paced. Look for a school that meets your needs.

## 4 TECH REQUIREMENTS

The computer you will use should be "yours" – you need to own the equipment, not depend on an office computer or the library because you may need to download course-specific software. Having one that is fairly new and fast will make your life easier. And your online connection also needs to be fast; connecting your laptop through your cell phone as a hot-spot may frustrate you when you are working. A smart phone is helpful for keeping connected to your classes but insufficient for writing papers and taking tests. You may need a webcam for tests or assignments and/or a headset to participate in synchronous activities.

## 5 TECH SUPPORT

Tech support is critical. Is there a phone number you can call 24/7 if you are having difficulty?

## 6

## CAREERS AND INTERNSHIPS

A college should emphasize career-focused academic programs. Career advisors can help you evaluate your strengths and passions to suggest careers and their appropriate majors. A good college has resources to help you write a resume, get internships or job shadowing opportunities, prepare for interviews – in short, offer all the services needed to prepare you for a career after college. Make sure all of these are available to you online.

## 7

## COMPUTER SKILLS

You'll want to evaluate your skill level in using the computer. How often do you ask someone for assistance with it? If it is more than once a week, you may want to consider an on-ground computer class at a local community center to increase your computer skills before taking an online class.

## 8

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT RESOURCES

Many students seek assistance for the academic demands of higher education. The college you choose should offer online tutoring, support centers and library resources to help you succeed. Make sure they are available to you during the times you will be studying.

## 9

## ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Even if it's a prestigious college, if it doesn't offer the major you seek, it may not be the best choice. Programs, including curriculum, credit requirements and completion rates, are important. And it's always a good idea for students to have multiple programs to choose from.

## 10

## PROFESSORS

Instructors will have a major impact on your college career. Look into the credentials of the professors in your field. They should be accomplished and respected in their academic communities and, preferably, have professional experience in their teaching areas.

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