In 2012, a research study has been proposed by Kelly and Redman (2012) of the University of San Diego regarding the perception and acceptance of online education. This study will seek to investigate not only the history of online education, but also the perception of the rigor and validity of the equality acceptance of alternative online education in the current academic model. Of notable importance is the literature review conducted by Kelly and Redman during their proposal. Specifically, it is identified that the perception of online learning is that it is inferior to face to face learning and those institutions not offering online learning perceive it to be inferior more often than those who are offering courses or degree programs.

Despite this perception, as identified in the research of Allen and Seaman (2005), research indicates that there are equivalent outcomes from online and traditional environments with similar dropout rates in students receiving similar educational quality. Publications by Allen and Seaman specifically class differences, online education in the United States, and grooming by degrees and online education in the United States publication in 2005 have provided us with a variety of statistics that are important in assessing the perceptions of employers regarding online degrees. As of 2010, Allen and Seaman estimated that approximately 800 schools who offer no online possibilities make up about 18% of the U.S. Degree granting institutions and that these schools have less than 5% of the total higher education enrollment. Additionally, about a 1,000 schools have some type of online offering which comprises about 25% of the total higher education enrollment. Fifty percent of traditional private schools provide four credit online offerings. Others like Harvard and UC Berkeley offer four credit classes but no degree programs. Schools like Princeton, Yale and MIT offer no online classes for credit.

Kelly and Redman note that the perception of online learning is that it is inferior to face to face learning and that this study will seek to provide some potential answers to the role of the acceptance of online education. This study is anticipated to be completed hopefully in 2013.

Astani and Ready (2010) of Winona State University offered an abstract regarding employer perception of online versus traditional face to face learning. These researchers identified that employers stated that they will recommend online courses to their employees to further develop skills, yet despite their positive perceptions, employers surveyed were uncertain about whether an online degree was comparable to the traditional face to face learning degree.

Of specific importance, employers stated that they were uncertain about hiring somebody with an online degree if the position required a college degree. As research has shown, this is not to imply that there is no difference in the learning outcomes for students in online versus face to face settings, although perceptions by employers of online versus traditional degrees continue to play a prevalent role in hiring decisions.

It is important to draw a distinction between utilizing online courses and related technology for professional development versus obtaining a college degree. Astani and Ready noted that employers would recommend online courses to their employees to further their professional development. Over 86% of employers recommended online courses to their employees. Astani

and Ready also found that based on the results of their study that employers with online experience have more positive attitude towards online learning compared to those employers without online experience. This implies that employers who utilize a variety of hiring techniques and have in place profession development programs that utilize technology are likely to view online degrees as more favorable than those who do not. Overall, Astani and Ready concluded that the overall results revealed that employers have a favorable opinion of online learning, especially those with experience in online courses regardless of industry sector. This study had a significant limitation in which the researchers were unable to compare different industry sectors, managers views of online education said sample sizes for sectors were so small this would imply that its possible gatekeepers or managers who have the ultimate hiring decision were unable to be served and their opinions were unable to be accounted for.

Some of the most significant studies regarding employer perceptions of online education were conducted by Adams and DeFleur 2005 and 2006. Adams continued on with additional studies in 2007 and 2008. Major findings from these studies focused in the number of disciplines and in almost all cases the results indicated that a candidate with a traditional degree had a much better chance of gaining employment.

One of Adams' earlier studies researched the employment chances of a faculty candidate who obtained their doctoral degree entirely or partially online compared to one who obtained their degree through a face to face delivery system. The results of this study clearly indicated that the candidate with the degree obtained via the traditional mode of instruction had a much higher chance of being hired when compared to the candidate who obtained their degree through online setting.

Some contradictory findings were identified in the study conducted by Guendoo in 2008 were, according to this researcher, faculty candidate who obtained a doctoral degree online will not be at a disadvantage when it comes to getting hired by a community college.

The differences among these researchers' findings were explained by Linardopoulos in 2008 where he stated that different settings in which these studies were conducted may, in part, explain why the results differ.

Adams in 2008 also specifically assessed hiring chances of candidates within the healthcare professions who obtained their degrees online versus face to face settings. The results again showed that applicants with face to face degrees had a better chance of being hired. In fact, overall the 2008 study by Adams estimated that over 95% of gatekeepers in these types of professions, business and academic industries specifically view traditional face to face degrees as more acceptable credentials for employment versus online.

Linardopoulos in 2010 did note that there was anecdotal evidence according to which as more programs and courses are offered online and more graduates who obtain their degrees online advance within their organizations. The perception of online degrees being less credible as an employment credential will change.

