

In *Distance Learning's Downfall*, Dr. Doogie Horowitz talks about the ups—and, more recently, multiple downs—of the online-based learning systems we've all seen on late-night commercials and in online ads. While the Internet has its education potential, Horowitz says that for-profit institutions can also use it for less altruistic purposes in the names of higher learning.

The abundance of opportunities to cheat are first on Horowitz's list of problems. With a simple online search, less scrupulous students can find ghostwriters willing to sit through an entire semester's worth of classes for around \$1500. Plagiarism is a problem anywhere, of course, but the anonymous nature of online classes, specifically those that don't require webcams, can cause huge trouble.

Worse are those institutions that seem not to care as long as they're paid for it. Horowitz has few figures to back this up, since these institutions have no obligation to discuss their internal policies and practices. However, he makes the rational claim that those companies most driven to big advertising programs, and thus likely making the biggest profits, would probably have an incentive to be lax with their expulsions and suspensions. At the very least, he argues, lax policies, like those not requiring webcams as part of class attendance, or those that don't wish to pay for online anti-plagiarism software, indicate a commercial motive, not an educational one.

There is also, Horowitz says, the lack of hands-on experience inherent in many online classes. While some do require external volunteer work, internships, or classwork, nothing matches the experience of attending a class, looking a professor in the eye, and getting your hands dirty with various lab activities. For this argument, Horowitz produces an online article that claims learning absorption is better done in an area devoted to learning. Other places, like coffee shops or the living room couch, often provide distractions outright banned in the classroom.

Finally, Horowitz claims that the educators in this field are often little more than mercenaries. He claims that his own biases from his time as a university professor might shine through, but that overhearing online teachers in the pub bragging that they get paid X amount for X classes in a semester is a microcosm of the whole for-profit online learning "scheme." While any education is better than none, he claims, a student might be better served attending a nearby community college—many of which cost a fraction of an online tuition bill.

In the end, Horowitz says online classes are "a problem—maybe not a catastrophic one, but a problem." Because of the for-profit motive and cheater-friendly systems, he says, education as a whole is compromised. Given the reputation even traditional colleges have received, all reputable learning systems should work to distance themselves from their less honest cousins.