

Why Invest in Online Learning?

By Gail Terry Grimes and Claude Whitmyer, Co-Founders
The University of the Future, LLC (aka FutureU™).



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Why Invest in Online Learning?

To dissolve boundaries.

No matter where your people work--all in the same room or scattered around the world--getting them together for a learning experience can be a challenge. Online learning creates a virtual classroom they can "attend" from any location, anywhere in the world.

To expand time.

Any working adult who has tried to squeeze a college course into a busy schedule will appreciate online learning. At FutureU, you attend class at your own convenience--while you eat breakfast, if you wish, or just before bed at night. You may come to class for five minutes at a time or for an hour at night when you just can't sleep. Because our campus is located wherever you and your computer happen to be, there's no commute, no parking, no waiting for the instructor to show up, no wasted time at all. Just pure learning.

To increase participation.

Research shows that most instructors in face-to-face classrooms tend to do much or all of the talking, while many students remain silent or ask a few questions at best. In the online classroom, by contrast, learners are far more likely to get involved, while the facilitator simply guides the conversation instead of dominating it.

To create a level playing field for a diverse workforce.

In the absence of visual cues, the shy and the outgoing are equally likely to join in. Preconceptions based on gender, race, disability, and attractiveness seldom arise. Everyone is both invisible and equal.

To encourage teamwork.

Despite the enduring myth of the solitary scholar bent over a book, the best and most useful learning happens in groups. At FutureU, we have seen strangers, living thousands of miles apart, create what is often called a "community of practice" in our online classrooms. They have used one another as sounding boards; explored new areas of interest together; shared their commonalities, differences, concerns, and successes; given one another support; found new meaning in their work; and learned in ways they could never have done alone. Imagine what a well-facilitated online learning environment can do to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing in your own workforce.

To improve the bottom line.

Don't be misled. The direct cost of technology-mediated learning usually outweighs any short-term savings, but the *long-term* payoff in productivity and creative problem-solving can be



significant. Online learning is worth the investment. In the future, it will appear on the menu of learning options of every successful large organization.

To build a learning organization.

Management books abound with stories of failed businesses that might have survived if their workforce had been a true learning organization. Such an organization is always grounded in the need to succeed financially. This need drives performance needs that often call for additional learning, not just skills-based training but a more complex type of learning that involves personal reflection, discussion, and direct application in the workplace. This kind of learning presents a particular challenge to a widely distributed workforce that cannot easily come together in a single location.

At **FutureU** , we have developed methods for bringing this kind of learning to the online environment and have successfully used our online classroom to help organizations and industry associations in their ongoing quest to build learning organizations. Done right, online learning is a workable option for delivering even the "softer" types of learning, especially for organizations seeking to provide management development to a widely dispersed workforce.

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