The Society of Human Resources Management conducts various polls regarding human resources issues. Specifically in August 2010, a poll was conducted regarding online degrees, color employers perceptions of job applicants. What was significant in their findings is that 79% of organizations have hired job applicants with online degrees in the last 12 months. It was noted that as traditional schools continue to open online programs and online schools improve their reputations we will see an increase in acceptance of online degrees in the workplace. It is however noting that 19% of HR professions strongly agree, and 68% agree, that online degrees are viewed more favorably today than five years ago. It continues to be noted however that 49% of HR professions surveyed viewed an online degree as less favorable than a traditional degree, and four out of 10 organizations indicated that an online degree credential is acceptable for an entry level position. It is also important to note that the majority of surveyed HR professionals, approximately 64%, noted that they use certain schools reputations with well-known online degree programs who ascertain applicant's online degrees, but some 15% cannot determine the degree type by looking at the applicants resume.

Probably the most recent and the most empirical literature review conducted to date regarding employer perceptions of online degrees was conducted by Columbaro and Monaghan in 2009 from Cleveland State University. The literature review explored research regarding the perception of potential employers for gatekeepers about online degrees in comparison with those earned in a traditional format. Columbaro and Monaghan noted that there were various perceptions and concerns related to online degrees that included not enough academic rigors, not enough face to face interaction, posed a more favorable environment for cheating, were identified as having a relationship with diploma mills, and it perceived lack of commitment on the students end due to not being willing to come to campus. Columbaro and Monaghan also noted that the following variables were viewed as more favorably from employers if the online degree came from an institution that had a reputation or significant recognition, were accredited, and that the perception of the online students were more self-directed and disciplined.

Some significant limitations regarding all of these studies discussed include that many researchers did not distinguish perceptions between types of degrees and specific domains. Many of the studies were focused on perceptions rather than actually determining whether or not an individual was hired with an online degree versus a traditional degree. There was also a lack of research across various industries and how a specific level of degree attainment, whether online or traditional, would affect employer's decisions on hiring.

The overall conclusion reached as a result of the literature reviewed states that spanning nearly seven years there still appears to be marked stigma attached to online degrees throughout the hiring process.

Columbaro and Monaghan also note that as a result of seven years of scholarly research review that gatekeepers have an overall negative perception of all online degrees. As is noted in the study of Adams and DeFleur in 2006, this was particularly evident at the level of a bachelor's degree candidate when seeking a job for an entry level position. The only noted exception when regarding employer perception and hiring those with online degrees at the same level of those with traditional degrees were implied by the studies of Guendoo in 2007 and 2008 in community college environments. Columbaro and Monaghan also point out that Russell's 2001 annotated

bibliography identifies 355 research reports touting the comparability and occasional superiority of online education.

In summary, the literature review and research show that while online programs and related technology distance learning becomes more popular, employer perceptions of online degrees continue to remain less favorable in those completed within traditional academic settings. Key points of summary from the related research and literature reviews note that an annual growth rate of online enrollment in the United States is estimated at approximately 21% as of the fall of 2009. This includes about 5.6 million higher education students enrolled in at least one online course. This number is expected to grow. Student with disabilities which is estimated at approximately 26% in the United States enroll in one online class or degree program more often than students with no disabilities.

The Adams and DeFleur studies between 2005 and 2008 noted that employers viewed traditional degrees as favorable when compared to those with online degrees. In 2006, 96% of hiring managers stated they would hire candidates who obtain degrees face to face as opposed to online. The SHRM poll of 2010 noted that 79% of organizations have hired job applicants with online degrees in the last 12 months; this assumed that schools were accredited. Nineteen percent of HR professionals strongly agree and 68% agree that online degrees are viewed more favorably today than five years ago. This study was conducted out of 449 randomly selected HR professionals. As traditional schools continue to open up online programs and online schools improve their reputations, it is expected that there will be an increased acceptance of online degrees in the workplace.

Previous research by Astani in 2010 noted that some researchers argue that there is no significant difference in the learning outcomes of students in online and face to face settings. Of particular importance, employers with online experience had a more positive attitude towards hiring online learners than those without online experience. It is important to note however that many of these researcher's statements are regarding quality and not necessarily perception.

Lastly, many of the studies noted that there was a perceived lack of interaction associated with online degrees and therefore a variety of stigma and limitations associated with online degrees such as lack of rigor, lack of face to face interaction increased ability to cheat and perceived lack of commitment. Research has shown a marketing increase in the amount of employers who are utilizing technology and online distance learning to encourage professional development in continuing education although the overall stigma regarding online degrees continues to prevail.

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