

# Obtaining a university education through distance learning

Theresa Dugwell

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I am completing my undergraduate psychology degree through distance learning. Why did I choose this style of learning and what led me to the decision to pick Athabasca University?

Today many adults, like myself, are choosing to return to school for that formal education that they could not pursue in their earlier years. There are many reasons for doing so, and because of the evolution of distance learning, pursuing one's academics through distance learning is becoming more desirable.

Universities like Athabasca are reshaping the Latin meaning of university, or "*community of teachers and scholars*" Through reputable distance universities like Athabasca, opportunities to achieve academic credentials without having to attend campus is now possible.

I started out as a part-time mature student through traditional campus learning at York University. Unfortunately, holding a full time job and traveling back and forth to the campus for late night lectures left me feeling exhausted and frustrated. I was discouraged by the stress of trying to intertwine my personal adult obligations with the desire to move forward academically. Three years later and with five completed courses, I learned of Athabasca Distance Learning University.

Athabasca is considered Canada's Open University dedicated to removing the barriers to a university education. It provides

accessibility for students who cannot attend a campus, which removes a great stressor for those who are mature adults with a family and financial responsibilities.

I could study any of the individualized courses at any time on any day that suited my schedule. The fees are reasonable and include the cost of books and materials.

There is no semester system, which means I could register at anytime, complete my course within the specified time frame, and immediately get to work on another course on my own time. This had the potential to speed up the process of earning my psychology undergraduate degree. The Centre is also pleased to announce its doctoral program in Distance Education, the first program of its kind in North America. Credit can also be awarded for prior experiential learning based on the presentation of a criterion-based portfolio.

I embraced the opportunity to continue my studies through Athabasca University.

Approximately one year later, I have learned that Athabasca University is a strong and organized distance institution. It takes less than one week to receive all the necessary material for a course once you sign up on-line. There is a strong student service approach when dealing with any of the departments via telephone, as well as prompt and pleasant interactions with university staff. In addition, access to your tutor and tremendous volumes of online databases are readily available.

The opportunity to earn various levels of degrees in this format opens the doors for many students; however, there are also some associated challenges. This style of learning cannot provide you with face-to-face interactions with your professor or with other students, an important source of intellectual stimulation for many. Good time management is also critical, since, with no immediate demands placed on a distant learner, balancing life and academics can become stressful.

I still, however, remain wedded to the idea of distance learning because I've found that

the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. I believe that in the end it becomes a personal choice which should be made on the basis of where you are in your life. I would recommend taking a rigorous approach when deciding between distance vs. traditional learning. Compile all pertinent data regarding both educational routes, evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, and make your decision based on the evidence. Only a strong commitment from that point on will lead you to your glorious day of graduation.