

## SAMPLE CASE: AGAINST ONLINE COURSES

### Introduction

A single teacher can reach thousands of students in an online course. Online teaching can open up a world of knowledge to anyone with an internet connection. This limitless reach offers benefits for school districts that need to save money, by reducing the number of teachers.

### Problem

There is mounting evidence that the growth of online education is hurting a critical group: the less proficient students. Those who are precisely those most in need of skilled classroom instructors.

Online courses can be broken down into several categories, and some are more effective than others.

- A. In “blended” courses, students don’t do their work only online. They also spend time in a classroom with a flesh-and-blood teacher.

Research suggests that students at nearly all levels of achievement do just as well in these blended classes as they do in traditional classrooms. In this model, online resources supplement traditional instruction but don’t replace it.

- B. In the fully online model, on the other hand, a student may never be in the same room with an instructor. This category represents the main problem. It is where less proficient students tend to run into trouble. Taking a class without a teacher requires high levels of self-motivation, self-regulation and organization. Yet in schools across the country, students who are struggling in traditional classrooms are increasingly steered into online courses.

For example, in so-called credit recovery programs, many high school students who have flunked a course in an old-fashioned classroom retake the class online. The negative consequences may not be obvious at first, because the pass rates in these courses are very high and students who take them tend to graduate from high school instead of flunking out. Sounds good, right?

No. In reality, students who complete these courses tend to do quite poorly on subsequent tests of academic knowledge. This suggests that these online recovery courses often give students an easy passing grade without teaching them very much.

Consider a study conducted in the Chicago schools. Students who had failed algebra were randomly assigned either to online or to face-to-face recovery courses. The results were clear: Students in the online algebra courses learned much less than those who worked with a teacher in a classroom.

Online courses have many real benefits, of course. They can help high achievers in need of more advanced coursework than their districts provide through other means. This is especially true in small, rural districts that offer few specialized, traditional courses for students working ahead of their achievement level.

A study in Maine and Vermont universities examined the effect of online courses on math students. They were randomly assigned either to online math or to the less challenging, standard math offered in traditional classes.

Both groups of students were tested at the end of the semester. The online students did substantially better than their counterparts in standard classrooms. They were also twice as likely to complete advanced math later in college.

Online education has expanded rapidly at universities with similar effects. Schools disproportionately enroll low-income students who are often the first in their families to attend college. Such students tend to drop out of college at very high rates. Students with weak preparation don't fare well in online college classes, as recent research by professors at Harvard and Stanford shows.

These scholars examined the performance of hundreds of thousands of students at DeVry University, a large for-profit college with sites across the country. DeVry offers online and face-to-face versions of all its courses, using the same textbooks, assessments, assignments and lecture materials in each format. Even though the courses are seemingly identical, the students who enroll online do substantially worse.

The effects are lasting, with online students more likely to drop out of college altogether. Hardest hit are those who entered the online class with low grades. Work by researchers in many other colleges concurs with the DeVry findings: The weakest students are hurt most by the online format.

Online education is still in its youth. Many approaches are possible, and some may ultimately benefit students with deep and diverse needs. As of now, however, the evidence is clear. Academically challenged students need a classroom with an in-person instructor's support.

**Plan:**

Hence, my proposal: We should accept online credit only for students whose ACT is equal to or greater than 22 and for students who have an unrecalculated GPA of 2.5 or greater.

**Who else rejects online courses for poorly-performing students?**

**How plan meets need**

**Objections?**

**Call to action**